

Celebration of AR 50th Anniversary with Friends, Colleagues, Parishes and Area Communities

Script for Local Events

The following is an outline and script that can be used in whole or in part. This is a model that you can feel free to adapt to in-person presentations in homes or church meeting rooms, or present on Zoom with groups of any size. The keys to successful gatherings are a combination of prayer, focus on service, and refreshments. In live presentations, a service dimension could be added locally, such as a collection of food for an area food bank or preparing backpacks for summer school children or sandwiches for delivery to the homeless. On Zoom, refreshments are not available, of course; but invitations may suggest that participants are welcome to bring a cup of tea/coffee or a glass of wine to enjoy during or after the gathering.

General Format One-hour interactive meeting

Location Meeting room in church, school, home, workplace – or virtual meetings on Zoom

Outline

- Welcome and Introduction (5 min.)
- Prayer Service and Reflection (30 min.)
 - Theme: “Imagine”
 - Jesus
 - St. Francis
 - St. Clare
 - Alexia, Alfons, and Clara
 - Associate Relationship
- Comments and Q&A (10 min.)
- Refreshments & social time (15 min.)

Please let us know if you create a local event. Also, we would welcome your feedback on the script. Tell us how it worked for you, or how you modified it for your gathering.

Script

[Facilitator lights a candle, to bring light to the gathering. The facilitator speaks the Welcome, the readings, the call to Interaction & Response, and concludes the program. If two or more associates and/or sisters are presenting together, they may choose to alternate roles.]

WELCOME

Welcome, everyone. We are delighted that you have joined us this evening (morning/afternoon) to celebrate 50 years of our Associate Relationship with the School Sisters of St. Francis of Milwaukee.

Over the past 50 years, more than 500 women and men have been linked in bonds of mutual support with the School Sisters in a relationship that has enriched the lives and supported the ministries of lay people and sisters in a spirit of joyful companionship.

Many of you may know School Sisters who taught in schools and served in hospitals in this area. They served in the Midwest, and also in Mississippi, Kentucky, California, and other states. Today, sisters continue to serve in those ministries. Additionally, they support immigrants at the border of El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. They also have ministries in Europe, Latin America, India, and Africa. At one time they even ministered in China.

Is anyone here a member of an associate program with another religious community, such as Third Order of St. Francis, the Dominicans, or any others? If so, thank you for celebrating with us. We join with you as part of a widespread movement of lay associates that includes some 60,000 men and women around the world.

[PRAYER SERVICE]

Let us begin our prayer service

Our theme for this anniversary celebration is *Imagine!*

We thought John Lennon's song, "Imagine," would be appropriate to establish our theme. Let's listen to the song and follow along with the words.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNnFFKv_Nyl

[Play this YouTube video. Advance past any ads and cue up the video before the start of the meeting. On Zoom, this can be shown by using "Share Screen." For Zoom assistance, contact Kathymflan@aol.com]

Lyrics to “Imagine” by John Lennon

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us, only sky

Imagine all the people
Livin' for today
Ah

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion, too

Imagine all the people
Livin' life in peace
You

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world
You

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

ÍMAGINE: Just imagine, there was a man named Jesus.

Let's listen to a reading from the gospel according to Luke, 4:14-21, where Jesus proclaims his mission and his identity:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news of him spread throughout the whole region. He taught in their synagogues and was praised by all. He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went, according to his custom, into the synagogue on the sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because God has anointed me
To bring glad tidings to the poor.
God has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
And recovery of sight to the blind,
To let the oppressed, go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, “Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing.”

[INTERACTION]

Let's take a few minutes of silence to reflect on this reading. In what ways have you found yourself called to bring Gospel values into your family and community?

(Wait 2-3 a few minutes)

Let's hear from a few people willing to share your reflections.

(After 2-3 responses)

Thank you for sharing your comments.

[RESPONSE]

Please join me in spirit as I read this shared response:

“We have been called to do what Jesus did. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Us.”

IMAGINE: Just imagine, there was a man named Francis.

St. Francis lived in Assisi in the 12th century. Faced by a world growing more materialistic as monetary exchange and commercial enterprises become more dominant, Francis cast off all worldly possessions. And the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, and he urged his brothers and sisters to bring glad tidings to the poor. He cast off the garments of his wealth and put on the simplest of clothing, calling everyone to recognize that peace and goodness does not come from possessing material goods, but from following the example of Jesus.

[INTERACTION]

Let's take a few minutes of silence to reflect on the message of St Francis. To whom can we bring glad tidings?

(Wait 2-3 a few minutes)

Let's hear from a few people willing to share your thoughts about to whom we can bring glad tidings.

(After 2-3 responses)

Thank you for sharing your reflections.

[RESPONSE]

Please join me in spirit as I read this response from the early Rule of St. Francis:

With our whole heart, our whole soul, our whole mind, with our whole strength and fortitude,
With our whole understanding, with all our powers,
With every effort, every affection, every feeling, every desire and wish
Let us all love the Lord God who has given and gives to each one of us
Our whole body, our whole soul, and our whole life,
Who created us... who did and does everything good for us.

IMAGINE: Just imagine, there was a woman named Clare.

Clare was a noble lady with a dowry and lands who heard the message of Francis. In a shifting world, Clare refused to cling to material symbols of security. She audaciously chose to live by the work of her hands and on the alms of her neighbors. Clare preferred interdependence with her fellow city dwellers to financial independence. In her Form of Life and in her Testament, which are her spiritual legacy, Clare repeatedly speaks to those who would come after her. Clare had found the treasure in a narrow field. She was determined that it would not be buried with her. Clare challenges us to name our treasures, to stop scurrying about long enough to look within our hearts and to name what really matters.

[INTERACTION]

In silence, let us take a few moments to look into our hearts and name one or two of our most important treasures.

(Wait 2-3 a few minutes)

Let's hear from a few people willing to share your thoughts about the treasures that really matter in our lives.

(After 2-3 responses)

Thank you for sharing your reflections. Your comments were very moving.

[RESPONSE]

Please join me in spirit as I share the blessing of St. Clare:

What you hold may you always hold.
What you do, may you always do and never abandon.
But with swift pace, light step, and unswerving feet,
so that even your steps stir up no dust,
Go forward, the spirit of our God has called you.

IMAGINE: Just imagine, there were three women, Alexia, Alfons, and Clara, who founded the School Sisters of St. Francis.

Nearly 150 years ago, three courageous women left their own country to be of service to immigrants in the United States. More than 5,000 women have followed in their footsteps as teachers and health care providers, and in many other ministries serving the People of God. Rather than withdraw from the world and its challenges, the founders called us to meet the “needs of the times.”

The following was written as a tribute to the founder, Mother Alexia, and quoted in the community’s history, *He Sent Two*, by Sister Francis Borgia:

From the earliest days you understood religious life to be a life of commitment, of involvement. Your day-and-night work with typhoid victims and with the wounded during the First World War, your sharing of the convent home with orphans, your concern for the mentally ill and the nervous sick when little was being done for them – [these were] not evidence at all of a withdrawal mentality. Even your very last words to all of us we notice are in the imperative mode, ringing, challenging: “Be united! Remain faithful and sacrificial. Become interior souls. Have only supernatural intentions in all your actions.”

[INTERACTION]

In silence, let us take a few moments to reflect on the courage of the founders of the School Sisters of St. Francis. What does their commitment stir in you?

(Wait 2-3 a few minutes)

How do you respond to the challenge of the lives of these brave women? Let’s hear a couple of your reflections.

(After 2-3 responses)

Thank you for sharing. It’s inspiring to see their spirit living in you.

[RESPONSE]

Please join me in spirit as I speak this prayer to our founders written by Sister Roberta:

Mother Alexia, Mother Alfons, Sister Clara, we call on you to come, each of you, to us in our endeavor. We are hungry for your word, your love, your sense of what is right for us. We long to know the truth of you, of one another, of our universe. We pray – Dream your dreams within us to wake us from our sleep. Give vision to our eyes in dark of night. Let the dreams of our hearts come alive and the heart of our dreams be true.

IMAGINE: Just imagine, there is a group of people named Associates of the School Sisters of St. Francis

Associates are women and men from all walks of life and various creeds who are seeking a deeper experience of God for their own transformation and for the transformation of the world. . . The associate relationship is not membership in [a religious institute. It is instead] a mutual relationship of vowed members of a congregation and lay women and men. At heart, the associate presence is recognized as the work of God's creative spirit in the life of the congregation. The vowed members [the sisters] receive from the associates the wisdom of their faith stories, friendship, and a new vision of co-creating the reign of God. At the same time, the sisters share the heritage of joyful participation in the redeeming love of Jesus, their spiritual tradition, hospitality, and friendship. The distinct relationship with the Congregation of the School Sisters of St. Francis creates a mutual bond between the associates and the sisters that widens the circle of Jesus' unconditional love for all. [Notes of the Associate Relationship Think Tank, November 2017]

Here are some of the reflections of a few people who have become associates over the past 50 years.

From Maureen Hellwig, Illinois

"I signed my first agreement in January, 1973. . . Over 40+ years, my mutual agreement has changed many times in specifics, but never in its overall thrust. However, it has been worded, I have essentially said that your work is my work, and my work is your work."

From Gene & Dolores Suding, Indiana

"Gene and I became associates in 1974. We are Roman Catholic. We chose to be in the Chiara group from Rockford, Illinois. We were both very active in our local parish at the time. . . Our connections with the School Sisters of St. Francis are very important to us, sustain us and keep us grounded in our Franciscan spirituality."

From Joan Anderson, Tennessee

"I became an associate in 1999. I converted to Roman Catholicism in 1994. My movement as an associate has been in the mission and community life of School Sisters of St. Francis in Nashville, Tennessee. From 1997 to my retirement in 2014, I worked at Project

Reflect, a non-profit founded by Sister Sandra Smithson, to educate poor and minority children. . . .It has been my privilege to work and live side-by-side with School Sisters who have welcomed me as one of their own and blessed my life.”

From Dr. Eleanor Fleming, Maryland

“I became an associate in May 2016. . . . The mutual agreement has enriched my life in more ways than I can count. I have grown in my spirituality and faith. . . . Overall, I have new friends from the community who make life better.”

[INTERACTION]

Let’s take a few minutes to hear from a couple other associates or sisters regarding the way Associate Relationship has influenced their lives.

(After 2-3 responses)

Thank you for sharing. I think we can agree that the experience of Associate Relationship has been enriching in many ways

[RESPONSE]

Let’s ponder the response of Catherine Hammer in an article on “Empowering Tomorrow’s Laity.” She said this about the future of associate relationship:

“The great potential of associate [relationship] programs lies not so much in a revitalization of religious congregations, but in a renewal of the spiritual life and power of the laity. . . .It is possible that in the coming age, newly-empowered and self-aware lay people, some of whom have been nurtured and supported in the associate [relationship] program, will be a major force for carrying on the work of the church.” [“Empowering Tomorrow’s Laity” by Catherine Hammer, PhD, “The Associate,” Summer, 1999, as quoted in “History of Associate Relationship” by Sister Barbaralie Stieffermann, OSF]

IMAGINE Just imagine all the blessings that have been received by sisters and associates during 50 years of journeying together. And this is just the beginning. We will be celebrating the past 50 years and building for the future throughout this milestone year.

We are grateful to each of you for being present with us today to share in this moment.

[We invite you to continue this conversation and enjoy refreshments (if available).]

Anyone who has questions or anyone who is interested in learning more about Associate Relationship, please contact me after this meeting.

In closing, we would like to share the blessing of St. Francis. As I raise my hands, I am representing all the School Sisters of St. Francis and Associates as we join in the blessing as sung by The Chapel Singers, a choir of the St. Joseph Convent in Milwaukee.

[If you have the technical ability, you can play the recording of the Blessing of St. Francis, which is available from the Associate Relationship office. If not possible to play the recording, you can say the blessing yourself, as follows.]

May God bless you and keep you.
May the Holy One grant you mercy.
May the face of love shine on you
And give you peace, and give you peace.

Please join me in saying Amen as we conclude this prayerful celebration:

Let all God's people say. . . . "Amen."

God bless you. Have a great rest of your day.

[Provide email in Zoom chat, or in a handout of the prayer service. At in-person meetings, or as mail follow-up to Zoom guests, you can distribute information cards that are available from the Associate Relationship office.]