



# PROPOSITUM

June 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis,  
Peace and all Good!

2025 is a particularly significant year for us members of the great family of Francis of Assisi and for the whole world: the VIII Centenary of the Canticle of the Creatures, an occasion to reflect on our spirituality and our mission. In this Jubilee Year, we recall with affection and gratitude the figure of Pope Francis, who has left an indelible mark on the Church and the world. We are grateful to God for the gift of the new pontificate of Pope Leo XIV, who instils hope, joy and peace in us, in all God's people and in all humanity. We wish Him every success in His ministry.

It is with great pleasure that we send you the Propositum, the fruit of the work of many members of our International Franciscan Community. This document is an important tool to better understand our mission and our commitment in today's world. Within these pages of the Propositum you will find the outcome of our work during the General Assembly of the IFC-TOR, as well as a clear statement of our goals and priorities, resulting from the process of reflection and sharing among the members of our community.

I would like to conclude this introduction by mentioning an important event that took place during our Assembly from 11 to 15 May 2025: 68 General Ministers and/or their delegates gathered at the Domus Pacis in Assisi for the celebration of the 11th General Assembly of the International Franciscan Conference of Institutes and Monasteries of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, presided over by the President of the IFC-TOR, Sister Frances Marie Duncan, with the theme *'Franciscans, repair my world'*.

On the last day of the Assembly, the voting members elected the new Council that will lead the IFC-TOR for the next three years:

## **President**

**Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban** – from India – living in Rome  
*Minister General of the Franciscan Handmaids of the Good Shepherd*

## **Council Members**

**Sr. Lorella Chiaruzzi (Vicepresident)** – from Italy – living in Rimini  
*Minister General of the Franciscan Missionaries of Christ*

**Sr. Pacyfika Leman** – from Poland – living in Rome  
*Minister General of the Sisters of St Francis of Penance and Christian Charity*

**Sr. Georgette Ngom** – from Senegal – living in Rome  
*General Councillor of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary*

**Sr. Mary Elizabeth Imler** – from United States  
*Minister General of the Franciscan Sisters of the Sacred Heart*

**Sr. Rute Almeida Guimarães** – from Brazil  
*Minister General of the Franciscan Sisters of God Providence*

I am immensely grateful to President Sr. Frances Marie Duncan and the outgoing Council for the work they have skilfully done, accompanying us in the growth of communion and formation as a Franciscan Family. May the Lord accompany your journey as consecrated women and men and Franciscans with His blessing and predilection!

Together with the new councillors who will be at my side in the next term, we enthusiastically wish to begin this new chapter in our history, working together to realise our mission.

I wish you good reading and invite you to join us on our journey towards a greater understanding and sharing of Franciscan values.

With esteem and cordiality,

*Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban*  
IFC-TOR President

*Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban*



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## *IFC-TOR COUNCIL REPORT*

### *2022-2025*

***Sr. Frances Marie Duncan***

*Franciscans Sisters Teachers*

*Rome*

*Original Language: English*



Sisters and Brothers of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis,

As we assemble in Assisi this May of 2025, we witness around us a world in turmoil. Thus, the theme of this assembly, Franciscans, Repair my World, is especially relevant as we are called upon to renew our congregations, the Church and our world. We are hopeful that the talks both formal and informal will inspire all to renew our efforts individually and as a common Franciscan body to do our part in this renewal.

This report on the ministry of the IFC-TOR Council from 2022 to 2025 states some of what was done to fulfill the Vision and Concrete Actions suggested at the previous General Assembly. The Council and Staff met in person each year and virtually several times a year to discuss issues and implement projects.

The Members of the Council and Staff include:

Sr. Frances Marie Duncan, President

Sr. Daisy Kalamparamban, Vice President

Sr. Beatriz Vásquez Mayta, Councilor

Sr. María Luisa García Casamián, Councilor

Sr. Rute Almeida Guimarães, Councilor

Fr. Brian Terry, Councilor

Ms. Emanuela Miceli, Executive Director

Sr. Elisa Di Lorenzo, Financial Administrator

Mr. Espedito Neto, Webmaster

The three statements of Vision and Concrete Actions proposed at the last assembly in May 2022 included:

1. Renewal of IFC-TOR by reviewing the aim and purpose of the conference, renewing and updating the website, technology and social networking, and investigate the hiring of an executive director;
2. Network Resources for Formation Programs through technology and reporting on the Centenary celebrations;
3. Form Collaborative Relationships in Synodality with other Franciscan organizations through sharing resources;
4. Focus on a Collective Mission.

At the first meetings using ZOOM and in person in Rome in the fall of 2022, it was decided to pursue searching for an executive director since Sr. Margherita Merlino wished to retire and it was an opportune time to transition from a general secretary to an executive director as suggested at the last assembly. After requesting applications from member congregations for this position and since none were received, the search went out to include laity. The search resulted in the hiring of Ms. Emanuela Miceli as the executive director of IFC-TOR. The staff of IFC-TOR is thus composed of three part time individuals with Emanuela working 20 hours a week, Sr. Elisa working 2 days a week and Mr. Neto working 8 hours a week. However, all of these individuals put in a great deal more time unofficially working for this organization.

The website was an area of concern for the council and at ZOOM meetings discussions were held to give suggestions on how to make the material available on the website more visible. One request from the last assembly was to share formation resources. The council saw that the website already had many resources available but it needed to be easier to locate these resources. After receiving many suggestions, the task was begun by Mr. Neto to redesign the website and members of the council gave suggestions along the way. The result is a website that is easier to navigate and highlights resources of the past and present.

Monthly meetings of the staff with the president were held to collaborate better especially in the development of the website, planning the *Propositum* editions and planning for this assembly. In addition, biweekly visits by the president to the office and numerous emails and calls back and forth created a wonderful spirit of cooperation among the staff.

The editions of the *Propositum*, published twice a year, centered on the themes of the Centenary with some articles submitted by well-known authors and some reflections by members of the Franciscan congregations as responses to the articles. The edition directly after the last assembly featured the major addresses of the Assembly. All of these are found on the website in all languages of the conference.

Throughout these past years, a large emphasis has been on the Centenary celebrations. The IFC-TOR as a member of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, which meets twice each year and is composed of the 5 General Ministers of the First and Third Orders Regular and Secular and the President of the IFC-TOR, was represented at each of the major openings of the Centennials and at the major celebrations of the Centenary. These celebrations were held in Greccio for the remembrance of the Christmas Creche, in Rome for the Anniversary of the First Order Rule, in La Verna for the Stigmata and in Assisi for the opening of the Year of the Canticle remembrance. Videos and texts from these events can be found on the website.

In addition to the Conference of the Franciscan Family, the IFC-TOR supports the ministry of Franciscans International both financially and with a representative on the board. Sister Charity Katongo Nkandu serves as our representative for IFC-TOR and she has attended meetings in New York and Geneva each year as well as representing FI and IFC-TOR for special gatherings.



Until a year ago, the IFC-TOR was active in the JPIC committee.

Both Sisters Sheila Kinsey and Nancy Celaschi resigned from this committee during the term due to other commitments and residence changes. In the interim, I have been following reports from the JPIC in Rome (Romans VI.) Presently, they are involved in offering two on-line courses JPIC courses and an event entitled Hope for Peace scheduled for 29 September with Pax Christi.

One very active representative for the IFC-TOR has been Brother Fabrizio Szymanski in his role as our liaison on the Centenary planning committee here in Assisi. He has spent a great deal of time and effort at meetings and events representing IFC-TOR and relating pertinent information back to us.

Regarding communications, in addition to the Propositum and letters sent to the ministers, attempts were made to take a survey of the membership to assess what they most utilize from the IFC-TOR and what they felt was needed. The response was limited and there was no clear direction given as the responses were varied and one could not narrow down the options. This also led to the concentration on the website to cover a variety of topics in videos and text.

The statutes were reviewed by the council to suggest updates to align with changing the structure of leadership from the general secretary to an executive director and to change the assembly meeting schedule to every three years to coincide with that of the UISG meeting. The other changes proposed were made so that the articles of the statutes agree on these topics. A two thirds vote is needed to approve these changes and the vote will take place at this assembly.

At present, we have 225 active member congregations listed on our roster. Of this number, 83 member congregations paid dues in 2024 and updated their membership compared with 109 in 2022. The listing of members can be found in the Members Only section of the website. The office has been trying to contact members who have not responded to emails or phone calls to update their information, however, due to the lack of updated information, the emails may never reach the intended receivers. On two occasions, I spoke directly with Sister Margaret Carney, who was instrumental in founding IFC-TOR concerning its future. She was most understanding of the situation of decreasing numbers and gave several suggestions of how the IFC-TOR can continue into the future, including the possibility of pairing it with a Franciscan University here in Rome. That will be a task, perhaps, for the next administration.

The fiscal situation of IFC-TOR is not dismal but is also not good as you can see by the material on income and expenses prepared by Sister Elise. In order to pay operating expenses, it has been necessary to take money from investments every year as expenses are greater than income. Communities who in the past helped with sizeable donations have not been able to gift us as in the past. In addition, this year, a lawsuit, which had been pending for many years, regarding a lease for former office space, was settled but not in our favor. It resulted in a large payment which needed to be taken from investments. We have taken a number of steps to cut back on expenses including those seen at this assembly with recycling some older folders and badges. In addition to saving it also serves as a statement to preserve the earth's resources.

In operating as a council, the greatest difficulty has been finding times when 6 active leaders in congregations from different time zones and often on visitation can meet, even on ZOOM. Another problem is the fact that there are four different languages spoken, which means added costs for interpreters or added time in translating for each other at meetings. However, despite these difficulties, we have tried our best to meet and contribute to the IFC-TOR and we have enjoyed the time we have spent together especially the in-person meetings in Rome and Assisi.

Going into the future, a few items that need to be addressed are:

- What is the future of IFC-TOR? Despite diminishment in some areas, how can we better meet the needs of the newer members of the third order in growing their congregations?
- How can the council better communicate and be actively involved in all areas of the ordinary running of IFC-TOR despite language differences, time zone differences and the varied commitments of those in General Leadership?
- What is the one area most needed to concentrate on by the new council for the next few years?
- How can the financial situation be improved with fewer members paying dues or making contributions?
- How can we best utilize our resources to repair our congregations, the Church and the world?



In Conclusion, the council and I thank you for the opportunity to serve you over these three years. The experience has been most enriching especially during this time of the 800<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations. It has afforded us a time to meet and celebrate our joint Franciscan heritage. In this year of Jubilee may we continue to journey together to bring the Joy of St. Francis and the Hope of Christ into the world.



## ***FRANCISCANS AND GOD'S GREAT PLAN FOR THE REPAIR OF THE WORLD AND THE RENEWAL OF HUMANITY***

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*Original Language: English*



Long before there were train stations, bus stops, vendors, and coffee shops along these streets of the Porziuncola, there were only forests and wildlife in this area. This was a stretch of abandoned land to be looked down upon from the wonderful heights of the town of Assisi above, with its glorious churches and bustling economic enterprises. This forest was for outcasts, for the wild animals and dangerous rebels of society, for lepers with broken bodies and lunatics with fractured minds, all those that society could not endure or contain in its customized orders and conventions.

It was a place where nature was overgrown with its primitive passions, where thoughts ran as wild as the vegetation, outside the lines and prescriptions of the social conventions and customs of polite imperial society and ecclesial discourse above. This forest was dotted with chapels, mostly broken down by time, weather, and neglect. These were the places where the lonely and weak came to pray. These were the haunts of mysticism for those as broken as the walls and torn apart as the roofs under which they prayed to their wounded God.

Here in this forest, the friars came for renewal every several years. Something about its rough terrain and primeval posture incited hope in ways that the usual urban centers of their foundational ministries could not. Perhaps it was because Francis returned here to pray time and time again. Maybe it was because the friars needed to touch the ground again where Francis lay naked the night before he died. There was a refreshment when they touched the naked ground where Francis shivered in the cold of that October night, empty to the world but anticipating the lush abundance and fulfillment of a soon glorious death and resurrection in the Lord.

We are here today to touch that sacred ground. Some of us have been here before, and others of us are newly enchanted. We too would love to be inspired anew. However, the commercial interests and ecclesial crises of our times have crept up on us, perhaps unawares but with a bit of cynicism or an ounce of doubt that anything of real worth or importance can come of our international discussions about renewal. We have spoken or thought of renewal so many times before. And, besides, we are not in the forest anymore.



The first passions of our Franciscan life are deep in our memories now, shrouded by the crises and emergencies that come across our cellphones and laptops with such steady intensity that we feel ourselves becoming numb to newness, oblivious to opportunities, and immune to risk. But we are here in Assisi not to do what Francis did, for he was explicit in his dying declarations that we were not to copy him word for word or deed for deed. We were to do what is “ours to do.” Francis reminded us that we were made for freedom, the freedom of the children of God who believe beyond fate and fear and into faith in the One who can make all things new.

Let us talk about renewal, first, the many forms that renewal has taken in religious life over these last several decades. Then, let us return to the grand project of renewal laid out for us in the Scriptures. Over the last several years, Scripture scholars have reported their research on the historical Jesus in His Jewish context.<sup>1</sup> Their studies indicate a new and deeper discipleship as Jesus preached it. We will study as best we can within the limits of the time that we have the great project of the renewal of humanity that Jesus launched by his ministry and His death and resurrection. This will provide us with the platform we need to consider a “renewed renewal” for the years ahead, one that is intentionally Christo-centric.

### ***Religious Life and Renewal in the World Today***

As stated above, religious life has been all about renewal since the Second Vatican Council more than sixty years ago. We have been through many stages and periods, and we have faced many questions and challenges.

Since Vatican II (1962–1965), the renewal of religious life has been a complex process that unfolded in distinct stages and involved various forms and methods. The Council’s standard for *aggiornamento* (updating) and *ressourcement* (returning to the sources) significantly shaped the course of this renewal.

In its initial renewal period (in the 1960s and 1970s), religious life was guided by the mandate and directives developed in the Council’s document *Perfectae Caritatis* (1965). In it, religious life was re-evaluated and re-envisioned by the study of Gospel values, the charism of founders, and an attempt to adapt to contemporary times, contexts, and conditions. The renewal took the form of studying and revising constitutions and statutes. Habits and traditional structures were modified in some cases or abandoned in other cases in favor of modes and methods of living that were considered more pastoral and practical. Renewal in this period was focused mainly on canon and constitutional law.

This was followed by a period of crisis and re-evaluation in the 1980s as declining numbers of religious vocations, especially in the West, led to questions of sustainability. Anthropologist Fr. Gerald A. Arbuckle studied cultural models of change and reinvigoration and devised a program of *refounding* that promised

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<sup>1</sup> Wright, N. T., & Bird, M. F. *The New Testament in its world: An introduction to the history, literature, and theology of the first Christians* (Zondervan, 2019); Bauckham, R. *Jesus and the eyewitnesses: The gospels as eyewitness testimony* (Eerdmans, 2006).

sustainability for religious congregations willing to find prophetic figures on the margins of their communities and offered them the opportunity and the means to reinvigorate their congregations from within.<sup>2</sup>

The 1990s also saw the publication of a significant psychological study of religious life by Fr. David Nygren and Sr. Miriam Ukeritis that detailed the phases and dynamics of growth, diminishment, and reinvigoration of religious communities in the United States.<sup>3</sup> They famously predicted that religious life in America had ten years to institute significant structural reforms (based mainly on mission integration) or face “inevitable institutional decline.” I was with Sr. Miriam Ukeritis on the tenth anniversary of the publication of her study (we were giving a workshop together on leadership to provincial superiors). I asked her how religious communities had done in the intervening ten years. Her answer was crisp and sobering. She said that some communities had taken their suggestions; most had not. She feared that many congregations had resisted structural changes and were beginning their inevitable institutional decline.

In the 1980s and 1990s, others began to sound alarms of resistance to what had developed since the Council. We might call this “the reform of renewal” project to remember the book and efforts at the renewal complaints and methodologies developed by individuals like Benedict Joseph Groeschel, CFR.<sup>4</sup> A former Capuchin-Franciscan, Groeschel famously walked out of his province with several solemnly professed friars and friars in formation in protest at what they believed were failed and even corrupt forms of renewal. None of those charges were sustained by Rome, but they caused considerable concern about the direction of renewal in religious life and, in fact, in the Catholic Church. Groeschel’s movement mainly highlighted the growing polarization within Catholic life between progressive and traditionalist mindsets about the work of renewal and evangelization.

When religious men and women entered the twenty-first century, they seemed to turn their attention away from their vocation declines and toward the implications of a more globalized world. Efforts at broader collaboration and new associations with the laity gave religious energy and confidence to adapt to new cultural contexts and gospel challenges. The wider Franciscan community pooled its energies and resources to become a voice at the United Nations. *Franciscans International* became a corporate ministry of the entire Franciscan family, providing a prophetic witness of care for creation, peacemaking, and concern for the poor. During this time, I was elected the first President of Franciscans International and spoke often about the renewal needed to live out what I called the “international compassion of Christ.”

In the 2020s, Pope Francis introduced a missionary dynamism in religious life with his emphasis on missionary discipleship, especially in his encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, the care for creation in *Laudato Si’*, and the structures of synodality that can shape the identity and mission of religious life in new ways.

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald A. Arbuckle and David L. Fleming, *Religious Life: Rebirth through Conversion* (New York: Alba House, 1990); Gerald A. Arbuckle *Refounding the church: Dismantling the tradition of division*. (Liturgical Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> David Nygren and Miriam D. Ukeritis, *The Future of Religious Life in America: Transformation and Commitment* (Westport, CT: Prager, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> Benedict J. Groeschel, CFR, *The Reform of Renewal* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1990).

This “missionary dynamism” focuses more profoundly on poverty, simplicity, and solidarity with the marginalized.

In the end, the methods of renewal have been diverse, broad, and intense, concentrated on:

1. Return to Sources;
2. Engagement with Modernity;
3. Synodal Processes;
4. Formation and Education;
5. Partnership with the Laity.

The renewal of religious life remains a dynamic and ongoing process characterized by a creative fidelity to the Church’s mission and the unique charisms of religious institutes. This flyover of the contemporary history of religious life reveals one significant gap in the renewal process, not by its total absence but by a presence primarily by implication only.

The renewal of religious life over these past decades has been driven by canons, the *aggiornamento* of customs, and the *ressourcement* of charisms and cultures. Amid all the changes and challenges of canons, customs, and codes, one might ask, “Where is Christ?” There is no doubt in my mind, and I do not wish to imply otherwise; religious women and men love Christ. They follow Christ, and they pray to Him daily and fervently. However, the specific renewal of religious life itself has not been forthrightly, robustly, sufficiently, or intentionally Christo-centric in its design or development. It is time, I believe, that we make it so.

### ***Christ and the Repair and Renewal of the World***

Our assembly here this week begins with the bold proposition that we, as Franciscans, have an essential and necessary part to play in repairing and renewing the world. The contours of that Franciscan approach to repairing the world will be discussed at length in the following two talks. Here, we are laying the foundations for that discussion.

The repair of the world is an extension and application of Francis’ initial insight before the crucifix at San Damiano when he was called to “repair the church.” At first, he took those last words concretely, limiting himself to the masonry of that worn-down church. In time, he would recognize a far greater call to repair “the universal church” and, indeed, the world itself. This revelation flows from the Gospel insight that the work of salvation is more than just about “saving souls” and helping them “get to heaven.” Franciscan eschatology is more than a guarantee that individuals, freed at last from the corruptions of their bodies and this earth, are finally transported to heaven, where they will spend infinity in eternal and bodiless bliss with God.

New Testament research today indicates a more beautiful, enticing, and overarching goal for our Christian lives. Jesus came not just to "save souls" for heaven but to inaugurate God's kingdom on earth.<sup>5</sup> Jesus has prepared us for resurrection of our bodies at the end of time, when heavens come down to earth, and God reigns "on earth as in heaven," resurrected bodies in a new creation. Jesus came to defeat evil, reveal God's true nature, restore human vocation, fulfill Israel's story, launch new creation, and invite people into a transformed life. His coming was the decisive turning point in history, setting in motion God's plan to renew the world.

The late scholar and expert on "the kingdom of God", Fr. John Fuellenbach, SVD, expressed this well:

What was Jesus all about? What did he want to bring? What was his mission? He expressed his message and his mission with the words: Kingdom of God. A multifaceted concept but in it he enshrined what he wanted to communicate. He called disciples and he chose them to carry on his mission, the message of the Kingdom. "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you" (Jn 20:21). Since Jesus' message was the Kingdom because "he was sent for this purpose" (Lk 4:43) our message has to be the same, be it individually or communally. The Second Vatican Council defined the Church on the same lines: the Church must see itself in the service of the Kingdom of God meant for the transformation of the whole world.<sup>6</sup>

Fuellenbach's wonderful analysis of the kingdom of God reminds us that the work of salvation is not to be conceived of as a "rescue operation" for souls in trouble. God's intentions are much bolder than that. The goal of salvation in the kingdom of God is of the transformation of creation. Again, Fuellenbach offers this gracious insight:

Salvation is not to be understood in the first place as a rescue operation through which those who are to be saved will be taken out of this world which has no future as it is doomed to disappear at the end. Salvation is envisioned in terms of transformation. To be saved means we are not taken out of this world but that God himself comes into this world to save the world by transforming it into the fullness of his image. This is the goal of creation: to become the Icon of the Trinity, and in becoming so to express God's very being externally in his creation.

It is a total, global and structural transfiguration and revolution of the reality of human beings; it is the cosmos purified of all evil and full of the reality of God. The Kingdom is not to be in another world but is the old world transformed into a new one (L. Boff).<sup>7</sup>

Disciples of Jesus are meant to be part of God's great mission to restore and renew humanity for a more abundant life, which God initiated in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

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<sup>5</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> John Fuellenbach, SVD, "The Kingdom of God: Jesus' Principle of Action in the World. Presented to SEDOS, Rome, December 2005, accessed at the following link:

The Kingdom of God: [https://relforcon.org/files/fullenbach.the\\_kingdom\\_of\\_god.pdf](https://relforcon.org/files/fullenbach.the_kingdom_of_god.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



The great New Testament scholar N.T. Wright argues that Jesus' resurrection is not proof of a distant life after death somewhere up above but the launch of a new reality here in which God is making "all things new" (Revelation 21:5).

He writes:

The resurrection of Jesus is the beginning of the new creation; the ascension of Jesus is the point at which, as Daniel 7 prophesied, he is given all authority in heaven and on earth."<sup>8</sup>

In fact, Christ's resurrection is the "first fruits" (1 Corinthians 15:20) of what will happen to all creation. Renewal is not simply the task of men and women for the improvement of their lives here and now; something grander is underway. And it is this: the whole cosmos awaits renewal. In Romans 8:19-23, Paul describes creation groaning even now in anticipation of its liberation from death and decay. Wright comments:

Paul is not talking about the destiny of human beings alone. He is talking about the entire cosmos, the whole created order... God's plan is to redeem and renew the entire world."<sup>9</sup>

This means that salvation is not an escape from the material world but the renewal of that world. We often forget that not only will our bodies be resurrected one day (and we are called to live in anticipation of that), but so too will our earth and all its creatures be repaired and renewed. John 3:16 reminds us that "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son."

The mystery of "repairing the world" is now a foregone conclusion in Christianity. Christians are called to be agents of restoration in both spiritual and practical ways. Jesus' teachings emphasize love for God and neighbor (Mark 12:30-31). This love manifests in acts of charity, justice, and service. Christians are called to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9) and to seek reconciliation in personal relationships and society (2 Corinthians 5:18-19). The Bible repeatedly commands believers to care for the marginalized (Proverbs 31:8-9, Isaiah 1:17, Matthew 25:35-40). Christianity views the repair and restoration of the world as essential to God's redemptive mission. Through love, justice, stewardship, and spiritual renewal, Christians strive to heal the brokenness in expectation of the complete restoration God has promised.

And yet, this repair of the world is increasingly rejected in the secular imaginary. Interestingly, the philosophical pessimists of the Enlightenment once posited an innate penchant for progress in the hearts of humankind. They once maintained that now that the mind was finally freed from religion's (supposed) follies, humanity could be about what they called "inevitable human progress."

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<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), (New York: Harper One), 77.

<sup>9</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 140.

Then, when modernity's "progress" produced the bloodiest of centuries in human history (the twentieth) along with the terrifying capacity for nuclear annihilation, they abandoned progress and preached despair and alienation.

And we see the sad and dangerous spectacle in our modern political climate today: the secular repair of the world is being abandoned to be replaced by hyper-nationalism, a resurgence of shameless greed, the abandonment of foreign aid programs, and the rise of authoritarian rule.<sup>10</sup> Contemporary politicians are abandoning the project to repair the world, a frightening feature of our postmodern mindset.<sup>11</sup>

Heaven somehow got trapped in this vice. Wright argues that we now misunderstand "heaven" in the Christian lexicon. Wright critiques the all-too-common idea that the goal of salvation is to leave this forlorn and wicked world and go to heaven as the proper and eternal telos of human existence.

Instead, he insists:

Heaven is not the end of the world, but rather the place where God's purposes for the future of the world are stored up."<sup>12</sup>

The biblical vision of renewal is not about souls leaving the earth but something much more significant; it is about God coming to repair and renew the world and creating new heavens and a new earth, where God can once again walk with humanity "in the cool of the evening" (Revelation 21-22).

In this great mission, the role of the church is to anticipate and work towards the repair of the world and the renewal of creation. Our work as Christians is contextual and anticipatory. Wright states:

What you do in the present—by painting, preaching, singing, sewing, praying, teaching, building hospitals, digging wells, campaigning for justice, writing poems, caring for the needy, loving your neighbor as yourself—will last into God's future.<sup>13</sup>

We do not stand in a world to watch it shake and tremble in its death throes. St. Paul tells us that what we see and hear now is a world already groaning, moaning, and sighing through all its failed attempts at securing justice and restoring peace.

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<sup>10</sup> Kim Phillips-Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Businessmen's Crusade Against the New Deal* (W.W. Norton, 2010) and *Fear City: New York's Fiscal Crisis and the Rise of Austerity Politics* (Metropolitan Books, 2017).

<sup>11</sup> Richard R. John and Kim Phillips-Fein, *Capital Gains: Business and Politics in Twentieth-Century America* (University of Pennsylvania, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 25.

<sup>13</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008), 204

Paul writes:

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in the hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now. (Romans 8: 19-22)

What we are hearing is not the long, drawn-out end of the world. We are overhearing a world struggling in anticipation of a major restoration, a grand and more beautiful re-creation. The church, therefore, and we, as religious, through our mission of justice, beauty, and love, participate in God's restoration, refreshment, and renewal of the world that even now anticipates what the Lord will fully accomplish for her at the end of time.

### ***The Spirituality of World Repair***

In memory of Francis and Clare, we are trying to ground our thoughts on repairing the world in God's grand plan of creating new heavens and a new earth. This should offer those fearful of the politicization and polarization of religious life a bit of calm and peace. We are not trying to construct a religious utopia from the shards of modernity left behind by Enlightenment philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. We certainly do not propose that we photocopy the efforts of the twentieth century to design great societies based on universal man-made principles of human development. Too many of those efforts have ended up on the ash heap of history.

This morning's task is to lay the foundation for our Franciscan efforts at repairing the world on the principles laid out in the Scriptures. Our agency should be rooted in God's purposes for the world and our agenda based on our understanding of the comprehensive nature of salvation. That said, the work of salvation as we practice it as religious women and men must be about:

1. *"whole human beings and not merely souls."* We must be about the whole good of each and every person and not simply interested in the partial goods or selected interests of bodies, minds, or souls. The latter is the bane of most political operations today.
2. *"the present, not simply the future."* Christians' practice throughout the ages has been about their sisters and brothers' present conditions and circumstances. From the beginning, the early church was known in Rome for its charity toward widows and orphans and, in a special way, toward those dying. Because of the current ministry of care offered, Christian communities were thought to have miraculous powers when the sick recovered from severe illnesses.

3. “*what God does through us, not merely what God does in and for us.*” Here, NT Wright makes an important distinction. God commissions us to the work of salvation. We join in the Lord’s care and justice in the world. We are baptized into Christ and crucified with Him so that we can “console others, with the same consolation that we have received from Him.”<sup>14</sup>

It is important that we remember the context of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus was a Jew; he thought like a Jew, prayed like a Jew, and understood God’s purposes in terms of Jewish traditions, customs, and experience. Jesus also lived under oppression in land occupied and governed by the brutal regime of Rome. The fastest-growing religion at the time of Jesus was the cult of the Roman Emperor and the worship of Caesar. The renewal of humanity is, therefore, centered on the role of worship in the life of the Christian.

For Wright, worship is an act of new creation in the present. When believers gather in worship, they are not just remembering the past or longing for the future; they actively participate in God’s kingdom, already breaking into the world. Through worship, the church anticipates and embodies the new heavens and earth, where God will dwell fully with His people (Revelation 21:3). He writes: “Christian worship declares in advance what the new world is like, thus claiming it already in the name of Jesus.”<sup>15</sup>

Wright often emphasizes that worship is not a passive activity but an act of resistance against the world’s powers. In the Roman world, Caesar was Lord (Kyrios). To now say “*Jesus is Lord*” in worship was to deny the authority of Caesar. Similarly, worship today challenges the false gods of consumerism, nationalism, totalitarianism, and individualism. Wright states: “Worship is political. When we worship the Lamb upon the throne, we are refusing to give allegiance to the powers of the world that corrupt and enslave.”<sup>16</sup>

For N.T. Wright, worship is not an escape from the world but **the fuel for its renewal**. It restores humanity’s true calling, resists idolatry, and anticipates God’s final transformation of all things. When it worships, the church is a **living sign of the coming new creation**.

When it worships, the church also creates (through grace) the possibilities of the world’s political alterations. For worship is also an act of realignment; it turns and readjusts the world toward justice, peace, and the true reign of God.

Wright views worship and mission as profoundly interconnected. He writes: “The church exists primarily for two closely related purposes: to worship God and to work for his kingdom in the world... Worship is the central vocation of the renewed human race.”<sup>17</sup> True worship leads to action—justice for the poor, care for creation, and reconciliation in the world.

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<sup>14</sup> NT Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, 100.

<sup>15</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 176.

<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright, *Revelation for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 198.

<sup>17</sup> N. T. Wright, *For All God’s Worth: True Worship and the Calling of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 105.



In his analysis of the renewal in the New Testament, NT Wright reminds us that ecclesial renewal is more than professional development or ongoing formation. It is not a credentialing process that gives us points toward promotion in our contracts. Wright offers us that St. Paul sees the renewal of humanity as a cosmic movement with profound implications. It reaches beyond humanity and touches all things.

The restored image of God in renewed humanity sets Christians in authority above any and all pagan empires via true worship of God. God's mission is not merely individualistic evangelism; it is the fulfillment of the Jewish hope, 'a cosmic movement, beginning with the resurrection of Jesus and ending with the renewal of all things.'<sup>18</sup>

Wright shows how the New Testament envisions the renewal of humanity through worship, resurrection, holiness, love, mission, and the significance of our present bodily life.

Learning to live as a Christian is learning to live as a renewed human being, anticipating the eventual new creation in and with a world which is still longing and groaning for that final redemption.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The Deeper Discipleship of Jesus***

By now, it should be evident that the renewal of humanity, of which we are a part as baptized Christians and consecrated religious, requires a more profound and deeper discipleship than we have previously thought. The discipleship of Jesus involves and engages us in the renewal of humanity from the time of the Resurrection of Jesus until the end of the ages. Our discipleship is not simply individual piety and is not reducible to local or even national communities. The communion of Jesus' disciples is international and cosmic in nature. It is about the renewal of humanity itself and all creation, as well.

Christianity has fostered various kinds of discipleship throughout history, shaped by different traditions, theological emphases, and cultural contexts. We can isolate and describe ten major types.

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<sup>18</sup> N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 178.

<sup>19</sup> N. T. Wright, *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 196.

Type of Discipleship	Description	Examples
<b>Personal Discipleship (One-on-One)</b>	Focuses on mentorship, accountability, and personal spiritual growth.	Spiritual mentorship, pastoral counseling, accountability partnerships.
<b>Community-Based Discipleship</b>	Encourages shared learning and mutual encouragement within groups.	Home churches, cell groups, discipleship groups (D-Groups).
<b>Liturgical &amp; Sacramental Discipleship</b>	Emphasizes formation through sacraments and structured worship.	Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican traditions.
<b>Missionary &amp; Evangelistic Discipleship</b>	Centers on spreading the gospel across cultures.	Missionary organizations, street evangelism, church planting movements.
<b>Monastic &amp; Contemplative Discipleship</b>	Focuses on prayer, fasting, and solitude, often within monastic communities.	Benedictine, Franciscan, and Eastern Orthodox monastic traditions.
<b>Educational &amp; Theological Discipleship</b>	Encourages theological training and intellectual growth.	Seminaries, Bible colleges, systematic theology studies.
<b>Charismatic &amp; Spirit-Led Discipleship</b>	Emphasizes spiritual gifts, supernatural encounters, and guidance by the Holy Spirit.	Pentecostal movements, prophetic ministries, healing ministries.
<b>Social Justice &amp; Servant Discipleship</b>	Involves living out faith through social action and helping the marginalized.	Christian humanitarian organizations, liberation theology movements.
<b>Family &amp; Generational Discipleship</b>	Focuses on faith formation within families and across generations.	Family devotionals, homeschooling with a biblical worldview.
<b>Workplace &amp; Vocational Discipleship</b>	Integrates faith with professional life and ethics.	Christian business networks, workplace Bible studies.

Each type of discipleship above focuses on critical aspects of the Christian life, such as prayer, fasting, integration, mission, and the sacraments. We note that each type has its strengths and opportunities. At the same time, each has its limits. It is important to recognize the ways that any form of discipleship today can be reductionistic. For example, one type may stress individual interests over the common good. Another may prioritize spiritual gifts over concrete action.

A list of their limitations is attached to help in this regard. Let's reiterate that each of these ten types of discipleship has strengths and is an honest attempt at following the Lord. At the same time, each also comes with challenges that deserve our attention. Here's a critical look at the potential shortcomings of each approach:

Type of Discipleship	Limitations
Personal Discipleship (One-on-One)	It can lead to dependence on a single mentor rather than a well-rounded Christian formation, and it risks becoming personality-driven rather than Christ-centered.
Community-Based Discipleship	It may become inward-focused, fostering groupthink rather than mission-oriented growth; it can sometimes prioritize relationships over theological depth.
Liturgical & Sacramental Discipleship	It can become overly ritualistic, emphasizing external participation over internal transformation, which may limit active personal engagement in discipleship beyond formal worship.
Missionary & Evangelistic Discipleship	It can sometimes focus on conversion rather than long-term formation; it risks cultural insensitivity or colonial attitudes in mission contexts.
Monastic & Contemplative Discipleship	It can become too isolated from the world, limiting engagement with broader society; it may not be accessible to laypeople or those called to active vocations.
Educational & Theological Discipleship	It risks intellectualism without spiritual transformation and may prioritize knowledge over obedience and lived faith.
Charismatic & Spirit-Led Discipleship	It can become experience-driven rather than rooted in Scripture; it risks overemphasizing spiritual gifts while neglecting character formation and doctrine.
Social Justice & Servant Discipleship	They may prioritize activism over personal spiritual formation, risking reducing Christianity to moral action rather than a relationship with Christ.
Family & Generational Discipleship	It can reinforce unhealthy family structures or exclude those without Christian family backgrounds; it may focus too much on tradition without fostering critical faith development.
Workplace & Vocational Discipleship	It risks compartmentalizing faith in professional life rather than integrating it fully, which can lead to prioritizing success over spiritual integrity.

## ***The Importance of Intentional Discipleship***

While each of the above models of discipleship has helped millions of Christians over the years, a new model has been proposed that emphasizes intentionality, dedication, active commitment, and service.

*Intentional discipleship* is a purposeful and structured approach to Christian formation in which individuals or communities actively seek to grow in faith, character, and mission.<sup>20</sup> It contrasts with passive or accidental discipleship, where spiritual growth is left to chance or occasional church attendance. There are five key characteristics that differentiate intentional forms of discipleship from those that are more passive.

- **Deliberate Growth in Christlikeness:** Intentional Discipleship (ID) is rooted in Jesus' command found in *Matthew 28:19-20*: "Go and make disciples of all nations..." It focuses on lifelong Christian transformation, and not just conversion or knowledge.
- **Relational & Accountable:** (ID) often involves mentorship, small groups, or spiritual direction and encourages mutual accountability in spiritual disciplines (prayer, Scripture, service).
- **Holistic & Integrated:** (ID) balances personal faith, community engagement, and mission and includes intellectual (theology), spiritual (prayer), moral (virtue), and practical (service) dimensions.
- **Mission-Oriented:** (ID) encourages disciples to disciple others (2 Timothy 2:2: "Entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also"). It integrates faith with everyday life, work, and social justice.
- **Spirit-Led & Contextual:** (ID) is responsive to the Holy Spirit's guidance rather than rigid programs. It is adaptable to different cultures and life situations.

Intentional discipleship models require commitment. They may be less casual than other programs since they require transparency and mutual accountability. They are also time-sensitive, requiring the investment of time and effort to build relationships and be formed in the faith and in mission (service).

## ***Conclusion: Intentional Renewal and Deep Discipleship***

We have highlighted two significant trends in spiritual formation today. The first comes from the intense research being done in New Testament studies by British, Australian, and American researchers, such as NT Wright, Michael Bird, Richard Hays, Michael Gorman, Richard Bauckham, Larry Hurtado,

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<sup>20</sup> Sherry Shedell, *Intentional Discipleship: A Guide to Christian Growth and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018).



and others.<sup>21</sup> Their principal insight is that the New Testament results from trustworthy eye-witness accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, his passion, death, and resurrection. They are rooted in the Jewish context of Jesus' life and that of his earliest followers. Thus, their insights and teaching are not divorced from Israel's social, religious, cultural, and political challenges during the time of Jesus and the early church. All theology is contextual. While many of us have been trained in theological and catechetical methods that are often abstract and wrenched from their original philosophical and cultural contexts, we are being challenged today to a different methodology more attuned to the social, religious, cultural, and psychological experiences of our elder sisters and brothers in the faith.

The second trend invites us to intentional renewal and deep discipleship. At the beginning of this lecture, I mentioned the early efforts to renew religious life after Vatican II. I argued that many of these methods were canonical and legal forms of adaptation that rarely took notice of adult forms of learning and timelines of adaptation and assimilation. They often came as "orders from above" without adequate explanation. Unfortunately, because of this, renewal stumbled along the way, not so much by active resistance but by confusion and mixed messages. Methods have shifted.

Now, we have the opportunity for a more intentional renewal and deep discipleship. Some are listening to this who have done their own version of this deep discipleship work, calibrating it as best they could to their individual needs and interests. I suggest that an intentional and deep discipleship is required today, one practiced in common but with respect for each individual's passion and experience with the project. What has been missing in previous individual forms of intentional renewal is the social imagination and worldview that can strengthen and amplify our vision of the Christian life. Christianity is fundamentally a graced worldview provided by the Lord Jesus that challenges the idolatries of each generation, especially those that are consolidated in cultural forms and political agendas.

We are looking for an intentionally deep and Christocentric model of renewal. It is not enough for religious people of any age to go through life "alone" in the spiritual life. Neither is it enough to simply follow rules, schedules, or obligations. To use a Pauline phrase, being "in Christ" is more than socialization to the rules of common living.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2008); Michael F. Bird, *The Gospel of the Lord: How the Early Church Wrote the Story of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); □ Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996); Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006); Larry W. Hurtado, *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> Michael J. Gorman, *In Christ: The Christian's Relationship with Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019).



The grand plan of God for humanity should not be understated. It is nothing less than the transformation of all creation, beginning with the Lord's Resurrection and leading to His return in final glory. And we, as disciples of the Risen Lord, already baptized into Christ, are called to participate even now in the initial steps of that transformation. At whatever age we are and with whatever

gifts and talents we have, we have a purpose and place in this grand repair of the world.

Having laid a firm foundation for the task at hand, we turn next to the example of Francis and Clare of Assisi to guide us in our task of repairing the world today.

### *Discussion Questions:*

## **1. Christ-Centered Renewal and Religious Life**

*Couturier argues that the renewal of religious life has often been focused on structures, canons, and customs rather than being explicitly Christocentric.*

- In what ways can our congregations intentionally refocus renewal efforts on deep discipleship and a Christ-centered mission?
- How can we ensure that our renewal is not just institutional but transformative at a spiritual and communal level?

## 2. The Franciscan Call to Repair and Renew the World

*Drawing from the Franciscan tradition and New Testament scholarship, Couturier emphasizes that Jesus' mission was not just about saving souls but inaugurating God's kingdom and restoring creation.*

- How does this vision of renewal challenge or deepen our current understanding of mission and evangelization?
- What concrete steps can we take to align our ministries with this broader vision of renewal, particularly in a fractured and polarized world?

## 3. Intentional Discipleship and Formation

*Couturier discusses various models of discipleship and highlights the need for intentional and deep discipleship that integrates formation, mission, and community engagement.*

- What challenges do we face in fostering intentional discipleship within our congregations, especially in a rapidly changing global context?
- How can we creatively adapt our formation processes to cultivate a more engaged and mission-driven religious life that addresses the needs of the contemporary world?





*English Groups*





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