

Juntos Como Hermanos III

Monday, October 12, 2015

We first met for light snacks and drinks followed by dinner. We then gathered for our first session at 7:30PM. After introducing ourselves we gave a little background of where we are and in what ministries we are involved. There were eighteen of us present from six provinces: Joaquín Mejía (IC), Orlando Ruiz (IC), Sebastián Sandoval (SB), Mark Schroeder (SB), René Juárez (SB), Tommy King (SB), Jacek Orzechowski (HN), Erick López (HN), Edgardo Jara (HN), Gonzalo Torres (HN), Steve DeWitt (HN), Ed Shea (SH), Tom Luczak (ABVM), Eduardo Espinoza (OLG), Efrén Quintero (OLG), Abel Olivas (OLG), Jorge Hernández (OLG), and Andrés Gallegos (OLG). On Tuesday Victor Vega (SB) joined the group.

Tuesday, October 13, 2015

We started the day with breakfast followed by Morning Prayer. We then gathered for our second session at 9:30AM. We were given a talk by Eduardo Fernandez, SJ entitled, “La Alegría de ser Testigos: el Mundo Latino en los Estados Unidos y la Espiritualidad Popular”.

Some of the major points of this talk/PowerPoint presentation were:

Religious distribution of Hispanics in the US: 55% are Catholic, 33% are Protestant and 18% are non religiously affiliated; Hispanics are the largest minority in the US; Hispanics are a young population, the median age is 25.9 years; the level of poverty is high for this population; the majority of this group is working class, young, and with less educational preparation compared to the general population; a investigative group from UCLA concludes that there is an apparent contradiction with this group that has one of the highest levels of poverty and low levels of education but show behaviors positively influenced with respect to the family, work, health and community. This should not be the case. According to the sociologist David Hayes-Bautista it is because of spirituality; this popular spirituality is bearing good fruit in Hispanic communities in the US; there is a large representation of laics in positions of Hispanic ministry; within the various challenges there are two key ones: the need to promote immigration reform and while many of the parish ministries are focused on the traditional family there are many groups that do not fit into this picture but need attention as well.

After a short break we reconvened to watch a video about Holy Week in Guatemala. We then had a question and answer period followed by lunch.

We gathered for our third session at 2PM. We broke into groups to discuss four questions and then reconvened to share the various group's responses.

Below is a list of the questions and a summary of what was shared:

1. With what Eduardo has shared with us, what importance does this have for Franciscans working in Hispanic/Latino ministry in the US?
2. How do we reinforce the ideas that Eduardo has shared with us?
3. How can we put these ideas into practice in our ministries?
4. What is the relation between what has been presented to us by Eduardo and the challenge that Pope Francis presents to the Church?

Group 1 responses:

- the importance of youth ministry presents us with challenges because of immaturity and the use of technology
- support for Hispanics in the social aspect
- how to support a multi-cultural parish and how to make it feel as one community
- sensitivity to young people in regards to their energy, their ethnic culture and integration
- identity of the first generation and how to assist them
- for whom and for what do we want to restructure our Franciscan identity in the US
- mobile communities not stationary
- integration of the ethnic communities, don't group
- propose an interprovincial committee for Hispanic ministry and the promotion of Hispanic vocations
- the provinces put obstacles for Hispanic vocations in regards to legal documents, language, and education
- Hispanic ministry is more complex than it appears to be
- Hispanic ministry done by an American is heroic while Hispanic ministry done by a Hispanic is criticized

Group 2 responses:

- Eduardo affirmed realities that we are already living
- importance of working together and with less provincialism
- invitation to reflect about our own ministry, to a deeper understanding of the areas and elements of our brothers and sisters that we serve
- we lack in understanding where we are going in our provinces
- what is the reality of the Church in the US today and where are we (friars) going in respect to mission/vision in this country?
- there exist at times different opinions between provincials and the reality of the Church today; at times there is frustration at the lack of support (OLG/IC)
- connect and strengthen the relationship with all the friars in Hispanic ministry; how many are there of us?; where are the rest?
- equilibrium within our roots, a way to practice/live our faith and encounter the Church in the US

Group 3 responses:

- we have a missionary charism; we have a responsibility to work with different cultures; it is part of our charism

- we should be aware of the different cultures in the locations that we minister
- need to be aware of the differences in the “Latino” culture
- we need to encourage friars in formation to work in Hispanic ministry or to at least consider it
- we need to encourage friars in formation to have exposure to other cultures
- we can’t take Latinos for granted; need to give attention to them
- watching out for the young
- we need to learn to work with the different cultures and their devotions
- we need to learn how to celebrate together the various cultural devotions
- being with the people at different things
- paying attention to the individual person
- making sure we incorporate solidarity into our ministries
- encourage cross understanding of experiences in our ministerial places
- how do we help heal the communities where we minister?

Group 4 responses:

- Given the context of our fraternal conversation about the restructuring process, it was very helpful to hear Eduardo’s presentation. He underscored the fact that we were in the midst of profound demographic shifts and social changes in the Catholic Church in the US due to the huge influx of Latinos. An overwhelming number of them are young. Many of the Spanish-speaking Catholics are affected by disproportionately high levels of material poverty compared with the rest of the country (30% of Latino children are growing up in poverty). Millions of the Hispanics in the US are also disadvantaged by a lack of legal status in this country and, as consequence, are struggling against many forces of economic, social and political marginalization.
- According to the 2014 study from Pew Research Center, one in four Latinos in the US has left the Catholic Church. In large part, this can be attributed to the fact that the Catholic Church is often not meeting their spiritual/ pastoral needs in integrated, comprehensive ways. On top of it, the Church faces a difficult challenge of ministering to the 2nd and 3rd generation of immigrants and helping them to foster a model of the Church that is responsive to its current multicultural context. These are some of the difficult challenges that the Church and the Franciscans in the US face. To the extent that we dare to face them with faith, hope and creativity, we would discover that these challenges are also laden with golden opportunities for growth and revitalization of the Church, our society and our Franciscan order in the U.S.

After a short break we gathered for our fourth session at 3:15PM. In this session we broke into groups and discussed the topic, “Revisioning and Restructuring Franciscan Life in the USA” and then reconvened to share the various group’s responses.

Below is a summary of what was shared:

Group 1 responses:

- what is the vision and mission?; where will Hispanic ministry fit in this path we are taking as OFM's in the US?
- we could share our work as brothers working for the common good
- one province with focus on Hispanic ministry with Definitorium working for Hispanic ministry (Hispanic director); more brothers working in this ministry
- wanting to make the statistic of Hispanic ministry more of a focus in our province now and in the future

Group 2 responses:

- each province has to go through their own restructuring first (re-focus ourselves) e.g. OLG: Hispanic ministry vs. Native American ministry
- will there be support for those who want to do Hispanic ministry?
- with Model A we restructure only once with a common vision = revitalization
- the reality of the Church in the US is that we are multi-cultural
- Pope Francis calls us to work for JPIC, for the poor, for the marginalized, therefore Hispanic ministry will be part of our work
- we will need to learn a broad vision of Hispanic ministry as it differs throughout the US
- the whole process seems to be only talking about geography and we want to talk first about values, vision, etc.
- make a video that shares all the ministries we are doing now throughout all seven provinces

Group 3 responses:

- some provinces don't have Hispanic ministry well planned out; we need to develop guidelines to challenge provinces in this area; we need a committee to develop guidelines
- in provinces with Hispanic ministry we need to give priority to this ministry
- we need to provide opportunities to those who want to work in Hispanic ministry; this includes friars in formation
- we need to be open to and creative with vocations that come to us with or without legal documents
- we need to be active in promoting Hispanic vocations; this includes 2nd and 3rd generation Hispanics
- we need to develop a pastoral plan to work with Hispanics
- we need to create a committee from this group to push these ideas

Group 4 responses:

- A number of friars in our small group discussion shared their opinion that the leadership of our Franciscan provinces do not sufficiently understand, appreciate and respond to the challenge and opportunities of Hispanic ministry and the multicultural nature of the Church's life and mission in the U.S. As the demands for multicultural ministries increase, the number of friars who are available and equipped to minister in that context

decrease. The friars gathered in Danville expressed concerns that that our Franciscan provinces struggle with a deficit of a clear vision regarding the vital role that the multicultural, collaborative parish ministry should have in the revitalization of the life and ministry of the Franciscan friars in the United States. It appears that there is also a deficit of strategies, personnel and financial resources, and corporate commitment to encourage the friars – especially those in initial formation – to learn Spanish, immerse themselves in the Latino culture so as to be evangelized, enriched and transformed by it. Many of the dioceses across the country are doing a much better job in that regard than we do as Franciscans.

- Pope Francis warns us against the perils of a “self-referential Church,” and of “diagnostical overload.” As our provinces explore different options for restructuring and reconfiguring our entities, we must ensure that this interprovincial dialogue takes into a serious consideration the profound demographic shifts taking place in the Catholic Church in the US. Likewise, our Franciscan leadership and all the friars across the country would do well to enter into critical reflection on the signs of the times and prayerfully enter into a process of discernment about what the Church and the contemporary world is looking from us as friars. Without a spiritually bold process of interprovincial dialogue about re-envisioning the Franciscan presence in the United States, all the elaborate diagnostics about possible ways of restructuring our provinces might prove to be woefully inadequate.

After we concluded this session we celebrated the daily liturgy together followed by dinner and then recreation.

Wednesday, October 14, 2015

We started the day with breakfast followed by Morning Prayer. We then gathered for our fifth session at 9:30AM. After initial introductions we were given a presentation by two lay leaders of St. Boniface parish in San Francisco. Angelica López described her work with the youth group and as a catechist of Confirmation there at St. Boniface. She stated that she appreciates the support of the pastor and that the friars help the laity to realize that they can do things. Lourdes Negrete described her work as a pastoral assistant and catechist of children, teenagers, and adults there at St. Boniface. She encouraged the friars to socialize and encourage the lay people more. She also stated that St. Boniface is a parish with various cultures and together they are moving forward.

Following their personal sharing there was a question and answer period with these two lay leaders. One of the suggestions that came out of this exchange was that the friars need to hear the people and motivate them with words, that is give them encouragement, and not necessarily money. The question was asked of them, “What do 2nd generation Hispanics want of the friars?” The answer was that they want to be taught about the traditions. Many parents work long hours and don’t always have an opportunity to pass on the traditions. We need your support to help pass these traditions on. Another suggestion was that the friars need to gain their trust. The people need to feel comfortable talking to a priest. Another suggestion was that the friars connect the Bible and actual life. It was pointed out that the youth are bi-lingual and bi-cultural. They are

Hispanic but speak English as well. They receive their catechism in English while their parents learn it in Spanish. Another topic that was addressed was the issue of problematic lay leaders. Sometimes these lay leaders become comfortable in their positions and prevent anyone else from rising to leadership positions. Some friars, out of respect for the current leaders, are hesitant to step in and address the dysfunction. It was suggested that at times it is necessary for the friar to step in and take charge and then once the dysfunction has been solved return the power back to the lay leaders.

After a short break we gathered for our sixth session at 11:15AM. In this session we discussed various points to include in a letter to the Franciscan Interprovincial Team. We then broke for lunch.

We gathered for our seventh session at 2PM. In this session we continued our work by fine tuning the letter for the Franciscan Interprovincial Team. It was decided that a representative from each province should sign the letter. They are: René Juárez (SB), Erick López (HN), Eduardo Espinoza (OLG), Tom Luczak (ABVM), Orlando Ruiz (IC), and Ed Shea (SH). This session was followed by a break.

We gathered for our eighth session at 3:15PM. In this session we talked about next year's location of Juntos Como Hermanos IV. It was decided that we will meet from Oct. 10 to Oct. 13, 2016 at Mt. Alvernia Retreat Center in Wappinger Falls, New York. We also worked on a letter to the provincials and the provincial councils of the seven provinces. This letter will accompany a copy of the letter being sent to the Franciscan Interprovincial Team.

After we concluded this session we celebrated the daily liturgy together followed by our ninth session at 5:45PM. In this session we completed an evaluation of Juntos Como Hermanos III.

Below is a summary of the evaluation:

- it was stated that the group enjoyed an outside speaker to educate us
- thanks were given to Tommy King and Jacek Orzechowski for organizing this year's gathering
- fraternal piece is important
- incorporate fun time to be together
- suggestions for topic and speaker for 2016
- liked that we came away with something concrete – letter to FIT
- letter was good, good work was done
- suggested topic of “La justicia brota de la fe”
- look at issue of Catholics leaving the Church to go to Protestant denominations
- incorporate how to deal with the psychological piece within immigrant parishes
- talk on how to help immigrant parishioners deal with loneliness
- what are our people finding in Evangelical churches that they aren't finding in us?
- glad more Latino friars participated, need to get more of them here
- send email to all friars who work in Hispanic ministry

This session was followed by dinner and then recreation.

Thursday, October 15, 2015

We started the day with breakfast. We then gathered for our tenth session at 10AM. In this session a presentation was given about the St. Barbara province's immersion experience in Guaymas, Mexico. The history and description of the location was given. It was pointed out that at present while the province is no longer present in the parish it does support various social work projects such as a medical clinic, a cooking school, a women's co-op, and a soup kitchen. Various college groups also come to Guaymas for an immersion experience with the friars. The original mission immersion experience took place from 1991 to 2000 in Guatemala. Then after a revision to the program it was moved to Cabo San Lucas in Baja California Sur with the St. Junipero Serra Province. The program was eventually discontinued due to lack of friar personnel. Tommy King hopes to go to Guaymas in September of 2016 to restart the program and receive the first group of friars in formation in January of 2017.

We then talked about suggestions for Juntos Como Hermanos IV. The following are the suggestions that were made:

- that we address feedback from the seven provincials on the letter that was drafted and will be sent to FIT as a result of the 2015 gathering
- that an ad hoc committee be formed to deal with the feedback
- that we meet Monday, Tuesday with a fun night, Wednesday and Thursday morning
- that we send in a non-refundable deposit
- that the language can be bi-lingual
- fee would be around \$250 (subject to change)
- possibility of grants from the various provinces to cover expenses

After we concluded this session we celebrated the closing liturgy together followed by lunch and then departure to our respective provinces.

Respectfully submitted by: Sebastián Sandoval, OFM