

Fr. Franklin Fong, OFM

Walking in Faith, Friar's Journey Comes Full Circle

Faith, trust and patience guide FST alumnus, uniting the many pieces of his life and work

Born and raised in San Francisco, at the intersection of Chinatown and North Beach's Little Italy, Fr. Franklin Fong, OFM, spent his early years immersed in rich cultures and traversing through varying, eclectic environments daily. The city for him, "sowed the seed of curiosity."

"I was always more curious than afraid of varying cultures and ways of thinking." Now, at 72, Fr. Franklin, connects God's vision to his early life and learning.

Fr. Franklin continued his journey of exploration at the University of California, Davis and later the University of California, Riverside where he earned a doctorate in biology. Little did he know then, but his first teaching job at Texas A&M would fuse a link that would alter the course of his life.

Teaching plant physiology and conducting research, Fr. Franklin found that, while he was successful, high stress had impacted him emotionally and physiologically. A Christmas play would bring an introduction to the Monastery of St. Clare and the Franciscan Poor Clare Nuns operating the monastery's miniature horse farm. Among them was Sister Bernadette, an animal lover who believed raising and selling tiny equines could provide the revenue needed to support the community.

Fr. Franklin began making monthly visits to see Sister Bernadette. "One day," he recalled, "She asked if I had ever thought about being a friar." Growing up in San Francisco he'd never seen a Franciscan friar, and while he was raised in the United Church of Christ, Sr. Bernadette's suggestion resonated with him.

At her advice, Fr. Franklin began attending mass. "It started with me going at the end of the week, but then became the way I started my week," he recollected. "It didn't take long before I was going every day. I found I was able to deal with the stress of my job by listening to the Word of God at Mass every day." Through daily Eucharist and Bible study, Fr. Franklin connected his head, heart and body, and before long he began his Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process. Within a year he was discerning to enter religious life. "This all came about because I was open and showed up," he recalled.

Fr. Franklin completed his novitiate in Santa Barbara in 1992 and returned to the parish at the Old Mission Santa Barbara last summer after his service, most recently, as Pastor of the St. Boniface Parish in San Francisco. Throughout his journey, he has continued teaching. From a stint at Gonzaga University and summers teaching biology in the Philippines to his time spent in service in Portland, Berkeley, Oceanside and back home in San Francisco and Oakland, Fr. Franklin's teaching, and learning, were entwined.

"In my own life, I simply wanted to give my life to build the church through teaching," Fr. Franklin shared in a 2016 homily on faith, trust and patience before St. Boniface parishioners that centered on the life, challenges and spiritual journey of St. Francis. "Teaching," he said, "led me from one thing to another and has unfolded in my preaching, being a priest and now pastor. Trust me, I never had any thought about being a priest nor a pastor when I entered the Franciscans. This is God's vision for my life!"

Each step along his path has revealed what Fr. Franklin said were, "gifts to receive," that impacted his teachings and allowed him to connect with the diverse communities within which he taught. At FST, he found not only a connection to the doctrine and philosophical perspectives being taught, but also the opportunity to walk in faith with the students, friars and faculty members who were teachers as well.

Today, Fr. Franklin continues teaching through art, sharing God's word through his calligraphy.

"I realized all these years of ministry have pulled together many cultures and chapters of my life," Fr. Franklin said. "It was out of curiosity that I explored, but I realized it's after you walk in your journey of faith that you

see what God has provided for you and why he wanted you to learn what you have.”

To share your path to FST and beyond, please connect with Alan B. Andrade via alanandrade@fst.edu.