

JPIC And Our Franciscan Parish Ministry

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Introduction

Since March 2000, I have been receiving answers to the questionnaire on parishes sent to all the entities of the Order. As of this date, May 28, 68 of the 110 provinces and vice-provinces and 6 of the 22 Custodies and foundations have sent in their responses to the questionnaire. In July, we are contacting the remaining entities that did not respond to the questionnaire, so as to be able to complete this part of the study. The questionnaire is but a first step toward what the General Chapter of 1997 asked for: “promote at the level of the whole Order a study and revision of our presence and mode of acting as friars minor in parishes and to indicate new forms and new modes of evangelization in communion with the local and universal Church and in faithfulness to our charism.” Although some of the statistics do not always agree (because of different interpretations), there are some very definite conclusions and tendencies that can be seen in the results of the 74 entities that responded up until now.

So, we are looking at “our presence and mode of action as friars minor in parishes”. Just in time for your JPIC Congress

at Vossenack! You have an opportunity to look at our presence and mode of action in parishes and other ministries in the perspective of JPIC. How are we friars involved in parishes and other ministries doing as agents of JPIC? What kind of JPIC experiences do we have in our parishes throughout the world? Certainly there are many local, regional examples of JPIC being developed by our men who are parish ministers or who are working together with parish ministers (whether they be friars or not). Where are we lacking and why? What formation and input do our men receive in regard to JPIC? How can we integrate JPIC issues into our everyday evangelizing/pastoral service? We definitely should examine our parish ministry in the light of JPIC, because a healthy portion of the solemnly professed friars throughout the world is serving parishes, service churches/sanctuaries.

Some Statistics From The Questionnaire, as of July 2000

To give you a brief idea of how many friars are involved right now in parish ministry and in service church/sanctuary ministry, here are a few statistics taken from the yet incomplete results of the questionnaire sent to the entities of the Order about parish and other forms of evangelization: (Repeating what is stated above, these are statistics from the 74 entities which already responded to the questionnaire.)

a) Of the 8430 solemnly professed friars tabulated in various ministries (also

retired/sick friars) 2310 are said to be involved in parish ministry (one in every 3.6 friars are parish ministers).

b) Of the same 8430 friars, 1161 are ministering in Service Churches or Sanctuaries. Twenty-seven friars are military chaplains; also a form of parish ministry.

c) $2310+27+1161= 3498$ friars. 3498 of the 8430 solemnly professed friars registered in this questionnaire are in some form of parish ministry. One in every 2.4 friars. Consider that 988 of the remaining friars are officially retired (advanced age or sickness) and 1135 are doing fraternal services. That leaves about 2809 solemnly professed friars doing other ministries. (*Many doing "other" ministries categorized by Mother Provinces as "missionaries", are in fact, often parish ministers in their places of "mission."*)

d) On the other hand, so far the questionnaire says that:

- Of the 8430 solemnly professed accounted for so far:
- 282 friars are involved in "special ministries"/new projects of evangelization;
- 252 in preaching ministries;
- 205 in health institutions or ministries;
- 692 in educational institutions;
- 95 in a contemplative/prayer presence/ministry.

1526 = Total (one in 5.5 friars)

*282 in special (often new) forms of ministry (one in 30 friars approximately).

e) Then there is the "other" category! Unfortunately it was impossible at the time to name all the ministries in the

questionnaire. There was, however, the possibility for each entity to write in the examples of other ministries. Some ministries named were very specific, e.g., JPIC agents (in some questionnaires); other ministries were not so specific, e.g. "missionaries".... (often parish ministers).

Number of Parishes

The friars in these 74 entities that have responded up until this date serve 1351 parishes (not counting military chaplaincies or service/sanctuary churches). In the last 10 years some 253 parishes have been returned to dioceses, principally because of a decrease in the number of friars available. In some cases, parishes have been returned in order to embrace new forms of evangelization or to assume a parish ministry in needy dioceses/among the poor.

The Results also Indicate That:

1) 44 entities have no Plan for Evangelization so far. 26 said they do have one, but the majority of the "YES" answers are "in preparation". From this I think we can conclude that we have little occasion "for every province to evaluate and if necessary revise the forms of presence and manner of operating in the parochial apostolate", as the 1997-2003 Priorities Document states.

2) 49 entities said they have no "VISION FOR PARISH MINISTRY". 26 entities said they do have a "Vision". Often,

however, the “vision” is a question of norms.

3) 22 entities say that parish ministers do not meet to evaluate, plan, etc. In 47 entities they do (on a local, or regional, provincial, or diocesan level).

4) 65 entities responded that they do promote the participation and formation of the laity. There are very few, if any, responses mentioning the “social teaching of the Church” or Franciscan JPIC issues. Maybe that was forgetfulness, more than reality.

5) 31 entities said the parish ministries use some form of social, economic, demographic, etc. analysis to study the reality of the people and area. 37 entities said there is no use made of these studies.

These are a few of the results of this particular questionnaire so far. There is furthermore a definite need to gradually get to answers and reflections of the friars who are actually involved in parish and other ministries. For the present, however, these conclusions and reflections gathered through this particular questionnaire can, I hope, contribute to your discussions:

Parish ministry is a very large part of the friars’ ministry throughout the world. Numbers vary according to conferences.

It appears to me that often our parish structures are very diocesan; we friars do not always mark this ministry with our Franciscan charism.

Parish ministers are often swamped with serving the faithful, maintaining the faith, with financial, organizational and diocesan matters, with religious formation programs that very little time is left for the missionary thrust of the Church, for JPIC issues, for being friar with other friars.... especially when there is no friar team or fraternity collaboration in the ministry. Too frequently we get busy with diocesan things, with internal affairs, in a vicious circle of much activity. JPIC issues and activities are also avoidable and avoided because we don’t want to make waves, step on toes, cause problems; turn off perhaps many in the congregation. Of course, this is easier to say than to do!

Where there is a Plan, a Vision for Parish Ministries, periodical evaluating and planning, lay collaboration and participation in formation, decision making and in the various activities, there is possibility for a renewal of our presence and activities in the parochial ministry and also possibilities for JPIC.

Here are a couple examples of material (related to parishes and JPIC) that have come from some entities of the Order. The entities of the Order mentioned many new projects/new forms of evangelizing presence and action related to JPIC, but there were only a few examples possibly JPIC related as far as the parish and more traditional ministries are concerned. That does not say that they do not exist!

The Holy Spirit Province of Australia has a document (1995) entitled: *The Franciscan VISION for Parish Ministry*.

There are three Major Goals: 1) Gospel Living 2) Life in Fraternity/Partnership with All and 3) Service. The Objectives to achieve the first Goal, Gospel Living, are *Worship, Social Justice, Adult Education, RCIA, and Vocation Discernment*. Under SOCIAL JUSTICE, the document states: The Parish will establish groups to be responsible to ensure:

–Preaching and education for Social Justice and Peace;

–The fostering of an awareness of ecology or ecological issues.

The Second Goal, Life in Fraternity, Partnership with All, also includes under the Ministry Call: to enable all Parishioners to live out their Baptismal call to ministry, we will:

–Respect the dignity of each person;

–Accept and acknowledge their giftedness;

–Encourage multicultural representation in our parish groups and on committees.

And under Gender Awareness:

–Create an alertness and expression of gender awareness in Parish, e.g. complementarily of Francis and Clare;

–That there be evident in the Parish, equal opportunities for men and women in all the ministries of the Parish.

The Third Goal, Service, has specific directives to form a WELCOMING COMMUNITY (all age groups, specific

programs for youth, ecumenical activities), a MINISTRY TO THE ALIENATED, a PASTORAL OUTREACH PROGRAM (caring communities: house and hospital visits, provision of opportunities for the disabled and unemployed and others, to meet current and changing needs, adoption of a “sister” Franciscan parish within Province or overseas.

The Holy Name Province of New York, USA, presented a Commentary on Parishes, the result of a Ministerial Needs Assessment (11/3/98), in which a reading of all the ministerial needs assessments of the Parishes of the Province provided a basis for the following division of parishes: the Basic Parish, the Full-Service Parish and the Outreach Parish. What are described, as Outreach Parishes seem to respond better to this JPIC theme:

“These have all the services of the Basis Parish (e.g. Mass, sacraments, devotions, religious education, care of sick, etc.) and many of the services of the Full Service Parish (social programs, youth groups, counseling, adult faith formation, etc.), but they tend to prioritize the use of their resources more on adult formation and outreach into the larger community. The friars are central and seen as teachers and mentors, but the laity more and more assumes responsibility for the visioning, for the planning and evaluation, for initiatives. Being a ‘Franciscan Parish’ means more than having friar ministers and being hospitable and personable. The people begin to see themselves as Franciscan and bearers of the

Franciscan values, with less dependence on the initiative of the friars... The manner of ministering fraternally or collaboratively is expanding beyond the Refounding Core Team or the parish council to become the normal way of doing business in every group and program in the parish. Further, collaboration is not seen as only an internal value; it is becoming just as important to collaborate with other churches, the Diocese, civic groups, etc. It is not clear, however, even in these parishes, if faith – sharing and prayer have become an internal part of the collaborative process... Social concerns in these parishes is more likely to be done in collaboration with other groups, as noted above, and more likely to include education of the people, and advocacy. Social concerns are becoming an integral part of every ministry and program of the parish, rather than a separate ministry, or charitable works. The parish is becoming an agent of change in the larger community, and the community is aware that this is essential to its mission and dedicate the resources of the parish accordingly.”

The Friar Minor Province of St. Michael The Archangel of Puglia and Molise: “The Regulation of Parishes”. ...The Province... with the present Regulation tries to put into practice that which is said in the General Constitutions of the Order, which wants each friar called to evangelization, sent into the

world to announce the Gospel to all creatures... to give to the Parishes entrusted to our pastoral care, a Franciscan image.

b) The subject and object of Franciscan evangelization: The Fraternity, fraternal communion sustained by prayer and penance is the first and most visible testimony of the Gospel and the prophetic sign of a human family. If this fraternal communion is extended to the poor, then we have a truly Franciscan Parish:

- Franciscan fraternal spirit should make our Parishes open communities in which the child and the old, the marginalized and the socially well known, the Christian and the non-Christian, etc. find a welcome.

c) The content of Franciscan evangelization in the parishes:

- A parish can be said to be of Franciscan inspiration when it has become conscious of the fact that true peace and good for every man comes from the Lord and his Gospel and from no other reality, institution or human culture.
- It is urgent then that the announcement of the advent of the Kingdom of justice and peace that is expressed in respect for creatures and the protection of creation.
- The creation of a mentality of reconciliation and pardon through listening, dialogue, attention and welcome of the other.

d) The Franciscan parish is a laboratory of charitable institutions: During the decade 1990-2000, the Church has been

reflecting on its vocation to charity and is making every effort to redesign its image of charity. It has always been a custom for us Franciscan to install social structures of charity in our houses and in our Provinces. Today we are called on to operate in Church institutions, such as Parishes, into which we must make social structures of charity flow as expressions of our charism.

Beginning with the identification of the poor and most marginalized of our parish environments it is not difficulty to create distinctions between: the poor and least in general; the old, poor families, unemployed, the casual worker, the sick, the young, divorced, handicapped, etc.; the new poor, alcohol and drug dependants, AIDS sufferers, vagrants, teenage mothers, the blackmailed, etc; the corrupt, prisoners and ex-prisoners, difficult children, homosexuals, etc.

We must respond to these categories of people with our own structures of charity or join with existent organisations with the same aims. It is true that such social charity structures and work cannot be set up in all parochial communities but surely a mentality that looks to the interests of these brothers and to the realization of all that is within the bounds of possibility of the community could be developed.

The Province of the Philippines celebrated a Franciscan Pastoral Conference in 1996 to clarify the General Pastoral Orientation for the Franciscan Parishes

and Shrine. The province published “pastoral principles.”

Among other principles and orientations: In conjunction with the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, the friars assume the task of building Basic Ecclesial Communities. The pastoral methodology is “seeing, judging and acting”, which begins with the analysis of the actual socio-political-economic-cultural-ecological and ecclesial situation of the people. Then it proceeds with looking at the analyzed situation in the light of faith. This leads to the planning-action-evaluation stage...

The province has among its pastoral goals:

To promote critical awareness and prophetic involvement in SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, both on the micro and macro levels.

To promote ECOLOGICAL CONSCIOUSNESS and address conscientiously the PROTECTION AND CARE OF CREATION.

Other goals for parishes and shrine:

To set-up LEADERSHIP BODIES AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES that are truly representative, participative, grassroot and service-orientated.

To re-orient and re-direct ORGANIZATIONS, MINISTRIES AND MOVEMENTS, which are either Church/Parish/Shrine-based or transparochial, towards the promotion of the Church of the Poor through BECs and other BEC-related activities.

The Province of Ireland has developed a process of Placement of Ministries and Fraternities so the friars can best fulfill their mandate and presence for the next 20/30 years.

The Province Decided:

To strengthen fraternities already located in a predominantly poor community. These are Ballywaltrim, Ballinfoyle (Galway)(now closed) and Merchant's Quay. In each of these, we are in charge of a parish...Our continuing commitment to these parishes may seem contradictory: the predominant view among religious today is to lean away from parishes. Our commitment must be seen in the light of our overall thrust to bring the Good News to the poor as Franciscans. Our ministry in these areas is very much a ministry to the poor.

To relocate our center of gravity in some cities and towns where we are already present, moving our fraternity and ministry to a place closer to where the poor people actually live. We hope to pursue this aim in Limerick, Waterford and Carrick. We have already initiated this change in Belfast.

We see our living among the poor as giving opportunity for solidarity with their suffering condition, learning from them and with them to know the Lord better, for He was poor, working with them

against injustice, and collaborating in such community projects as will raise their self-esteem and improve their human condition.

The ministries we undertake will be such as to respond best to our Franciscan and prophetic charism.

As this is very much a new direction, the Definitory is not deciding the details of ministry in each situation. Rather, the main lines are defined, and it will be left to the ability and creativity of the friars involved.

These few examples show the kind of reflection and action being developed in various entities of the Order as far as parishes and ministries are concerned. Certainly these examples reflect JPIC concerns in parish and other ministries. You will have to ask the friars of the provinces cited here how each project is being developed in practice.

Conclusion

Along with the testimony given by my brother, Florêncio Vaz, I hope this contribution to the JPIC Congress will help stimulate some discussion and debate. Please be generous with your JPIC suggestions as to how we can "study and revise our presence and mode of action in parishes and other ministries!"