

## The Four Pillars – 4 Apostolate

### Word Origin

Late Latin *apostolātus* the office of an apostle, equivalent to Late Latin *apostol(us)* apostle + *-ātus* –ate

### Definition

The work of an apostle, not only of the first followers of Christ but of all the faithful who carry on the original mission entrusted by the Savior to the twelve to "make disciples of all nations" (*Matthew 28:19*). The apostolate belongs essentially to the order of grace. Its purpose is not temporal welfare, however noble, but to bring people to the knowledge and love of Christ and, through obedience to his teaching, help them attain life everlasting.

The word *apostolate*, then, is related to the word *apostle* – and describes the mission of an apostle of Christ.

### Franciscan Mission

From Bonaventure's *Major Legend of St Francis*, Chapter 2:

One day when Francis went out to meditate in the fields, he walked near the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of age. Impelled by the Spirit, he went inside to pray. Prostrate before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with no little consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from that cross, telling him three times: "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed."

This became the mission of Francis and eventually became the mission of the whole Franciscan family.

We Secular Franciscans are to make ourselves available, like Francis, every time the Church calls, every time there is something to repair. There are reconciliations to promote, sufferings to alleviate, solitudes to fill, despair to console, marginalization to fight, material and spiritual poverties to heal, respect for life and nature. These are the places where Secular Franciscans need to be found! There are no limits! (*FUN Manual*)

### OFS Rule related to the Apostolate

#### Witness to Gospel Life

"going from gospel to life and life to gospel." (*Rule 4*)

"They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words." (*Rule 6*)

## Ecumenism

"Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service." (*Rule 14*)

## Peace and Justice

"Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives." (*Rule 15*)

"Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others." (*Rule 19*)

## Family

"In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ." (*Rule 17*)

## ***Apostolicam Actuositatem: Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity***

### **Second Vatican Council – 1965 (key points)**

- The apostolate of the laity derives from their Christian vocation and the Church can never be without it.
- The Church was founded for the purpose of spreading the kingdom of Christ throughout the earth for the glory of God the Father, to enable all men to share in His saving redemption, and that through them the whole world might enter into a relationship with Christ.
- All activity of the Mystical Body directed to the attainment of this goal is called the apostolate
- The laity derive the right and duty to the apostolate from their union with Christ the head; incorporated into Christ's Mystical Body through Baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit through Confirmation, they are assigned to the apostolate by the Lord Himself. They are consecrated for the royal priesthood and the holy people (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10) not only that they may offer spiritual sacrifices in everything they do but also that they may witness to Christ throughout the world.
- For the exercise of this apostolate, the Holy Spirit gives the faithful special gifts... From the acceptance of these charisms, including those which are more elementary, there arise for each believer the right and duty to use them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and the building up of the Church...
- Such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope, and charity. Only by the light of faith and by meditation on the word of God can one always and everywhere recognize God...
- Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice of God's kingdom... brought into conformity with the higher principles of the Christian life and adapted to the shifting circumstances of time, place, and peoples.
- Preeminent among the works of this type of apostolate is that of Christian social action which the sacred synod desires to see extended to the whole temporal sphere, including culture.
- The greatest commandment in the law is to love God with one's whole heart and one's neighbor as oneself (cf. Matt. 22:37-40).

- Therefore, the laity should hold in high esteem and, according to their ability, aid the works of charity and projects for social assistance, whether public or private, including international programs whereby effective help is given to needy individuals and peoples.
- The laity carry out their manifold apostolate both in the Church and in the world. In both areas there are various opportunities for apostolic activity... more important fields of action: church communities, the family, youth, the social milieu, and national and international levels.
- The apostolate of married persons and families is of unique importance for the Church and civil society. Christian husbands and wives are cooperators in grace and witnesses of faith for each other, their children, and all others in their household. They are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them by word and example for the Christian and apostolic life. They prudently help them in the choice of their vocation and carefully promote any sacred vocation which they may discern in them.
- The apostolate in the social milieu, that is, the effort to infuse a Christian spirit into the mentality, customs, laws, and structures of the community in which one lives, is so much the duty and responsibility of the laity that it can never be performed properly by others.
- The laity fulfill this mission of the Church in the world especially by conforming their lives to their faith so that they become the light of the world
- They fulfill their mission also by fraternal charity which presses them to share in the living conditions, labors, sorrows, and aspirations of their brethren with the result that the hearts of all about them are quietly prepared for the workings of saving grace.
- This apostolate should reach out to all wherever they may be encountered; it should not exclude any spiritual or temporal benefit which they have the ability to confer.
- True apostles endeavor to announce Christ to their neighbors by means of the spoken word as well.
- The laity can engage in their apostolic activity either as individuals or together as members of various groups or associations.
- The laity should vivify their life with charity and express it as best they can in their works.
- The group apostolate is very important also because the apostolate must often be performed by way of common activity.
- Associations established for carrying on the apostolate in common sustain their members, form them for the apostolate, and rightly organize and regulate their apostolic work...
- The most holy council, then, earnestly entreats all the laity in the Lord to answer gladly, nobly, and promptly the more urgent invitation of Christ in this hour and the impulse of the Holy Spirit.

## Examples of Apostolate from Bonaventure's *Major Life of Francis*

### Lepers

... the lover of profound humility moved to the lepers and lived with them, serving them all most diligently for God's sake. He washed their feet, bandaged sores, drew pus from wounds, and wiped away filth. He who was soon to be a physician of the Gospel even kissed the ulcerous wounds out of his remarkable devotion. As a result, he received such power from the Lord that he had miraculous effectiveness in healong spiritual and physical illnesses.

## Joyful Witness to the Gospel

He used to say that it would be difficult to satisfy the necessity of the body without giving in to the earthbound inclinations of the senses. Therefore when he was in good health, he hardly ever allowed himself cooked food... He discovered more effective methods of abstinence and daily improved in their exercise.

He was austere toward himself but considerate toward his neighbor. Making himself obedient to the Gospel of Christ in everything, he gave an edifying example not only when he abstained but also when he ate.

It happened once that a poor man met him on his return from Siena, when, because of an illness, he was wearing a short mantle over his habit. When his kind eye observed the man's misery, he said to his companion: "We must give back to the poor man his mantle for it is his! For we accepted it on loan until we should happen upon someone poorer than we are." But his companion, seeing the need of his pious father, objected to this stubbornly, lest by providing for someone else, he neglect himself. But he said: "The great Almsgiver will accuse me of theft if I do not give what I have to someone in greater need."

Once while he was staying in the hermitage at Greccio, the people of that place had been stricken by multiple disasters... When the herald of the holy Gospel preached to those afflicted in this way, he said to them: "To the praise and honor of Almighty God, I assure you that all the disasters will cease, and the Lord looking down upon you, will multiply your earthly goods. If you believe me, show mercy to yourselves. Once you have made a sincere confession, bring forth fruits worthy of repentance... From that hour, therefore, once the people did penance at his exhortation, the disasters ceased, the dangers vanished...

## Concluding Remarks

Our apostolic life and fraternal life are integrally related. As Franciscans, when we minister, we minister to and with our brothers and sisters and we minister to the larger community. It is not only "what we do" but also "how we do it."

The fraternity apostolate is our privilege and responsibility to go forth as witnesses and instruments of the Holy Spirit and the Church. When we come together in our fraternity gatherings we interact with each other, but the fraternity apostolate gives us the added opportunity to cooperate and minister with each other at a different level. Our hearts are good and generous, but they need to meet together as a unit. When we choose an apostolate in which all participate, in some manner, we will come to know each other at a deeper level. When we live in relationship, we learn about the other – sharing values, telling one's story, telling about our relationships, and working with others. A cooperative spirit attentive to those involved and the objective of the task are the basis to pursue the apostolate. This pursuit is to communicate individuals working as a unit in peace and harmony – to feed, to clothe, to comfort – to make Christ present in the name of Francis. Then and only then will our vocation as Secular Franciscans be realized and the passion of our vocation become alive.