

Understanding Franciscan Solidarity Tables of the Franciscan Action Network

Rooted in the Franciscan Spiritual Tradition, Franciscan Solidarity Tables are intended to enkindle the fire of the Spirit of God within us, so as to move us toward being a community of love in action. With hearts aflame in justice and consolation, we are inspired to set tables of peace and friendship, which nourish action in the public square through the example of Francis & Clare of Assisi.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis Chapter 15

Francis, came to St. Mary of the Angels, and...caused the table to be set upon the bare ground, as he was wont to do. And when the dinner hour was come, St. Francis and St. Clare sat down together, and one of the companions of St. Francis with the companion of St. Clare; and thereafter all the other companions sate them humbly down at the table. And, at the first dish, St. Francis began to speak of God so sweetly, so highly and so marvelously, that abundance of Divine grace descended upon them and they were all rapt in God. And while they were thus rapt, with eyes and hands raised to heaven, the people of Assisi and of the district round about, saw that St. Mary of the Angels and the wood were burning fiercely. But when they reached the place they saw that there was no fire at all, and they went in and found St. Francis and St. Clare and all their company rapt in God through contemplation, and sitting about that lowly board. Whereby they understood of a surety that that had been Divine fire and not material, the which God had made to appear miraculously to show forth and signify the fire of Divine love wherewith were enkindled the souls of those holy friars and holy nuns; wherefore they departed thence with great consolation of heart and holy edification.

Phase 1: Building Relationships

Rooted in Scripture, Franciscan Solidarity Tables are an invitation to *Come to the Table* and sit beside the Lord, to sit alongside one another.

"Come to the Table" by Michael Card captures the spirit of this phase, a FAN video to accompany this music would be helpful in establishing FSTs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKB9bGtr5rw>

As FSTs begin, it is important that the members of the group come together and build relationships so that they might be/become a true expression of family, in a Franciscan manner. Like other families that gather at table, differences will naturally arise. Peace building is essential here, by recognizing differences within the FST while seeking forgiveness for and release from our prejudices.

An FST might include both Franciscans and Franciscan hearted people. So, some FSTs may be ecumenical and/or interfaith. A Franciscan should always be a part of the group.

The Structure of a FST needs to include:

1. A **facilitator** who will convene each gathering the FST. This role can rotate among members of the group.
2. A **scribe** who will report back to FAN, as to the regular progress of the group.
3. A **spiritual servant** (a Franciscan) of the charism of the group. The spiritual servant will help the group in understanding FAN's eight characteristics of *Franciscan Voice*, and Franciscan spirituality.

The Director of the program will need to begin implementation of this phase by answering these questions:

- How are small groups formed?
- What are the basic steps and timetable?
- How many should persons should there be at a FST?
- What number might be too many/too few for a successful group?
- How are differences of opinion overcome and peacebuilding within a table actualized?

Phase 2: Minority & Solidarity

Inspired by Franciscans living the Gospel, the heart of this phase is the ability of everyone to listen, as Francis and Clare did to the lepers of their day, thereby discovering a God who speaks in living parables.

"Will You not Listen?" by Michael Card captures the spirit of this phase, a FAN video to accompany this music would be helpful in FST discernment.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ouuyrFsO1NE>

Once relationships are well established, an FST can turn to the core of what it means to embody Franciscanism, namely the virtues of minority & solidarity. As sisters and brothers minor, the members of an FST quiet themselves to listen, so as to hear the voice of God and discern a group "in the margins" of their local area, with whom they become one at heart with, in compassion.

The Director of the program will need to begin implementation of this phase by answering these questions:

- How do we "hold" the group in the margins in prayer/fasting without the group in the margins even knowing it?
- How might we meet/encounter those in the margins?
- How do members of an FST reach out to others in a sense of equality marked by minority and solidarity?

Phase 3: Social Outreach

Rooted in Scripture, the call is to community, the impoverished power that sets the soul free. It is in our humbly responding to our promises made to God, that day after day we take up the basin and the towel in Jesus' example of servant love.

"The Basin and the Towel" by Michael Card captures the spirit of this phase, a FAN video to accompany this music would be helpful in encouraging outreach through FSTs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV14WES9aow>

This phase is the first step of love in action. The first foot forward is social outreach, or charitable works to those who are in need. Moving through the first two phases, prayer and discernment now move into action, when members of FST concretely embrace the other, "in the margins" as Immanuel, God who is with us!

The Director of the program will need to begin implementation of this phase by answering these questions:

- What will you do to be in solidarity with this identified group in the margins?
- How are the voices of the underserved being lifted up?
- Possible situations/contexts might include:
 - [USCCB's charitable works](#) offers examples (short-term, emergency assistance for individuals)
 - Peacemaking (Gun violence prevention, inter-religious Dialogue)
 - Human Dignity (Immigration/Refugee, Trafficking, fair wages, healthcare)
 - Care for Creation (food security, Right to Water/clean water)
 - Example for food security: Gleaning Network is the traditional biblical practice of gathering crops that would otherwise be left in the fields to rot, or be plowed under after harvest

Phase 4: Social Justice/Advocacy

Inspired by Franciscans living the Gospel, we move as sisters and brothers into the public square to speak the truth to power, so as to seek justice for the oppressed, for those in the margins. Like Francis & Clare we become *Fools for Christ*, and do the unbelievable!

"God's Own Fool" by Michael Card captures the spirit of this phase, a FAN video to accompany this music would be helpful in inspiring FSTs.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tEJrjGa106U>

This phase is the second step of love in action. With moving the other foot forward, FSTs do not ask *how to help* the poor, but rather, they ask *why people are poor*, why things are the way they are, in the sense of injustice. Here the members of FSTs organize to raise their voices in awareness efforts and for effecting systemic change locally, nationally and

internationally. Key to this phase is the FST working closely with FAN and its partners in organized advocacy efforts.

The Director of the program will need to begin implementation of this phase by considering the following:

- As described by the USCCB, there are two distinct, but complementary, ways we can put the Gospel in action in response to God's love: *social justice* (addressing systemic, root causes of problems that affect many people-Phase 3) and *charitable works* (short-term, emergency assistance for individuals-Phase 2).
- For example, if the issue of an FST is Food Security, they may choose in Phase 2 of "Minority & Solidarity" to help start a food bank or glean for those most in need. In Phase 3 of Advocacy, they would work to raise awareness about food deserts and advocate for legislation and economic reform that would bring new life, hope, and better health to people in food desert areas.
- This phase would include:
 - Basic advocacy preparation/education on a given issue/situation
 - Coordinate people to work on policy issues locally, statewide & nationally based on geographic region & issues of concern
 - How do you change a law? Contact a Congressperson?
 - Discuss lifestyle change both personally and communally
 - Develop a strategy for networking with national social justice organizations



THE LORD'S SUPPER (1953)