

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS)



For Up to Now

Foundational Topics for Initial Formation

Prepared by the National Formation Commission
of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – U.S.A.
--- 2011---

*“Let us begin FOR UP TO NOW we have done nothing.”
~Francis of Assisi~*

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Portions of this document have been
adapted from
“Forming the Formators”
CIOFS 2008

Thank You

Our International Presidency and the International Formation Commission, especially the Chair, Benedetto Lino, OFS, deserve our heartfelt gratitude and thanks for their dedication to this project:

Benedetto Lino, OFS (Italy), Coordinator; **Marie-Odile Blanty**, OFS (France); **Marie Amore**, OFS (USA); **Tibor Kauser**, OFS (Hungary); **Fr. Irudaya Samy**, OFM Cap. (India); **Fr. Martin Bitzer**, OFM Conv. (Argentina).

This initiative to revitalize our formation process and provide training for the formators of the Order was a true labor of love.

When the Presidency approved the content, they knew that if these materials were implemented, it would deepen our understanding and strengthen our commitment to the fundamental elements of our vocation worldwide.

It took creativity, cooperation, and a lot of energy on the part of the entire Presidency and Formation Commission to see this commitment through to completion and pass their dream on to the National Fraternities.

Further, it was the Presidency's hope that once it was in our hands, each National Fraternity would make sure that it reached all the local fraternities, the privileged places where the Franciscan Life of all our brothers and sisters could be formed and enhanced by it.

This was our goal also in developing these materials for the OFS-USA,

National Formation Commission - USA

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Introduction

Forward from the Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order¹

“This [Formation] was by far the theme that received the most attention. The importance of formation has emerged as the essential element to guarantee an authentic and deep sense of belonging, rooted in a clear notion of identity and knowledge of the true nature of the OFS and of its place in the Franciscan Family and in the Church. The Chapter has manifested the urgency of finding new, original, and efficacious ways to give to formation the completeness and uniformity which an Order, spread around the whole world, deserves to accomplish the fundamental role of mature and authoritative apostolate it is called to offer, in collaboration with the rest of the Franciscan Family.” (Conclusions, General Chapter 2002)

This is how the service of the Presidency elected for the sexennium 2002-2008 was inaugurated, with a strong and clear mandate of the General Chapter to engage itself to give to the Order a strong, complete formation, rooted in identity, sense of belonging and on the knowledge of the true nature of the Order.

The Presidency has accepted this mandate with conviction and love and used its best efforts to achieve this goal, not without some trepidation as to the outcome of the project. This Manual is the concrete testimony of this commitment, together with the living testimony of all those who, in Rome or elsewhere, have already implemented the project and this formation material.

We thank God, who assisted us with His Love and Providence, as well as all the brothers and sisters who have believed in the project and supported us. A special thanks goes to the members of Presidency Formation Commission,² who have worked with great sense of duty and enthusiasm and also to the benefactors who have made possible the realization of this project, despite our lack of resources.

Encarnación del Pozo, OFS

Minister General

¹ Extracted from the CIOFS *Forming the Formators Manual* – CIOFS Presidency 2008

² **Benedetto Lino**, OFS, Coordinator; **Marie-Odile Blanty**, OFS (Francia); **Marie Amore**, OFS (USA); **Tibor Kauser**, OFS (Ungheria); **Fr. Irudaya Samy**, OFM Cap. (India); **Fr. Martin Bitzer**, OFM Conv. (Argentina).

Introduction from the International Presidency of the SFO³

In a certain sense, the Order of Penitents of Saint Francis (Franciscan Third Order), in its secular component today called SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER⁴, lives in a **new era**, some kind of rebirth marked by the new Pauline Rule, the new General Constitutions, new Statutes, the new Ritual, and an Ecclesial Status clearly redefined.

—In the process of renovation of religious life called for by the II Vatican Council, all the religious Institutes had to question their institutional identity in the light of the new doctrinal acquisitions ‘canonized’ by the Council and to offer an adequate response of their charism to the changed conditions of times.⁵

The OFS is not a Religious Institute of Consecrated Life; however, our foundational history, our laws, and our Profession place us in a state that makes these words applicable to us as well.

Let us not forget, moreover, that the same Papal Magisterium has defined us a “True Order” and a “Lay Order.”⁶ We must therefore become fully aware that our Order is a “unique” reality in the history of the Church.

This process of renewal has already produced deep changes in our structures and in the way we “understand” our Order and ourselves as members. Such changes, however, have remained, to a large extent, confined to some restricted circles and have a hard time breaking through without a strong effort to “push” formation to reach the very roots of the Order.

All this demands:

- a clarification of the **identity of the Order**;
- awareness of being an authentic and **essential component** of the original **Franciscan Trilogy**;
- a great effort to **integrate** into the DNA of each of the individual OFS members and of the OFS, as a whole, the complete dimensions of **Secularity, Unity, Autonomy**;
- a new **understanding** and **awareness of the role that the OFS**, and consequently every Secular Franciscan, has in the Church and in the Franciscan Family.

The Presidency Formation Commission, and subsequently the Presidency itself, after close study and consideration, have approved a project to reshape the INITIAL FORMATION OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS of the entire Order. This Manual is the outcome of this project.

Let’s go on full of confidence and **“let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing”** (1C 103).

*Benedetto Lino, OFS
Presidency Formation
Commission Coordinator*

³ Extracted from the CIOFS “Forming the Formators” Manual – CIOFS Presidency 2008

⁴ The official name of the Order is *ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS*. In this text we will always refer to our Order with the acronym **OFS**.

⁵ A. Boni, OFM, *La Novitas Franciscana nel suo essere e nel suo divenire*, Spicilegium Pontificii Athenaei Antoniani, page 13

⁶ Benedict XV, *Encyclical Letter Sacra propediem*, Pius XII, “Speech to the Tertiaries”, 1 July 1956; John Paul II, to the OFS General Chapter, 14 June 1988.

Conclusions of the XII General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order⁷

In order to better understand and focus our energies as an Order, as a National Fraternity, as Regional Fraternities, and as numerous Local Fraternities, all places where our vocation is actively lived out, I have included the remarks expressed by the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants. This following section is excerpted from the “Conclusions of the XII General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order” as reported in the publication of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, “Koinonia” 2009-1 Year 16 #61.

The XII General Chapter took place in Hungary to conclude most appropriately the biennial celebration of the 8th centenary of the birth of the beloved Patroness of the OFS, Saint Elizabeth of Hungary.

The key themes of the Chapter, the *Profession of Secular Franciscans* and their *Sense of Belonging*, were developed masterfully by the lecturers, Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., and Emanuela De Nunzio, OFS, and offered full and expectant stimuli and precious indications to continue in the direction already undertaken.

The rich and vibrant report of the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, bore a strong witness to the commitment of the Presidency and to the great quantity of work accomplished in the past six years. The report provided a cue for the following reflections, which resolutely aimed at a continued commitment to formation and on a full assumption of the secular dimension of our lives with all the consequences that ensue from it.

The OFS is the part of the Family that lives this dimension in all its fullness, and it cannot fail in contributing this essential element to the mission of the entire Franciscan Family.

The Chapter was blessed by abundant gifts of spiritual and concrete reflections and suggestions: the report of the Minister General, Encarnación del Pozo, the report of the President of the Elective Chapter, Fr. Marco Tasca, OFM Conv., Minister General, on the *Beginning of the Charism*, the report of the Conference of the General Spiritual Assistants presented by its President in turn, Fr. Irudaya Samy, OFM Cap., the reports on the Emerging National Fraternities, on Formation, on the Presence in the World, and on the Franciscan Youth.

The Chapter acknowledged with joy that the Order is still in existence or is starting up in many countries, including in those areas where religious persecution, atheism, and secularization have reduced the presence of the Church to a bare minimum or even wiped it out completely.

⁷ “Koinonia” 2009-1 Year 16 # 61 www.ciofs.org/Koinonia/a9enkoinic.htm

The Order has also made a strong reflection on itself. The exponential increase of activities, the service to be offered to the Emerging Fraternities, and the increasing needs of the Order, also from the economic point of view, demand a firm commitment by each and every one and a more effective and incisive communication.

It was also acknowledged with joy that Franciscan Youth is growing and strengthening in several countries, but that the Order must also commit itself more actively and with more determination at all levels to responsibly fulfill its essential role in animating Franciscan Youth in their Christian and Franciscan vocational journey.

The Chapter was a great experience of sharing and fraternity. The fraternal joy, the happiness of being together with brothers and sisters from all over the world, especially from the poorest and persecuted countries, was for all a privileged moment of grace.

The sincerity and depth of the feelings shared by all during the Chapter is a concrete wealth that each of the capitulars will have to share with all the brothers and sisters of their own countries.

The presence of several observers, including Franciscan religious from a number of countries, bore witness to the interest in the Order and for its development.

At the conclusion of its work, the Chapter indicated the fields of action and the priorities to be implemented by the whole Order during the next six-year period.

The priorities of the General Chapter are as follows:

1. FORMATION
2. COMMUNICATION
3. FRANCISCAN YOUTH
4. PRESENCE IN THE WORLD
5. EMERGING FRATERNITIES

For purposes of this formation project, we will focus on the formation priority.⁸

FORMATION

Formation remains the top priority of the Chapter for the entire Order.

The Chapter recognized the importance of the Formation Project, which has already been initiated, and has decided to continue in the same direction to fully implement the initial formation course in every part of the world. **Great importance is attached to the formation of formators, and to the necessity of making sure that local Fraternities are reached by the Formation Project.**

⁸ This document can be found in its entirety on the CIOFS website: *Koinonia* 2009-1 Year 16 # 61 www.ciofs.org/Koinonia/a9enkoinic.htm

In addition to the topics already proposed, it is requested that the Formation Project include the following topics:

1. Social doctrine of the Church;
2. Better understanding of the significant social and political problems of the day;
3. Social and political commitment of Secular Franciscans in the world;
4. Development of aids for a more focused and deeper study of the OFS's own legislation—Rule, General Constitutions, and Ritual; and
5. Most important documents of the Church and of the Magisterium.

The Chapter further recommends that the Presidency promote permanent Formation by proposing to all the fraternities in the world a central theme of annual formation and by providing the necessary indications and aids to develop and study this theme.

Moreover, it is recommended that formation be implemented, not only at an intellectual level, but also on the practical level of concrete charity.

The Chapter recognizes that the *sense of belonging*, *vocation to fraternity*, and *the importance and nature of the commitment of Profession* are all fundamental elements in the life of Secular Franciscans that must be undertaken, underlined, and re-proposed with strength in initial and permanent formation.

It is recognized that strong and qualified projects to **promote vocations** to the Secular Franciscan Order are urgently needed at all levels. It is also recommended that joint formation meetings be organized between Secular Franciscans and Franciscan religious.

The Chapter also requests that the Presidency prepare adequate instruments for the formation of lay spiritual assistants and assistants who are not members of the First Order or the Third Order Regular.

The Presidency

- ✓ shares, makes its own, and receives with attention all the requests and recommendations of the Chapter and commits, for whatever falls within its responsibilities, to implement them to the best of its ability;
- ✓ formulates the following observations and recommendations for all the Fraternities of the whole world:
 1. **The Conclusions of all Chapters are binding for the Presidency, but also, and perhaps even more, for all the Fraternities of the whole world at all levels and for each and every Secular Franciscan.** Therefore, they must be the object of a continuous and attentive consideration by all. The entire Order, as a single body, has to strive in every possible way to implement them. It is, therefore, requested to do everything possible at all levels to make known, implement, and verify the objectives set by the Chapters.

2. The effort to deepen and assume the proper identity of Secular Franciscans must continue more intensely than ever according to what has been indicated by the Chapter and by the Formation project.
3. The commitment to work in order to achieve a true communion of “being” and “doing” as Franciscan Family must grow and the OFS must be a qualified actor in this process.
4. It is fundamental that the International Councilors, in the process of gaining awareness of their essential role, realize that their responsibility goes beyond their own National Fraternities and towards the Presidency to include the whole Order in its entirety.

Forward to the U.S. Version

From Our National Minister

Beloved Secular Franciscan Formation Workers in the Fields of the Lord,

First of all, please say a prayer of thanks for the good people from CIOFS (particularly Benedetto Lino, OFS, Coordinator (Italy); Marie-Odile Blanty, OFS (France); Marie Amore, OFS (USA); Tibor Kauser, OFS (Hungary); Fr. Irudaya Samy, OFM Cap. (India); Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv. (Argentina); and from our National Formation Team (Robert L. Fitzsimmons, OFS, Chair, Richard Trezza, OFM, Jan Parker, OFS, Kathleen White OFS, and Rena Xuerub, OFS), plus other Secular Franciscan writers and editors who have worked hours and hours to bring you this Formation Manual. They deserve all our prayers and thanks.

Second, please accept my sincere thanks on behalf of the entire National Family for your efforts to call and form true, lifelong Secular Franciscans by using these materials.

To paraphrase, “Receive this document whose facilitator you are. Believe what you read. Teach what you believe. Live what you teach!” (See the Ordination Rite for Deacons.)

Third, relax. The Secular Franciscan Order in the United States is not “your” Order or “my” Order or even “our” Order. It is the Holy Spirit’s Order.

If this Formation Manual comes from God through you, then it will bear fruit. If this manual is mere words without the Word, then please don’t bother to try to breathe life into this document. You don’t have the power.

Therefore, never open this manual without bringing it to prayer.

Forming true, lifelong Secular Franciscans is never only about any Formation Manual, however inspired, as I pray this one is. Nor is true formation only about you or me, however holy we may feel ourselves to be (and I pray that this manual may help us on the road to holiness). No, this enterprise is either from God and leading to God, or it’s a sham and a shame.

To paraphrase one last time:

“You may spread this seed (evangelization); another may water (catechesis); but only God will give the life (‘right faith, firm hope and perfect charity’)” (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7). Let us pray without ceasing, therefore, that this Formation Manual will help us form true, lifelong Secular Franciscans (including ourselves) AS GOD INTENDS, CALLS, AND BRINGS TO FRUITION.

Peace with love and prayers,
Tom Bello, OFS
National Minister
Secular Franciscan Order
United States of America

From Our National Formation Commission

Dear Sisters and Brothers;

Over the past two and a half years, the National Formation Commission and a host of dedicated Secular Franciscans have diligently labored to adapt the original CIOFS “Forming the Formators” materials for use here in the United States.

It was also, in the mindset expressed by The XII General Chapter (2008) and our Minister General to expand the CIOFS materials to develop a comprehensive manual that would serve as the foundation of Initial Formation. It was our charter from our own National Executive Council to present specific topics and textual material, based on the *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, 1985, and the direction set by CIOFS.

These topics would form the fundamental basis of formation for the Order here and would constitute the areas deemed essential in the formation of the Franciscan person.


Our intention is:

- to develop a more uniform formation process across the USA;
- to define essential elements of this formation, concretely;
- to provide our formators with easy to read and useful materials that include texts suitable for those in formation, along with teaching aides, lesson plans, objectives, prayer actions, etc. to make facilitating the local and regional formation process easier and more user friendly;
- and lastly, to increase our own understanding of who we are called to be as Franciscans, to enhance our sense of belonging and ownership of our Order, and to pass this Franciscan spirit on to others who respond to this same vocation.

It has been an intense time, and I cannot extend adequate thanks to all those who participated in this project, writers, editors and our sisters and brothers from the Presidency formation commission. I can only accept your gracious gift to our Order and offer back my blessing and prayer.

On behalf of the National Formation Commission; peace and all good!


Robert L. Fitzsimmons, SFO
Formation Chair


Richard Trezza, OFM
Formation Spiritual Assistant


Jan Parker, SFO


Kathleen White, SFO


Rena Xuereb, SFO

“We have done what was ours to do, may the Lord show your what is yours!”

Brief History of This Formation Process

This abbreviated history is provided by Anne Mulqueen, OFS, our International Councilor.

I am writing because it gives me such joy to know that what I experienced in Rome in 2006 will now be available to you in May 2011!

If you have a moment and have an interest, I'd like to give you some history on this International Formation Project, which began nine years ago and will have its American debut in May of this year (2011).

It began at the 2002 General Chapter, where formation was voted the highest priority for the entire Order, and national fraternities were asked to send formation materials to the Secretariat in Rome. The USA did so. Thereafter, an International Formation Commission was established under the leadership of Benedetto Lino, OFS, Presidency Councilor for the Italian-speaking countries.

The United States was included in this initiative in 2004, when Marie Amore, OFS, joined that Commission. Others on the commission were Marie-Odile Blanty, OFS, from France, Tibor Kauser, OFS, from Hungary, and Irudaya Samy, OFM Cap, General Assistant. General Assistant Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv, joined them later.

They met in Rome a few times under quite "primitive" conditions (money is always tight!), and they quickly became aware of the diversity of formation materials coming in from different national fraternities. Quoting Benedetto Lino, OFS, "[they felt an] urgency of finding new, original, and efficacious ways to give to formation the completeness and uniformity that an Order spread around the whole world deserves..."

Now all they had to do was develop a program that would guarantee a profound sense of belonging, rooted in a clear understanding of the nature of the OFS and its place in the Franciscan family and the Church. No easy task, but they did it.

Two International Workshops for National Formators were held in 2006 and 2007. The first Workshop was in March 2006 for the English-speaking countries. There were 17 countries represented. Marie Amore, Teresa Baker, and I were present, but in different capacities. We made wonderful and lasting friendships, and I am still in touch with some of the participants. I thank God and the OFS-USA for this opportunity. The second Workshop in March 2007 was for the Spanish- and French-speaking language groups.

At the 2008 Chapter, the International Councilors were given a manual containing the workshop presentations and were instructed to take the material back to their National Formation Directors, with instructions to adapt it for use in their own countries. And again, at the 2008 General Chapter, formation was selected as the top priority.

If you are still with me, I'll let you in on the desire of my heart. I pray that after the workshop in May, you take the ball and run with it. This workshop does not mark the completion of the project—it's just halftime. Fitz, his Commission, and many others have worked long and hard adapting this material for our use, but if it doesn't get from the regional level to the local level, the dream that started in 2002 will fizzle for the United States.

CIOFS has done what was theirs to do. Fitz and his people have done what was theirs to do. Soon it will be in the hands of the regional councils and formators to do their part so the local fraternities will have access to this material. Please make implementing this manual and sharing your experience of fraternity a priority. I know Fitz and his gang will assist you in whatever way they can.

In peace and with lots of fraternal affection,

Anne

February 2011

Editors note: Anne Mulqueen, OFS, is our elected representative from the National Fraternity of the United States to the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order. As such, Anne is our capitular (voting delegate) for the General Chapter of Elections, which is where the national fraternities elect our Minister General and Presidency councilors.

¹ Ecclesiastes 4, 12

Toward an SFO Ratio

A “ratio” is a plan of formation and study needed to prepare a person for a lifelong (perpetual) Profession into an Order or specific Spiritual Charism. The Formation Commission of our International Presidency (think Minister General) at the direction of the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order (our Order’s highest level of governance) gave all National Formators their plan to train all formation directors within the Order and at all levels of the Order.

The International Presidency, also called CIOFS (Council International of the *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*), presented their plan to us after the General Chapter of 2008. This formation initiative became the primary focus of the National Formation Commission of the United States (NFC), which began to develop a comprehensive plan to train our formators and to provide materials they could use for the Initial Formation Process.

With that, the NFC developed a comprehensive plan based on the focus received from CIOFS, and we are happy to offer formation directors and fraternities at all levels within the United States our suggested Implementation Plan and Topical Suggestions for each phase of Initial Formation for the Secular Franciscan Order.

The suggested plan below is set up in what seemed to us a logical progression, building an increasing depth of knowledge in developing both understand and competency in Franciscan Theology, Spirituality, Charism, and our Mission in service to both the Gospel and to the Church.

You will notice that in Orientation we mention RCIA. We are aware, as are our First, Second, and Third Order Regular Brothers and Sisters, that more and more folks come to see what we are about, but they themselves are poorly catechized in the basics of the Catholic Faith. While we have suggested and developed a short review of those Doctrinal Foundations, it is the responsibility of the individual to first understand the basics of our faith. If more than this simple review is necessary, then we suggest the person be asked to complete a year or so in the RCIA process of the local Catholic diocese or parish, and then return to explore whether they have a real and valid vocation to become a Secular Franciscan.

While the formation process must by nature present material to read, study, and comprehend, the ultimate goals are to first discern whether the seeking individual (sometimes called aspirant in the Order’s document) is called by the Holy Spirit to our particular spirituality. Does he or she have a true vocation or just the desire to “join” a new group? Second, and much more important, is that the formation process must provide and reinforce the tools and insights that can open the doors to true transformation. Our model is the Way of St. Francis of Assisi: his insights and his desire to imitate Jesus have been passed to us over the past 800 years.

Here is our Plan for Initial Formation for all individuals seeking Profession into the Secular Franciscan Order. You may notice that there is no hard-and-fast sequence for the topic areas we have presented. In fact, every Regional Fraternity will be asked to develop an implementation plan, which can be this suggested one or any sequencing they desire, as long as the “Fundamental Topics” are adequately presented so those in formation come to understand and comprehend the vocation they are seeking to undertake.

One of our goals was to ensure that this formation manual is easy to use, is comprehensive, is in accord with our directions from CIOFS, and has up-to-date Franciscan Scholarship that is approached with the Secular Franciscan in mind.

You will also see some of the topics identified with the following symbol: [C]. This indicates that this material was taken directly from the CIOFS materials and, with, their permission, adapted for use here in the United States.

You will also see a host of other materials: topics on the Rule, on JPIC and Catholic social teaching, our Blessed Mother, St. Clare, etc. We have added these as other key elements that form us into Franciscan people, able to follow Francis to Christ.

The CIOFS topics and the additional ones added by the National Formation Commission combine to form a comprehensive package that can be used to form both the formation directors (formators) and those seeking Initial Formation.

This material, which can be used either as the Formators reference material or the main text for the Formation Process, begins the standardization required by the XII General Chapter and adds specific content required by the Guidelines for Initial Formation (1985, 1992, 2001).⁹

⁹ Guidelines for Initial Formation 1985 and Elements of Formation 1992 are available from Smoky Valley Printing. See forms on the back cover of any TAU-USA. *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, Rome 2001, is available on the *For Up to Now* reference disc.

For the Formator



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FOR THE FORMATOR

Foundational Topics for Initial Formation

Note: The symbol [C] denotes a section adapted from the original CIOFS materials.

First Contacts

- What is Formation? [C]

Orientation

Additional reading: The Profession of Faith from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC). If additional catechesis is needed, beyond a basic doctrinal review, then the individuals should be referred to an RCIA or other parish based catechetical program.

- Basic Catholic Doctrine [C]
- Ecclesiology and Theology of the Laity [C]
- Introduction to the Franciscan Family [C]

Inquiry

Additional reading: A biography of St. Francis of Assisi

- Vocation [C]
- Identity of the Secular Franciscan [C]
- Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order [C]
- Charism and Mission [C]
- Franciscan Movement 1 - Life of St Francis of Assisi
- Franciscan Movement II – Your Own Journey

Candidacy

- Conversion & Penitence [C]
- Rule of The OFS (3 sessions)
- JPIC and Catholic Social Teaching (2 sessions)
- Francis and His Approach to Divinity (2 sessions) [C]
- Profession (2-sessions) [C]
 - Profession is designed to be presented mid-way through Candidacy
- Fraternity [C]
- Franciscan Theology, Spirituality, and Tradition
- Francis and the Blessed Virgin Mary
- Clare of Assisi
- General Constitutions and National Statutes
 - Annotated Study Edition of each document available on FUN CD and on the NFC Website
- History of the OFS and its Rules [C]

Additional reading: Franciscan Saints of all three orders

For Up to Now and Guidelines for Initial Formation 1985

What is the relationship of *For Up to Now* to the *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States 1985*?

To understand this relationship, let's look at a little history. In 1983, CIOFS issued a document entitled "Working Materials for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order." In 1985, the National Formation Commission in the United States adapted this material and published it as *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, 1985*. (GFIF). In 2002, CIOFS began work on a new formation project. This formation project, *Forming the Formators*, was completed by CIOFS in 2008 and contains the foundational topics to be used in formation. *For Up to Now* is the version of that CIOFS manual that has been adapted, expanded, and approved for use by all Secular Franciscan fraternities in the United States. Again, this is the work of the National Formation Commission in the United States.

As you can see, GFIF and *For Up to Now* both trace their roots to directives given us by CIOFS.

GFIF is not "outdated" in any way, and *For Up to Now* does not replace GFIF. Actually, one builds on the other. The material in GFIF is vital and is the foundation on which *For Up to Now* is built. The implementation of *For Up to Now* (FUN) is not complete without the implied, underlying content of GFIF. This is evident by the numerous references to GFIF in FUN.

Formators on every level of fraternity should be thoroughly familiar with and utilize both these publications.

Initial formation will suffer without both of these resources.

Formation Content Comparison

Comparison of the content specified in the *Guidelines for Initial Formation, 1985* and the Core Topics of the *For Up to Now* Project. The symbol [C] denotes materials adapted from the CIOFS manual (*Forming the Formators*).

Guidelines for Initial Formation

Approved October 1985

Ref: pp 25-35, 39

Orientation

Determine basic disposition to Franciscan Charism & life in fraternity

Content:

- Overview of life of Francis
- Branches of Franciscan Family
- The OFS
- Phases of Formation and expectations
- Review Catholic Doctrine

Inquiry

First Phase of Initial Formation begins more in-depth process of identifying and discerning vocation

Content:

- The Church & Vatican 2
- Lay Spirituality
- Life of St Francis
- History of the OFS
- Structure of the OFS
- Ritual of the OFS

Candidacy

- Preparation to embrace vocation and make permanent Profession (consecrated life)

For Up to Now

Core Topics

First Contact pre-orientation

- **What is formation [C]** explanation of the formation process

Orientation

Determine basic understanding of the primary doctrines of the Catholic Church and the basic disposition to Franciscan Charism and life in fraternity

Content:

- **Basic Catholic Doctrine [C]**
 - o The Creed (assigned extra reading) [C]
- **Ecclesiology of the Laity [C]**
- **Introduction to the Franciscan Family [C]**

Inquiry

Required additional reading:

A Biography of St Francis of Assisi

Content:

- **Vocation [C]**
- **Charism & Mission [C]**
- **Identity of a Secular Franciscan**
- **Nature of the OFS [C]**
- **Franciscan Movement 1 - Life of Francis of Assisi**
- **Franciscan Movement II - Your Own Journey**

Candidacy

- Preparation to embrace vocation and make permanent Profession (consecrated life)
 - o U.S. English version recommended.

<p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Structure of the OFS • Pauline Rule & Prologue • Sacred Scripture • Franciscan Apostolic Life • Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ U.S. English version recommended. 	<p>Content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Rule of the OFS (3 sessions) • JPIC (2 sessions) • Conversion – penitence [C] • Francis and His Approach to Divinity (2 sessions) [C] <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primacy of the Father ○ Christology • Profession (2 sessions) [C] • Franciscan Tradition and Spirituality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Trinity (Bonaventure) ○ Primacy of Christ (Scotus) • Fraternity [C] • Francis & Blessed Virgin Mary • Clare of Assisi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Gaze, consider, contemplate and imitate • History of the OFS [C] • General Constitutions and National Statutes (study guides) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Available on the For Up to Now CD or online at the NFC webpage: www.nafraformation.org • Note: <i>The Ritual of the OFS</i> is a good source to develop prayer for use in your formation activities along with prayer specifically developed for the individual formation topic/session. • [C] denotes CIOFS topic or adaptation
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First of all, congratulations on your election or appointment as a formation director! You have said yes to undertake one of the most vital functions within our Order, that of helping our sisters and brothers of the Secular Franciscan Order come to a deeper understanding of our vocation as we seek to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ after the manner and inspiration of St. Francis.

You are in the hearts and prayers of all of us, so we all might do what is ours to do and become the generous and joyful servants of all.

Next, what will you need in conjunction with this manual?

The *Handbook for Regional Formation Directors*, which is available on the National Formation website, might be your first guide. This handbook, applicable to formators in both the local and the regional fraternities, gives your “job description,” lists your responsibilities, which are many, and suggests ways for you to accomplish them.

It also advises you that you are not alone. It describes your relationship with the National Formation Commission and your very important relationship with your Regional Council and Spiritual Assistant. These relationships are vital to you and to the success of formation in the Order. This handbook also suggests how to develop a Formation Team.

As you can see, the work of formation in the Secular Franciscan Order is the work of all of the Agents of Formation.

- ❖ The Holy Spirit
- ❖ The person to be formed
- ❖ The Fraternity
- ❖ The Council and the Minister
- ❖ The Formator
- ❖ The Spiritual Assistant

This is not, and should not be, your task alone

(A complete description of the Agents of Formation can be found in the *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, National Formation Commission 1985.)

On page two of the *Handbook for Regional Formation Directors* is a list of resources needed, which should be given to every formation director.

That list is as follows:

1. *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order**
2. *The General Constitutions of the OFS**
3. *The National Statutes of the National Fraternity of the OFS in the USA**

4. *The Ritual of the OFS* – USA version¹
5. *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, National Formation Commission 1985²
6. *Elements of Initial Formation*, CIOFS, Rome 1992³
7. *For Up to Now Manual* and the associated *For Up to Now CD*
8. *OFS Formation Resource Manual**
9. *Handbook for Regional Formation Directors**
10. *Regional Guidelines* (Each region should have these in place)
11. Regional Directory (This directory would contain the names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of the council members of each fraternity, including the local fraternity Director of Formation and Spiritual Assistant.)
12. Regional Formation Manual (Please refer to page 7 of the Handbook for *Regional Formation Directors* for description)

* These can be found on the National Formation Commission website
www.nafraformation.org/

In addition to the above, here are some additional resources:

1. A good list of folks in the fraternity who can assist in presentations and/or sponsoring individuals.
2. A good working collaboration with your local Spiritual Assistant – this person is your partner in the formation process and needs to be present during the initial formation process.
3. A personal desire to keep current with the latest Franciscan scholarship and a willingness to share it with all your sisters and brothers.
4. The desire to help others understand and discern whether they have a true vocation. Your Spiritual Assistant is a tremendous help here.
5. A personal commitment. A commitment to prayer and the tending of your own vocation is primary. A commitment to take the time to do the work of the Order follows. This work does take time. The time you give is certainly sacrificial, a gift to the Order, and a blessing for us all.
6. A prayerful and joyful spirit which is the hallmark of a Franciscan.

So here is a suggestion: Armed with all of the above, and possibly some small feeling of being overwhelmed (don't worry it's normal), get familiar with all things Franciscan. Read "References to Formation in the Essential Documents."⁴ Take a good look at the diagram, "Pathway to Profession," and thoroughly understand the process of Initial Formation.

Read thoroughly this first selection titled "What is Formation," by Anne Mulqueen, OFS, for a good, in-depth understanding of the process. This will really help you explain what is in store for those seeking to grasp the nature of the lifelong journey they are thinking of entering.

¹ Available at Smoky Valley Printing, Box 189, Lindsborg, KS 67456 - lindabce@kans.com or see order form in the *TAU-USA*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Available on the For Up to Now CD

It is very important for you to understand that while you are the council's agent for formation, this is an endeavor that needs the cooperation of the whole council and also of every professed member of the fraternity.

Formation is vital to the Order and vital for all the Sisters and Brothers in it, so each one of us must assist in helping those in formation to develop the right understanding to be able to embrace Franciscan values and the Franciscan charism.

Enjoy with peace and every blessing,

Robert L. Fitzsimmons, OFS

On behalf of The National Formation Commission 2011

Pathway to Profession

An Explanation of the Journey of Initial Formation

Introduction

“Pathway to Profession” is a diagram and outline of the structure of the formation process. Compare this “structure” to the bones in the body. The bones are something on which to build. But a body is not only a skeleton and—for the sake of our analogy—a body needs not only the skeleton, but the muscle, circulatory and nervous systems, and the very breath of life!

- The “skeleton” is “Pathway to Profession” – the basic structure of Formation.
- The “muscle” is found in *For Up to Now* – the required knowledge⁵.
- The “circulatory and nervous systems” are the all of the work of Formation – by the Candidate, the Formator, the Minister and the Council, the Spiritual Assistant, and the Fraternity, all assisted by the Holy Spirit.
- The “very breath of life” is truly God’s grace!

“Pathway to Profession” gives you the structure. It is your work to flesh it out. So take this structure and build on it. Take the time to study the “Pathway to Profession” diagram and read through the description of each step along the path. Become familiar with the process, the goals, and the spirit of formation in our Order.

A formation program needs to have a balance of learned fact and lived experience. It needs to provide a solid foundation to fall back on when feelings fade. Yet facts alone will get us nowhere. There needs to be an experience of God – and that experience needs to be supported, nurtured and celebrated within fraternity!

The formation program should be well planned – yet flexible and sensitive to the needs of each individual candidate. Remember we are forming these prospective members for a life-time commitment. Formation should be slow and careful – never rushed. This is a Vocation – those who have the call and the sincere desire to become members of the OFS will be patient. They will appreciate the great care and concern we give to the formation process.

To share with others the joy of the Secular Franciscan way of life is a rewarding and important responsibility. It is something we do together as brothers and sisters – learning from each other as we go along, using the gifts, talents, and resources that God has given us.

Remembering the inspiration that first led us to follow Christ in the way of Francis, we can be confident that God will continue to fill us with every grace necessary for this task.

⁵ The Foundational Topics that are to be used within the formation process are described in the *For Up to Now* manual and are based on the desire of the XII General Chapter of the OFS, 2008, as expressed to us by CIOFS in their 2008 *Forming the Formators* manual. These materials were, by permission of CIOFS, adapted and expanded for formation in the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States by the National Formation Commission and provide topics as described in the *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, 1985.

The “Pathway to Profession” diagram can be found on the following page. The explanation of each step along the way follows the diagram.

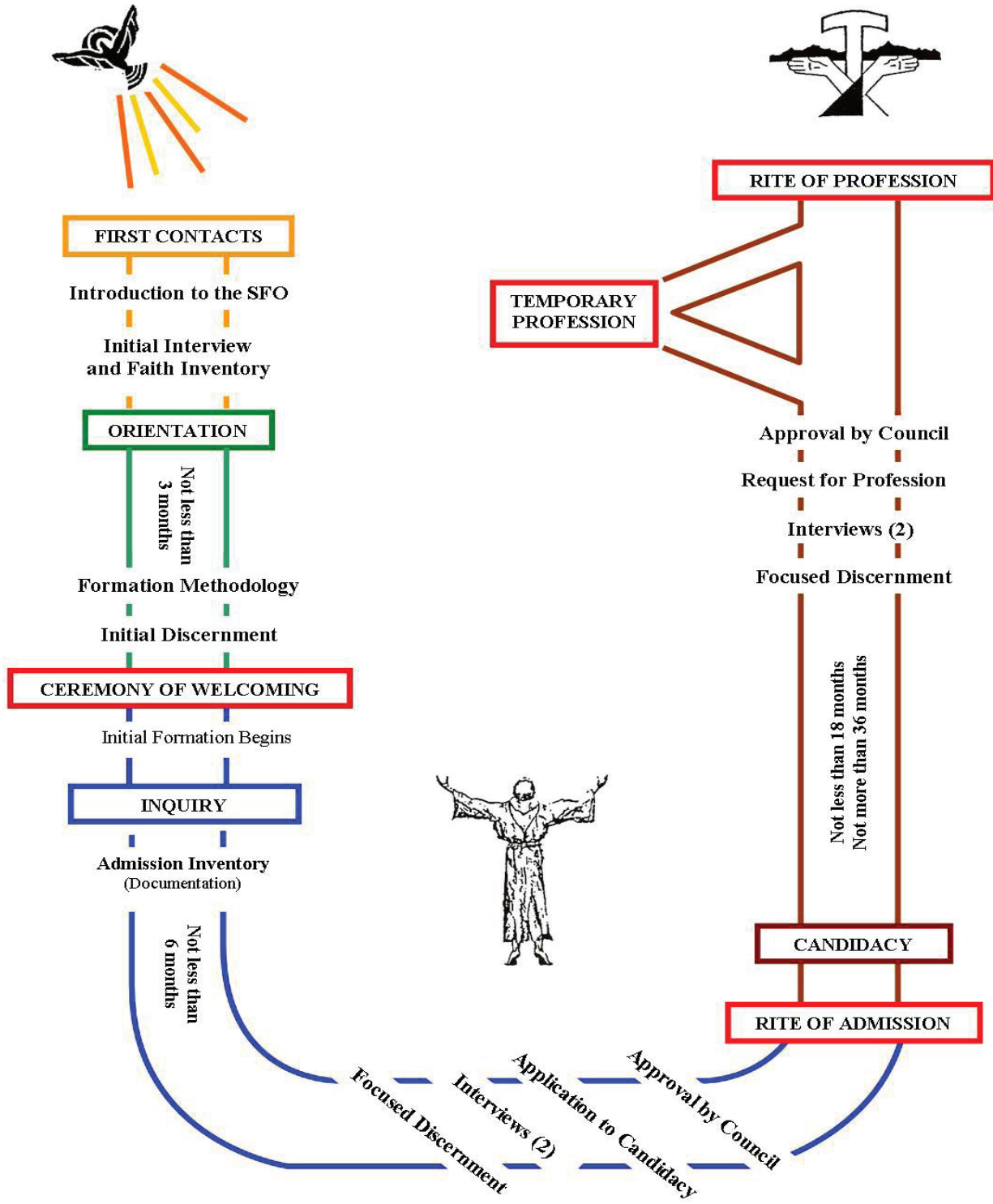
Jan Parker, OFS

March 2, 2011

Feast of St. Agnes of Prague

“Then he returned to the friars once again and told them, “Have courage, my dearly beloved, and rejoice in God. There is no need to be upset because there are only a few of us, nor any need to be afraid because we have no experience.”
Words of St. Francis from Bonaventure, Major Life

PATHWAY TO PROFESSION



First Contacts

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, by the life and witness of Secular Franciscans, and by promotion of the Order, people are drawn to explore a possible vocation to the OFS. Extend a warm welcome to all who are interested. Meet with them individually or invite them to an open house-type gathering in order to present to them an Introduction to the OFS. Refer to *Guidelines for Initial Formation* (GFIF) page 25, “First Contacts”.

Introduction to the SFO

In a one-on-one meeting or at an Open House:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Opening Prayer: “Praises of God” or “The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours” (*Ritual of the OFS*, page 99)
- Scripture reflection. (John 1:38-51) Like Francis and Clare, we are attracted to a person, the person of Jesus.
- An overview of the Franciscan Family (GFIF, page 23)
- Sharing of personal testimonies prepared by professed members of the OFS:
 - Who are Francis and Clare to me?
 - What does it mean to be a Secular Franciscan and how has it changed my life?
 - Explanation and real-life examples of “Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel.”
 - What does the Rule mean to me?
 - What does “Fraternity” mean to me?
- Brief explanation of Formation
 - Formation seeks to nurture the personal relationship one has with Christ.
 - Franciscan formation seeks to facilitate growth in that relationship with an ongoing awareness of how persons share in the charism of Francis and Clare, so that the life of a Secular Franciscan in today’s world might conform more and more to the example of the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.
- Overview of the formation process
 - Show Pathway to Profession diagram.
- Period of Question and Answers
- Closing Prayer: The Prayer Before the Crucifix⁶ or other prayer of St. Francis.
- Take-home reading materials:
 - Provide a copy of the *Rule of the OFS*⁷, or *From Gospel to Life - The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order with Commentary*⁸ by Benet Fonck, OFM, or an overview of the Rule⁹.
 - From the Digests¹⁰: Francis of Assisi, Clare of Assisi, Prayer, Franciscan Image of Jesus
 - *The Journey and the Dream* by Murray Bodo, OFM

⁶ Ritual of the OFS, page 100

⁷ Available on *For Up to Now* CD or as a download from www.nafraformation.org

⁸ Franciscan Resources http://franciscanresources.com/store/category/9akd/FORMATION_PROGRAMS.html

⁹ See *For Up to Now* CD, “Overview of the Rule” and “Overview of the Way of Life”

¹⁰ Available at Smoky Valley Printing, see order form in the *TAU-USA*

Initial Interview

- “Each person comes to the Fraternity carrying his/her own special gift. Therefore, this is a golden opportunity to ask some questions about the person, his/her style of being a brother or sister, and his/her evangelical and apostolic life, and to initiate some inner renewal. (GFIF, pg. 25)
- An initial interview takes place in the context of a conversation. Information should be recorded. See “Guidelines for Interviews”¹¹ and “Interview Guide for Prospective Members”¹²
- The formator should review the requirements listed in Article 19 of the National Statutes to ensure that the prospective member is qualified.

NOTE: It is recommended that all information forms, sacrament records, interview observations, correspondence, letters of recommendations and other notes be kept in a confidential file folder for each prospective member. This will help the Fraternity Council in its discernment process.

Faith Inventory

- A faith inventory or assessment is made. The prospective member must be a fully initiated Catholic, having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, and Confirmation and be in good standing in the Church.¹³
- Discern the necessity of a review of Catholic teachings in light of Vatican II Christology and ecclesiology. Is there a good understanding and a committed practice of the Catholic faith? A good mix of apostolic activity and prayer life?

Orientation

- Following an initial interview and faith inventory a prospective member begins Orientation.
- Orientation is a time for determining a person’s interest, eligibility, and disposition to enter into the initial formation process.
- The time spent in Orientation should be sufficient to adequately cover the foundational topics outlined in *For Up to Now* and not less than three months.¹⁴
- The topics for this phase of formation are given in *For Up to Now*. See chart on page 24, and refer to the GFIF, pages 25-26.
- Additional information and support material for Orientation can be found in the *OFS Resource Manual*.¹⁵

Formation Methodology

- As Orientation comes to a close, the prospective member should be given a thorough explanation of formation and the overall formation process.
 - o Formation seeks to nurture the personal relationship one has with Christ. Franciscan formation seeks to facilitate growth in that relationship with an ongoing awareness of how persons share in

¹¹ See *For Up to Now* CD

¹² OFS Resource Manual pp. 79-81 and “Signs a person may or may not have a vocation” pp. 77 and 78.

¹³ NAFRA National Statutes 2005 Article 19:2.d

¹⁴ NAFRA National Statutes 2005 Article 19:1.b

¹⁵ See *For Up to Now* CD or NFC website www.nafraformation.org

the charism of Francis and Clare, so the life of a Franciscan in today's world might conform more and more to the example of the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ.

- o Formation helps the Inquirer and the Candidate acquire the knowledge and experience to interiorize the Secular Franciscan Gospel life.
- o The goal of formation is conversion, not just knowledge – the goal being personal union with the Lord Jesus in the tradition and spirituality of the Franciscan family.
- Familiarize him/her with the “Pathway to Profession” diagram and each of the requirements along the “path.” The prospective member needs to be aware that although these are phases over a period of time, formation is a single process of daily ongoing conversion that continues beyond Profession – the commitment to the OFS is lived one day at a time for the rest of our lives.
- There should be an understanding on the part of the prospective member of what is expected of him/her during this time¹⁶.
- Those entering formation need to be freely able and ready to make the necessary commitment.
- Regions might develop an information sheet (Formation Policy Handout) to be given to prospective members outlining the formation policies of the OFS.

Initial Discernment

- Taking into account the faith inventory, the formator should review the requirements listed in Article 19 of the National Statutes to ensure that the prospective member is qualified.
- Formators should refer to “Signs of presence of vocation to the OFS” in the Resource Manual¹⁷.
- The prospective members are also guided in their own discernment at this time. Questions include: Who is Francis in my life? What is my attraction to the OFS?
- If there is a potential problem with a prospective member, it should be handled immediately, tactfully, and with great charity.

Ceremony of Welcoming

- At the beginning of the time of Inquiry, the newcomer is introduced and welcomed into the fraternity. This ceremony takes place following the directives in the *Ritual*, found in both the Preface, page 4, and within the ceremony, page 9.
- The “life of Francis” presented during the ceremony of welcoming might be the biography they will read as part of the Inquiry phase of formation. (See “Franciscan Movement One: The Journey of Francis” for details.)
- The Ceremony of Welcoming is a natural time to formalize a relationship between the newcomer and a sponsor. The document “Sponsors in the Formation Process” from the Resource Manual¹⁸, provides guidelines for this relationship.
- After the Ceremony of Welcoming, the period of Initial Formation begins.

¹⁶ Refer to GFIF, pages 17-18: Agents of Formation / The Candidate

¹⁷ OFS Resource Manual pp 77-78

¹⁸ OFS Resource Manual pp 38-40

Inquiry

Inquiry is the first phase of initial formation – a time of seeking and choosing. Content for this phase of formation is outlined in *For Up to Now* and the GFIF, see chart pages 26 and 27.

The purpose of Inquiry and the guidelines for this phase can be found in GFIF (page 26).

- Additional information and support material for Inquiry can be found in the *OFS Resource Manual*.¹⁹
- The time spent in Inquiry should be sufficient to adequately cover the foundational topics listed in *For Up to Now*, and not less than six months²⁰, but this time can be extended if needed to facilitate building stronger relationships, experience, and understanding.
- The Inquirer begins to participate fully in the life of the Fraternity, building relationships with the brothers and sisters and becoming familiar with the Franciscan way of life.
- The members of the Council should make a special effort to get to know Inquirers.
- An important dimension of this phase of formation is for the Inquirer to devote time to personal prayer, Scripture, reading a biography of St. Francis, becoming familiar with the prayers and writings of Francis and Clare, and listening to the call of the Holy Spirit.
- At certain times during Inquiry, one-on-one conversations between the Formator and/or Spiritual Assistant and the Inquirer provide opportunities to discuss progress, address concerns, answer questions, and provide support and encouragement.
- Gatherings with Inquirers from other local fraternities for prayer, formation and fellowship are highly encouraged.

Admission Inventory

The following documents must be on file prior to the Rite of Admission and should be obtained early in the Inquiry Phase:

- Baptism Certificate, annotated with other sacrament dates²¹.
- If married provide verification of validity.
 - Decree of Nullity, if applicable.
- If ordained, provide copy of letter verifying faculties.
- Two letters of recommendation, one being from the Inquirer's pastor.

Focused Discernment

Discernment is ongoing throughout the time of initial formation, but as the Inquirer nears the time for the Rite of Admission, it becomes more focused.

- The Inquirer is highly encouraged to:
 - attend a Day of Recollection or Retreat;

¹⁹ See *For Up to Now* CD or NFC website www.nafraformation.org

²⁰ NAFRA Statutes, 2005 Article 19: 2.a

²¹ NAFRA Statutes, 2005 Article 19: 2.d

- spend time in prayer;
- speak with the Spiritual Assistant and other members of the fraternity for spiritual direction to aid in their discernment.
- The Inquirer considers these basic questions in order to make a choice:
 - “What is a vocation, and how am I called? What is the Gospel Life, and how am I called to live it? What is a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, and am I called to live this way of life?”²²
 - The normative elements that should be clearly and evidently highlighted for the candidate are the following:
 - The request and the will to experience the Gospel life, like Francis of Assisi;
 - having in mind that the request is related to a possible future commitment to live this way of life, with the help of a fraternity, in communion and harmony with the whole Franciscan family.”²³

Interviews

- The purpose of interviews at the end of the Inquiry Phase is to:
 - Ascertain whether the Inquirer wishes to continue on to Candidacy.
 - Answer any specific questions the Inquirer may have.
 - Provide encouragement and support.
 - Ascertain readiness for the Rite of Admission.
- Two interviews are scheduled with the Inquirer – one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant and one by another member of the council. These interviews could be combined in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant and several council members present.
- Refer to the *OFS Resource Manual* for these documents:
 - Guidelines to Interviews
 - Inquiry/Candidacy Interview Form

Application to Candidacy

- An application to Candidacy is made by the Inquirer to the Minister of the local fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.
- The Candidate should be encouraged to write out their thoughts about the Secular Franciscan way of life and the possibility of a commitment to this way of life. This need not be long, but should be a good evaluation of how they feel called.
- Along with a personal written reflection, there is wisdom in asking the Candidate to sign an official request with the following information:
 - I have come to see in the Secular Franciscan Order a way of life that appeals to me.
 - I would like to continue studying this way and learn more about it.
 - Therefore, I request to be received as a Candidate, to experience this way of life more intensely, and to prepare for a future life commitment in the OFS.

²² GFIF page 26A

²³ Ritual pg 4, #3.22

- o I understand that my request for admission is subject to the approval of the Fraternity Council.
- o I realize that I may withdraw at any time prior to Profession.

Approval by Council

The Council, having come to know the Inquirer, has a serious responsibility to prayerfully and thoroughly consider whether the applicant is called to become a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. The importance of determining this information early in the formation process cannot be over emphasized for the good of the person and the good of the Fraternity.

1. The Fraternity Council reviews the Rule, General Constitutions, and National Statutes (see “References to Formation in the Essential Documents”²⁴) to insure that a prospective member meets all requirements. Everything that is necessary up to this point in the formation process must be completed and up to date before admission to the Order.
2. Requirements for membership are not only freedom from impediments. Certain positive indications of a vocation to the OFS are required. It is critical that the Council review the “Requirements for Membership” listed in GFIF, pages 17- 8, #2.
3. There must be a willingness and an ability on the part of the prospective member. It is critical to review the “expectations upon the candidate” page 18, #3 of GFIF.
4. To discern whether a prospective member has the basic dispositions that are essential for entering into this mature committed relationship, it is critical that the Council review the questions, referred to as “screening norms,” to be used in this discernment process as listed in GFIF, page 25.
5. The Council may also refer to “Signs of presence of vocation to the OFS” in the *OFS Resource Manual*.²⁵
 - After prayer and discussion, the Fraternity Council decides collegially on the request, gives a formal answer to the Inquirer, and communicates this to the fraternity.
 - If there is a potential problem with a prospective member, it should be handled immediately, tactfully, and with great charity.

Rite of Admission

- The Rite of Admission is not scheduled until after the Council approves the Inquirer(s) for Admission. Adequate planning is needed to ensure this Rite can be celebrated appropriately.
- The Rite of Admission takes place following the directives in the Ritual, found in both the Preface, page 4, and within the ceremony, page 11.
- Immediately after the Rite of Admission, the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.
- After the Rite of Admission, Candidacy begins.

²⁴ See For Up to Now CD

²⁵ OFS Resource Manual pages 77-78

Candidacy

- Candidacy is the period of interiorizing and integration of the Gospel life to prepare the Candidate for a lifetime commitment to live the Rule of the OFS
- The purpose of Candidacy and guidelines for this phase can be found in the General Constitutions (Article 40), GFIF (page 26), and in the *Ritual*.
- Content for this phase of formation is given in *For Up to Now* see list on page 18 or chart on page 25.
- The time spent in Candidacy should be sufficient to adequately cover the foundational material in *For Up to Now*. Candidacy is not less than 18 months, but not more than 36 months.²⁶
- Candidates are fully integrated into the life of the Fraternity in all aspects except those areas reserved for professed members.
- Candidates continue to devote time to prayer, Scripture, the prayers and writings of Francis and Clare, and listening to the call of the Holy Spirit.
- Knowledge of the Rule is essential and is attained equally by study, reflection, and lived experience, with a special focus on daily conversion. As Candidates begin to understand and live the Rule, embracing it as their own in their secular lives, it will ignite the Franciscan Charism within them, and they will pursue it as the ideal by which they can aspire to holiness.
- Called to go from Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel, those in Candidacy are guided to the regular practice of reading and meditating on the Word of God so they, like Francis and Clare, might hear and live it.
- At certain times during Candidacy, one-on-one conversations between the Formator and/or the Spiritual Assistant and the Candidate provide opportunities to discuss progress, address concerns, answer questions, and provide support and encouragement.
- Gatherings with Candidates from other local fraternities for prayer, formation, and fellowship are highly encouraged.

Focused Discernment

Discernment is ongoing throughout the time of initial formation, but as the Candidate nears the time for Profession, it becomes more focused.

- The Candidate is highly encouraged to:
 - participate with the fraternity on a Day of Recollection or Retreat;
 - spend time in prayer and Scripture reflection;
 - speak with the Spiritual Assistant and other members of the fraternity for spiritual direction to aid in their discernment;
 - prayerfully review the Rule of the OFS, as profession is a permanent commitment;
 - prayerfully read the Preface of the Ritual 3.3 on the Rite of Profession.

²⁶ NAFRA Statutes, 2005 Article 19: 2.b

- The Candidate should consider questions such as: Is there a desire to make a lifetime commitment to live as a Secular Franciscan? Where is the desire rooted? Where did it come from? How has it manifested itself? What is the evidence of that commitment?

Interviews

- Towards the end of Candidacy, two interviews are scheduled with the Candidate – one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant, and one by another member of the council. These interviews could be combined in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant and several council members present.
- The purpose of interviews at the end of Candidacy is to:
 - ascertain how the Candidate has progressed;
 - answer any specific questions the Candidate may have;
 - provide encouragement and support;
 - discuss openly and honestly the Candidate’s decision to become professed or not to be professed;
 - ascertain readiness for Permanent Commitment (Profession) in the Secular Franciscan Order;
 - impress on the Candidate the seriousness of Permanent Commitment (Profession) in the Secular Franciscan Order;
 - assure the Council that the Candidate’s decision to become professed is based on sound judgment and spiritual motivation.

Request for Profession

- After a time of focused discernment, including prayer, reflection, and self-evaluation, the Candidate may choose to request profession into the Secular Franciscan Order. This request must be made in writing or by direct communication with the fraternity minister.
- The Candidate should be encouraged to write a personal “statement of profession,” as part of their request, describing their thoughts and feelings at this time of commitment. This statement is optional, but helps the candidate crystalize their own vocation. This statement could be read during the Rite of Profession to the assembled community as part of the official request for Profession within the Rite (prior to the Homily and Questioning).

Approval by Council

The Council has a serious responsibility to prayerfully and thoroughly consider whether the applicant is called to permanently profess as a member of the Secular Franciscan Order.

1. The Fraternity Council reviews the Rule, General Constitutions, and National Statutes (see “References to Formation in the Essential Documents”²⁷) and reads from the Preface to the Ritual 3.3 as regards Profession.
2. Although thorough discernment at the time of admission to the order has taken place, it is helpful for the Council members to reevaluate signs of readiness:

²⁷ See *For Up to Now* CD

- Positive indications of a vocation to the OFS are required. Review “Requirements for Membership” (GFIF, page 17-18, #2),
 - Basic dispositions that are essential – review the questions, referred to as “screening norms” (GFIF, page 25).
 - The Council may also refer to “Signs of presence of vocation to the OFS” in the *OFS Resource Manual*²⁸.
3. The choices before the Council at this time are:
- Recommend Profession
 - Recommend delay of Profession
 - Temporary Profession
 - Denial of Profession
4. After prayer and discussion, the Fraternity Council decides by secret ballot on the admission to profession, gives its reply to the candidate, and informs the fraternity.

The Rite of Profession or Permanent Commitment

- The Rite of Profession is not scheduled until after the Council approves the Candidate(s) for Profession.
- Adequate planning is needed to ensure that this Rite can be celebrated appropriately and properly witnessed by the Church.
- The Rite of Profession takes place following the directives in the *Ritual of the OFS*, found in both the Preface 3.3, page 5, and within the ceremony, page 18.
It is important that both the preface and the ceremony be reviewed.
- For specific liturgical suggestions, please refer to the *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, English Version, approved by the Sacred Congregation for Sacraments and Divine Worship, August 5, 1985, and by the Franciscan Friars Conference of the USA (OFM, OFM Cap., OFM Conv., and TOR)
- Because Profession (permanent commitment²⁹) is an act of personal consecration, both public and ecclesial, the preferred celebration takes place in the context of the Mass and celebration of the Eucharist.
- It is also permissible, though not preferred, to celebrate Profession within the context of the Liturgy of the Word, if it is impossible to celebrate Mass and the Eucharist.
- Immediately after the Rite of Profession, the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

The Rite of Temporary Commitment

- This Rite generally takes place in a fraternity setting and is not performed in conjunction with the celebration of the Eucharist. There can, however; be a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.³⁰

²⁸ OFS Resource Manual pages 77-78

²⁹ See Ritual of the OFS, English edition 1985, Preface 3.3 and 3.31, also Chapter 3

³⁰ See Ritual of the OFS, English edition 1985, Preface 3.4 and 3.43, also Chapter 4

What Is Formation

Anne Mulqueen, OFS



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Introduction

The basic resource for the material presented here is *The Guidelines for Formation of the OFS*, issued by the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, Rome 2001.

As Secular Franciscan formators, you are expected to take this material back to your countries and form other formators. Your greatest challenge will be to create a sense of fraternity for those being formed. You will have to adapt the experiences you have had here in Rome to your culture at home.

I have a few simple suggestions to help you implement what you have learned and experienced.

1. Before you schedule a formation session, gather all your materials and decide what you already know. If you need more information, research the topic, or discuss it with someone you consider knowledgeable.
2. Determine your goals and objectives for the formation session and repeat them often and in various ways throughout the session.
3. Observe your participants carefully to determine whether your material is being understood. It takes constant attention and awareness. You may have to change your presentation. However, all that matters is that the participants understand the material.
4. Consider differences in age, educational level, and knowledge of the topic before planning a formation session.
5. Arrange and outline your points clearly and systematically so the main ideas and supporting material relate to your objective.
6. Be thoroughly prepared and know your subject. However, if you don't know an answer to a question, don't be afraid to tell the person that you don't know but that you'll get the information and get back to him or her. Humility and truth are essential elements of Franciscan spirituality.

Our theme today is "What is Formation?" It will be presented in four parts: (1) Identity, Role, and Mission of the Formator; (2) Steps of Formation; (3) Discernment of Formation; and (4) Methodology and Tools to implement at home what has been lived and learned together.

I. Identity, Role, and Mission of a Formator

Goal:

- Comprehension of identity, role and mission primarily in the Initial Formation Process

Objectives

This section will assist you:

- To understand and be able to apply the essential human and psychological traits of a formator
- To understand and promote growth in essential Catholic Christian fundamentals
- To understand and to promote growth of essential secular and Franciscan attributes
- To understand the role of the formator
- To understand the mission of the formation
- To facilitate the human, Catholic Christian and Franciscan growth of a prospective member's vocation from the initial encounter through full insertion into the fraternity

Identity, Role, and Mission of the Formator

The Guidelines for Formation of the OFS tell us that when considering a person for the ministry of formation, we are to choose psychologically, culturally, and spiritually reliable Secular Franciscans.

Psychologically, the formator is to be mature, well-balanced, self-controlled, open to dialogue, of good judgment, and able to apply and express what he or she has learned.

Culturally, the formator is to know doctrine, understand methodology, be able to convey information in a concrete fashion, and possess good communications skills.

Spiritually, the formator is to be committed to personal ongoing conversion through ongoing formation. The formator is to be a good witness, faithful to the Franciscan charism, of good character, and discerning.

This represents the goal and the ideal. It is the essence of what every formator wishes to be. If you have been chosen for the ministry of formation by your national fraternity, then, to some degree, you meet these standards.

In the following material, I will put shape and form on these ideals.

1.1. Identity of the Formator

The identity of the formator has three major components: (a) the human and psychological component; (b) the Catholic Christian component; and (c) the Secular and Franciscan component.

1.1.a. Human and Psychological

A formator must possess a certain degree of maturity, balance, and self-control before he or she undertakes the ministry of formation. Because those who come to us are vulnerable to our suggestions and biases, we must provide psychologically sound formators to accept this ministry.

Essential Human and Psychological Traits:

- Applies what is learned and passes it on to others;
 - Dialogues and shares rather than lectures;
 - Is emotionally honest and aware of personal limitations;
 - Takes responsibility for personal actions and choices;
 - Accepts others wherever they are on the spiritual journey;
 - Attempts to understand the meaning behind the words others say;
 - Stretches beyond one's comfort zone;
 - Admits failures and apologizes for mistakes;
 - Listens to others without interrupting or offering solutions;
 - Understands that growth is possible but perfection belongs to God;
 - Add your own:
-

1.1.b. Catholic and Christian

A formator must possess sufficient knowledge of the Catholic faith. However, because actions speak louder than words, a formator must also exhibit Catholic Christian behavior. Both knowledge and personal witness are essential.

Essential Catholic Christian Attributes:

- A fully initiated Catholic—having received all the sacraments appropriate to his or her state of life;
 - A person of both private and liturgical prayer;
 - A person devoted to meditating on Sacred Scripture, especially the Gospels—going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel;
 - A person familiar with the major documents of the Church, especially the Second Vatican Council documents and the Catechism of the Catholic Church;
 - A person committed to building up the Church using one's God-given talents;
 - Add your own:
-

1.1.c. Secular and Franciscan

A formator must internalize the charism of Saint Francis and understand lay spirituality so his or her very being proclaims the Secular Franciscan way of life.

Essential Secular and Franciscan traits:

- Desire to live the Gospel
 - Following Francis
 - Through conversion to the Gospels
 - In fraternity
 - As a member of the Catholic Church
 - Living a secular lifestyle
 - In life-giving union with all members of the Franciscan family

- Familiar with
 - Sacred Scripture
 - the Rule
 - the General Constitutions
 - International Statutes
 - National Statutes
 - the Ritual
 - the Franciscan charism
 - books and resources on St. Francis, St. Clare, and other Franciscan saints
 - official Church documents
- Add your own:

Much of what I have said about the identity of the formator also applies to the formator's role and mission.

I will comment on these two elements, but in less detail.

1.2. Role of the Formator

A formator will not be effective in his/her role unless they are a person of prayer and rely upon the Holy Spirit to guide their own life.

Specifically, the formator's role consists of:

- Calling prospective members to conversion and accompanying them on their spiritual journey, leading the way whenever necessary;
- Giving individual attention to each candidate, especially by being aware of each one's unique circumstances and personality;
- Allowing their love of Christ to determine all that they are and all that they do as a formator;
- Sharing their gifts and talents with the candidates and the fraternity and expecting nothing in return;
- Possessing a vision so vivid that they do not become discouraged;
- Formulating plans of action that are reasonable and can be accomplished, yet being willing to evaluate and change direction should they prove ineffective.

1.3. Mission of the Formator

The mission of the formator is simple and scriptural. It is the mission of the apostles, St. Francis, all evangelizers, and you and me. The mission is to "Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all of the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time" (Matthew 18:18-20).

No one can improve on the mission statement Jesus gave his apostles and which Saint Francis adopted as his own. This first section ends with the words of Jesus to formators: “Go and make disciples....”

You may add your insights if you wish:

II. Steps of Formation

Goal

- Knowledge and understanding of the various steps of formation.

Objectives

This section will assist you:

- To facilitate sessions and observe prospective members for signs of a vocation;
- To introduce and develop an understanding of Saint Francis, Franciscan spirituality, Christology, and theology;
- To determine his/her understanding of Church doctrine and obtain pertinent ecclesial documents;
- To prepare candidates for perpetual commitment to the Secular Franciscan Order;
- To provide transition between formal initial formation and insertion into full fraternity life;
- To provide material content for each step of formation.

The Rule and Constitutions

Article 23 of the Rule states that “... admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule.” Article 37 of the General Constitutions states, “Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the Profession of the Rule.”

These are minimum requirements. Each nation can adapt its process to meet its people’s needs. However, the minimum time frame and these steps cannot be eliminated. You may lengthen the time of initiation and formation but may not shorten them. You may divide the period of initiation into two portions but may not eliminate it.

Formation proceeds in steps in the midst of the fraternity. It requires cooperation with God’s grace and a desire to deepen their faith and conversion through the Secular Franciscan Order.

2.1. Period of Initiation

2.1.a. Primary Objectives

- To test the validity of the vocation in its various dimensions;
- To introduce Saint Francis and Franciscan Christology- Spirituality;
- To determine Catholic Christian comprehension.

If your National Statutes allow, the period of initiation may be divided into sub-steps. The United States National Statutes allow two stages of initiation: Orientation followed by Inquiry. The material is more general in Orientation and more specific in Inquiry.

Other presenters have spoken to you of the essence of Secular Franciscan identity. I will speak about your responsibilities as a Secular Franciscan Formator.

2.1.b. Material Content During the Period of Initiation

- Introduce and explain the process of dialogue and sharing.
 - Discourage the concept of a formator as lecturer and a prospective member as passive audience.
- Explain the meaning of vocation and how it is discerned.
 - Emphasize at the very beginning that the inquirer is primarily responsible for his formation and that the principal agent of formation is the Holy Spirit.
- Introduce the inquirer to the other agents of formation.
- Explain what will occur during the formation experience and what will be expected of him or her, especially the life of continual conversion to the Gospels.
- Introduce Saints Francis and Clare using biographies.
- Introduce Franciscan prayer and apostolic activity.
- Emphasize the importance of Sacred Scripture in the life of a Secular Franciscan, especially the Gospels.
- Determine the inquirer's knowledge of Catholic teaching and tradition.
- Promote knowledge and use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Second Vatican Council documents.
- As you progress, expand the inquirer's knowledge and understanding of the lives of Saints Francis and Clare.
- Explain in simple but thorough terms what is meant by secular or lay spirituality.
- Introduce the inquirer to the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Introduce him to the Rule, General Constitutions, International Statutes, Ritual, and your National Statutes.
- Explain briefly the Franciscan family and its history.
- Explain the organizational structure of the Secular Franciscan Order.
 - Encourage attendance at a retreat focused on vocation and discernment of vocation to a secular and Franciscan way of life.
 - Add your own:

2.2. Period of Formation (also Called Candidacy)

2.2.a. Primary Objectives

- To help candidates in their spiritual growth into the Secular Franciscan way of life;
- To deepen candidates' understanding of the significance of the choice they are contemplating;
- To provide more comprehensive Franciscan and ecclesial resources;
- To prepare candidates for perpetual commitment as Secular Franciscans.

2.2.b. Material Content During the Period of Formation

Continue to reinforce all subject material covered during the time of Initiation so they will be thoroughly grounded in Secular Franciscan spirituality and Secular Franciscan evangelical life.

- Preeminent in the period of formation is intensive study of the Secular Franciscan Rule—paying particular attention to signs of the Rule taking root in candidates' lives.
- Study the Prologue (written by Saint Francis), which describes the blessings of penance and the misery of not doing penance.
- Continue to emphasize the Gospels and their application in daily circumstances.
- Look for participation in the life of the Church and in youth ministry.
- Look for participation in the apostolic life—peace and justice issues, the protection of the environment, the strengthening of the family unit, respect for the worker, etc.
- Suggest reading original writings of Saints Francis and Clare.
- Introduce other Franciscan saints, especially Secular Franciscan saints.
- Begin a detailed study of the General Constitutions, International Statutes, and your National Statutes.
- Foster desire for lifelong growth in Franciscan spirituality.
- Encourage attendance at a retreat or day of prayer focused on commitment and the penitential way of life.
- Prepare candidates for the Rite of Profession by prayerful meditation on the solemnity of this public and perpetual commitment.
 - Discourage the concept of a formator as lecturer and a prospective member as passive audience.
 - Sacred Scripture
 - Explain in simple but thorough terms what is meant by secular or lay spirituality.
 - Introduce the inquirer to the Liturgy of the Hours.
 - Introduce him to the Rule, General Constitutions, International Statutes, Ritual, and your National Statutes.
 - Explain briefly the Franciscan family and its history.
 - Explain the organizational structure of the Secular Franciscan Order.
 - Encourage attendance at a retreat focused on vocation and discernment of vocation to a secular and Franciscan way of life.
 - Add your own:

2.3. Period of Temporary Commitment

Rule 23 Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years. (Article 42.2 General Constitutions)

2.3.a. Primary Objectives

- To allow the candidate time to attain the age requirement necessary for profession to the Rule;
- To reconcile any indecision on the part of the candidate with regard to permanent commitment;
- To reconcile any lack of certainty on the part of the fraternity as to the suitability of the candidate for permanent commitment;

2.3.b. Material Content During Temporary Commitment

- Continued reinforcement of all subject material covered during the time of formation;
- Continued study and reflection on Sacred Scripture;
- Continued study and reflection on ecclesiology;
- Continued study and reflection on Franciscan history and spirituality;
- Continued study and reflection on the role of the laity.

2.4. Rite of Profession, or Permanent Commitment to the Rule

2.4.a Before the Rite of Permanent Commitment or Profession, the candidates should have a clear understanding of:

- Vocation and how they were called;
- Crucial teachings of the Gospels and how to live them (primacy of Christ);
- Franciscan evangelical life;
- Church teaching and adherence to Church teaching;
- Secular life and mission in the Church as Secular Franciscans.

Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., covered permanent commitment thoroughly (see Profession segment by Fr. Richard Trezza, OFM, in this manual). My only comment is to emphasize that by profession of the Rule, the Candidate publicly states his or her intention to live as a Secular Franciscan in the world and for the world as Gospel leaven and salt for the earth for the rest of his life.

2.5. The Newly Professed

The 1992 edition of the *Guidelines for Initial Formation* describes the newly professed period as one in which the “Formative activity ... takes the form of a journey of faith in the footsteps of Francis in the spirit of the Rule.”

2.5.a. Primary Objective:

- To provide a transitional period of support between formal initial formation and full insertion into the local fraternity

2.5.b. The Analogy of Journey

- The model is Jesus
 - A detailed study of the Franciscan Christology
- The journey of faith
 - Emphasize the radical nature of Baptism—insertion into the body of Christ
- The Holy Spirit as Guide
 - Emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit to lead the newly professed into the will of God
- The emphasis on Saint Francis
 - As Saint Francis did:
 - ◆ They, too, are to reflect Jesus in their lives

- ◆ They, too, live lives of faith, hope, and love
- ◆ They, too, rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance

2.5.c. Material Content for the Newly Professed

- Use all material contained in 2.3.b. for a temporary commitment.
- Know that dialogue and sharing are even more important at this step because these people are more mature in their faith and are living the Franciscan charism.
- Rely primarily on Sacred Scripture for meditation, especially the Gospels.
- Continue studying, living, and loving the Rule.
- Provide appropriate examples from the life of St. Francis and other Franciscan saints during discussion time.
- If possible, introduce the newly professed to the newly professed in other fraternities.
- Use all the resources mentioned earlier, in varying degrees, for the newly professed,
- Understand a positive personal relationship with the formator is more important than material; the newly professed must never feel lost in the transition process
- Add your own:

2.6. Ongoing Formation

2.6.a. Primary Objective

- "Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and every one and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society" (General Constitutions, article 44.1).
- Ongoing formation is designed to support and strengthen the commitment made at Profession to live according to the Rule for the rest of our lives. Ongoing formation is manifested by continual conversion.

2.6.b. Material Content for Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation materials are unlimited.

Gospel living is not simply knowledge, but an attitude and a commitment. In essence, ongoing formation is ongoing conversion, and the objective is growing into the image and likeness of God.

Here are a few of the limitless resources.

- The ongoing formation portion of the regularly scheduled fraternity gathering;
- Retreats, days of prayer, workshops, and seminars;
- Church documents, papal encyclicals, apostolic letters;
- Books, tapes, videos that draw us into deeper personal knowledge of Christ, Saint Francis, Franciscan spirituality, and all other aspects of our way of life;
- The Rule as a document for meditation and integration into one's life;
- Introduction to Franciscan theology and theologians such as Saint Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus;
- Et cetera!

- Add your own:
-

III. Discernment of Vocation

Goal

- Determination of God-given vocation and basic eligibility for permanent commitment

Objectives

This section will assist you:

- To learn the process involved in discerning a vocation;
- To teach prospective members how to test the vocational call;
- To recognize the obstacles to vocation;
- To learn the positive signs of a vocation;
- To recognize absence of or negative signs of a vocation.

Discerning a Secular Franciscan Vocation

Discerning a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is a two-way street. Both the fraternity and the individual discern the presence or absence of a vocation. It is best to discern a vocation as early as possible, yet we must wait for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Discernment is not easy, and the path is not straight. All concerned must have faith that when a determination is made, it is God's Spirit we are following.

The General Constitutions provide the basic eligibility conditions for becoming a Secular Franciscan. I will speak of the less obvious signs.

Discernment is a process. It is a clear and conscious decision to hear and respond to God's call. To hear God, we must pray. Prayer is essential and our primary tool of discernment.

Rather than giving you many words to sort through, I will try to explain the elusive concept of discernment in simple, concrete terms.

To Discern a Vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, Both the Prospective Member and the Fraternity Discerning Body Must:

- Pray—this is our primary tool;
- Listen for the still, small voice of the Spirit or the loud rushing wind of the Spirit;
- Empty your hearts and minds of preconceived ideas and biases;
- Discern the source of the call
 - You may be surprised to learn that a person may be avoiding the call;
 - Discernment is cooperation with grace;
 - We hear many voices—those of culture, career, social pressure, self-interest, etc.;
 - Your primary objective is to distinguish between God's voice and the other voices.

- Tolerate uncertainty for a time because there are no simple rules to follow;
 - All must be completely dependent on God to determine and fulfill God's will.

While I cannot give you a perfect set of rules to follow, here are some essential elements to look for in a prospective member:

- Evidence of growth in Franciscan spirituality and the ability to make choices in harmony with the Gospels;
- Evidence of spiritual maturity and the ability to move beyond the need for certainty—not fully understanding but asking, “God, what is my next step?”
- Evidence of conversion—when hearts turn to God, values change, and we change.

There is always the possibility of making a mistake; however, we accept this risk because we know God honors the intentions of our hearts. If we persist in prayer, God blesses our actions and corrects our mistakes.

Just as each person is unique, each call is unique. One person may experience restlessness with life as it is. Another may long for something missing in his or her life. Hearing God's call is finding one's true identity. The call of the Spirit cannot be analyzed. A true vocation is simply a call to follow God's will for your life. Jesus, as model and example, says, “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Again, becoming more specific, there are some attitudes that help us discern God's invitation to an Secular Franciscan vocation.

The primary attitudes are:

1. Trust: The book of Proverbs tells us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not to lean on our understanding, because God will direct our paths.

To trust we must believe that:

- God is present;
 - God speaks to us;
 - God is loving and merciful;
 - “All things work together for good for those who love God” (Romans 8:28).
2. Listening: God speaks to us through everything—pain and pleasure, emotions, and senses. We must listen with open hearts and open minds, especially to what we do not wish to hear. Listening requires silence. Elijah heard God in a still, small voice—not a rushing wind (1 Kings 19:11-13).
 3. Prayer and Waiting: Samuel prayed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:10). Samuel waited for an answer. The prayer for discernment involves listening with total attention to God. The will of God is found in everything, and if we believe this, our whole life becomes a prayer.

4. Knowledge of Sacred Scripture: Scripture contains a multitude of relationships between God and His people. The more familiar we are with these relationships, the more the Word of God speaks to us and leads us in the right direction.
5. Humility: Humility is based on self-knowledge. A humble person is neither too self-confidence nor too modest. Humility is one of the foundation stones for discernment because a humble heart accepts the limits of human knowledge and is willing to depend on God and others for help.
6. Discipline, Perseverance, Patience, Perspective: These four attributes are essential in discerning a vocation.
 - God is present
 - Impulse is controlled by discipline
 - Uncertainty is mastered by perseverance
 - Patience replaces irritation
 - Perspective reminds us it is God’s call to which we are responding.
7. Add your own:

We have looked at positive conditions for discernment. Now let us look at impediments or barriers to discerning a vocation.

If unchecked, these items can turn a healthy fraternity into a dysfunctional one. Therefore, it is important to address these factors as soon as they are observed for the good of the fraternity. Take a moment and meditate on Article 22 of our Rule.

The local fraternity is “... the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.”

Individualism and competition have no place in a community of love.

These are the major obstacles to healthy fraternal life.

- Individualism and competition
- Self-absorption
- Self-interest
- Ambition
- Self-righteousness
- Need for control
- Difficulty with interpersonal relationships
- Add your own:

Unfortunately, the list is endless.

If you are uncertain about your ability to discern, remember that Moses, Jeremiah, and Isaiah all believed they were inadequate to carry out God's plan. Fortunately, God convinced them otherwise.

When we discern a vocation, we act on our present understanding, praying that God will correct any misunderstanding.

I will conclude with some positive and negative signs of the presence or absence of a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.

Positive Signs

The prospective member:

- Is aware of the needs of others;
- Shows honorable motives for wishing to enter the Order;
- Shows attributes of peace and serenity despite possible problems or turmoil in his or her life;
- Radiates joy from deep inside;
- Is open and authentic in relationship within the fraternity;
- Displays persistence and patience despite obstacles and impediments;
- Is accepted by the fraternity and believes that the fraternity is where he or she belongs;
- Is filled with gratitude and love that does not fade with time;
- Undergoes conversion experiences.

Negative Signs or Cautions

The prospective member:

- Is overextended and exhausted;
- Experiences inner turmoil, disturbances, sadness, or depression;
- Has pressing previous commitments that demand serious consideration, especially to children and spouse;
- Is experiencing anxiety or obsessions and is not in touch with God's presence;
- Exhibits attitudes of absolute certainty, arrogance, superiority, vanity, anxiety, irritability, resentment, condemnation, or condescension.

It is accepted practice in the United States that when a doubt exists about an individual's readiness to embrace a Secular Franciscan vocation, the fraternity is given the benefit of the doubt.

In conclusion, discernment for both the prospective member and the discerning body is the art of listening to one's inner self in utter humility and dependence on God and being aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit in all circumstances.

IV. Methodology and Tools for Implementation

Goal

- Assimilation of knowledge and skill necessary to be able to implement what was learned and experienced in Rome in your native country

Objectives

This section will assist you:

- To understand why we must accept the person being formed;
- To value the positive attributes of each person and be able to name these positive attributes;
- To understand why it is necessary to involve those being formed in the process of formation;
- To be able to convey ideas and information to a group of people with varying levels of knowledge;
- To be able to identify adult formation characteristics;
- To learn the positive signs of a vocation;
- To recognize absence of signs of a vocation

Methodology

Although we belong to the same Order, we come from different cultures. You might have difficulty understanding the material I am presenting because the words I use come from my culture and may not be used in the same way in yours.

You have another challenge. Your responsibility is to take what you have learned and what you have experienced in Rome back to your fraternities at home. This is quite a challenge.

Using the outline in the 2001 International Guidelines, I will discuss **methodology** in four sections: (1) accepting the persons being formed; (2) relying on the positive attributes of each person; (3) involving the prospective members in the formation process; and (4) transmitting ideas and information to a group with varying levels of knowledge.

(1) Accepting the Persons Being Formed

Sacred Scripture tells us that when God calls a person, He calls her or him by name. This very act of calling us by name makes us unique. Respect for the individual as a child of God is a fundamental consideration for the formator. The dignity of the human person must never be violated.

Formation links the human experience with Scripture and the Franciscan charism, allowing a candidate to explore, interpret, and judge his inner conversion experiences according to the Gospels and the Franciscan charism.

If formation takes place in a group, you may have people who approach the formation process in very different ways.

- Some listen until they get the meaning of the material and then make a spontaneous leap on their own. They learn quickly and work well on their own.
- Some will prefer concrete presentations. They like step-by-step directions and personal involvement in activities.
- Some think in symbols. They create their own mental pictures and like well-organized presentations with substance.
- Some will enjoy discussions and unstructured sessions. They like to reflect on material and draw conclusions.

If you have a formation group of diverse personalities, it is best to have a formation team composed of complementary personality types so that everyone's needs are met.

All we ask is that you accept the person as she or he is at that moment, remembering that she or he reflects the image of their creator.

(2) Relying on the Positive Attributes of Each Person

Formation is person-centered. Although formation may take place in a group, the individuality of each person cannot be ignored. We presume that those who come to us are responsible, somewhat knowledgeable, mature, honest, and trustworthy. We expect that they have a certain amount of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. We honor and respect each person's God-given free will.

Each one has something to offer others, the local fraternity, the church, and the world. Formators help candidates recognize their abilities so that they may be used for the common good. Some examples of willingness to serve others are:

- ministering to the sick
- working with youth groups
- planning prayer services
- extending hospitality
- involvement in the apostolic life, e.g. social action
- Add your own

(3) Involving Those Being Formed in the Process

It is said that dialogue is more important than lecture and sharing is more important than discussion.

Dialogue refers to both listening and speaking. Listening, without giving an answer, may be difficult for some formators for two reasons—first, the formator probably knows the answer, and second, the person wants the formator to provide the answer.

Our role is not simply to pour information into people's heads. Often a formator can re-direct a question by asking a similar question and helping the person to think for himself.

If we answer a question a person might be able to answer himself, we provide our knowledge and skill and miss an opportunity to build self-confidence and help him learn something about his reasons for asking the question.

Sharing is different from discussing, in that sharing involves the individual's personal experiences, and discussing may simply engage the mind without disclosing anything of a personal nature. I could discuss an issue with you, and you would never know anything about me or what I really believe.

The Holy Spirit is the one who leads a person to the Secular Franciscan Order. The Spirit leads through that person's life experiences. During the formation process, she begins to understand what is happening to her. Who can improve on the methods of the Holy Spirit?

Saint Francis had to grow in understanding, and so do we. When Jesus spoke to Francis from the San Damiano crucifix, Francis misunderstood the message. He heard the words "Go, rebuild my house, which as you see is falling into ruin" and interpreted them literally. He set about rebuilding churches brick by brick, but eventually he understood his true mission.

Our inquirers and candidates also grow in wisdom and understanding of their vocation as they progress through the various stages of formation.

In the process of formation, we experience fraternal love and acceptance as well as information. Formation gatherings are an experience of fraternity. Today, we are experiencing the love and acceptance of fraternity.

(4) Transmitting Ideas and Information to a Group with Varying Levels of Knowledge

Creativity in formation sessions allows the formator to transmit ideas and information to members of a group with varying levels of knowledge.

Nothing replaces the excitement and satisfaction of finding one's own answers to questions. A gifted formator provides general guidance and then allows those being formed the joy of personal insights and knowledge.

If we use varied resources rather than a single text, we will have a better chance of meeting the needs of diverse people. Always remember, the formator is not solely responsible for the individual's formation.

We have heard many times that the principal agent of formation is the Holy Spirit, and the candidate bears the primary responsibility for his or her formation. However, when we assume the ministry of formation, we may forget that this basic union of Holy Spirit and person is sacred. It is the foundation upon which the formation process rests. The rest of us simply assist the Holy Spirit in the formation process.

It is better to think of a formator as a facilitator rather than a teacher. Skilled facilitators help others learn at their own level and thus build self-confidence. The learner becomes less dependent on the formator, more confident, and more self-sufficient.

Formators who view themselves as teachers often express their opinions on questions too quickly. This weakens the candidate's confidence and ability to think for himself. Sometimes it is better to answer a question with another question, especially when it is a matter of opinion. Rephrase the question and ask the person to search for his own answer. The person will respond from his level of understanding.

Here is a simplified list of adult formation characteristics from a secular Franciscan point of view:

- Adults are made up of their experiences.
- Adults use their experiences in evaluating life and in making decisions for future commitments.
- Adults are involved in a lifelong search for their identity in God and in the Secular Franciscan Order.
- Adults expect to be comfortable in the formation setting.
- Adults want clear goals.
- Adults respond to positive and respectful relationships that enhance the formation process.
- Adults expect their individual strengths and weaknesses to be taken into consideration.
- Adults have different learning and communicating styles.
- Add your own:

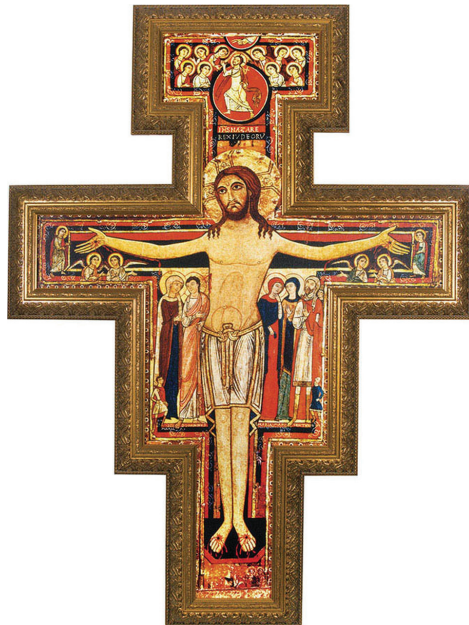
A way to meet the needs of a group with varying levels of knowledge is to use varied resources such as guest speakers, audio and video tapes, handouts, articles on the subject matter, and activities that allow the individuals to apply what they are learning and experiencing. This allows the individual to grow at her own rate.

In conclusion, if formators think and speak for prospective members and do not allow them to be directly and actively involved in the process, we will have immature secular Franciscans and weak fraternities. When asked to assume leadership, they will have difficulty exercising authority.

The thought I wish to stress here is that we should supply essential information. However, when a personal action or a decision is to be made regarding the formation topic, it is best for the formator to step back and allow the person to think about it and pray about it, using all of her life experience in the process.

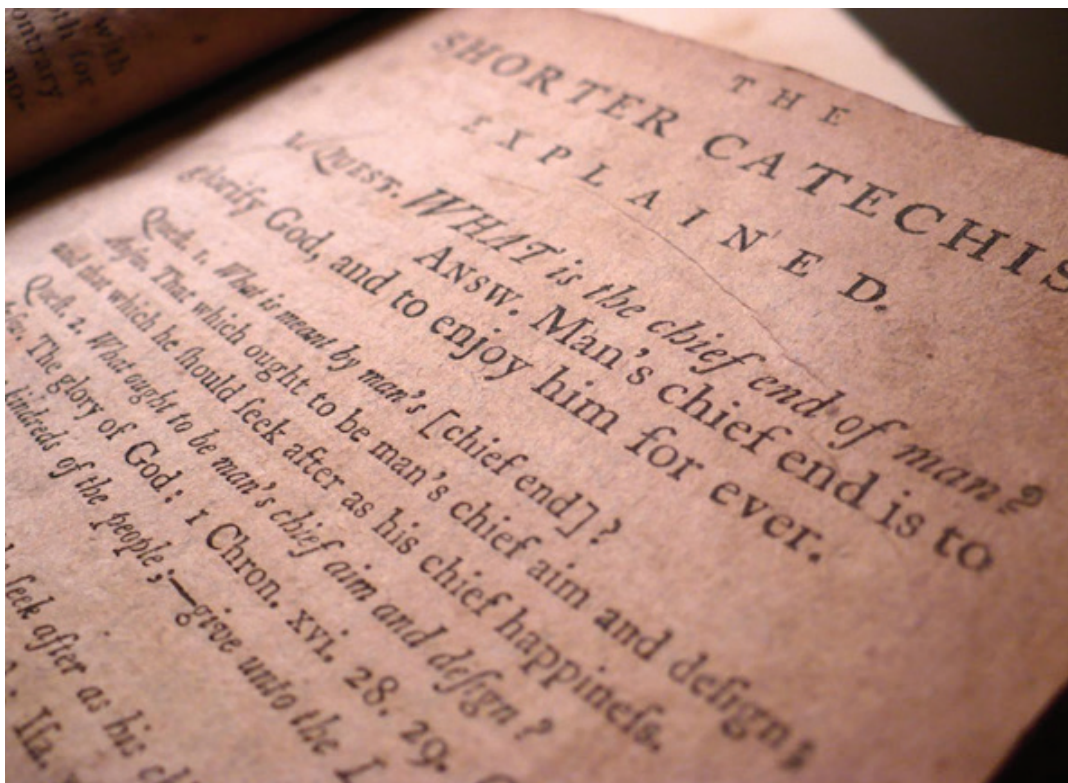
The Prayer before
the Crucifix
at San Damiano

*Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me true faith,
certain hope and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.*



Basic Catholic Doctrine

Edward L. Shirley, OFS



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Edward L. Shirley, OFS, is a professor of religious studies at St. Edward’s University, where he has taught for 24 years. He has also taught part time at a number of institutions, both in Texas and nationally. He has a doctorate in theology from Fordham University, and specializes in Trinity, Christology, Mariology, and Interreligious Dialogue. He possesses the theological *mandatum* from the Diocese of Austin. He has given classes and presentations for numerous dioceses, parishes, and Church-affiliated groups across the country.

He has received numerous St. Edward’s awards for his teaching, including the 2008-2009 University-wide Teaching Excellence Award.

He is a member of the American Academy of Religion and the Catholic Theological Society of America and is the past secretary for the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies. He has given a number of presentations at professional conferences and has published on a variety of subjects, many of them in Secular Franciscan publications.

Ed began meditating when he was a sophomore in college and has studied and practiced meditation from a variety of traditions, including Hindu, Buddhist, and Sufi. He has been formally initiated into two Hindu forms of meditation, as well as the Sufi Order International. Periodically, he teaches a course at St. Edward’s called “Exploring Inner Space.”

He has been a professed member of the Secular Franciscan Order since 1980 and has served in formation for local, regional, and national fraternities. He is currently the chair of the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee for the Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S. He is married and has one grown son.

BASIC CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

“Study to show yourself approved.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

Introduction

Elements of Formation: A Reflection on the Formation Process,¹ the “official guide” for Franciscan formation, directs that candidates must be formed on three “levels”: human, Christian, and Franciscan. We have to understand both what this does and does not mean. This does not mean that one must be a perfect human before one can become a Christian, and then get that down pat before one enters the Franciscan formation process. Indeed, it is closer to the truth to say that being Franciscan is our way of striving for Christian perfection,² and that being Christian is a way of striving toward human wholeness.³ This process does not end, we believe, until death, when one is fully formed into the likeness of Christ, the “complete human.”

On the other hand, *Elements* wants us to realize that there is a certain “bare minimum” of human and Christian formation that must be achieved before one can truly enter into the process of becoming Franciscan. We all know (and have probably witnessed) cases of psychologically immature people who are drawn to our fraternities, not because they truly understand the Franciscan path, but because they are “joiners” who look for fulfillment and acceptance in groups: if it weren’t the Franciscans, it would be the charismatic renewal, or the Legion of Mary, or even a local book club. Similarly, we also know people who come to our fraternities horribly unprepared in basic Christian teaching. I am not talking about people who are struggling with their faith (if we aren’t struggling, wrestling with the angel, as it were, we’re probably not “doing it right”). I am talking about people who come in looking for the last refuge of a Catholicism of the past, or the people who see Francis as the rugged individualist, rejecting all structure and merrily tiptoeing through the tulips. As with most things, the truth often lies between these two extremes.

This is why our formation process is so important: while we should not demand wholeness from our candidates (or we should all resign right now), we must insist on a certain level of human and Christian maturity. One cannot be a healthy Secular Franciscan and hold a childish (not the same as “child-like”) idea of Catholic teachings. Given that being Franciscan is a way of moving toward Christian and human wholeness, it is going to fall to us, the professed, to make certain we ourselves understand the basics of Catholic teaching. This is going to be especially important for those of us who serve as Formators in our fraternities. Our international directives have indicated six basic areas in which Secular Franciscans

¹ *Elements of Formation: A Reflection on the Formation Process*, 1995. Lindsborg, KS: Barbo-Carlson Enterprises, Inc., 2005.

² “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5: 48) The sense of this passage is probably closer to “be *made* perfect...” In other words, this is a process, not an end product.

³ “The glory of God is Man [the human person] fully alive.” St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, IV, 20:7.

must be somewhat theologically conversant: Scripture, Trinity and Christology, Ecclesiology (the Church), Liturgy and Sacraments, Mariology, and Canon Law.

Scripture: The Word of God in Human Words⁴

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.” St. Jerome makes this bold claim in his commentary on the book of the prophet Isaiah. When we read the writings of Francis, we see how steeped he was in Sacred Scripture: It is often impossible to tell where Francis’ words leave off and the Scriptural words begin. He not only knew the Scriptures intellectually, he was immersed in them. Let us hope that the days of Catholics believing they should not read the Bible are long past us. (This was never the teaching of the Church, of course; Pope Pius XII even went so far as to offer an indulgence for reading Scripture. Unfortunately, many Catholics were told in their religious formation, explicitly or implicitly, that they should use the Bible only to hold family documents.)

But *how* do Catholics read the Bible? Like the Ethiopian eunuch in the Book of Acts, we might find ourselves wondering “How can I understand these words unless someone explains them to me?” (Acts 8:30-31) Catholics are neither secular humanists nor Biblical fundamentalists. Catholics do not believe that the Bible is simply a human record of the thoughts of ancient peoples. They believe that is what Scripture is, but also that it is so much more. At the same time, Catholics do not take the Scriptures literally: *Dei Verbum* acknowledges that to truly discern what God may have been saying in the Scriptures, one must know something of the literary form of the passage, as well as the historical context.

This is what is meant by “Scriptural methodology”: to understand any passage, one must understand what type of literature one is reading (e.g., many parts, including the entire Book of Psalms, are songs, poetry, not to be taken simply at face value). Psalm 91, for example, says God hides us under his pinions, and under his wings we will find refuge. However, this is not trying to tell us what God is physically like, but it shows us that God’s actions toward us are those of a loving parent, concerned for our safety and well-being. Nor are any of the books “pure history,” as we tend to think of history today: nothing in the Bible is simply “this happened, and then that happened.” These are the reflections of ancient Jews or Christians on their experience of God in their history. (It is doubtful that the Egyptians, for example, saw the Exodus event in the same light as the Hebrews.) Thus, we must also understand the historical context of a passage. For example, if one understands what was happening when the Gospel of John was being written, it would be difficult to come away thinking that “according to the Gospel,” Jews as a whole were an evil, conniving people: Jews have suffered much in Christian history because of this misreading.

⁴ “For the words of God, expressed in human language, have been made like human discourse, just as the word of the eternal Father, when He took to Himself the flesh of human weakness, was in every way made like men.” Documents of Vatican II: *Dei Verbum*, III, 13.

Perhaps the best place to begin in studying the Bible is its actual physical structure. All Christian Bibles are divided into two primary sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. This may seem very elemental, but I am continually surprised at Catholics who believe that the Old Testament was written “to teach Catholics” something or the other. The Old Testament is the collection of writings from the Jewish people before the birth of Christ. It would be incorrect to say, though, that “Jews believe only the Old Testament.” For Jews, this *is* the Bible, period. Christians have adopted these Jewish writings as their own, and as such, they make up about two-thirds of the Christian Bible.

One of the first things people discover is that there is a slight difference between the “Protestant” and “Catholic” Old Testaments. “Catholics have ‘extra’ books.” Or, from a Catholic perspective, “Protestants have ‘fewer’ books.” Interestingly, the Eastern Orthodox (depending on the type of Orthodox) have a couple more books than the Catholic Old Testament. The why of all of this is rather complex, and probably does not need to occupy too much of our time, nor should one make a triumphalist mountain of this relatively insignificant molehill of a difference. However, it might be helpful for our candidates to realize that this difference is because Jews who lived outside of Palestine in the ancient Greek world translated the Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek and eventually added more writings. Even at the time of Jesus, these “two lists” existed. Because early Christians mostly spoke Greek, they gravitated toward the Greek translation. Protestants tend to use the Hebrew list, primarily because Martin Luther was trying to get back to the original texts.

The Old Testament consists of subdivisions, or collections of books. The first five books are called the Pentateuch (from the Greek word for “five”) or the Torah (from Hebrew, the Law). These are followed by the Historical Books (stories about the formation and eventual fall of the Kingdom), the Wisdom Literature, and finally the Prophets. The latter, it should be noted, were people who were chosen by God to be God’s “spokespeople” (pro-fessing, speaking for), and not primarily as tellers of the future.

The New Testament consists of 27 books, accepted by all Christians. These consist of the Four Gospels, the Book of Acts, the Epistles (letters) and the Book of Revelation (a very confusing book that was written primarily to give hope to early Christians who were being persecuted, sometimes even to death. (“In the end, Jesus wins, so don’t give up.”) It is important to remember that the Catholic Church does not view this book as a blueprint for the end of the world. For Catholics, while all Scripture is divinely inspired, the New Testament has preeminence over the Old, and the four Gospels have preeminence above the rest, This is why we stand when the Gospel is read publicly.

The Catholic Church does not believe that the Bible is meant to teach “pure history,” or to predict the future. Nor does it contain “secret messages,” and certainly it is not a science

textbook. To maintain any of these ideas is to believe contrary to the teachings of the Church. The truths in Scripture are revealed for one purpose alone: “for the sake of salvation.”⁵

That being said, Sacred Scriptures should not be read *solely* as a text to be studied. It should be that, of course, but it should be read with an even deeper significance: the Bible is the Word of God in human words. Christ, being the Word (John 1:1-18), is Really Present in Scripture, in a similar fashion to the way he is Really Present in the Eucharist. This is why, after public readings in the Eucharistic Liturgy, we boldly proclaim, “The Word of the Lord.” And the Bible is not simply for public proclamation: Catholics in general, and Secular Franciscans in particular, are to form themselves through a prayerful reading of the Scriptures. It is thus that we learn to go “from Gospel to life, and from life to Gospel.”⁶ Here, of course, “Gospel” refers not simply to the “four Gospels,” but to the entire “Good News” of Jesus, to which all of the Scriptures testify.

One way of entering into prayerful reflection on Scripture is the process of *Lectio Divina*, “Sacred Reading.” This method will be discussed more fully elsewhere, but for now, it will suffice to say that this process involves four components: reading, reflecting, responding, and resting in God. Ancient and Medieval Christian writers compared this to a cow chewing its cud: we bite off the Scriptures (read), chew them (reflect, or meditate), “regurgitate” them (respond to God in prayer), and repeat the process until, like the grass for a cow, the passage becomes part of who we are, and we are transformed. The interesting thing about *Lectio Divina* is that the goal is not to read as much Scripture as possible, but to let the little bit we read sink into us until we absorb it. Like Francis, the words of Scripture should become second nature to us, so that it is impossible to tell where our words leave off and Scripture begins. The goal is not to “understand doctrine,” but to hear what God is saying here and now: the next time you read the same passage, it may say something different to you.

Trinity and Christology: The Two Pillars of Catholic Doctrine

It is safe to say that the doctrine of the Trinity, easily the central dogma of Catholic faith, is misunderstood and underappreciated today. German theologian Karl Rahner remarked that if the Church were to change its mind about the Trinity today, most works on Christian spirituality would not have to be changed at all. Not so Franciscan spirituality! Francis was through-and-through a Trinitarian. Francis, of course, was not an academic theologian, but if the Trinity matters only to theologians in universities, it has nothing to do with our lives as Catholics. There is a reason so many of the encyclicals of Pope John Paul II began with a reflection on the Trinity: It is the basis of every other doctrine.

Unfortunately, when Trinity Sunday comes along, many priests seem to shy away from any real exploration of the doctrine’s relevance in the lives of the people. Often dismissed as

⁵ *Dei Verbum*, III, 11

⁶ *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*, Chapter II, section 4.

“Well, it’s a mystery,” the topic turns sometimes to “love” (which could be a very Trinitarian homily) or, even worse, parish finances.

Again, it is probably good to begin with what the Trinity is *not*: it is not a Divine Committee. The Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three guys (or even worse, two guys and a bird) sitting around in heaven, plotting the Creation and Salvation of the World. That would be tritheism, belief in three gods, and that is contrary to the Catholic faith. Nor is the Trinity merely one God “wearing different hats”: when he creates, we call him “Father”; when he stops by for a brief visit in ancient Israel, we call him “Son”; and when he lives in our hearts, we call him “Holy Spirit.” That’s also an ancient heresy. The doctrine of the Trinity is that there is only One God who is, at the same time, what we mean when we say “Father, Son and Spirit.”

So what does that mean? Well, it all started with the ancient Church continuing to ask itself the question Jesus posed to his apostles: “Who do you say I am?” This begins as a Christological issue: who, exactly, is this Jesus? Is he a human being who brings the Word of God to us, like the prophets of old? Is he “God disguised as a human,” like the ancient Greek gods who would pop down occasionally? No, the Church said, he is absolutely God, as much as the Father, but he is also absolutely human, “like us in all ways but sin.” (Hebrews 4:15) As the Church continued to reflect on this question, one-by-one the answers that were considered inadequate were left by the wayside, until, at the Council of Chalcedon, in 451, the Church declared that Jesus was the complete union of a full human nature and a full divine nature: He was as human as we, and as divine as the Father. Traditionally, this is known as the “hypostatic union,” the union of two natures in one Person. Why was this important to them? Because for the ancient Fathers, salvation was much more than just “paying for sins.” For them, salvation was the union of God and humanity; therefore the Savior must himself be that union.

If Christ is as fully divine as the Father, what does that mean? As noted before, it does not mean two (or three) gods: that is a negation of monotheism. Nor does it mean Christ was the Father in human form: that, too, is a heresy. The doctrine of the Trinity can be summarized in two words: *dynamic* and *interrelated*. The doctrine of the Trinity says that the Father is ultimately beyond all expression, the Infinite Mystery, which is, ironically, the Source of everything that exists. That Infinite Silence *expressed himself* in and through the Word, which is the expression of the Inexpressible, even to the extent that the Word *is* that same divine nature. St. Augustine theologized that the Holy Spirit is the relationship, the flow of love, from Father to Son, and from Son to Father: thus, there is both distinction (the Father is not the Son or Spirit) and unity (there is only one divinity). Their relationship is so intertwined and so complete that they “mutually indwell” (exist within) each other: i.e., “inside” the Father are the Son and Spirit; “inside” the Son are the Father and Spirit; and so forth. The Gospel of John expresses this poetically in John 1:18: “No one has ever seen God, except the

Son, who is at the Father's bosom." Remember that word: "bosom." The Trinity, put succinctly, means that Christians see God as a "community" of dynamic interrelations.

Not every Catholic theology viewed the Trinity in the same way. St. Thomas Aquinas laid the foundation for Dominican theology. St. Bonaventure, however, set the tone for Franciscan Trinitarian understanding: Every created thing, from the tiniest particle to the Universe as a whole, is stamped with the "likeness" of the Trinity. Every creature is somehow part of the dynamism of the Trinity (as Bonaventure reminds us, everything comes forth from the Word) and is interrelated to every other created thing.

The Word, which is the Expression of the Inexpressible, became flesh and dwelt among us. This is the Incarnation. Again, Franciscans have had a special way of looking at the Incarnation. Ever since Duns Scotus, Franciscans have maintained that even had there never been any sin, the Incarnation would have taken place because it was God's first intention to become one with his creation. In fact, humans are created "in anticipation" of the Incarnation. While some theologies struggled with how to "fit" the Word into human nature, like trying to put a foot into a glove, Franciscans saw human nature as created *so that* the Incarnation could take place (the analogy would be that shoes are made for the purpose of housing feet, so you don't have to fit two incompatible things together).

So for Franciscans, creation itself shares in both the Trinitarian relationships and the union of God and the world. This is why St. Francis can look at creation around him and see Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and Mother Earth.

The Church: The Continuing Body of Christ

As I said before, the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation are the two pillars of the Catholic faith. Indeed, perhaps a better analogy is that they are the interwoven strands of doctrinal DNA. They are found in every piece of Catholic doctrine, in every authentic expression of Catholic spirituality. This is not to say that every doctrine uses the words "Trinity" or "Incarnation." However, as noted before, one cannot understand the writings of Pope John Paul II without understanding something of his take on the Trinity and Incarnation. Family as interrelated? Dignity of the human person? It's there. Beyond the writings of this particular Holy Father, one must say that this basic DNA informs every other doctrine. One of the first places to look for this dynamic interrelatedness is Catholic ecclesiology, the theology of the Church.

By "Church," of course, we mean the community, what has been called, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, "the pilgrim people of God." St. Paul speaks of the Church as the Body of Christ, with each member, each organ, being absolutely essential to the whole. Like a human body, where everything is so interrelated (ah, remember that term?), what happens

to one part affects the whole, so when one member suffers, the entire body suffers, and when one member is built up, the entire body is built up. (1 Corinthians 12: 26)

What is the basis of this unity of the Church? The presence of the Spirit, which makes the Church the continuing Incarnation, the Body of Christ. Remember I said to remember the word “bosom”? There is one other place in the Gospel of John where the word “bosom” is used. At the Last Supper, the beloved disciple has his head on Jesus’ bosom. (John 13:23) The “beloved disciple,” the disciple Jesus loved, in the Gospel of John, represents all disciples: which disciple does Jesus not love? This is the Evangelist’s way of saying that the same relationship Jesus shares with the Father is shared between Jesus and his disciples. That is you and I, and in light of the developed doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation, this means that you and I are “part of” the Trinity, and therefore, “expressions of the Inexpressible” in human nature: we are “mini-Christ,” “Christians.”

This identification of the Church, and therefore its members, with Christ is found in Acts 9:4 (“Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?”), and is grounded in our baptism (Romans 6:3-5). We are quite literally “christened”—Christ-ened. This identification with Christ is nurtured in many ways, most notably through our celebration of the Eucharist. When preparing wine for the Consecration, the priest says a prayer: “Through the mingling of this water and wine, may we come to share in the divinity of him who humbled himself to share in our humanity.” St. Irenaeus said, in the second century, “...our Lord Jesus Christ, who did... become what we are, that he might bring us to be even what He is Himself,”⁷ and St. Athanasius said, in the fourth century, “He was made man so we might be made God.”⁸ Through our baptism and the Eucharist, we are divinized (the Eastern Church calls this *theosis*, divinization), we “become God by participation.” St. Augustine would say, as he gave out the Eucharist, “Receive what you are, and become what you receive.”

Because of this ecclesiology—understanding of the Church—as continuing the Incarnational ministry of Jesus, this dynamic and interpenetrating relationship is extended throughout history and even into Eternity. This is the Catholic notion of the Communion of Saints. Those who have gone before us and those who will come after us are *at this very moment* inextricably intertwined with us, Our relationship with God is always in relationship with them, and conversely, theirs with us. In terms of the “structure” of the Body, we need only remember St. Paul’s teaching that each part plays an essential role. It is true that there are clergy: bishops, priests, and deacons. It is true that there are consecrated religious and secular. It is also true that the major population in the Church is non-religious, non-ordained: the laity.

The Secular Franciscan Order plays an important—even essential—role in the fullness of the Body. Our present membership, and our membership throughout history, includes clergy:

⁷ Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5, preface.

⁸ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54: 3.

secular bishops, priests, and deacons. However, it is also obvious that the majority of our membership, like that of the Church as a whole, is the laity, and not ordained. That being said, we should never think of laity in negative terms: “not ordained.” The laity is the foundation of the Church, “the people” (from Greek, *laos*, people). Understood in this way, one could even maintain that everyone is among the laity, with some being ordained.

Root words aside, we must understand that “lay” does not mean “less.” We are only now beginning to formulate a theology of the laity that does not simply see lay people as providing a population to the Church, out of whom are drawn clergy, who, after all, do the real work of the Church. *Lumen Gentium* devotes nine sections to the role of the laity (30-38) and four sections to the universal call to holiness, much of it speaking of the laity (39-42). (Note: in comparison, the section on Religious is four sections long, 43-47.)

In addition to *Lumen Gentium*, there is also the decree on the apostolate of the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*. Lay people are called to be active participants in the mission of the Church. The laity, it says, “share[s] in the priestly, prophetic, and royal office of Christ.”⁹ In fact, the document goes so far as to say, “the member who fails to make his proper contribution to the development of the Church must be said to be useful neither to the Church nor to himself.”¹⁰ Never again would it be possible to say that the role of the laity to “pray, pay, and obey.”

Having said that about the essential role of the laity, we must remember that our Order also includes secular (diocesan) clergy. Saying that, we have to remember that “secularity” is in itself an officially recognized form of spirituality in the Church. Unfortunately, again, we have traditionally seen “secular” as something negative, in the sense of “not in a religious order.” Even worse, we have used the word “secular” to mean something in opposition to the Divine Will. However, from a Catholic point of view, and especially from a Franciscan view, there is no *secula* (literally, “age,” created time) that exists apart from the space-time world God has created. The secular is not in opposition to the sacred, it is the embodiment of the sacred. This is the basis of the Catholic sacramental understanding: water, oil, bread, and wine can be vehicles for the experience of God. Indeed, beads, relics, icons, you name it: If it is part of creation, it is a vehicle for experiencing God. We as Franciscans should know that better than anyone. We might phrase the issue this way: Just how far do we take this participation in the Incarnation thing? For Catholics in general, and for Franciscans in particular, our answer must always be “all the way.” The Incarnation in Jesus is the “boundary” toward which we and all of creation are moving. (1 Corinthians 15:28)

If we are only beginning to truly appreciate the essential role of the laity in the Church, we have taken only halting baby steps toward full appreciation of the secular vocation.

⁹ *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, I, 2

¹⁰ *ibid.*c

Liturgy and Sacraments: Transforming Actions of the Church

Just as our understanding of the Church is grounded in our understanding of the Trinity and Incarnation, so too, our understanding of liturgy and sacraments is grounded in our understanding of the Church. Though we don't want to draw too sharp a separation between personal and public prayer (after all, we must make the liturgy "our prayer," and no one truly prays without connection to the whole Body), the liturgy (from the root "public work," or "work of the people") is the public/official communal prayer of the Church. The liturgy includes the Liturgy of the Hours, as well as the various sacramental liturgies, especially the Eucharistic Liturgy (the "Mass"). Ideally, liturgy should be celebrated communally, as the name denotes. However, because of the reality of the situation of the Church today, where very few parishes offer any liturgical celebration apart from the Eucharist,¹¹ the "Prayer of Christians" (as the American title for the Liturgy of the Hours is called) is hardly celebrated by the Body worshipping together. However, even when we pray the Liturgy of the Hours by ourselves, we are consciously participating in the official prayer of the Body. Indeed, since in the Church, Christ himself prays to the Father, we are mystically identifying with Christ as we offer a "continual sacrifice of praise."

Let's think about the structure of the liturgy for just a moment. The Liturgical Year begins with the First Sunday of Advent, Christian New Year, as it were. For one "moon" (four weeks), we celebrate the anticipation of the world, waiting for deliverance. When the light is at its weakest, we celebrate the birth of the Light, not only in Bethlehem, but also at the end of the world, and in each of our lives during our periods of darkness. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isaiah 9:2). At the end of Christmas season, we celebrate the manifestation of Christ to the world (Epiphany and the Baptism of Jesus), after which, we enter into a period called "Ordinary Time," when we commemorate the life of the Christ whose birth we just celebrated. Then we enter into Lent, a time of "spring cleaning" for the spirit, preparing for the Triduum: the death, burial and Resurrection of Jesus, the Paschal Mystery. Just as nature is moving into Spring, with things presumed dead coming back to life, we celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, and in so celebrating, our own Resurrection as well. Fifty days later, we have Pentecost, and the descent of the Holy Spirit, the "birth of the Church." Then we enter into a very long period, again called "Ordinary Time," though this time, it is the life of the Church as we carry out Jesus' ministry in the world. Toward the end of Ordinary Time, we start getting readings about the end of the world and the Second Coming of Christ, crowned, as it were, by the Feast of Christ the King. The next Sunday, we arrive again at the First Sunday of Advent, and begin looking forward to the coming of Christ. The cycle repeats to constantly keep us in tune with the events of Jesus life and encourages us, year by year, to enter more fully into the Mystery unfolding before us.

¹¹ Even the Sacrament of Reconciliation is rarely celebrated liturgically, except perhaps in Lent or on youth retreats. Otherwise, we tend to line up as we did 50 years ago (though the lines aren't quite as long), go into the dark boxes, and recite our list.

In the Liturgical Year, we join together our commemoration of the life and significance of Christ (coming, birth, life, death, life in the Church) with the natural flow of the seasons: winter and death, spring and new life, summer as the time for the Church, and autumn, the time for the harvest. This works quite well for us in North America. South of the equator, well, that's another story. (Aren't you glad you aren't the ones in Rome who have to think about these things?)

The Liturgy of the Hours utilizes more than the natural cycle of the year; it reflects the times of the day: dawn, Morning Prayer, with the sense of Resurrection, New Creation ("the dawn from on high shall break upon us..." [Luke 1:78]); mid-day as the time for work; evening as thanksgiving, winding down, reversing the natural cycle, as the outside becomes dark and the inside light ("he has cast down the mighty from their thrones, and has lifted up the lowly..." [Luke 1:52]); night as death ("Now Lord, you dismiss your servant..." [Luke 2:29]). Morning comes: Resurrection! Who better than Franciscans to recognize the symbolic connection between the Prayer of the Church and the natural cycle?

Among the various forms of liturgical prayer, the celebration of the Sacraments stands out. I like to compare the Sacraments to the love between a husband and wife. (OK, I stole this from St. Paul. Can't go wrong with good material.) There are times when the couple says to each other, "I love you." There are special celebrations where they go to dinner or a movie: birthdays, Valentine's Day, their anniversary. And then there are those special moments when they join together physically, and "the two become one." This is how I like to think of the Sacraments: every act of God is an act of love for us, but the Sacraments are the "special moments" when the Church truly acts out who it is: the continuation of the Incarnational love of God in Jesus. Baptism brings us into the Community; the Eucharist nourishes us and transforms us just as certainly as the Bread and Wine are transformed. Marriage mirrors the relationship of Christ with his Church; the three expressions Holy Orders embody and symbolize the ministry of the entire Body; Reconciliation acknowledges that our failings have left both us and the Body (People of God, Church) just a little weaker. Reconciliation aids us in coming to terms with our own shortfalls and restores inner peace to the individual and harmony (relationship) with our Loving God and with each other.

Mary: Model and Mother of the Church

When the bishops of the Second Vatican Council were debating where to place the schema on Mary, there was some disagreement. Some felt that whatever the Council said of her should be placed within the context of the teaching on Christ. Indeed, every, and I mean every, thing ever said of Mary that was authentically Catholic was a statement about Christ. If she is the "Mother of God," this is a way we have of saying, "This little baby, born of Mary, is truly God. If she is "Queen of Heaven," this is because she shares, to a preeminent degree, in the royal prophetic priesthood of Jesus.

On the other hand, there were bishops who felt that the Council needed to re-emphasize Mary's role and place in the Church. She was, after all, a member of the early Christian community (Acts 1: 14). In the end, the schema on Mary was placed within *Lumen Gentium*. The sections on Mary come at the end of the document, echoing the teaching of St. Ambrose in his exposition of the Gospel of Luke, the document called Mary a "type," or model, of the Church.¹² Mary is the living symbol of the Church because the Church itself is virgin and mother. This echoes the words of St. Francis in his "Praises of the Blessed Virgin Mary, "Hail Lady, Holy Queen, Holy Mary Mother of God who art the Virgin made Church."

Veneration of Mary is rooted in the Catholic understanding of the Communion of Saints, that is, the Church as extended throughout time and eternity. Everyone who is sanctified by the Holy Spirit is a saint. We use the term in a special way referring to those who have completed their journeys, and in a very particular way when referring to those who have been recognized by the Church as being exemplars of the Christian life: the canonized saints. We believe that those in union with God in Eternity are still connected to those of us still in space and time, and that their prayers, like the prayers of fellow Christians here on earth, help us on our journey. Among this Communion, this "cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1), Mary is held up as the preeminent member.

Christians have honored the Blessed Mother for centuries in many ways and forms. In the early Church, the focus was on the motherhood of Mary, both of Christ and Christians. In the Middle Ages, influenced by the feudalism of the period, Mary was pictured as the Queen of Heaven, ruling alongside her Son, the King. She was, if you will, the Queen Mother. Using the imagery of romance literature, Christians saw themselves as knights bearing the favors of the Queen, through whom they could have influence with the King himself.

There was nothing wrong with this imagery in itself. However, sometimes Christians developed an exaggerated, and even misdirected, love for Mary, almost placing her as an equal with Jesus. Jesus, pictured as a strict judge, was often feared. However, Mary, gentle Mary, could get you on Jesus' good side. This, of course, did not do Jesus justice. He who came because of God's love of the world (John 3:16) is always on our side: he is not one we have to "convince" to be merciful.

In order to understand the actual teachings of the Church about Mary, we have to understand the difference between devotional and doctrinal language. When I say to my wife, "You are the only woman in the world," this is not a literal statement of "fact." She is obviously not the only woman in the world. However, I am not trying to be literal: I am expressing love for her. This is the language of devotion.

¹² *Lumen Gentium* VIII, III, 63.

There is absolutely nothing wrong with devotional love of Mary. Asked one time how much one should love Mary, German theologian Karl Rahner responded one can love her as much as possible, as long as one loves Jesus more. We come to her as “poor banished children of Eve,” asking her to turn “her eyes of mercy toward us.” We call her “our life, our sweetness and our hope.” All of this is the language of love, and it is perfectly OK, as long as we recognize that it is the language of love. It is when we confuse this language with doctrinal language, when we think that those who do not use the same words are somehow lacking in faith and love that problems can arise.¹³

Devotion is good, but we must not stop there. Good devotion is based on good doctrine. We can call Mary our life, our sweetness and our hope precisely because of the unique role the Church recognizes that she played, and continues to play, in the plan of salvation.¹⁴ When we examine everything the Church has said about Mary, we can sum it all up in two words: model and mother. To understand those words, we must turn to the source of our Christian understanding, the Bible.

There are relatively few passages about Mary in the New Testament; it is obvious that the focus is on Jesus. In fact, in the Gospel of Mark, neither Mary nor the rest of Jesus’ biological family come off very well. It is really from Matthew, Luke, and John, all written later than Mark, that we find the basis for Catholic understanding of Mary. There is so much material in these Gospels that we cannot go into all of it here. However, if you want to read more about it, take a look at *Mary in the New Testament*, edited by John Reumann.¹⁵ For our purposes, we can look at the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, the Infancy narratives in Luke, and the Wedding at Cana and Crucifixion in John.

Matthew names only five women in the genealogy of Jesus: four from the Old Testament, and Mary. The four from the Old Testament are all involved in potentially scandalous situations: sleeping with one’s father-in-law, a non-Jewish harlot, a Moabite woman, and an adulteress. Yet in each of these cases, God’s will is worked. What is more, three of the four were women of strong faith. When Mary is mentioned as the mother of Jesus, Matthew is making a point, beyond the statement of her virginity.

We meet Mary in the Gospel of Luke at the Annunciation, where an angel announces to her the birth of Jesus, who will inherit the throne “of his father, David,” and who will be the Son of the Most High. This is one of the earliest Christian creeds, and when Mary gives her *fiat*, she is accepting the “pre-Jesus Good News.” Mary is the proto-Christian, whose example

¹³ I remember a priest saying he had read something that claimed that Mary “had a singing voice more beautiful than all the angels combined.” He said simply, “We have absolutely no idea what Mary sounded like when she sang. This is one of those exaggerated statements that confuse people about the teachings of the Church, and leads to misunderstandings about our belief about Mary, both among Catholics and non-Catholics.

¹⁴ This is similar to saying that our love of St. Whomever is fine, as long as it is grounded in the Catholic understanding of the Communion of Saints, and that we do not see St. Whomever as somehow an autonomous figure.

¹⁵ *Mary in the New Testament*, Raymond E. Brown, John Reumann (editor), et al, Paulist Press, 1978.

we must follow. Later, in the Visitation, Mary becomes prophet and announces that the child to be born will bring about a revolutionary change where God “has cast the mighty from their thrones and has lifted up the lowly.” She has spoken the Christian message of justice (a fine example for the Franciscan JPIC work).

In John, Mary is the one who urges Jesus to help the married couple who have run out of wine. Jesus calls her “woman,” a term that has confused both Protestants and Catholics for centuries. However, a careful study will reveal that this sign is performed “on the seventh day,” when Jesus begins the work of the New Creation. Just as the woman at the First Creation was mother of the living, so, too, the woman of the New Creation is mother, directing us to “do what he says.” Mary then disappears from the text, only to reappear at the foot of the Cross, where Jesus once again calls her “woman,” giving her to the “beloved disciple” (i.e., all disciples) as mother. This is why the Fathers of the Church called Mary the New Eve, corresponding to Jesus as the New Adam.

There are only two dogmas (official teachings that must be accepted) about Mary, *per se*, in Catholic teachings: the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption.¹⁶ Even in these dogmas, what the Church has said of Mary says something about our own relationships with Jesus: just as Mary was free from Sin at her conception (which is why she can give a complete yes to God’s invitation), so, we also shall become free from Sin, and be able to give a complete yes to God’s invitation. In the Assumption, her whole self is taken into union with Christ: she does not just “float off” in disembodied form. Likewise, we, too, shall be saved as whole persons, not just “part of us.” This is the meaning of the Resurrection: the whole person is united to Christ and transformed. Mary is the vanguard: what she is, we shall become.

Nothing is required of us as Franciscans that is not required of Catholics in general: to hold certain teachings about Mary, to imitate her as our model, and to love her as our mother. We are not a Marian order, as, say, the Carmelites, and most especially, we are not a devotional society like the Legion of Mary. We do not, as a fraternity, “consecrate ourselves” to Mary in the style of Louis de Montfort. There is nothing wrong with these expressions of faith and devotion, but we are a unique and fully autonomous *order*, and our charism is not Marian, it is Franciscan. As such, our call is to live the Gospel of Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis. Our guiding document (General Constitutions) makes it clear that profession into the Secular Franciscan Order excludes membership in other Third Orders.

At the same time, Francis placed Mary as the Protectress of the Franciscan family. She holds a special place in our hearts and lives. There are some very authentic and specifically Franciscan ways of expressing this relationship. One option for our daily Office, for example, is the Little Office of the Virgin Mary, in its contemporary form, patterned after the Liturgy of the

¹⁶ Some hold that the Council of Ephesus called her Mother of God, which it did. However, this was not so much a statement about her as it was about the Son she bore: he is, indeed, God in the flesh.

Hours. We have the Franciscan Crown Rosary, the “seven joys of Mary.” So while it would be inappropriate to make the Crown our normative prayer at fraternity meetings, at certain times of the year, particularly in May or October, this may be a wonderful form of communal prayer. In all of this, as in the Franciscan life in general, we must always remember that we are people of our own time, and that we cannot and should not slavishly try to imitate Medieval spirituality.

Canon Law

It is said, regarding civil law, that a lawyer who defends himself in court has a fool for a client. Something similar could probably be said for those who try to interpret Canon Law without proper training. I once teased a friar I know, who was the Juridical Vicar of our diocese, saying, “Why should someone have to study Canon Law? After all, it’s all written down in a book; anyone can read it.” He laughed and said, “Ah, yes, there is what the text says and what it means.” It is important for us to remember that Canon Law serves the Church, and not the other way around. It is equally important to remember that Canon Law should reflect good theology, but it does not define what good theology is.

While most of us don’t have to be concerned with Canon Law, it might be good to have a basic understanding of what Canon Law is and isn’t. First of all, it is not “universal law” in the Church. What we think of as “Canon Law” is really the internal governing norms of the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. Eastern Catholic Churches have their own codes of Canon Law. While there were normative rules and procedures throughout Church history, Latin Rite Canon Law was not actually codified until 1917, under the directive of Popes Pius X and Benedict XV. This was revised in the Latin Rite after Vatican II, and promulgated by Pope John Paul II in 1983. Canon Law of the Eastern Rites was promulgated by the pope in 1990. While there are canon lawyers throughout the world, and while individual bishops can interpret Canon Law, the final arbiter of Canon Law is the pope.¹⁷

It is also important for those of us in the United States to understand that Canon Law is not based on the same theory of law as our law. United States law (except for Louisiana) is based on English Common Law, where we like to have everything spelled out. Decisions are made based not only on the written statutes themselves, but on precedents set in previous cases. One example of this type of law might be traffic laws: the speed limit says 45 mph, and, by golly, you don’t go over 45 mph, no matter what. Roman law, on which Canon Law is based, relies on very general statutes and is interpreted in particular contexts. Speed limit, for example, might be seen as the ideal, not the absolute, and if circumstances are such that you need to speed, this may be permissible. Our view of the law tends to be: if it were permissible, the law would say so. Roman law, on the other hand, tends to be: if it is not expressly forbidden, it is allowed.

¹⁷ I once had a graduate student question whether something Pope John Paul II did was in violation of Canon Law. I pointed out to him that the pope has authority over Canon Law, and suggested that if he wanted to write to the pope to point out the Holy Father’s mistake, he was free to do so. I don’t think he took me up on that.

All of that being said, one should remember that Canon Law is rather dry. I was sked to look up what Canon Law said about Eucharistic Adoration. In fact, it said very little, and absolutely nothing about devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Rather, there were regulations about when it was and wasn't allowed, who should have a key to the tabernacle, and what types of chapels could have Adoration: nothing particularly helpful for what the inquirer was looking for. If it isn't theology, it most certainly isn't devotional!

Canon Law tends to affect the Secular Franciscan Order only in terms of what it says of secular institutes. (Though we are a full Order in the Church, we don't fall in the legal category of "religious," and so we're lumped in with other secular institutes that are not themselves orders.) As Pope John Paul II acknowledged, we are "one and unique." We don't quite fit into the "normal" categories found in Canon Law. There are only a handful of statutes that affect us as an order. However, it could be helpful for at least some OFSs to have a general understanding of what is said about us, particularly our standing as an autonomous "subject of rights and duties" in the Church: though we are united with the various orders of friars and Third Order Regular priests, brothers and sisters, we are in no way "under their authority," nor are we adjuncts of "real" Franciscans. We *are* real Franciscans. There have been problems in some fraternities where a friar treats the OFS like his personal work force, even controlling finances, or where Seculars turn "to father" to get his "final word" on practically everything. This is contrary to our place within the Franciscan family, and contrary to the norms of Church law. To claim any less is a violation of our mission to and for the Church.

Conclusion

This chapter is not intended to be an "everything you wanted to know about" chapter. Many of these topics will be taken up in more detail, particularly from a Franciscan standpoint, later. The purpose of this chapter is to help orient us toward what it means to have a mature, contemporary, and authentic understanding of basic Catholic belief. We, as an Order, must be willing to form ourselves to be mature Christians, and we must, in turn, help our candidates to a mature understanding of their faith. If this is not done, we will have professed Franciscans who are Franciscan in name only, like an institutionally recognized icing on a half-baked cake. This move toward wholeness is, as St. Bonaventure entitles his work, the journey into God, the infinite journey into the Infinite God. It is a never-ending journey, but one which must be walked. As St. Francis so famously noted, "Let us begin, for up to now, we have done nothing."

Elements of Ecclesiology and Theology of the Laity

Adapted by Ron Pihokker, OFS



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ELEMENTS OF ECCLESIOLOGY AND THEOLOGY OF THE LAITY

What is the Church?

What is the relationship of its members among themselves?

What is the place and role of lay people in the Church?

Often, Secular Franciscans have imprecise ideas on what the Church is and on what their role in it is, as lay persons and Franciscan professed members of the OFS.

The II Vatican Council “re-thought” the Church in the light of Revelation and of the evangelical experience. “Old” novelties have emerged from this, which were perfectly anticipated by Francis eight centuries ago when he founded his Family.

It is therefore essential for Secular Franciscans to have clear ideas and to understand well what the Church is and what their role in it is, as lay and secular persons.

I. The Church According to the Council

With the Second Vatican Council, the Church came to new and deeper insights in defining itself and its role in society. This new way of thinking has been hailed from the start as a liberating event. But even today, there still exists a widespread ignorance of its content, and especially of the new outlook to which it gave birth. In some instances, it has not yet been successful in bringing about complete and fully developed insights. And for other important themes, the spirit of the Council is still waiting to be translated into action.

That said, the change brought about by the Council with regard to earlier reflection on the Church is profound: the passing from a top-down ecclesiology based on structure and law to an ecclesiology of Church as communion.

In this way, moving from an understanding of the church based solely upon the aspect of authority (which traces the foundation of the Church back to the Apostles and to Christ the Founder, emphasizing the legal/structural dimension)—a top-down understanding, the Council instead sought to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit and of the Charisms the Spirit inspires wherever he wills; of the Word and its link with the Sacraments; of human values and the capacity of each member of the community to be an apostle—a horizontal and radically equal understanding.

We rediscover the main themes of this new ecclesiological reflection, which bring together and joins these different elements in the Encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* of Paul VI. This encyclical emphasizes the commitment the Council has to the Church and its theological reflection about itself.

Above all, the Council wanted to express the self-understanding of the Church, its renewal and openness to dialogue within itself, with non-Catholic Christians, with non-Christian

believers, and with people of good-will who are not believers. In this way, we understand the style, or better said, the Spirit, that animated the Council Fathers.

A positive attitude and approach appear in the presentation of the Truth of which the Church is the repository. A real change in attitude became apparent: it is no longer one of condemnation of errors, of an excessive defense of traditional positions, but one of sincere encounter with the Word of God, the ultimate source of truth against error.

The discovery that the Truth is beyond human capacity to contain in its entirety gives rise to the authentic Gospel spirit of openness to the truth wherever it is to be found, even with the non-believer, in whose heart the Spirit of truth is always at work.

On the importance of seeking the truth and on the duty to reflect on it, Paul VI expressed this message to scholars: “All of us here, Council Fathers, are in search of the truth... Your path is ours. Your thoughts are never strangers to our own. We are with you in your vocation as seekers, allied to you in your fatigue, admirers of you in your success, and if necessary, sympathizers in your discouragement and failures.”

Because of this new self-understanding of the Church, the *lively dialogic* style became the new approach by which the Church would relate to the world and which came to characterize the way the Church would deal with social issues, the role of women, the importance of art within as well as outside the Church. This demanded a new style that consists not only in accepting the position of others as something to be taken into account but as something to be welcomed with great respect, and that represented a major shift! The Council wanted to meet the other with an attitude of respectful listening, understanding that it can and should learn from what is different; and in this way, it hoped to let itself be forced to re-discover itself.

While these themes make up the single thread of the Conciliar texts, some focused on the self-understanding of the Church itself—they are the four dogmatic Constitutions: *Lumen Gentium* (The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church), *Dei Verbum* (The Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation), *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), *Gaudium et Spes*, (The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World). Other texts refer to the commitment to renewal (principally the Decrees); others again underline the need for dialogue (the Declarations).

The first part of this study will look mainly at *Lumen Gentium* to clarify the theological elements that underlie the reflection on the Church. The second part will develop the two characteristics that set forth the identity of the layperson: his/her being Christian and his/her secular character.

1. Origin and Goal of the Church

The etymological meaning of the word Church comes from the Greek word *Ecclesia*, which expresses its deepest essence: an assembly or community united to hear the Word of God. This use of the word, already present in the early Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, continues into the New Testament, where the structure and constitution of the Church are seen as one of relationship. On the one hand, it means a relation to God who speaks and calls together, and the people who listen and respond; on the other, a relation of communion among the members.

From the meaning of the Church as an assembly called together more closely by the Word of God, the II Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* has expressed a theological reflection on the Church, underlining the relational aspect by means of the category of communion. In addition, we find two other categories or dimensions that are useful: witness and service.

In this way, communion (*koinonìa*), witness (*martyria*), and service (*diakonia*) become the three terms or categories that define the nature and mission of the Church. Around these three aspects, the theological understanding of the identity and mission of the whole Church and of the laity in particular is tied together.

a) The Church: Sacrament of Communion

“The Church is in Christ as a sacrament or sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race” (LG1).

The definition of the whole Church as a sacrament has as its aim to underline the close connection with Christ, source of all grace. The Church not only administers the sacraments as a sign-means of grace, but as a whole, in its being and action, has the duty to communicate Christ.

To be “Sacrament” means for the whole Church to be a sign of both vertical communion (intimate union with God) and horizontal communion (unity of the human race). In the Church, people experience the mystery of God’s love. In his infinite love, God wishes to meet every person, in the unity of each of its members, to raise them to a sharing in his divine life. (LG2).

Such a **communion** of God with people and people among themselves constitutes the divine plan of being “one” in Christ. Through the eternal plan of a gradual and deeply rooted insertion into humanity, the Church becomes a visible **sign** of the presence of God and an instrument to realize the vocation of all people.

b) The Church: Sign of Trinitarian Communion

Communion and mission are the elements that define the Church. This assertion not only says something about the Church. The reason we say that the Church is defined by

communion and mission is that, first of all, these same ideas are characteristic of the inner life of God.

God is a communion of persons sharing a life of mutual giving and receiving in a relationship of equality. Through God's loving plan, this inner life of God is opened up to all the created world through the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit, that is, God the Father sends the Son and the Spirit into the world to draw the human family into deeper communion.

So in *Lumen Gentium*, the Trinitarian basis for the communion of the Church is articulated: "Thus the Church has been seen as a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG #4).

Similarly, in the Second Vatican Council's *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity*, the mission of the Church is firmly established in the mission of God. "The pilgrim Church is missionary by its very nature since it is from the mission of the Son and the mission of the Holy Spirit that she draws her origin, in accordance with the decree of God the Father."

To the Christological emphasis is added a Trinitarian one in the statement that the Church is a people gathered in the unity of Father, Son and Spirit. (LG4)

In the living out of this relationship, the Church itself becomes the time and place of the experience of God. Its being, a place of communion, is the consequence of its being an icon of the divine mystery.

The whole Church is not self-sufficient, it does not live for itself, it does not have within itself its own foundation, but receives it from God, through Jesus Christ in virtue of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Mission of the Church

God calls all people to become His children, because they are brothers in Christ (sons in the Son) to make manifest the love of God the Father and to increase the divine family sharing in his life: All people are called to this union with Christ, light of the world; we come from Him, we live for Him, we go towards Him (LG3).

The mission of the Church, its duty, begins in the Trinitarian communion, and in the fact of being the Body of Christ. "The Church is by its nature missionary" (AG2), she proclaims not herself, but the gift received from on high.

"The Church [and in it every person] both prays and labors in order that the entire world may become the People of God, the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit; and that in Christ, the Head of all, all honor and glory may be rendered to the Creator and Father of the Universe" (LG17)

The content of the mission is the proclamation (good news) of the love of God through Christ in the Holy Spirit. Each member of the Church shares in the mission of leading humanity to the unity that Christ has come to establish.

The Church becomes missionary by giving itself and by giving the presence of the Spirit, which always enlivens it. Its primary mission is accomplished in the heart of the human realities of its children, proclaiming to them that they are children of God and exhorting them to live according to “the state of... dignity and freedom proper to the children of God, in whose hearts the Holy Spirit dwells as in His temple. Its law is the new commandment to love as Christ himself has loved us. Finally, its goal is the kingdom of God, which has been inaugurated by God Himself on earth, and and destined to spread out through the ages until it is brought to perfection by Him at the end of time” (LG9).

Present in history, the Church shares the road with humanity throughout the centuries. It is the travelling companion of humanity, no longer with an attitude of conquest or defensiveness, but with affection and admiration towards people it offers itself as a leaven to lead to the fullness of the good that God has sown in her.

Concern for the world makes it not “the enemy” to be fought, but the place, time and condition in which God reveals Himself in a free and mysterious way. As Christ has taken upon himself all humanity to reveal to it his true identity as Son of God, so the Church presents itself to the world as the one for whom “the joys and the hopes, the grief and the anxieties of the people of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these too are the joys and hopes, the grief and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.” (GS1)

The Church is the experience of people who journey, conscious that, in the mystery of love, “it has pleased God to make people holy and save them not merely as individuals without any mutual bonds, but by making them into a single people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness” (LG9).

The new identity as children of God and as a people who live the Trinitarian communion allows each member of the whole Church to establish new relationships, to see people as God sees them in his loving plan.

II. The Identity of the Layperson

The theological reflection on the laity was presented by the Council in different texts, notably chapter IV of *Lumen Gentium* (nos. 30-38), the Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, and *Gaudium et Spes*, and the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

From these texts there emerges, besides doctrinal statements, a new image of the Church that reflects on itself in relation to the world and entrusts a specific duty in the

realization of its mission to the laity. It is evident that the self-understanding of the laity, or rather the theological reflection on Christian lay people, follows on the self-understanding of the Church. The new identity of the Church leads to the recognition in the laity of a special area of competence, the secular reality, and a “power” based on the common belonging of all to the People of God in virtue of Baptism.

1. Secular Character

The identity of the lay person and his/her special mission in the Church flows from the Christian newness brought about by Baptism. By this sacrament we are reborn to a new life, grafted to Christ, given life by the power of the Spirit. We proclaim salvation, hope, and love.

As baptized, we are all children of God; but the modality of living this is different for lay people than for clergy and religious. This modality is not accessory nor secondary, but proper and particular to the layperson; it is his/her intimate nature that is to be secular.

“The secular character is proper and particular to lay people.”

In No. 31 of *Lumen Gentium*, the Council Fathers affirm that “[t]he term laity is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in a religious state specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and the world.

After the first negative definition, which indicates what they are not (neither priests nor religious), lay people are defined as the faithful incorporated in Christ by Baptism. It is thus through **Baptism** that lay people receive their **identity** and **mission** in the Church; through Baptism they participate in the three messianic works (priestly, prophetic, royal) in a **particular** and original way that is the **secular way**.

- a) The priestly function of which one speaks is “spiritual” in the strict and proper sense of the word: to offer one’s concrete daily life to the Father in the spirit that animated Christ himself in the offering of himself. All their deeds, their prayers, and apostolic activities, their work and family life, if they are carried out in the Spirit, become a spiritual sacrifice agreeable to God. The vital priestly dimension appears clearly: to act righteously in all life situations leading the world to its fulfillment.
- b) The prophetic function coincides with witness. It is realized by lay people through the gift of speaking of their own faith experience, by proclaiming in their own lives the marvels that the Lord has wrought. It is a witness strong in hope, which the lay person brings to the world when he/she sees suffering as the occasion in which God mysteri-

ously reveals his presence. The laity show themselves “as children of the promise, and thus strong in faith and hope they make the most of the present, and with patience await the glory that is to come. Let them not, then, hide this hope in the depths of their hearts, but even in the program of their secular life let them express it by a continual conversation” (LG 35).

To be a prophet means to be a witness to the faith that has been handed down to us, understanding its doctrinal aspects and actualizing it in life and word.

The seriousness of the prophetic duty involves the need to be prepared in teaching and knowledge. The study of theology is obligatory for lay people to overcome ignorance and incompetence.

- c) The royal function exercised by lay people is properly that of the baptized, who have the freedom of the Children of God. For them “to serve is to reign” (LG36), according to the logic of Christ, for whom the greatest strength was that of giving himself to humanity in the power of love.

Service, freedom, and kingship are the aspects that overlap and constitute the condition of those who belong to the kingdom of Christ. The lay faithful put this condition into practice firstly by confronting themselves in the daily effort at self-determination and with regard to created reality when they recognize in it the manifestation of the glory of God.

It is not for the laity, therefore, to set a value on these realities for, as the works of God, they are already constituted as “good.” The duty of lay people is to recognize the goodness of creation, which orders these works in such a way that “through the members of the Church will Christ progressively illumine the whole of human society with his saving light” (LG36). The saving action of Christ becomes real from within society by the lay faithful called to reveal the definitive and ultimate meaning of created reality.

Lay people are invested with the duty of being a bridge between the world and the Church by their immersion in earthly realities and living their human activities in openness to the Lordship of God.

To be a “bridge” between the Church and World, between the economy of creation and the economy of redemption, it is necessary that the adult Christian be a person of our time, active and responsible, open to the richness of experience that the world can offer, but grounded in the proclamation of Christian newness.

2. Lay People and the Mission of the Church

The secular dimension, while pertaining to the whole Church as to each of the faithful (cleric, religious, lay) called to build up the Body of Christ in the world, is realized, however, in a special way by lay people. The message of salvation is indeed addressed to the whole world, and it is precisely there, **in the world** and **through** the things of the world, that the lay faithful respond to the call of God and are witnesses of **His presence**, incarnating in their lives the task of revealing God.

“By their very vocation, the laity seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven” (LG 31).

a. “Being lay” as a specific theological “place”¹

There is an important message from the Council: the world is not a place, a space, nor a means of sanctification, but the means of living the dignity of the Children of God in the midst of the most hidden miseries of the humanity that Christ has taken to himself.

Lay people in their ordinary activities (work, friendships, pleasure in knowing and learning, free time of rest and sport, politics and economic affairs, etc.) witness to the extraordinary in life and realize the perfection of charity. In this sense, we read in *Christifideles laici* that “[t]he secular character of the lay faithful is not therefore to be defined only in the sociological sense but most especially in a theological sense” (CFL 15), that is a sign and revelation of the creative and redemptive activity of God.

This is what the Council affirmed when it said that the laity are called by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the Gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. In this way, they can make Christ known to others, especially by the testimony of a life resplendent in faith, hope and charity. The lay person is closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is therefore his/her special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop and persist according to Christ’s mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer (LG31)

The universal call to holiness is made concrete in the diversity and variety of the members of the Church, which recognizes in the lay state one of its fundamental characteristics.

¹ The “state” of being lay is a specific way designed by God to live the vital relationship with Him (theological)

b. Competence of lay people

Lay people are “competent” in the questions of ordinary life (marriage, family, human culture, political life, economics, etc.). It is through them that the Church is present there in a special way.

In these sectors, the laity act as leaders, and the Church must rely on those who live in the world, are versed in different institutions and specialties, and grasp their innermost significance in the eyes of both believers and unbelievers.

With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the entire People of God, especially pastors and theologians, to hear, distinguish, and interpret the many voices of our age (GS44).

For the Church, listening to the world is not limited to a reference to method and language, but through them she means to welcome the newness, the hopes, the needs, and the presence of God, which is at work in all things.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Paul VI, speaking of the laity, wrote: “Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering. The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the Kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ.”

3. Lay People and Pastors in the Mission of the Church

Having strongly confirmed and furthered the participation of lay people in the mission of the Church, the Council studies more deeply their autonomy and their relationship to the Hierarchy in no. 37 of *Lumen Gentium*.

This relationship is defined and articulated on the theological basis of equality in dignity of the Children of God and diversity of function. It is a question of rights and obligations.

“The laity have the right, as do all the faithful, to receive in abundance... the spiritual goods of the Church, especially the assistance of the Word of God and the Sacraments. They should openly reveal to them their needs and desire with that freedom and confidence which is fitting for children of God and brothers in Christ” (LG 37).

From the right to receive, one passes to the right-duty to give their advice on that which concerns the good of the Church, not in a partisan or arbitrary way, but “according to the knowledge, competence and authority which they enjoy.” This must be realized “always with

respect for truth, with courage and prudence, and with the respect and charity due to those who, because of their sacred function, represent Christ.” To make known their advice represents for lay people the true way of living their faith, expressing it by holiness of life and effective competence.

The duties of pastors are also presented: They should recognize and promote the dignity and responsibility of lay people in the Church, gladly make use of their prudent advice, assign to them posts of confidence in the service of the Church, grant them freedom of action and an area to exercise it, and even to encourage them to undertake tasks on their own initiative. They should also consider, with fatherly attention and affection in Christ, the projects, demands, and desires put forward by lay people.

Hierarchy and Laity are thus associated in the mission of the Church, which “is not only to bring the message and grace of Christ to men, but also to penetrate and to perfect the temporal order with the spirit of the Gospel” (AA5). In certain areas of life, without the laity, the Gospel of salvation cannot reach people. Nonetheless, one should not forget that this mission is realized in the whole Church in diverse and complementary ways.

“Her pastors must clearly state the principles concerning the purpose of creation and the use of temporal things and must make available the moral and spiritual aids by which the temporal order can be restored to Christ. The Laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation. Led by the light of the Gospel and the mind of the Church, and motivated by Christian love, let them act directly and definitively in the temporal sphere. As citizens they must cooperate with other citizens, using their own particular skills and acting on their own responsibility. Everywhere and in all things they must seek the justice characteristic of God’s kingdom” (AA7).

The close relationship between lay people and pastors shows that the participation in the mission of the Church does not depend on belonging to a category of persons but on belonging to Jesus Christ.

4. Lay Spirituality

Lay spirituality has consistently been overlooked and unappreciated. Lay spirituality has been an essential and fundamental aspect of Christianity from the beginning, although lay people themselves have frequently been portrayed by Church leaders as incompetent in religious matters and lacking in leadership abilities. In the earliest Christian communities, however, there was no separating lay people and ordained ministers. All lived in equality, for according to St. Paul, among the baptized “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free person, there is not male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).

For Roman Catholics, the Second Vatican Council was an important turning point for the Church, the beginning of a recovery of that earlier vision and spirituality of Church with its universal call to holiness and appreciation of everyone's ministries and gifts. Rich insights were given at that council, especially with regard to the laity.

The particularity of lay people is made clear in an original and fruitful way not only at the level of the apostolate but at that of spirituality, one no longer borrowed from religious.

Lay Christians are called to be on the watch for the breath of the Spirit, which makes the Word of God living and effective.

Their "life in the Spirit" (or spirituality) has specific connotations.

- It is characterized above all by service and apostolic co-responsibility that takes human history seriously, living it as the daily place of sanctification. The today of God is in our concrete lives, our day-to-day is the "hour" of God, the today of salvation. Secular involvement, however, does not consist in living the faith by consecrating the world, but in living in the world according to the Spirit-mission proper to the People of God.
- It is Christ-like in the sense that it flows from sharing in the priesthood, prophecy, and kingship of Christ in the Church.
- It is Charismatic: it is founded in the inner freedom of the Spirit, which continually offers new life.
- It is Evangelic. In the spirit of the Beatitudes, lay people are not prisoners of the logic and wisdom of the world, but they make of their life and "path" the arena for the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.
- It is Wisdom. By its dual belonging to the ecclesial community and the human community, as such it brings together the demands of divine revelation and human reason.

Gaudium et Spes denounces the grave error of separating daily life from the life of faith: "They are mistaken who, knowing that we have here no abiding city but seek one which is to come, think that they may therefore shirk their earthly responsibilities. For they are forgetting that by the faith itself they are more than ever obliged to measure up to these duties, each according to his proper vocation.... This split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives deserves to be counted among the more serious errors of our age.... The Christian who neglects his temporal duties neglects his duties toward his neighbor and even God, and jeopardizes his eternal salvation" (GS 43).

This is the vocation and spirituality of the lay person: to seek the Kingdom of God and to be concerned for God's concerns.

The Christian lay person is called by the Church to be capable of expecting and welcoming the new and unheard of in the Spirit, which is always given. Revelation is already fulfilled in Christ. But not all the power of the Word has yet been felt, heard, understood, and realized.

Legitimate lay spirituality promotes leadership that values the wisdom of the past, the richness of the present, and a vision of the future that calls everyone to respond. It encourages a maturity in adults that is associated with gratitude and serenity, even in the midst of great anxiety, suffering, and pain.

Above all, it takes seriously the experiences, gifts, and common call to ministry of every baptized person. Such a spirituality will always be attentive to those experiences, especially those that raise questions about ultimate concerns, such as the meaning of life, the presence of God, and the depth of our love.

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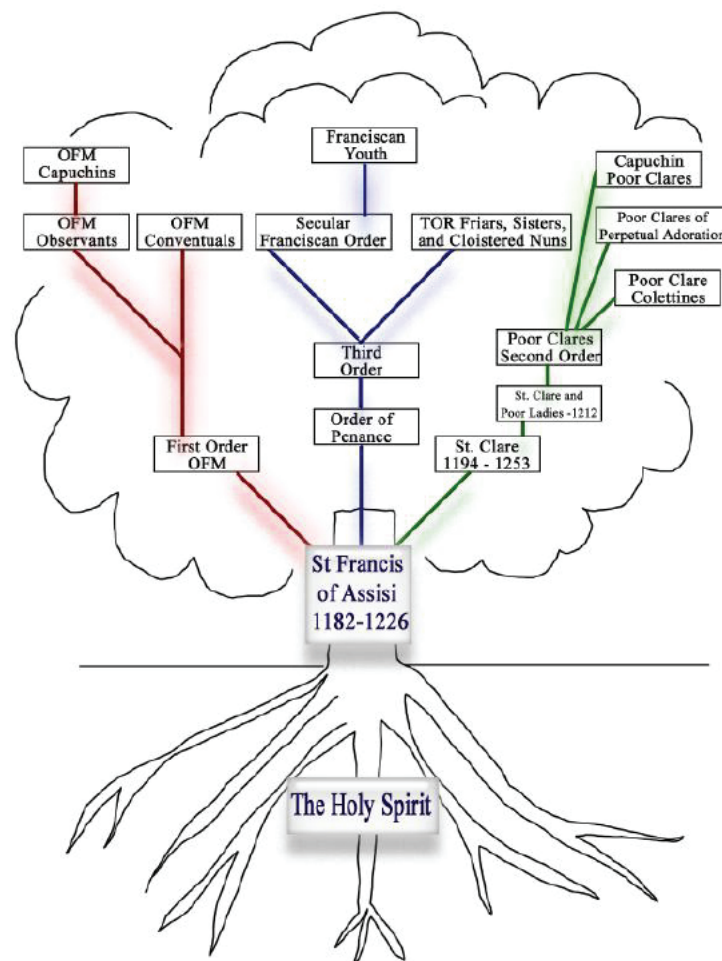
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The Franciscan Family,

a

Brief Introduction

Robert Fitzsimmons, OFS



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The Franciscan Family

Introduction and Suggested Format

- Opening Prayer: “Praises of God” or “The Praises to be Said at All the Hours” (*Ritual of the OFS*, page 99)
- Scripture reflection. (John 1:38-51) Like Francis and Clare, we are attracted to a person, the person of Jesus.
- Brief overview of Franciscan Spirituality

Franciscan Spirituality points us to the amazing truth that the Son of God was born among us from the womb of a Virgin-Mother in order to share our human condition [humanity of Christ], to live simply and humbly among the poor, and then, taking on our sins, to suffer the injustice of a cruel death. By imitating His style of life and His servant-role as revealed in the Gospel, we respond to each other’s needs as brothers and sisters of Jesus in joyful praise of God’s goodness. Franciscans are called to remind the Church that she must always image the poor and humble Son of God.

We are called to:

- prayers of praise to the all holy and all good God;
- simple prayer, no special formulas;
- imitation of a very human Christ;
- joy in all life’s circumstances.

Franciscans:

- are optimistic and joyful;
- see the beauty, goodness and love of God everywhere;
- understand the whole of creation is filled with a loving God;
- realize God speaks to them through their senses;
- love the Gospels, which have a special appeal for our spirituality;
- are more about being (evangelical/Gospel people) than just doing (apostolic mission people). These two aspects need balance;
- understand Jesus’ Incarnation is the visible, audible, tangible presence of God upon earth; the center around which our spirituality revolves;
- see Jesus as our brother and the beloved Son of God;
- are not concerned with past or future, live for the day.

An overview of the Franciscan Family¹

- The Franciscan Family Tree
 - Three Orders
 - ❖ First Order, the friars: OFM, OFM Cap., and OFM Conv.
 - ❖ Second Order, the Poor Clare Sisters

¹ *Guidelines for Initial Formation*, 1985, page 23

- ❖ Third Order
 - The Seculars, OFS
 - The Regulars, friars and sisters TOR
- Our symbols, the TAU and the San Damiano Cross
- Discussion of the Digests² readings
 - ❖ Francis of Assisi,
 - ❖ Clare of Assisi,
 - ❖ Prayer,
 - ❖ Franciscan Image of Jesus
- Period of Question and Answers
- Closing Prayer: The Prayer before the Crucifix³ or other prayer of St. Francis.
- Take Home reading materials:
 - Basic information form⁴ and materials for those discerning to request entry into the Inquiry phase of Initial Formation.

² Available at Smoky Valley Printing, see order form in the *TAU*

³ *USA Ritual of the OFS*, page 100

⁴ *OFS Resource Manual*, page 79-81

Opening Prayer

(Two suggested Franciscan Prayers)

The Praises of God by St. Francis of Assisi

You are holy, Lord, the only God,
And your deeds are wonderful.
You are strong. You are great.

You are the Most High, You are almighty.
You, holy Father, are King of heaven and earth.
You are Three and One, Lord God, all good.

You are Good, all Good, supreme Good,
Lord God, living and true.

You are love, You are wisdom.
You are humility, You are endurance.

You are rest, You are peace.
You are joy and gladness.
You are justice and moderation.

You are all our riches,
and You suffice for us.

You are beauty, You are gentleness.
You are our protector, our guardian and defender.
You are courage.

You are our haven and our hope,
our faith, our great consolation.

You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord,
God Almighty, Wonderful Savior.

**Praises to be Said at the Hours of the Liturgy of the Hours
by St. Francis of Assisi**

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,
who is, who was and who is to come,
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

O Lord our God,
You are worthy to receive praise and glory and honor, and blessing.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity,
wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit:
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord,
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Sing praise to God all you His servants and you who fear God,
the small and the great.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let heaven and earth praise Him who is glorious.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Every creature: in heaven,
on earth and under the earth, and in the sea.
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

All-powerful, Most Holy, Most High, Supreme God, all good,
highest good, totally good,
You who alone are good, may we give You all praise,
all glory, all thanks, all honor, all blessing and all good.

So be it. So be it.
Amen.

Brief Overview of the Franciscan Movement

According to the early accounts and writings of Francis, he began his conversion in earnest around 1206 as a lay penitent. For several years, Francis took to heart the word heard in his heart to repair the Church, and he spent his time in physically repairing various churches around the countryside of Assisi.

In roughly 1208, inspired by what they observed in a changed Francis, several other men from Assisi joined him in what became the “Penitents of Assisi,” part of a broader lay penitential movement already approved years earlier by various popes, including the then-reigning Pope Innocent III.

Wanting his group to remain faithful to the Church and not fall into heresy as had many of the other lay movements, Francis and his group from Assisi journeyed to Rome in 1209 to seek official direction and approval from the Holy Father.

Although it would be many years before this fledgling “order” would receive written approval of a rule of life, Innocent III did give spoken approval to this Gospel-oriented way of life, the *Propositum Vitae* of Francis.

This approval began the formation of the Franciscan Movement, a Gospel way of life based on imitation of the poor, humble Jesus, a way of life grounded in faithful loving relationships and service modeled after the life and actions of Jesus, the beloved Son of God.

From these early days of spirit-filled fervor, three distinct yet interrelated orders would emerge, a Franciscan Trilogy.

The First Order

When Pope Innocent III approved the Franciscan Rule in 1209, he made them a structured religious order. This became the First Order, known as the Friars Minor (Little Brothers). Over the centuries, the Friars Minor experienced many distinctions and reorganizations based on their understanding of the Franciscan way of life.

Today, there are three branches:

- Friars Minor
- Friars Minor Conventual
- Friars Minor Capuchin

The Second Order

The Second Order of St. Francis, the Poor Ladies of Assisi, today commonly known as Poor Clares, was founded in 1212 in Assisi when St. Francis received Clare Offreduccio as a follower of his way of life.

The Poor Clares are a religious community of women. They observe a cloistered, contemplative life based on the Gospel, a life of prayer and penance in the Franciscan tradition of joy and simplicity.

The Third Order

The origins of the Third Order can be found in the movement known as the Penitents, going back to the sixth century. The original Penitents were people who sought to grow in holiness through their daily lives and work.

This desire for holiness assumed many forms, such as pilgrimages to holy sites, constructing, repairing, and rebuilding churches, and caring for the poor and sick.

The first Franciscans were, in fact, known as “penitents of Assisi.” Men and women who were attracted by Francis’ way of life but who could not leave their homes and families to become wandering preachers or cloistered nuns, banded together. Thus the Third Order was born.

This original Third Order had several names, from the Brothers and Sisters of Penitence to Third Order of St Francis, originally both lay orders. Today the Third Order exists in two forms, the original lay order, now the Secular Franciscan Order and the Third Order Regular, (the friars, both priests and brothers TOR, and 400+ communities of religious sisters who follow the regular rule for vowed religious).

Early on, small groups in the Third Order formed more structured communities, publicly professing the Church’s traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and often uniting around specific works of charity or common prayer. Since then, numerous congregations of lay people and religious have developed throughout the world.

In each instance, the call to conversion and simplicity of life animates the members: In the Secular Franciscan Order, men and women follow the way of Francis, but are not vowed religious living in community.

The Secular Franciscan Order was recognized to exist as early as 1210-1215 and received official recognition by Pope Honorius III, in *Memoriale Propositi* 1221, where a rule is offered for the way of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penitents of St. Francis.

A milestone occurred in 1289 in the Papal Bull *Supra Montem*, in which the Holy Father Pope Nicholas IV gave written approval for the Secular Franciscan Order. The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order has been modified twice to adapt to the changing needs of the Church, first by *Misericors Dei Filius*, Pope Leo XIII in 1883, and again in 1978 (our current Rule) *Seraphicus Patriarca* by Pope Paul VI. Since that time, the Secular Franciscan Order has been recognized as an Order within the Catholic Church.

The Third Order Regular, Franciscan Friars, TOR, officially founded in 1447 by papal decree, is an international community of priests and brothers who emphasize works of mercy and ongoing conversion to the Gospel.

One thing that is important to understand is that all branches of the Franciscan Family, in their respective Rules of Life, are charged to “observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.” Three parts of the whole, like a three-ply cord, are stronger when united as equal partners to share and spread the vision of Francis. We all live out our Franciscan life in a unique way, yet we are all guided by the same vision to proclaim the Gospel, using words only when necessary.

Some Franciscan Symbols

Tau



TAU, as a symbol of sanctity, comes from Ezekiel 9:4, “Go through the city of Jerusalem and put a TAU on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it.” It is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and looks very much like the letter T.

Pope Innocent III opened the Council on November 11, 1215, with these words: “I have desired with great desire to eat this Passover with you” (Luke 22-15). Innocent announced that for him, for the Church, and for every Catholic at the time, the symbol they were to take as the sign of their Passover was the TAU Cross.

He incorporated into his homily the statement from Ezekiel (9:4) that the elect, the chosen, those who are concerned, will be marked with the sign of the TAU.

Much Franciscan scholarship points to St. Francis being present at the Fourth Lateran Council and that he heard the words of Pope Innocent III when he said, “The TAU has exactly the same form as the Cross on which our Lord was crucified on Calvary, and only those will be marked with this sign and who have mortified their flesh and conformed their life to that of the Crucified Savior will obtain mercy. From then on, the TAU became Francis’ own coat of arms, and he often used it in his writings as his personal signature.

St. Bonaventure said, “This TAU symbol had all the veneration and all the devotion of the saint: he spoke of it often in order to recommend it, and he traced it on himself before beginning each of his actions.”

Thomas of Celano, another Franciscan historian and biographer of Francis, writes, “Francis preferred the Tau above all other symbols: he utilized it as his only signature for his letters, and he painted the image of it on the walls of all the places in which he stayed.”



In the famous blessing of Brother Leo, Francis wrote on parchment, “May the Lord bless you and keep you! May the Lord show His face to you and be merciful to you! May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace! God bless you Brother Leo!” Francis sketched a head (of Brother Leo) and then drew the TAU over this portrait.

Due, no doubt, in large part to Francis’ own affection for and devotion to the TAU, it has been a well-recognized and accepted Franciscan symbol among Franciscans of various denominations and of all orders within those denominations for centuries. It remains so today. The TAU carries with it all of the symbolism of the Cross of Christ as well as Francis’ ideal of life and dream for himself and his followers.

The TAU is designated as the distinctive sign of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States.

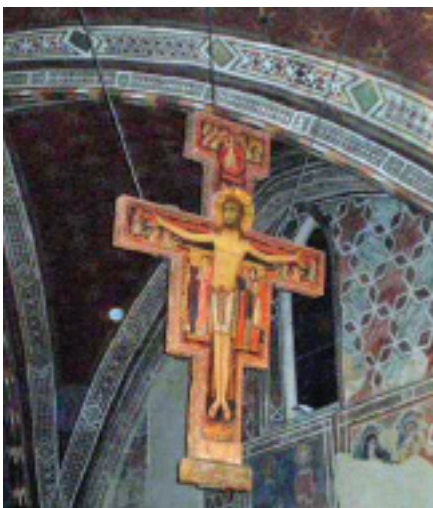
San Damiano Crucifix

Francis of Assisi did not start out life as a fiercely devout and pious man. His early years were spent indulging in the extravagances available to those born to money and privilege. As he approached adulthood, however, he found himself in crisis, searching for deeper meaning in his life.



This inner conflict led him to the deserted church of San Damiano in his hometown of Assisi. It was here, praying before the San Damiano Crucifix, that Francis first heard the Word of God. “Francis, go and rebuild my house, which, as you see, is falling into ruins.”

When Francis heard these words, he responded by quickly taking up a collection to restore the churches of Assisi, which were in disrepair. Through his efforts, many chapels and churches were rebuilt.



Francis eventually realized that God was not merely asking him to restore chapels, but to rebuild His Church around the world as a community. Francis responded with decisive action. He embraced a life of poverty, prayer, and service and began to preach the Word of God.

The San Damiano Cross is an “icon cross,” meaning it contains not only a depiction of Christ, but icons of various people and scenes relevant to the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Cross is in the Eastern style and was crafted in Umbria, Italy (the region where Assisi is located) in the 12th century. It is made of painted walnut and measures 75 inches high, 47 inches wide, and slightly less than 5 inches thick.

The original Cross is now located in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi.

Discussion of *The Digests*⁵ Readings

- Francis of Assisi
- Clare of Assisi
- Prayer
- Franciscan Image of Jesus

Pay attention as you read and reflect on these brief snapshots into our founder and into the vision that has become our Franciscan Journey of faith. As you pray and discern whether this “Way of Life” speaks to you, ask whether it resonates with your own experiences of a loving God, one who shows Himself to be a Father and who desires us to enter into a relationship with Him as lover and beloved?

If these themes, developed briefly in *The Digest* readings, do speak to you in the deepest recesses of your heart and soul, then speak to the fraternity’s formation director, spiritual assistant, and minister, for you indeed may be called to a Franciscan Vocation.

Closing Prayer

Prayer before the Crucifix

Most High,
glorious God,
enlighten the shadows of my heart,

and grant me a right faith,
a certain hope
and a perfect charity,
and sense and understanding,

Lord, so that I may accomplish
Your holy and true command.

Take-Home Materials

- Basic information forms and materials for those who feel called to continue.
- Selected reading materials to be discussed in beginning the Inquiry phase of Initial Formation.

⁵ Available at Smoky Valley Printing, see order form in the *TAU-USA*.

Vocation - God's Call

Marie Amore, OFS

*I have called you by name.
You are mine because
you are precious in my eyes,
you are honored and I love you.
(Isaiah 43:1)*

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Outline of Presentation on Vocation

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 - ❖ A call to share in the life of God for all people
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- III. A Call to Perfection
- IV. Aimed at Universal Salvation
- V. Total Availability
- VI. The Specific Franciscan Vocation
- VII. Discernment
- VIII. The Secular Franciscan Vocation

Ed. note: Scripture quotes are taken or based on the New American Bible, Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, or have been paraphrased from the original CIOFS formation material.

Vocation – God’s Call

“I have called you by your name. You are mine because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored, and I love you.” (Isaiah 43:1b, 4)

In these times, we are accustomed to getting calls by telephone and cell phones and text messages. Vocation is God’s call. In the New Testament, the word “call” is used 40 times. The dictionary has more than 26 meanings for the verb to call. The best definition for our purpose is “a request to come.” It is an invitation to all people to share in the life of the Trinity. God wants every person on earth to turn from sin and be transformed by his love. (See 2 Peter 3:9.)

We begin the inquiry phase of a Secular Franciscan vocation with an analysis of God’s **primary call to all people**, proceed to the **personal** vocation, and then to the specific vocation to the Franciscan Order.

Called by God’s Love

Essential to any analysis of vocation is the belief that **God is love**. *“Look into your experience; find the ways in which God has acted within your life, and then you will come to know that God is a God of love.”* (Based on Deuteronomy 4: 32-37.)

Don’t we all have evidence of God’s great faithfulness to us? Has not God also brought us out of some kind of troubles in our own lives? The whole Bible is the story of God’s love. God loves each one of us personally and unconditionally, not because we are good. We are good because God loves us.

Vatican II tells us that we are not called because of our good works but by God’s design and grace.¹ The wonder and the mystery is this: We can speak of vocation because we recognize that we are loved by God, that we can love God in return; that we can speak to God and sense God’s call in our lives.

Because of love,

- God (the Father) created us.
- God (the Father) made a covenant with us through the chosen people. “I will be your God.”
- God (the Father) sent prophets to communicate with human beings.

Because of love:

- Jesus (the Son) became human.
- Jesus (the Son) showed us how to live.
- Jesus (the Son) died for us.

¹ *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V The Call to Holiness, number 40

Because of love,

- The Holy Spirit inspired the Scriptures.
- The Holy Spirit continues to guide, direct and comfort.
- The Holy Spirit dwells in us.

Called to Share in God's Life

Love Seeks Union

I pray... they may all be one, as you, Father. are in me and I in you that they also may be in us. (John 17:20-21 NAB)

When we love someone, we want to be with them. God wants to be with us. The ultimate vocation for all people is union with God. From the beginning of time, everyone is in God's plan. "*He chose us in him before the foundation of the world*" (Ephesians 1:4). We were not made to go it alone. God calls us from all eternity to share in His divine life; to be united with Him. What an awesome God!

By his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus did for us what we could never do for ourselves. He gained for all people what they didn't have by nature, a sharing in God's own life.

Everyone's primary vocation is to share in that life. This is not something that can be earned. It is pure gift. **Everyone has the choice to accept that gift or refuse it.** It is most important because all other choices are based on that one.

Called and Chosen

"You are the ones that I have chosen, that people may know and believe me and understand that it is I" (Isaiah 43:10).

Not only are we **called** but we are **chosen**. God is the initiator. Thomas H. Green, S.J., in his book *Come Down Zacchaeus*, writes about being chosen. He writes that the Gospel of John develops a theology of vocation.

1. God makes the first move either directly, as He did with Phillip (Jn. 1: 43-46) or through a human instrument, like John the Baptist (Jn. 1:29 &ff).
2. He never forces us to respond. He always leaves us free to respond to his gracious initiative.
3. He deals with each one of us in a unique, personal way.

Many stories in scripture tell of how God chose people like Abraham and Sarah, Moses, David, Samuel, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Mary, Peter, and Paul. "God wants people who are *usable* as instruments. For starters though, the instruments have to know that they are not just doing their own thing, but rather that they are doing God's thing. Being chosen does not mean that God likes one more than another or that they are more worthy than the rest. God's chosenness is for the sake of communicating chosenness to everyone else."²

² Richard Rohr, OFM, *Things Hidden in Scripture*, Chapter 2, Chosenness, pp 42-43

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus took his disciples up on a hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him, and he chose twelve, who he named apostles, *“I have chosen you to be with me.”* *“You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you”* (paraphrase of John 15:16 and Mark 3:13). The Apostles were called to be the first to witness to the divinity of Jesus; to preach and act in his name. This was their personal vocation.

Called to a Personal Vocation

We can look at three examples from the New Testament of the way God calls people for a personal vocation.

The Rich Young Man (Mt. 19:16-30)

The rich young man told Jesus that he had observed the commandments. Then the young man asked, “What do I lack?” Jesus said, *“If you want to be perfect, go sell what you have... and come follow me.”* It was God’s call for his personal vocation.

The Gerasine Demoniac (Mk 5:1-30; Lk 8, 26-29)

After Jesus healed the man from whom seven demons had come out, the man begged Jesus to be allowed to stay with him. Jesus answered: *“Return home and tell what God has done for you.”* A call to proclaim the good news was God’s plan for the demoniac’s personal vocation.

The Call of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:5-7)

Zacchaeus was anxious to see what kind of man Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus, who was to pass that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and spoke to him. Jesus said, *“Zacchaeus come down! Hurry because I must come to your house today.”* Jesus did not ask him to sell everything and leave to follow him. He said that He would come to the house of Zacchaeus. This was God’s plan for Zacchaeus’ personal secular vocation.

Called to Perfection

“This is the will of God, your holiness (1 Thess 4:3)

To ask catechumens: “Do you wish to receive Baptism?” means at the same time to ask them: “Do you wish to become holy?” It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt 5:48).³

Can we be Holy? Of course. If God wills our holiness, then God will provide us with the means of holiness. With the grace of Baptism, all people can be holy. Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; anoints us in the Holy Spirit.⁴ It is the grace of this anointing that helps us to reach the sanctity God has planned for us.

Can we be perfect? The ideal of perfection is often misunderstood. Many believe perfection is only for a few very heroic people, but Vatican II tells us that perfection is not reserved

³ John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

⁴ John Paul II, *Vocation and Mission of the Laity*

only for some extraordinary souls.⁵ Christians in any state or walk of life are called to holiness to accomplish what God has planned for them.

There is no one state of life that is more perfect than another (Romans 8:23-30). *God sent the Holy Spirit to **all** to move them interiorly to love God with their whole heart, with their whole soul, with their whole understanding, and with their whole strength and to love one another as Christ loved them* (Mk 12:30; Jn 13:34). God gives every individual the means to become holy according to their personal vocation.

In his address to youth, Pope John Paul II said, “It is therefore indispensable for each one to seek and to recognize day after day the long path on which the Lord is leading to personal encounter with God. Dear Friends, question yourselves seriously about your vocation and be ready to answer the Lord who is calling you to take the place God has prepared for you from eternity.”⁶

Called to Bring Others to God

The gift of vocation is not only for the person being called. It is a call to be used, to be an instrument, to bring others to God (Universal salvation). In her article on Life and Apostolic Activity, Emerenziana Rossato, OFS, wrote:

“The initiative was His, not ours. It is God who calls and continues to call and at each call chooses places and guides a person. God calls for a certain purpose and furnishes the means to reach it. He calls for the benefit of the person, but also for the benefit of the community. And it is the answer of the person that fulfills or not fulfills the will of Him who calls. So each fulfillment of a vocation will never be a small matter, but a fullness of grace.”⁷

St. Francis too emphasizes that a vocation is a call to be an instrument that God will use not only for the one called but for the benefit of other people.

“Let us take thought of our vocation. God in his mercy has called us to it not so much for our sake as for the sake of the many. So let us go out into the world and remind everybody by example as well as word to turn to God. If you seem feeble and of no importance and wisdom, never fear but urge contrition in a plain way without misgiving, trusting in the Lord, who has overcome the world, since it is He who by the operation of his Spirit speaks through you and in you.”⁸

Called to Total Availability

In Philippians 2:5-8, St. Paul says that Christ emptied himself for the sake of humankind. Though he was God, he was born of woman and became man. When we follow Jesus as our model, and say our “Yes” to God’s call, we need to recognize that our “yes” includes the offering and surrendering of ourselves in giving ourselves back to God. St. Francis wrote

⁵ *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V ⁶ Address to Youth, 1978

⁷ *Life and Apostolic Activity*, Emerenziana Rossato, OFS, undated CIOFS Document

⁸ I found the exact quote in *The Words of St. Francis, An Anthology*, by James Meyer, OFM, pages 172-173, but I’m not certain which number is represented in the *Three Companions*.

in the Letter to the Entire Order that we are to hold back nothing of ourselves for ourselves, so that he who gave himself totally to us may receive us totally. By our choice, our yes, we become God's property to be used for the specific mission God has planned for us.

Can I willingly offer the total and best gift of myself without conditions or time limits? Vocation demands one's entire life. In scripture, we find models of those who answered God's call with that kind of desire to serve.

- Samuel: *"Speak Lord, your servant is listening."* (1 Samuel 3:10)
- Isaiah: *"I will go, send me."* (Isaiah 6:8)
- Mary: *"Be it done unto me according to your word."* (Luke 1:38)
- Ananias answers the Lord's call to help St. Paul. Ananias uses the familiar words that we pray and sing. *"Here I am Lord."* (Acts 9:10)

Total availability is expressed in two words: willingness and surrender. If we are willing, then we are ready to do whatever God asks. If we surrender, we yield control to the God who loves us so much. Guided by the Holy Spirit, we become aware of the opportunities to be used by the Lord in every aspect of our lives, in our families, work, and community. That Spirit will lead us to **be** and **do** what God has planned for us.

The Specific Franciscan Vocation

One of Francis' early followers, Brother Masseo, asked Francis, "Why does the whole world run after you, and everyone want to see you and hear you and obey you? Francis, why after you?"⁹ People are inspired by Francis. He is called the universal saint and is almost everybody's favorite.

Why not?

The Francis people read about is truly an inspiration. He is so like Jesus. It has been 800 years since Francis gave his Gospel message to the world. Yet people still run after him because Francis reminds us of Christ and leads us to him. In reality it is Christ we seek.

*"When Francis looked back, he saw Christ; when we look back, we see Francis. The difference between him and us is all there, and it is enormous. Question: Of what, then, does the Franciscan charism consist? Answer: Looking at Christ with the eyes of Francis! We do not cultivate the Franciscan charism by looking at Francis, but by looking at Christ through Francis' eyes."*¹⁰

Many people are attracted to St. Francis and believe they have a Franciscan vocation. However attraction is not enough. To have a Franciscan vocation includes the willingness to

⁹ Fioretti 10

¹⁰ Cantalamessa, OFM CAP, April 18, 2009

bind oneself permanently to a consecrated religious life as the friars and sisters do, or to a consecrated form of life for lay people, as the Secular Franciscans do. One can be inspired by Francis but not be destined to serve in a consecrated Franciscan form of life.

It's necessary to tell the difference between only being attracted or inspired by Francis and the call to follow Christ in the way Francis did. One who is thinking about a call to the Franciscan lifestyle and is looking into his/her heart as to whether or not a Franciscan vocation is for them, the answers to the following questions can be of some help.

1. Can I put aside feelings of romanticism or sentimentalism about St. Francis?
2. Do I identify with the things about Jesus that Francis discovered and on which he based his way of living and serving?
3. Looking at my own life experiences do I find myself ready to learn more about this way and make the effort to embrace the Franciscan path?
4. Can I accept living and nurturing the charism of Francis to make it present in the world?

Called to a Franciscan Lifestyle

Discernment

Generally, to discern means to make a judgment about something that is not clear. For our purposes, discernment describes the process of coming to understand whether or not the Lord is calling and inviting an individual to a Franciscan life style.

How does one discern a true Franciscan vocation? We begin with prayer. Pray each day to fulfill God's will and purpose in the life that is being discerned. We don't always know what that is, but sometimes we are given clues.

There is a particular spiritual style for those who are Franciscans. We will address this lifestyle only briefly, because it is covered in other places during formation. The following are some characteristics that are found in a person who is called to be a Franciscan. These can help us discern whether we have an authentic Franciscan vocation:

- A very intense Eucharistic spirituality: Seeing Christ present in the Eucharist and the ideal of self-giving as Jesus did and continues to do in the Eucharist.
- A very strong fraternal communion: We are united as brothers and sisters to each other in our fraternities and in the world. Our spirituality includes the support and encouragement and inspiration of others in our Order.
- Simplicity: A spirituality that is genuine, without pretense.
- Poverty: Love of Gospel poverty develops confidence in the Father and creates internal freedom.
- Humility: The truth of what and who we really are in the eyes of God; freedom from pride and arrogance.

- A genuine sense of minority: The recognition that we are servants, not superior to anyone.
- A complete and active abandonment to God: Trusting in God's unconditional love.
- Conversion: Daily we begin again the process of changing to be more like Jesus.
- Transformation: What God does for us when we are open and willing.
- Peacemaking: We are messengers of peace as Francis was.

Those who through proper discernment recognize that their call is to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Francis will then accept his way of living through a public, solemn, and perpetual commitment called profession before God and the Church. This is true for all called to the Franciscan way of life, including Franciscans of the first, second and third Orders.

Called to the Secular Franciscan Order

Does one have a vocation to the Secular Order of Franciscans? Father Lester Bach, OFM Cap, in his book *The Franciscan Journey* lists ten signs a person may have a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.

The individual:

- Is a good, practical Catholic;
- Has a desire to follow Jesus and his Gospel, the heart of our life;
- Has a personal faith relationship with Jesus, not just simply an intellectual knowledge about Jesus;
- Is hope-filled and willing and able to deal with life's issues;
- Realizes that we are all sinful and in need of conversion;
- Has some knowledge of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi;
- Is willing and able to commit to the Rule of the OFS and to live in fraternity;
- Trusts God and realizes the importance of God in their life;
- Has a reverence for all creation and a sense of courtesy and respect for it;
- Is willing to embrace a counter-cultural stance that is part of life in fraternity and is able and willing to share creative ideas and life with others.

Obligations of Secular Franciscans to the Fraternity

A Secular Franciscan agrees to

- Personal presence at gatherings
 - Witness to the Gospel
 - Daily prayer
 - Active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations, for the animation of the fraternity
- (Article 30.2 Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order)

During the formation process, we will learn more about the Secular Franciscan way of living by studying scripture, the Rule, Constitutions and many other resources. A person

can learn even more about the Order by experiences with the brothers and sisters in a local fraternity. They inspire, encourage, and support us in our efforts to live the rule of life we profess.

Those who begin to live this way of life will find their prayer life growing richer, their love for God and neighbor growing greater. They will experience God's transformation in themselves.

The vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is truly a gift. Do not be afraid to commit to it. God gives an abundance of grace when you respond with all your heart to this CALL of God to be a Secular Franciscan.

"Do not be afraid, I will be with you. (Exodus 3:11)

Reflection Questions

What Do You Want of Me Lord?

As you consider your call to union with God, reflect on the way God has called you and write the answers to the following questions. If you are journaling, use your journal for these questions, or if not, use a separate sheet of paper.

1. God makes the first move either directly, as He did with Phillip (Jn. 1: 43-46) or through a human instrument, like John the Baptist. (Jn. 1:29 &ff) How has God called you?
2. God never forces us to respond. He always leaves us free to respond to his gracious initiative. What is your response?
3. God deals with each one of us in a unique, personal way. Describe the personal way in which your vocation was made clear to you



Quotes from Scripture and Francis

I have called you by your name. You are mine because you are precious in my eyes, you are honored and I love you. (based on Isaiah 43:1-3)

GOD IS LOVE AND LOVE SEEKS UNION

Essential to any analysis of vocation is the belief that **God is love**. *"Look into your experience; find the ways in which God has acted within your life, and then you will come to know that God is a God of love."* (based on Deuteronomy 4:32-34)

I pray... they may all be one, as you, Father. are in me and I in you that they also may be in us. (John 17:21)

Called and Chosen

"You are the ones that I have chosen, that people may know and believe me and understand that I am he." (based on Isaiah 43:10)

Personal Vocation

"Return home and tell what God has done for you." (Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-29)

"This is the will of God, your holiness." (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

To ask catechumens: *“Do you wish to receive Baptism?”* means at the same time to ask them: *“Do you wish to become holy?”* It means to set before them the radical nature of the Sermon on the Mount: *“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Mt 5:48).¹¹

Called to Bring Others to God

“Let us take thought of our vocation. God in his mercy has called us to it not so much for our sake as for the sake of the many. So let us go out into the world and remind everybody by example as well as word to turn to God. If you seem feeble and of no importance and wisdom, never fear, but urge contrition in a plain way without misgiving, trusting in the Lord, who has overcome the world, since it is He who by the operation of his Spirit speaks through you and in you.”¹²

“Do not be afraid, I will be with you. (Exodus 3:11)”

Prayer Service

Presider: Come let us worship the Lord God as we are his people.

All: To you Lord we give glory and praise.

Presider: Let us pray. Eternal God, we, your chosen people, gather in your presence. You have called us by name to be united with you. Every mindful of our call, we now pray.



Liturgy of the Word:

First Reader:

Romans 8:28-30

We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined he also called; and those he called he also justified; and those he justified he also glorified.¹³

Response: We praise you, O Lord.

Second Reader:

2 Peter 1:3-11

³His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power.

¹¹ John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

¹² *Legend of the Three Companions*

⁴Through these, he has bestowed on us the precious and very great promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature, after escaping from the corruption that is in the world because of evil desire.

⁵For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, virtue with knowledge, ⁶knowledge with self-control, self-control with endurance, endurance with devotion, ⁷devotion with mutual affection, mutual affection with love.

⁸If these are yours and increase in abundance, they will keep you from being idle or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹Anyone who lacks them is blind and shortsighted, forgetful of the cleansing of his past sins.

¹⁰Therefore, brothers, be all the more eager to make your call and election firm, for in doing so, you will never stumble. ¹¹For, in this way, entry into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be richly provided for you.¹³

Response: God, our God has blest us. May all peoples praise you.

Intercessions:

Presider: Let us pray to the Lord our God who has chosen us to be his own by praying together, The Lord's Prayer.

Presider: Lord, bless and strengthen your people.

All: Let your face shine on us and bring us peace. Amen



Additional Journal and Discussion Questions

What is my answer to these questions?

1. Can I put aside feelings of romanticism, sentimentalism about St. Francis?
2. Do I identify with the things about Jesus that Francis discovered and on which he based his way of living and serving?
3. Can I see Christ with the eyes of Francis? Can I live that way too?
4. Looking at my own life experiences, do I find myself ready to learn more about this way and make the effort to embrace the Franciscan path?
5. Can I accept living and nurturing the charism of Francis to make it present in the world?

¹³ Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, and United States Catholic Conference. Administrative Board. (1996). *The New American Bible : Translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources with the revised Book of Psalms and the revised New Testament* (Rom 8:28-30). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

Our Identity as a Secular Franciscan

By Anne Mulqueen, OFS



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Introduction

Throughout this manual you will see glimpses of the Secular Franciscan identity in all the topics presented. Identity cannot be separated from the Secular Franciscan *person*. Identity is the essence of our humanity.

Identity as a person is impossible to define conclusively, because each one that God creates is unique and unrepeatable. God calls us by name, and one of the sweetest sounds to anyone's ears is the sound of their name.

Expressions of personal identity will vary. When asked who we are, any number of answers is possible. We might mention our faith, the values we hold dear, our passions, what we do, who we are related to, our associations and countless other attributes. The answers we give to the question of personal identity define what is important to us. Yet although identity differs from person to person, for Secular Franciscans there exist common *identifying* threads. The identifying threads can be woven into a collective name—Secular Franciscan.

When we refer to ourselves as Secular Franciscans, our name identifies our relationship within the Franciscan family and the word *Order* after our name connects us to the Catholic Church. *Secular* binds us to a large group of people called by God to live the Franciscan charism in ordinary daily lives. A fraction of these people we know, but there are many more we will never meet in this life. When we use the name Secular Franciscan, we reveal an identity to others that tells them quite a lot about who we are and to whom we are related. If this name plays a major role in our identity, it will affect everything we do.

Secular Franciscan Identity in Broad Strokes

Despite the elusiveness of the term, let us consider a general definition of what a Secular Franciscan identity might be. A possible definition is Catholic Christians, living their vocation in a secular state as members of the Franciscan family.

As Catholic Christians, “[We] have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism . . .” In our secular state, “[we] go forth as witness and instrument of her mission among all people proclaiming Christ by [our] life and words.”¹ We are to be the leaven in the dough, the salt for the earth, the light for the world. We are to show that God is in the world and the Gospel can be lived.

As members of the Franciscan family, we hear the call to rebuild the church in union with the religious and priests . . . “we recognize that [we] are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi.”²

¹ Article 6, OFS Rule

² Article 1, OFS Rule

Reflecting on the way the Franciscan charism can be lived by secular persons, I quote Anselm Romb, OFM Conv., who seems to have captured the essence of Franciscan spirituality in one short paragraph. He writes:

St. Francis would insist we stand against our times and take the Gospel at the full and really trust God.... Francis would tell us to accept the crosses we cannot reasonably escape and emphasize the Spirit over legislation and policies . . . to prefer the poor and realize [our] effectiveness derives from grace and not [our] own efforts... and to love the Church in order to preserve the community of faith.”³

This is the face we present to the Church, the world, and the Franciscan family.

A Little Soul Searching

Before we become **specific** concerning our Secular Franciscan identity, consider some general identity questions in light of our Catholic faith.

Who am I? God created us human beings—a little less than angels. Individually, we are born into a particular family and culture. We have unique gifts, hopes, dreams, needs, and personal wounds. All these elements influence our Christian identity. When God calls a person into being, God has a purpose for that particular life. That is who I am.

Who are we? We are the Church, and we are instruments to be used by the Church to make Christ known to all people. We make up the body of Christ by using our individual gifts for the good of all.

What is my purpose? We are to proclaim that Christ is present among us through our behavior and our words. We are to be faithful stewards of creation in all its forms. Further, our call is to build a world that is capable of allowing the kingdom of God to break into it.

To whom do I belong? Ultimately, we belong to God. We came from God and will return to God. We belong to the Catholic Church, which we promised to serve. We belong to the Franciscan Family as a vital and indispensable branch of the family tree. And we belong to those we love; our family and friends and those we serve as secular persons.

The Franciscan dimension of the equation unites the family as sisters and brothers. When we know who we are called to be, what our purpose is, and to whom we belong, we are able *to go forth as witnesses and instruments of [the Church’s] mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by [our] life and words and [building] a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.*⁴

³ *The Franciscan Charism in the Third Millennium*, p. 26

⁴ Article 15, OFS Rule

Obviously, these are not the only answers to the question of Franciscan spiritual identity. You might wish to consider the four questions—Who am I? Who are we? What is my purpose? To whom do I belong? Allow your personal memories and experiences reveal your unique identity.

Secular Franciscan Identity in More Precise Strokes

I. The Secular Dimension

Secularity Is Good

All human beings begin life as secular persons. We are born into this world. Subsequently, through baptism, we are born again and become Christians.

Scripture tells us that God created the world; God provided light to separate day from night. On subsequent days, God created the sky, the earth and seas, the sun and moon. Continuing His creative work, God provided living creatures in the seas, on the earth, and in the sky. Finally, God created man—male and female—in God’s own image He created them. *God looked at everything he had made, **and he found it very good.***⁵

God calls the world “very good.” With gratitude to our good God, we embrace that portion of our identity, and we call it very good. Further, as secular Franciscans, we are responsible for taking care of the “good” earth because the Spirit of the Lord created us for this purpose.

The identity of the Secular Franciscan is rooted in our secularity. St. Francis brought the practice of Gospel life out of the monasteries into the world of the family and society. This was, indeed, very good. Deeply spiritual and generous men and women, who could not abandon family responsibilities, now had a way to follow the Lord in the manner of St. Francis.

The Rule identifies the world as the place where the brothers and the sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity, *in [our] own secular state.*⁶ The world is our home and our mission field, and we are stewards of its resources and responsible for its care.

Sacred or Secular?

To consider our lives and our actions either sacred or secular is to create an unnatural duality in our lives. Secular life is sacred when we offer the work of our hands and the desire of our hearts to the Lord. Obviously, it is easier to sense the sacred in liturgies and retreats. However, our Rule tells us in Article 16 that work is a gift and a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. God placed us in the world for a reason. We are meant to carry God’s presence by word and action to every highway and byway we travel. We are to live our lives with enthusiasm and carry out our tasks for the Lord—not for human

⁵ Gen. 1:31, emphasis added

⁶ Article 2, OFS Rule

masters.⁷ Delivering mail, typing memos, caring for the sick, etc., are all sacred acts when we do them for the good of others and the glory of God.

As Scripture says, “The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it.”⁸ One day the world will be restored to its original purity. Until then, the weeds may grow with the wheat, but only the wheat fulfills its purpose and provides nourishment for the hungry. Scripture says we provide light, salt, and leaven for the world, to which I add we also provide wheat.

Secularity Is Necessary

One area of our secular identity that is crucial to the continuance of humanity is family life. Without procreation, human beings simply would cease to exist. Our roles in the family constitute a huge portion of our identity. We are mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, husbands, wives, etc. How often are our conversations peppered with statements such as, “I am the youngest of seven,” or “My family has farmed this area for a hundred years,” or “we’ve been married for 35 years.” If we agree that the world is good, then it follows that we need committed people in the world to maintain it. Further, as Secular Franciscans, we add a vital spiritual dimension to family life.

In addition to the family, our secular dimension allows us access to areas of public life—places where, perhaps, the religious might not be involved. We have occupations, communities, associations, etc., where we bring our Gospel values to the world simply by living our identity. We bear witness by who we are.

Anselm Romb states that, “...the original twelve followers of St. Francis came from many walks of life—lawyer, priest, businessman, soldier, peasant. Having known the world, they were better adapted to transform it.”⁹

Too often we neglect the part diocesan clergy play in the Secular Franciscan Order. Anselm Romb’s description of the original twelve points out that the OFS is home to many dedicated secular clerics. Often, they assist us as spiritual assistants, but their identity remains secular.

Society is where we live. Isn’t it logical that we would be in the forefront of social justice issues—“worldly” affairs? Our secular nature gives us a forum to witness to our Christian and Franciscan values. We take stands against exploitation and discrimination. We protest reckless and evil disregard for human life. We work to protect our environment. And as people of peace, we bring the essential ingredients of prayer and peace to penetrate society. With no conscience, society and civility deteriorate. It is our responsibility to provide that conscience.

⁷ Cf. Ephesians 6:5-8

⁸ Psalm 24:1

⁹ *Franciscan Charism for the Third Millennium*, Anselm Romb p.98

We have a responsibility to show the temporal world that the Gospel and the Franciscan charism can be lived in any age, under all conditions, and in every stage of life. It follows that our identity as secular people—people in the world—is indivisible from the other components of our identity, and we should “wear” our secularity with gratitude to the One who bestowed it upon us.

II. The Franciscan Dimension

Before we examine the particular spiritual emphasis of the **Secular** Franciscan, we must remember that we are one branch of a single family. We are united with our brothers and sisters who profess a religious life. Without our brothers and sisters of the First Order, Second Order, and Third Order Regular, our family would be incomplete. We are a single family united by our founder and our history.

The spiritual emphasis for the First Order is minority. The spiritual emphasis for the Second Order (Poor Clares) is poverty. The spiritual emphasis for the Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order is conversion (penance).

The roots of our Secular Franciscan identity begin in the penitential movement St. Francis joined and influenced in the early 13th century. Conversion for St. Francis meant turning away from self-centeredness and turning to Christ. He abandoned his self-centered desires and lived for Christ. It is the same for us. Secular Franciscan conversion is being conformed to Christ. It means we love and serve Christ’s Church, Christ’s world—all that is created through the Word of God, Jesus the Christ.

Article 13 of the General Constitutions

1. *Rule 7*: Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times “the brothers and sisters of penance,” propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser; and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.¹⁰

Our identity as **Franciscan Penitents** began shortly after St. Francis was given the gift of penance by the Lord and became a penitent himself. Quoting from his *Testament*:

The Lord granted me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: While I was in sin, it seemed very bitter to me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led

¹⁰ *Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda 22 ff.*

me among them and I had mercy upon them. And when I left them that which seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body; and afterward I lingered a little and left the world.¹¹

From this portion of the *Testament*, we understand that St. Francis considered penance a gift from God—the Lord granted it to him. Further, we can be assured that just as the Lord led St. Francis to embrace conversion and conformity to Christ, God will do the same for us if this is our desire. St. Francis experienced a radical interior change—a change in thinking, a change in feeling, a change in values, and a change in the way he perceived God, the world and himself. For St. Francis and for us a radical interior change is reflected exteriorly in ministry and apostolic action. St. Francis left the world as he knew it before his conversion and entered into a life of penance.

Quoting Article 7 of The Rule of 1978:

United by their vocation as brothers and sisters of penance, and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls conversion. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

Article 7 of our Rule points us to the sacrament of reconciliation as *the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace*. The meaning underlying these words is that this sacrament is not to be entered into without serious commitment to change. It is spiritual immaturity to “confess” and expect interior cleansing without serious reflection and desire to be conformed to Christ and the Gospel. Nor is this a sacrament to be ignored or neglected, as is all too evident in our church today.

To emphasize how important the Sacrament of Penance was to St. Francis and to his early followers, let me quote from various sources.

In his Later Exhortation (Second Letter to the Faithful, 4:22), St. Francis states, “*We must, of course, confess all our sins to a priest and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ from him.*”¹² St. Francis revered and respected priests profoundly because they were the ministers of divine pardon.

In the *Memoriale Propositi* of 1221, we have a more juridical wording of St. Francis' exhortation to penance.¹³ Chapter V.1 states, “*Let them confess their sins three times a year and receive Communion on the Nativity of the Lord, Resurrection Sunday and Pentecost.*” This exhortation is repeated in the Rule of 1289, Chapter 6.

¹¹ *The Testament*, paragraph 1

¹² Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 4:22

In conclusion to this section on our penitential nature, I quote Fr. Lino Temperini, TOR, who said:

“The term Penance in Franciscanism is equivalent to the biblical meaning of metanoia, understood as an intimate conversion of the heart to God, as a vital attitude, a continuous state of being. It is not a question of doing penance but of being penitent.”¹⁴

The cornerstone or emphasis of the Secular Franciscan identity is a life devoted to self-transcendence (self-Transformation)—a life radically changed through repentance—a life that leads us into the likeness of Christ. Persons committed to personal conversion assume responsibility for their actions and the consequences of those actions. But personal conversion is not the end. It is the means. We take the fruit of conversion and distribute it to a hungry and broken world.

In the Prologue to the Rule of 1978, we read in the Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance:

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance:

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them” (cf. Is 11:2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. Jn 14:23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

It is obvious from the first two paragraphs of the Earlier Exhortation, St. Francis does not begin by urging us to do external penances—no strict fasts, no hair shirts, no flagellation. What he asks us to do is positive: (1) love God totally, (2) love our neighbor as ourselves, (3) hate our sinful tendencies, (4) receive the body and blood of Christ in a worthy manner, and (5) produce good fruits of penance.

Conversion in the Rule of 1978 and the Earlier Exhortation

The Rule of 1978 is an inspirational document that expresses who we are, our reason for being, and to whom we belong, and it points us to the Gospel and love of God, neighbor, and creation as a way of life.

¹³ Although written within St. Francis' lifetime, because of its juridical style, the *Memoriale Propositi* is considered to have been composed by Cardinal Hugolino.

¹⁴ Penitential Spirituality in the Franciscan Sources, p. 41. <°)))))><

If we view each article of Chapter II, The Way of Life, through the lens of the Prologue, we will see that each article relates to one or more of the five exhortations; love of God, love of neighbor, conscious avoidance of sin, worthy reception of Eucharist, and commitment to living the Gospel in daily life, so that worthy fruits of penance result from our actions. Each article in Chapter Two points out specific areas of our lives that call for continual conversion.

Authentic conversion is holistic. It impacts our intellect, emotions, morality, spirituality, and our socio-political convictions. I find the following definition of these five aspects of our humanity useful when examining my conscience. Unfortunately, I do not know the source.

EMOTIONAL – *How Blessed are we when we responsibly face our own disordered emotions and strive to cultivate a healthy emotional life.*

INTELLECTUAL – *How Blessed are we when we responsibly face our own disordered mind and commit to critically examining our values and beliefs in dialogue with others.*

MORAL – *How Blessed are we when we responsibly face our own disordered moral system and commit to living by ethical norms and ideals that make the ultimate claim upon us.*

RELIGIOUS – *How Blessed are we when we responsibly face our own disorder. Then we accept God’s self-revelation of love given in Jesus and accept the consequences of following Jesus’ teaching.*

SOCIO-POLITICAL – *How Blessed are we when we responsibly face our own disorder. Then we commit to collaboration with others in the reform of unjust social institutions.*

Continual Conversion and Identity

Because of human frailty, the conversion process is ongoing. For this reason, our Rule tells us that conversion must be carried out daily.

We know that St. Francis read and meditated upon the Word of God until it was integrated into his very being. In body and soul, St. Francis was altered by the Gospel. His identity changed as he became conformed to the likeness of Christ. St. Francis went beyond imitation. He became one with the beloved. Francis proved that the Gospel could be lived. It was a process for him. It continues to be a process for us. It is what our Rule calls ongoing conversion. If we wish to be changed in the process, we must become one with the Lord.

One of my favorite Scriptures comes from the first three chapters of the prophet Ezekiel. The prophet hears the voice [of the Lord], and the voice tells Ezekiel to eat the scroll handed to him. After he has eaten the scroll, Ezekiel is told to speak God’s word to the house of

Israel. *Ezekiel had to assimilate the scroll—actually eat it—before he could call the people to repentance. It had to be digested by him.* That was the wisdom of St. Francis. This is what he did. This is what we must do—assimilate the Word and then let go of whatever stands in the way of Gospel values.

Franciscan Identity Expanded

I have given considerable attention to conversion, because it is the spiritual emphasis and origin of the OFS. Yet to be a fully individuated Secular Franciscan, we must not ignore the other aspects of our identity we hold in common with the entire Franciscan family.

The year 1965 was the beginning of a process to bring the Secular Franciscan Rule into harmony with the changed conditions of the modern world. The previous rule was approved in 1883. The 1965 Rule was to be more positive, more evangelical, and thoroughly Franciscan. In 1969, the Assisi Congress gathered to focus on the revision of the Secular Franciscan Rule. The work of the committees was presented as motions. Motion 9 essentially guided the process for Chapter II of the Rule of 1978. Motion 9 lists 17 essential elements of Secular Franciscan Spirituality.

1. To live the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis
2. To be converted continually (*metanoia*)
3. To live as sisters and brothers of all people and of all creation
4. To live in communion with Christ
5. To follow the poor and crucified Christ
6. To share in the life and mission of the Church
7. To share in the love of the Father
8. To be instruments of peace
9. To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal, and liturgical
10. To live in joy
11. To have a spirituality of a secular nature
12. To be pilgrims on the way toward the Father
13. To participate in the apostolate of the laity
14. To be at the service of the less fortunate
15. To be loyal to the church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her ministers
16. To be open to the action of the Holy Spirit
17. To live in simplicity, humility, and minority¹⁵

It would take a lifetime to understand all the implications and layers of meaning contained in these essential elements and another lifetime to incorporate them into the core of our being. We must be content to continue in the process of ongoing conversion until the day when we see the Lord face to face.

III. The Significance of Being an Order

As we begin this portion, “the significance of being an order,” we must acknowledge the amazing grace and treasure of our vocation. It is an unmerited gift from God. Words cannot express our gratitude for this wondrous gift. Faithfully living the ideals of our charism is all we have to offer our good God.

What Constitutes an Order?

Chapter I of the Rule best defines what constitutes an Order and, in particular, the Secular Franciscan Order. Take some time to read and meditate on these three articles, with particular emphasis on Article 2. Article 2 contains all the essential elements of an Order. It is a movement led by the Spirit. It is an organic union of Catholic fraternities throughout the world. Its people strive for perfect charity in a secular state. They profess to live the Gospel in the manner of its founder, Francis of Assisi.

- The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God—laity, religious, and priests—who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.
- The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities, the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.
- The present rule, succeeding *Memoriale Propositi* (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

What can we know about ourselves as an Order from these three articles?

- ❖ The OFS has a specific place in the Church and in the Franciscan Family; *it is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful.*¹⁶
- ❖ We have a responsibility to make present the charism of our common Seraphic Father St. Francis in the life and mission of the Church.

¹⁶ *De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam*, The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, OFM, p. 250

- ❖ At all levels of fraternity we form Christian communities that are animated and guided in accordance with the tradition and values of St. Francis.
- ❖ God is the origin of our vocation. It is not the work of our hands.
- ❖ We are called to grow in holiness through the vocation we have received. Led by the Spirit—striving for perfect charity—in a secular state.
- ❖ The secular branch of the Order is a necessary part of the Franciscan family tree, because its milieu is the world. Its complementary nature to the ministry of its religious brothers and sisters makes whole the Franciscan charism.
- ❖ In a secular state and by a profession of a Rule approved by the Church, Secular Franciscans pledge to live the Gospel in the tradition and ideals of St. Francis.
- ❖ Article 3 tells us that our current Rule is only the third revision in eight hundred years.

A concise summary might be, our Order is formed as an organic union of all the Catholic fraternities whose members, moved by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves through profession to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis, in their secular state, following the Rule approved by the Church.

A Backward Glance at Our Recent History

Pope Paul VI approved the OFS Rule we profess on August 24, 1978. The Ritual that appears on the International website and in the *Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order* was approved March 9, 1984. The revised General Constitutions were approved on December 8, 2000. The International Statutes were revised and approved in 2009. Thus all the legislation of the Secular Franciscan Order is up-to-date and approved by Rome.

On November 22, 2002, Pope John Paul II, exhorted Secular Franciscans to look to the future and set out into the deep. *Duc in Altum!*

Pope John Paul II said, and I quote in part:

The Church expects from the unique Franciscan Secular Order a great service to the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today. She wants your Order to be a model of organic, structural and charismatic union at all levels, so as to present yourself to the world as a "community of love" (SFO, Rule, art. 26). From you, Secular Franciscans, the Church awaits a courageous and consistent witness of Christian and Franciscan life that aims at building a more fraternal and evangelical world for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

¹⁶ Article 2, OFS Rule

The reflection made at this Chapter on "vital reciprocal communion in the Franciscan family" impels you to be more dedicated to promoting meeting and agreement, first of all within your Order, then among your Franciscan brothers and sisters and, last of all, as with the greatest attention, as St Francis wanted, in your relationship with the hierarchical authority of the Church.

Your **renewed legislation** gives you excellent instruments to realize and express fully the unity of your Order and your communion with the Franciscan Family, within precise coordinating principles.

[In it there is, above all, provision for the service of animation and guidance of the Fraternities,] "coordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions." This service is indispensable for the communion among the Fraternities, for the orderly collaboration among them and for the unity of the Secular Franciscan Order (cf. *General Constitutions OFS* 29.1). Important is "spiritual assistance as a fundamental element of communion," to take place collegially on the regional, national and international levels is important (General Constitutions OFS 90.3). Finally, the collegial service of the *altius moderamen*,... "entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and to the Third Order Regular," to which the Secular Fraternity has been attached for centuries (cf. *General Constitutions OFS* 85.2; 87.1).

The OFS—An Integral Part of the Catholic Church

Before we look at where we are now in the Church, let's continue to look back at where we began. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of the relationship between Francis and the Church in a general audience on January 27, 2010. In part, this is what he said.

[At the time of St. Francis,] Innocent III was a powerful Pope who had a great theological formation and great political influence; nevertheless he was not the one to renew the Church but the small, insignificant religious. It was St Francis, called by God. ...[I]t is important to note that **Francis did not renew the Church without the Pope or in opposition the Pope, but in communion with him**. The two realities went together: Peter's Successor, the bishops and the Church founded on apostolic succession, and the new charism that the Holy Spirit brought to life at that time for the Church's renewal. ¹⁷ [Emphasis added]

In the same address, Pope Benedict said:

It is also true that at first Francis "did not wish to create a new order" with all the due canonical procedures. However, not without disappointment, **he came**

to understand “that everything must have its order and that the law of the Church is necessary to give form to renewal. Thus he entered ... with all his heart into communion with the Church, with the Pope and the bishops.”¹⁸
[Emphasis added]

From a Category to an Order

In Canon Law, the Secular Franciscan Order falls within the category of a Public Association of the Faithful.

Canon 303 of the Code of Canon Law defines all third orders as:

Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute while in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name.

The OFS General Constitutions further define our status in Article 1.5 and states:

The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church. It is divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own juridical personality within the Church.

The Secular Franciscan Order differs from other Third Orders in significant ways, and it is important that we be aware of the characteristics specific to the OFS.

- ❖ The OFS shares a common **founder** with the First and Second Order—St. Francis of Assisi.
- ❖ The OFS is not associated or affiliated with the First Order or TOR—it is **autonomous** and **self-governing**.
- ❖ The OFS shares in **vital reciprocity** with the other branches of the Franciscan family and has **equal dignity**.
- ❖ The OFS was given the **same charism and mission** as the other branches of the Franciscan family. In our secular state, we too continue the mission of St. Francis to rebuild God’s Church.
- ❖ Our Rule and Constitutions are **approved by the Holy See**, not by the Ministers General of the First Order and Third Order Regular.
- ❖ Members of other third orders may belong to more than one third orders. **Secular Franciscan may not.**

¹⁷ AG/FRANCIS OF ASSISI/...VIS 100127 (1040) 1/27/10

¹⁸ AG/FRANCIS OF ASSISI/...VIS 100127 (1040) 1/27/10

Rather than repeat the information contained in the section entitled The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order in the International Formation material, I suggest that you reserve some time to read and digest this material.

Conclusion

In this conclusion, we will turn to the document some believe to be our First Rule of Life, the Earlier Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sister in Penance (circa 1209-1215).¹⁹ This document is considered to be so important to the identity of Secular Franciscans that it was placed in our Rule as its Prologue. In the exhortation, St. Francis tells us what our identity must be if we are to be true to our calling.

First, we must love God with our entire being, hearts, souls, minds, strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love our neighbors as ourselves (cf. Mt 22:39). Immediately following the great command to love, St. Francis says we must despise our sinful ways. How do we despise our sinful ways? We turn from sin and temptation and choose to be conformed to the image and likeness of Christ. We do penance. If we do this, as surely as night follows day, we will be what God intended us to be, his beloved children. Then we will produce worthy fruits through this conversion process.

God gives us many gifts when we embrace a penitential identity. God gives us joy, a hallmark of Franciscan spirituality. Further, God gives us “the spirit of the Lord [to] rest upon [us]” (cf. Is 11:2) and to make “his home and dwelling among [us]” (cf. Jn 14:23). But to receive these gifts, we must remain faithful to our vocation.

Becoming more specific, Francis tells us that when we embrace this vocation, we become sons [and daughters] of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45), whose works [we] do, and [we] are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

What does it mean to be a spouse, a brother, or sister, and a mother to Christ? Imagine your soul united to our Lord Jesus Christ. Imagine being brother or sister to him by fulfilling the will of the Father. Imagine being mother to him through divine love and a pure conscience. And imagine giving birth to Christ through a holy life that is light to others.

Continuing his exhortation, St. Francis tells us that we are intimately wrapped in the Trinity. Francis says, “Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven! Oh how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:15).” We possess all three persons: a holy Father, an admirable spouse, the

¹⁷ Also called *Letter to All the Faithful, Earlier Exhortation, Primitive Rule, Volterra text.*

Holy Paraclete, and a self-sacrificing brother, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are immersed in the Trinity from which our identity flows.

And finally, St. Francis ends his exhortation by praying to the Father for us, saying in the words of Jesus:

“O holy Father, protect them with your name (cf. Jn 17:11) whom you gave me out of the world. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you, they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these I pray, not for the world (cf. Jn 17:9). Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (cf. Jn 17:20) that they may be holy by being one as we are (cf. Jn 17: 11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom” (cf. Jn 17:6-24).

We have quite an identity—

quite a lot to live up to—

quite a lot to be thankful for—

and we are blessed.

May the Lord grant us peace.

PRAYER SERVICE

Presider: Let us pray.

Almighty God, we thank you because through your love and goodness we were created in your image—male and female. You looked at us, the work of your hands, and called us good. [Genesis 1:27, 31] Father, you gave us a new covenant and placed your law within our hearts. You revealed yourself as our God and made us your people. [Jeremiah 31:31, 33] For this and all your blessings, we thank you, we praise you, and we adore you.

All: Amen.

Hymn: We Are Many Parts – Marty Haugen

First Reading: *Francis, A Letter to the Entire Order*

Listen, pay attention to my words. Incline the ear of your heart and obey the voice of the Son of God. Observe His commands with your whole heart and fulfill his counsels with a perfect mind.

Give praise to Him because He is good; exalt Him by your deeds; for this reason, He has sent you into the whole world: that you may bear witness to His voice in word and deed and bring everyone to know that there is no one who is all-powerful except Him. Persevere in discipline and holy obedience and, with a good and firm purpose, fulfill what you have promised Him. (LtOrd 5-10)

[Period of Silence]

Litany: *[Do not recite the Scriptural citations. Alternate Sides for the Litany.]*

Presider: In Christ Jesus . . . *[repeated before each response]*

I am God's child.	(John 1:12)
I am a member of Christ's Body.	(1 Corinthians 12:27)
I am blessed, chosen, and dearly loved.	(Colossians 3:12)
I am blessed with every spiritual blessing.	(Ephesians 1:3)
I am forgiven.	(Ephesians 1:8; Col 1:14)
I can forgive others.	(Ephesians 4:32)
I have purpose.	(Ephesians 1:9 and 3:11)
I have hope.	(Ephesians 1:12)
I have peace.	(Ephesians 2:14)
I am sealed with the Holy Spirit.	(Ephesians 1:13)
I am salt and light of the earth.	(Matthew 5:13-14)
I am His disciple.	(John 13:15)
I am alive with Christ.	(Ephesians 2:5)
I have access to the Father.	(Ephesians 2:18)
I am a dwelling for the Holy Spirit.	(Ephesians 2:22)
I can approach God with freedom and confidence.	(Ephesians 3:12)
I know there is a purpose for my sufferings.	(Ephesians 3:13)
I know I have been called.	(Ephesians 4:1; 2 Timothy 1:9)
I can give thanks for everything.	(Ephesians 5:20)
I know I can be strong.	(Ephesians 6:10)
I possess the mind of Christ.	(1 Corinthians 2:16)
I am a new creation.	(2 Corinthians 5:17)

[Short Period of Silence]

Second Reading: Matthew 5:13-16

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lamp stand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.

[Period of Silence]

[Shared Reflection on the Readings and the Litany if Desired]

Personal Intercessions of Gratitude

The Lord's Prayer

Closing Prayer:

God, all powerful, most holy sublime ruler of all, you alone are good - supremely, fully, completely good, may we render to you all praise, all honor and all blessing: may we always ascribe to you alone everything that is good!

Amen

[St. Francis – Praises to be said at all hours]

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,
who is, who was and who is to come,
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

O Lord our God,
You are worthy to receive praise and glory and honor, and blessing.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity,
wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit:
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord,
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Sing praise to God all you His servants and you who fear God,
the small and the great.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let heaven and earth praise Him who is glorious.
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Every creature: in heaven,
on earth and under the earth, and in the sea.
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

All-powerful, Most Holy, Most High, Supreme God, all good,
highest good, totally good,
You who alone are good, may we give You all praise,
all glory, all thanks, all honor, all blessing and all good.

So be it. So be it.
Amen.

The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

**Adapted by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS,
based on a presentation at
a Regional Chapter**

This section on the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order is based on the work of our brother Beneditto Lino, OFS, coordinator of the Formation Commission of our International Presidency. This material, originally released in the CIOFS "Forming the Formators" manual, has been adapted for use by the OFS in the United States by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS, National Formation Chair of the National Fraternity of the United States. We owe a great debt of gratitude to all our brothers and sisters, at all levels of fraternity, who, for love of our Order, have participated in this formation project.

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The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

To begin to understand who we are as Franciscans, let us again take a moment to recall the foundational building blocks of the Franciscan Family as we understand them: from Francis and Clare and then on to the major mentors and developers of Our Spiritual Traditions, Bonaventure and Scotus.

Francis and Clare gave us the understanding of the goodness, worthiness, i.e., the love-ness, of God and how we encounter God by immersing ourselves in the messiness and plight of all created things. In day-to-day life, we begin to understand the “Dance of Life,” the presence of the Trinity, and our invitation to enter into relationship with God and each other.

Bonaventure leads us into the life of the Trinity with his *Soul’s Journey into God (Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum)*, and Duns Scotus soon follows, giving us the understanding of the Absolute Primacy of Christ. Breaking with the primary thought of his day and possibly also ours, Scotus taught that Jesus is not God’s reaction or response to the sin of mankind. Jesus’ Incarnation was not plan B, put into effect by God because plan A failed. Jesus is and always was God’s whole action and whole plan from the very beginning. For Scotus, Jesus truly is the Alpha and the Omega; the very reason for God’s loving act of creation and His continuing acts of creation. Jesus is not just the reason for the season, as we cheerfully remark around Christmas, Jesus is the reason PERIOD!

Beginning with our current Rule of Life, as approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978, the Secular Franciscan Order, as part of the renewal of all religious orders in the Church, received new direction for revitalization of our way of life in the modern world. No longer just a “piety” society, we, along with the other members of our greater Franciscan Family, were charged with returning to and re-enlivening the original charism of our founder, Francis of Assisi. The hope is that Francis’ example and spirituality might again become a source of holiness, drawing more and more people to imitate Jesus and to become a source of enlightenment and inspiration for the modern world.

Our task is simple: to make the wisdom of the Gospels and its values come alive and become a source of transformation for ourselves and for all we touch.

Our renewed Rule is our call to do what Jesus taught, to follow Him into the lives of the poor, the rejected, the people discarded by society, because that is where He is and where He serves. Here is where we will find Him; if we only but look.

Based upon these very brief comments on our spiritual roots, we can look at the composition of the Franciscan Family, especially at the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order and how the OFS has been viewed by several modern Pontiffs (the Holy See).

An Order?

First, from Benedict XV:

“...[Francis] founded a **true Order, that of the Tertiaries**, not restricted by religious vows, as the two other Orders, but similarly conformed to simplicity of customs and to a spirit of penitence. So, he was the first to conceive and happily carry out, with the help of God, what no founder of regulars (religious Orders) had previously contrived, to have the religious life practiced by all.” (Benedict XV, Encyclical *Sacra Propediem*, June 6, 1921)

Secondly, from Pius the XII:

“You are an Order: a lay Order, but a real Order. *Ordo veri nominis*, as our predecessor of holy memory, Benedict XV (*Sacra propediem*, June 6, 1921) called it. You will not, as is obvious, be an assembly of the perfect; but you must be a school of Christian perfection. Without this resolute will one cannot suitably be a part of such a chosen and glorious militia.” (Pius XII, July 1, 1956, Speech to the Tertiaries in Rome)

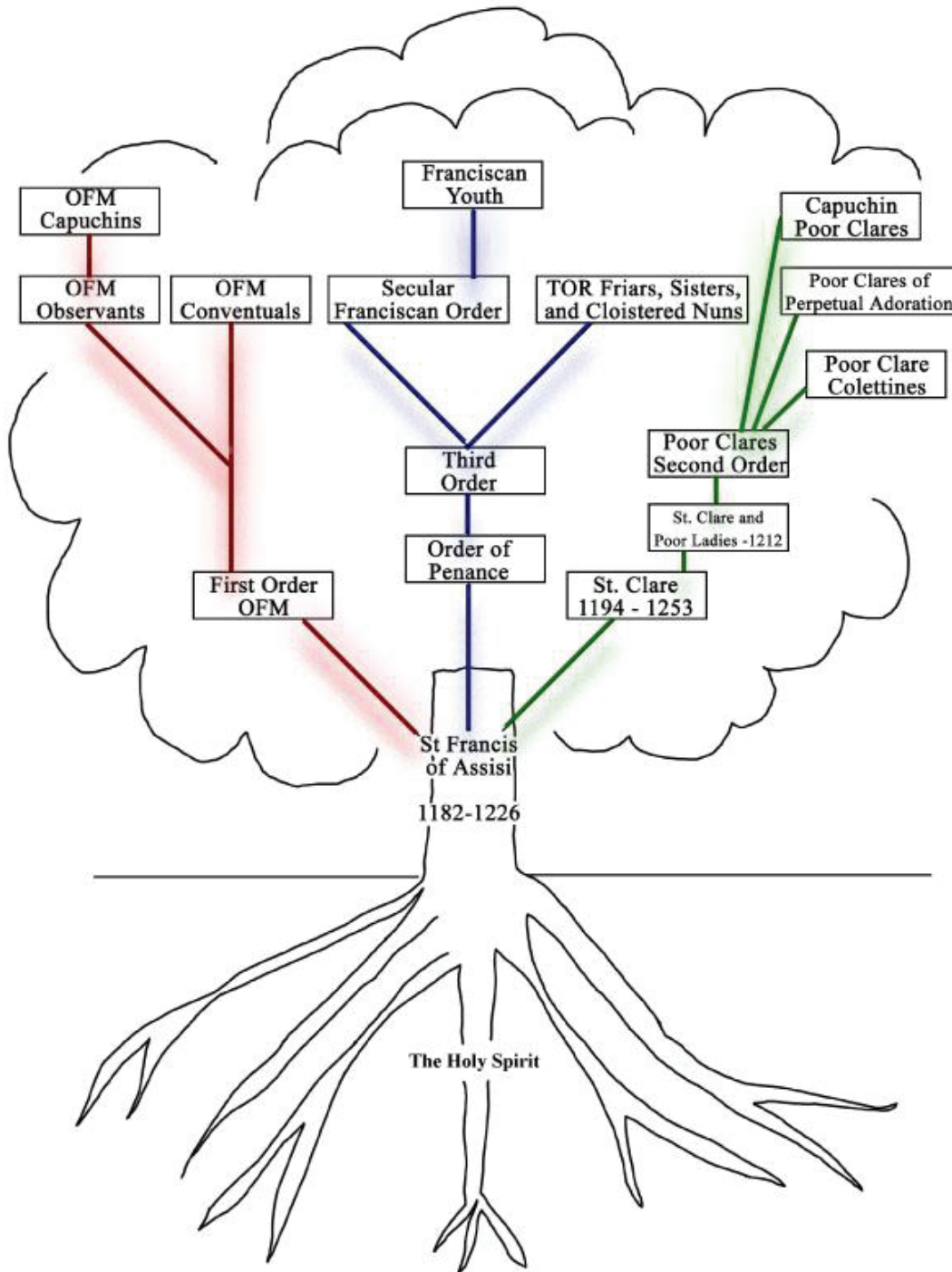
And lastly from John Paul II to our General Chapter of 1988:

“...you are also an “Order,” as the Pope said (Pius XII): **A Lay Order, but a Real Order,**” and after all, Benedict XV had already spoken of *Ordo veri nominis*. This ancient term—we can say medieval— “Order” means nothing more than your intimate belonging to the large Franciscan family. The word “Order” means the participation in the discipline and actual austerity of that spirituality, while remaining in the **autonomy typical of your lay and secular condition**, which, moreover, often entails sacrifices which are not lesser than those experienced in the religious and priestly life.” (John Paul II, June 14, 1988, General Chapter, OFS)

Note: Popes Gregory IX, Blessed Gregory X, Innocent XII, Pius IX, Pius X, Martin V, Clement XII, and all Popes from Pius IX, up to and including John XXIII, were Secular Franciscans.

The Franciscan Family

The diagram below is a representation of the formation of the Franciscan Family, noting in particular that the Third Order (formerly the Order of Penance, originally known as the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of St Francis and now known as the Secular Franciscan Order), which has shared, from the very beginning a common founder, Francis of Assisi, with our brother and sister “religious.”



Franciscan Family Tree

The following is our adaptation of the original materials received from CIOFS as part of the “Forming the Formators” Project and Manual, by Beneditto Lino, OFS, Presidency Councilor for Formation of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), in Rome.

Francis and the Franciscan Trilogy

Founding of Three Orders Within the Franciscan Movement

The Franciscan Trilogy [the Three Orders] is the first (and only) religious experience preordained to apostolic life, born simultaneously, and designed to include all states of life.

Francis received from Christ very precise directions: “go, repair my house...” The Pope clearly confirmed this directive for Francis and his followers: to accomplish in themselves conversion and preach it to others (*facere et predicare poenitentiam*).

Francis began work immediately and put all his confidence in the Spirit. He did not deliberately intend to *found* three Orders. However, in the institution of his three Orders, Francis let himself be guided solely by the Spirit of the Lord. He welcomed this reality as it flourished in his hands, without any predetermined plan.

Thus, his three Orders were born, and soon Francis realized that all of them (each according to its own condition) related to his own apostolic mission of restoring the house of the Lord. His three Orders were entrusted with fidelity to their vocations and joint co-responsibility of mutual fraternal help in their journey towards the Lord¹.

Essentially, Saint Francis gave his three orders only one rule: **a more perfect observance of the Gospel, according to their state of life.**

The commitment of a permanent conversion to the Gospel (*facere poenitentiam*) must permeate the life of all three Orders.

In view of their preordained apostolic mission, the three Franciscan Orders are not related among themselves hierarchically, but from their very beginning have been equal and should recognize both their spiritual interdependence and their need for mutual assistance.

Within the context of the Fourth Lateran Council, St Francis **is the first person to found a religious trilogy that provided for living a religious life regardless of a person’s state of life.**

Since St. Francis was unable, due to the prevailing Church laws at the time, to welcome into his “apostolic religion”² (Order) either communities of consecrated women or seculars (men and women living in their own homes), Saint Francis was obliged to institute the Second

¹ A. Boni, OFM, *Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus* (TOHO), Ed. Porziuncola, Assisi, 1999,

² “Religion” corresponded to “Institution of religious life.” Here we refer to the Order of Friars Minor, approved by Innocent III and the Fourth Lateran Council.

Order (for consecrated women) and also a Third Order (for seculars). These orders were, by their very nature, autonomous.

Due to the common origin, shared mission, and charism of the First, Second and Third Orders, the Secular Franciscan Order is not *merely* a Public Association of the Christian Faithful. Anyone who enters the First, the Second, or the Third Order belongs to a single entity, the Franciscan Family, willed by God for the restoration of the Church, where each part is in intimate communion with the others.

The rule of Nicholas IV provided a common legislative structure to all the fraternities of Franciscan penitents, (Bull *Supra Montem*, issued by Nicholas IV on 18 August 1289).³ This rule became the first Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Saint Francis that received formal written Papal approval. This was the official *Regula Bullata* of the OFS and was the fruit of the work and initiative of the Franciscan Penitents themselves. (Especially notable in its development were two **Secular Franciscans**: a judge, **Ugolino de'Medici di Ferrara**, and his brother **Elias**.)

Although the three Franciscan Orders are autonomous and independent, and their autonomous existence is not conditional on the other parts of the Franciscan Family, our common spirituality depends on the mutual support we share with one another across the various branches of the Franciscan Family (vital reciprocity).

We can summarize our foundational elements with three Latin phrases used by Fr. Andrea Boni in his book *Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus*.

1. *Tres ordines hic ordinatus* (Three were the Orders he arrayed).⁴ Common founder – Francis of Assisi
2. *Eiusdem corporis membra existentes* (Existing as members of the same body)⁵
 - Same charism
 - Same mission in different states of life, interdependent and complementary: all three to accomplish the marvelous work

³ “The foundation of the Third Franciscan Order was achieved by St Francis in accordance with the provisions of the penitential law of the era, without the need of the specific constitutional approval of the Holy See.

The official documents were subsequently obtained. **It is wrong to think that** “the constitutional approval” of the Third Franciscan Order came only with the Bull *Supra Montem*, issued by Nicholas IV on 18 August 1289, as if it were determined by the official announcement of *The New Rule* of the Third Order Secular of St Francis. The approval, according to the legal principles in place at the time, is attested by the testimony of the *Legend of the Three Companions*, which, with reference to the approval of the three Franciscan Orders, reports: *Each one of these three Orders was in its time approved by the Supreme Pontiff*. (L3C, chapter XIV, 60)

It was a **papal approval** that was **direct** and **indirect** at the same time: it was indirect in so far as the three Orders were born in full accordance with and according to what was established by the common law of the Church, and was direct in that for these three Orders the Apostolic See renewed and granted measures and privileges partly new and partly renewed, because they had already been formerly granted to professed converts and to *secular penitents*. (A Boni).

⁴ *Julian of Speyer The Divine Office, Antiphon for Lauds*

⁵ *Urban IV, Bull Spiritus Domini, 1. C, 671*

3. *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur* (A three-ply cord is not easily broken).⁶
 - Independence and unity
 - Vital interconnection [reciprocity]

Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)

1. The nature of the OFS is determined by three characteristics:
 - **First**, its birth and the intention of its founder, Francis of Assisi based on inspiration he received from God;
 - **Second**, through its historical evolution as an order/movement consistently [and continuously] approved by the Holy See; and
 - **Third**, through legislation, (Rule and General Constitutions) approved by the Holy See and accepted throughout history, as expressed by the Supreme Pontiffs and Magisterium of the Church.

We are, therefore, united by a common founder, with common charisms/spirituality and apostolic mission to our brothers and sisters of the first and second orders. Despite this foundational unity, we remain fully independent of the other Franciscan Orders, but by privilege we are intimately connected in a relationship of mutual and vital reciprocity.

2. We (OFS) are a group of Christian faithful, evangelically called (vocation) to respond in fullness to follow Jesus, through the witness of Francis, while living in our secular condition. We are as deeply called and committed, as any other Franciscan, friar or sister, to God's call to continually rebuild the Church, inviting her and ourselves to live in greater fidelity to the Gospels.
3. Although the OFS is not "religious" in the strict sense of the word (making evangelical vows), we do commit ourselves through a true and proper "religious" profession to give witness to the Gospel along with and beside our other Franciscan Family Members.
 - Franciscan Family
 - the Friars (priests and brother) of the First Order
 - The Sisters of the Second Order (Poor Clares)
 - Our Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular
 - Priests and Brothers (also called Friars" of the Third Order Regular (TOR)
 - 400+ communities of Religious Women (Sisters) bound under the Rule of St. Francis
 - Secular Franciscan Order

⁶ Ecclesiastes 4, 12

The Secular Franciscan Order (in the Church and Canon Law)

The Secular Franciscan Order is a **public Association** in the Church. OFS Gen. Const., art. 1.5 – (Code of Canon Law [CCL] 301 §3; 312; 313)

The OFS, as an **international public Association**, is connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff, from whom it has received the approval of its Rule and the confirmation of its mission in the Church and in the world. (OFS Gen. Const., Art. 99.2)

The General Constitutions of the OFS open and close with these two fundamental statements, which characterize the ecclesial nature of the OFS as:

We Are A Public Association of Christian Faithful

- **International in scope**
- **Linked by a special bond with the Roman Pontiff**
 - who gives the OFS its **Rule** and
 - confirms our **Mission** in the Church and in the world

Thus we can define the nature of our Order and outline it as follows:

- A group of Christian lay faithful evangelically committed in our own secular state of life to a full response to the call to follow Christ; humble, poor, and crucified, like St. Francis.
- Secular Franciscans, along with the brothers and sisters of the First and the Second Orders, are committed to achieving the mission God entrusted to Francis to repair his house, which is the Church, the Body of Christ, in all its manifestations. We are called to help the Church fulfill its mission of salvation, announcing conversion and the message of the Gospel to all creatures. (*Convert and believe the Gospel*).
- Secular Franciscans, while not “religious” in the strict sense, are committed by means of a real and personal “religious” profession to witnessing to the saving power of the Gospel by uniting ourselves to the apostolate of the Brothers of the First Order and to the contemplation of the Poor Clares⁷.

While most public associations within the Church are created by the Church Hierarchy (Bishops), which endows them with a juridic [legal under Canon Law] personality and assigns them a canonical mission within a specific jurisdiction (generally a diocese), the Secular

⁷ So Francis could accomplish the mission entrusted to him, Christ worked in him “a marvelous work” by conforming him to Himself in life and death (LMj, Chapter XIV, 4); and to continue this, He inspired him to give life to a threefold militia (the knights of the dream of Spoleto, LMj, Chapter I, 3).

The First Order to make the apostolic life flourish;

The Second Order to give new energy to the contemplative life achieved through prayer and sacrifice;

The Third Order to restore family and social life from within and with people committed to live the Gospel values in the world.

All three Orders are heirs of Francis’ original mission and his charism to accomplish this mission. As stated by Pope Paul VI: “The vision of Innocent III of Francis sustaining the Lateran basilica, that is the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, in its historical and central, hierarchical and Roman expression, discerned the vocation and mission of the great Franciscan family, “ (The General Chapter OFM, 23/6/1967).

C. Piacitelli, OFM

Franciscan Order exists as a deliberate act of will of the whole Church, created by the Holy See, and is connected to the evangelical mission of the Church in the world. Thus our juridic personality is derived directly from the Holy Father.

The Hierarchy (Bishops) of the Church generally does not intervene in the life of the Secular Franciscan Order, its governance, in its electoral process or in its civil identity, although the local ordinary does exercise oversight of the OFS to help insure our fidelity to the Church.

Likewise, by privilege granted by the Holy See, the OFS has freely bound itself to the brothers of the First Order and TOR in a relationship of equal and vital reciprocity (life-giving union) for the support and life of both orders. Our Friar brothers help us to keep the Charism of Francis vibrantly alive. Our commitment is to “Observe the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ,” to remain faithful to our Profession and our Rule of Life, and to further the apostolic activity of the Church.

The Nature of the OFS, then, is not that of a simple third order or public association. We are both one and autonomous (having our own laws); united by a common founder, charism, and mission and by chosen privilege (to the Franciscan Family), while living out our vocation in the secular state. Though we have subdivided into the OFS and TOR, **we, the OFS, remain the original Third Order directly founded by Francis.**

From our Holy Rule, our goal in life is to flow between the Gospel and Life, not just as an academic exercise of studying the Gospels, but in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, and to discover the Living God present in all creation, as beauty and ultimate goodness (love).

As we reach the end of this section on the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order, it is important to reflect on **profession** and **sense of belonging** both to the Order and to the greater Franciscan Family. It is paramount to our survival as a unified and autonomous order.

Choosing profession into the OFS is a deliberate choice for Jesus and a promise to embrace the Gospel and His way of Life after the manner of Francis of Assisi.

So, like Jesus and Francis, we are invited to consecrate ourselves to live the Gospel and to respond with love for all so we can be instruments of peace.

Comparison Between a “Third Order” and the Secular Franciscan Order

A Third Order	The Secular Franciscan Order
Affiliated, associated to a religious house (e.g., Benedictine, Dominican, Carmelite)	Not affiliated or associated with the Franciscan First Order or the Third Order Regular (TOR). The OFS is autonomous and is equal and complementary to the other Orders of the Franciscan Family.
Participates in the spirit of the religious house to which it is associated	The OFS is part of the religious family founded by Francis of Assisi, in its three-fold articulation, and participates in the spirit of the entire Family. It is not simply a single part of it, as the OFS is a direct depository of the common charism of our common Seraphic Father. It is equally and directly Franciscan from its beginning, as are the other orders within the Franciscan Family.
It exists under the authority of a religious house	The OFS began an autonomous entity and remains so, under the authority of the Holy See, who has entrusted assistance to the OFS and vigilance to the First Order and the TOR
A member of a religious institute (house) may belong to the third order of other religious house without any incompatibility	OFS General Constitutions contemplates the exact opposite, i.e., exclusivity via perpetual profession (Gen Const Art. 2.1). <i>The vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members. Therefore, those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life cannot belong to the OFS.</i>
The same individual may belong to the third orders of several different religious houses without any special authorization.	Contradicts Gen Const Art 2.1 cited above
Any religious institute/house may have its own third order without requesting any privilege of the Holy See.	The OFS is created and granted its juridic persona by the Supreme Pontiff, not by any religious house. None of the Franciscan First Orders nor the TOR hold the OFS as its own third order. The single OFS is its own entity and has the privilege of being assisted collegially by its own brother religious rather than by local bishops

Structure and Governance

Today the OFS has a **centralized structure of government** [see Structure of OFS – Appendix 2 on page 145]. It has acquired the self-awareness of being a single Fraternity [comprising all levels of fraternity] with respect to its structure and has decided to overcome the divisions that occurred within the First Order.

Governance is accomplished through the fraternity councils at the various levels in a relationship of collegiality and consensus, with most activities being conducted at the lowest possible level (called subsidiarity), to afford the local fraternity the highest degree of flexibility within the Order.

Higher levels of fraternity exist to animate and guide the lower level (local) fraternities. They intervene only when an issue cannot be resolved at a lower level or when it involves more than one fraternity.

We must become fully aware of this centralized structure of government to acquire the necessary sense of belonging both to our local fraternity and to all the fraternities at higher levels. We live out our profession within our own local fraternity where we are called to serve, but we are also part of the whole Order and may be asked to share our talents and gifts at higher levels of fraternity. We become part of the whole and need to embrace this reality and accept a true sense of belonging at all levels of the order.

Again, let us not forget that **Profession incorporates the person into the Order** (Gen. Const. 42.2 and Preliminary Notes of the Ritual, 14.c), that is, into the Order as a whole, so it is not possible to live in this reality without being aware of all the members that make it up. It is in our awareness of the whole Order that we can grow harmoniously and fully develop our vocation to live as fraternity, to live the charism, and to accomplish our mission.

The nature of governance and authority in the Order should be understood in the Spirit of the two verbs, repeated in our Rule and Constitution: *to animate* and *to guide*. This authority is not to command or to prescribe.

The rule of **subsidiarity**, then, is crucial.

Local Fraternities are the fundamental units of the Order, and in them live our brothers and sisters.

The Fraternities have (and should have) a broad capacity for self-determination and what they are properly able to do. They must do this without undue intrusion of higher levels.

The regional and national governing bodies are liaison and coordination structures designed to offer service and guidance and to guarantee legality. Their primary objective is to serve, link up, coordinate, and, always, animate and guide.

These governing bodies (local, regional and national) have authority, and this authority expresses itself in:

- admitting and receiving to Profession the candidates in the name of the Church;
- presiding over elective Chapters of Fraternities of lower levels;
- the possibility of suspending or removing from office or from the Order;
- the approval of Statutes (local, regional, national and even international);
- performing fraternal visits, where the visitor has the authority and the duty to suggest and sometimes impose measures when the fraternity has violated our governing documents, or where the Rule is manifestly ignored or, in general, when there are objectively serious problems.

It is worth repeating, once again, that the Minister is not the “absolute master” of the Fraternity. This is something that is still not well understood and which needs to be stressed forcefully. **The elected council determines the will of the fraternity; the Minister is the agent who implements the will of the council.** The Minister has only the power to serve the brothers and the sisters, to watch over them and to love them (to animate and guide). (Gen. Const. 31.2)

Let us remind ourselves that St. Francis placed himself below and in service to all his brothers. Similarly, if we place mutual service, guiding and animating our sisters and brothers at the center of all we do in fraternity life, we shall never err.

Appendix I: Public Associations in the Church vs. OFS

PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL according to the Code of Canon Law (CCL):

- Associations erected by the hierarchy as corporations endowed with juridical rights.
 - *canonical erection* by the hierarchy causes the Association to have a public character from its very inception, conferring on it a public juridical personality in the Church.
- The Hierarchy assigns them a canonical mission because these Associations are established to share in the pastoral mission of the Hierarchy.
- They act in the name of the Hierarchy.
- Their property is ecclesiastical.
- They are totally subject to the authority of the pastors:
 - Intervention in appointments and dismissals;
 - Nomination of chaplains or ecclesial assistants;
 - Possibility of appointing commissioners;
 - Statutes of the Association approved by the competent ecclesial authority;
 - Control over property.

As a Public Association of the Christian Faithful, **THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**:

- exists through a deliberate act of the will of the whole Church⁸ (it is the Church, itself, that wants the OFS's existence, inasmuch as the Church considers that it needs the OFS);
- is erected by the Holy See;
- is intimately connected to the life of the Church, from which it receives a specific mission to be carried out in its name, (*in nomine Ecclesiae* = in the name of the Church).

However, looking at our own laws, (General Constitutions, Statutes, etc.) we can underline the following **specific differences** with respect to the Code definitions of Public Associations of Faithful:

1. Hierarchy does not intervene in the nomination and removal of officers: OFS laws allow the election of its own ministers and councilors without the intervention of the Hierarchy. Removal by the hierarchy is obviously possible in extreme cases.
2. Spiritual assistants do not exactly identify with the ecclesiastical assistants as described in the Code. Moreover, by a special *privilege* granted to the OFS by the Holy See, our spiritual assistants are appointed by the Major Superiors or by the General Ministers of the First Order and Third Order Regular, on the request of the Fraternities, and not by imposition of the First Order or Third Order Regular.
3. The Rule and the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order are approved by the Holy See. Statutes are approved by Secular Franciscans functioning at appropriate levels (e.g., International, National, Regional Councils).

⁸ Stated and confirmed by the Church for eight centuries.

4. The functions and control of property belong to the OFS. Only in case of disputes or of extinction of the Association as a whole, would the Hierarchy dispose of the properties.

In the context of the Code of Canon Law, the general definition of Association (Can 298 § 1⁹) indicates that the purpose of Associations is to enable the Christian faithful *to be more or to do more*¹⁰.

A Third Order (Can 303) is defined as an association whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection¹¹, living according to the spirituality of the religious institution which guides them. (A Boni, Quaderno Compi N. 6, FEDELI LAICI FRANCESCANI, 1990, page 54).

Being defined by the Church itself as a Public Association of Faithful (PAF) tells us that we are vital to the Church, by helping Her to fulfill Her canonical mission; a mission which for us coincides with the mission of the Franciscan family and finds its specific expression in the Rule (sections 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19) and in the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order (CC. GG). The entire Title II of the CC.GG. (Articles 17-27) most clearly explains our mission and the articles from 99 to 103 complete the description.

So as a Public Association of the Faithful/Third Order, the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS General Constitutions Art 1.5 & 99.2) has the following characteristics:

- The OFS is, in canon law, an Association of the Christian Faithful, which is universal, constituted by the faithful and erected under the personal authority of the Supreme Pontiff.
- As a Public Association, the OFS enjoys *the privilege* of being assisted pastorally and spiritually by its brothers of the First Order and the TOR, rather than by the Bishops, though remaining under their jurisdiction for apostolic activities in their respective dioceses (article CC.GG 101.2).
- The OFS is autonomous (has its own law) and united, living in fullness its secularity, to completely fulfill its role in the common mission of the Franciscan Family.
- These three features, **autonomy, unity, and secularity** are the essential characteristics that make up the constitutive elements of the nature of the OFS.

The OFS is and will always be “the” Third Franciscan Order, in an uninterrupted continuity with the one founded by St Francis. It is and functions as a “privileged Public Association.”

The OFS, within the Church, is placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Society of Apostolic Life (for the internal life of the OFS itself) and under the Pontifical Council for the Laity (for the apostolic life on a world-wide level).

⁹ Can 298 - §1. In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavour to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit.

¹⁰ By this, it is meant to strive just for spiritual perfection or for more concrete apostolic work.

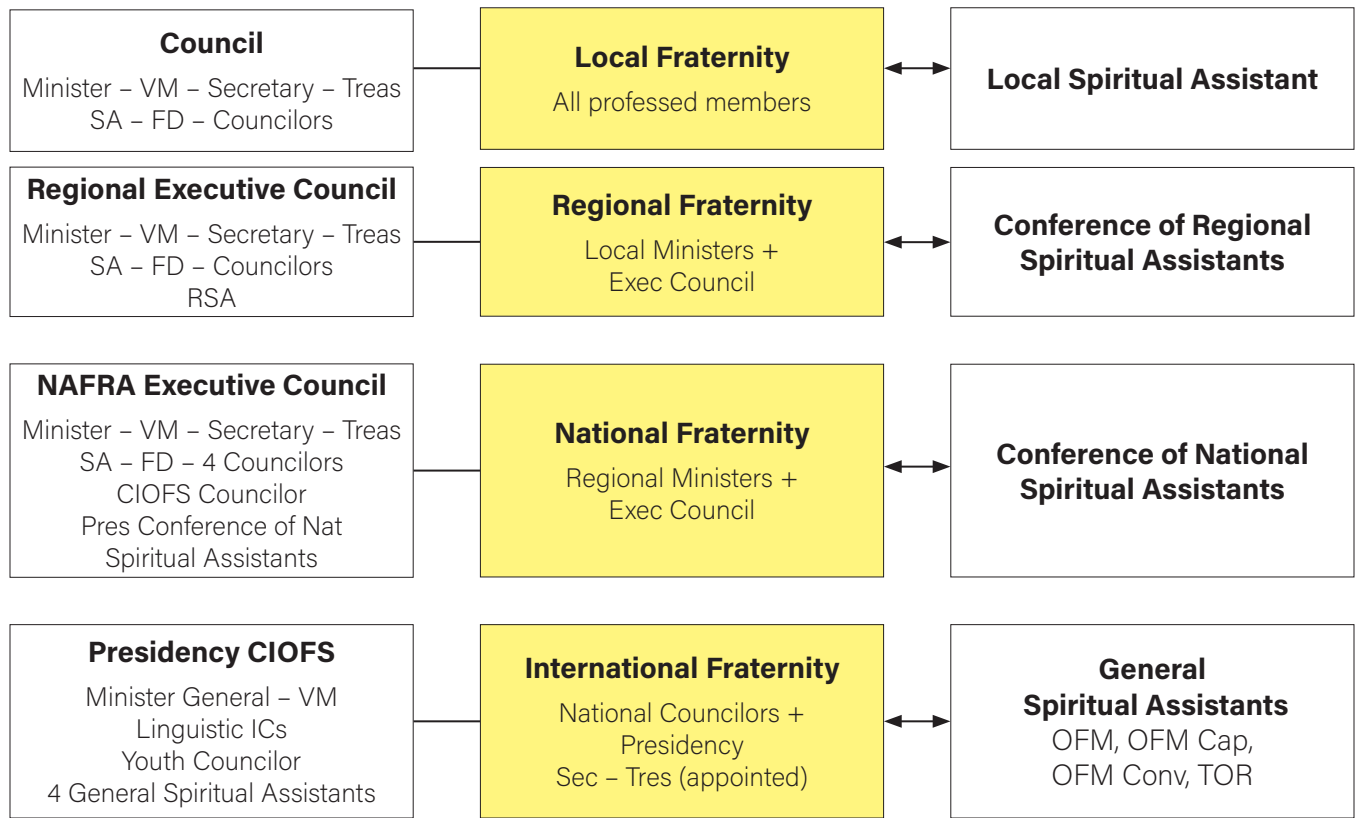
¹¹ A necessary aim for all the baptized, regardless of whether they are a member of any group, secular or religious.

Embracing our identity as Secular Franciscans involves understanding who we are, as an association, as an Order, and as an autonomous branch within the Franciscan Family, and what our role/mission is in service to the universal mission of the Church.

The Papal Bull, *Supra Montem* in 1289, is our officially recognized ratification by the Holy See, for the OFS, our *Regula Bullata* [Rule with Papal Seal].

Our new Rule, [Pope Paul VI, 1978] reaffirmed and reestablished our ancient reality and grounded us firmly on the dignity of our baptismal state, insofar as it can lead to perfect love of God and man and help the Secular Franciscan Order transition into the modern world.

Appendix 2: Structure and Governance of the Secular Franciscan Order



The center column in yellow denotes the physical structure of the Order, beginning with the local fraternity; the basic unit of the Order, and the different levels of fraternity from Local to the International level. The Council and the Spiritual Assistant's columns show the governance structure of the Order, also from local to international levels. The Spiritual Assistance of our Order is provided to us at the request of the Holy See and with our concurrence.

The Vocation, Charism, and Mission of Secular Franciscans

This segment on Vocation, Charism and Mission of Secular Franciscans is based on the work of our brother Benedetto Lino, OFS, coordinator of the Formation Commission of our International Presidency.

This material, originally released in The CIOFS “Forming the Formators” manual, has been adapted in part for use by the OFS in the USA, by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS, National Formation Chair of the National Fraternity of the United States.

We owe a great debt of gratitude to all our brothers and sisters, at all levels of fraternity, who for the love of our Order have participated in this formation project.

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Forward

Too often, especially in the past, candidates have been admitted into the Order simply “because they were good and pious people” or because they held in great esteem some holy friar, or simply because they liked Saint Francis.

Often people ask to enter the Order because they feel lonely or because they need to feel part of a group or simply out of devotion.

Obviously, this is not enough. Quite the opposite....

Entering into a “form of life” such as the Franciscan form of life is not only one of the many “optional” decisions we make in our lives. It is the result of a very precise call of God to become Franciscan, with a very precise purpose.

Becoming a Secular Franciscan is, must be, the result of an authentic vocation. Along with it comes a precise mission, in communion with the entire Franciscan Family, sustained by the very charism of Saint Francis, which enables us to accomplish the mission in our secular state.

It is absolutely necessary to rediscover and to live to its full extent the vocational dimension of our being members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

It is no longer acceptable to become a Secular Franciscan out of devotion or without a true and authentic vocation. In the absence of a real vocation, there are many ways to share in Saint Francis’ spirituality and in our own secular Franciscan spirituality without entering the Order.

*Benedetto Lino, OFS
Coordinator
Formation Commission
International Presidency
Rome 2008*

Overview

Vocation

It is God who calls. We are not the ones who choose.
Called to Life.
Called to life in Christ. Acceptance of revelation.
Called to Holiness, which is sharing in the Life of God.
Called to a state: *lay ordained, religious, secular*.
Called to the Franciscan way.
Discernment of vocation.

Charism

Charisms
Charism of the Founder and of the Institute.
Charism of Saint Francis.
Franciscan spirituality (apostolic religious, contemplative religious, apostolic lay secular).
Franciscan Spirituality in its secular expression.

Mission

“*Go Francis repair my house*” in the Franciscan Trilogy.
“*Missio in nomine Ecclesiae*” in the Public Associations of Christian Faithful.
“*Make present the charism of Saint Francis in the life and in the mission of the Church* (Rule 1):
“They should be recognized by their ‘being’ from which their mission springs” (General Constitutions - 100).
Live in “communion” with the Church and the world.

The Vocation

The vocation, the call, of the Secular Franciscan was thoroughly discussed in the section titled “Vocation,” so it will be addressed only briefly and summarized here. The goal and intention of this section is to look at our Charism, which stems from our spiritual insights and vision of our Founder, St. Francis, and to understand our mission within the Holy Church.

So let us first begin with a brief revisiting of vocation, then on to our major topics of the Charism and Mission of the Secular Franciscan Order.

“*I want love, not sacrifices, not offerings, but COMMUNION with ME, says the Lord.*”
(Antiphon of Psalm 49, Monday, Week 3, Office of Readings)

It is not possible to speak of *vocation* without reference to *Communion*. Communion is the **aim** of the call of God (the vocation); the **foundation** of our **hope**, the object of our **faith** (communion with God), and the immediate and ultimate accomplishment of the sense of life (**love** with God and with each other).

St. Paul exhorts us strongly in this direction:

“May he enlighten the eyes of your mind so that you can see what **hope** his call holds for you, how rich is the glory of the **heritage** he offers among his holy people...” because “there is only one **hope** to which you are **called**, the one of your **vocation**” (Eph 1:18-19; 4:4).

Through Revelation, we know that **God is Love**.

But in order for the love of God to reach his goal (the vital sharing of His life with his creatures [the Other, each of us], it is necessary that we exist, (*ex-sistere* = to be outside) and also for us to realize our complete “otherness” from God. Once we accept our “otherness,” free will and our specific choice come into focus. Each of us needs to choose for or against entering into and developing a deepening relationship with the God who is our loving Father.

This is, therefore, the PLAN OF THE FATHER—the inconceivable, the Eternal, the Infinite, who “thinks” of us from the beginning as the focus of his love and calls us to life to exist and to share eternally in His Life, His Divinity! It is unparalleled, hard to grasp and understand that God loves and desires us!

In the Son, God creates us, and in Jesus He “assumes” the fullness of our Humanity, individually and collectively, so that all human beings, individually and collectively, may, by His Grace, “be made God-like,” that is, become, by Grace, what we are not by nature.

This is what we are radically “**called**” to be, to enter into relationship with God and to transform ourselves to be God-like. St. Francis exhorts us to become imitators of Jesus and to conform ourselves to Him.

But only through our free acceptance of this relationship of receiving and reciprocating God’s love and his grace can He introduce us into the sharing of his own life. This is living in imitation of the divine mutual relationship shared between the Father and His Beloved Son, Jesus.

This is our **VOCATION—the irrevocable call to sanctity, the sharing in the life of God**.

For this reason, each of us is **called** by God during our lifetime to exercise a *fundamental option*¹: to accept or refuse this relationship, to accept or refuse his love; in practice, to accept or refuse God himself.

To develop our reflection on vocation, I would like to propose two Gospel passages on which we can meditate together. One is about the *Rich Young Man* (Mt 19:16-26) and the other is about the *Gerasene Demoniac* (Mk 5:1-20) and (Lk 8:26-39).²

¹ The fundamental option is a person’s basic orientation in life, either for or against God. This orientation is directed by a person’s actions. See also, John Paul II Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor* 66-67, 1993.

² For this section and the following on the “call to perfection,” I depend on the work of Fr. Andrea Boni, OFM..

The Rich Young Man (Mt 19:16-26)

A rich young man goes to the Lord and asks what he has to do to gain eternal life (Mt 19:16-26). *You have to observe the commandments*, says the Lord. *But I do observe them. Have I missed anything?* No, he hasn't: He who observes the commandments, who performs his duties, who is a good father to the family, etc., will gain eternal life and will go to paradise. There is no doubt.

The Lord looks at him and says: *you are lacking one thing. **If you want to be perfect*** [this is the key word], *go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, then **come and follow me.***

This was a true “religious” **vocation**. This was God’s project for him.

The Gerasine Demoniac (Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-39)

They came to Jesus and saw the demoniac sitting there, clothed and in his full senses ... As he [Jesus] was getting into the boat the man who had been possessed with demons *begged to be allowed to stay with him. He would not let him, but said: “Go home to your people and tell them all that the Lord has done for you and how he has had mercy on you.”* So he went and began to proclaim throughout the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him, and everyone was amazed.”

This is a typical “secular” vocation: to remain in the “world” and proclaim God’s good news. Two different, but identically “perfect,” types of vocation and discipleship.

The Specific Franciscan Vocation

Are you called to be a Franciscan? To answer this question of vocation, you must first understand the essential elements of the ***Charism of St. Francis and how they grew into Franciscan Spirituality.***

Every human being needs to give meaning to his/her life, to find the origin of his/her life, to find a father; *the Father, the giver of Life*. Man, ultimately, searches for the Father, the origin of Life and for his perfect realization of Him.

Jesus, the beloved Son, is *the Way, the Truth, and the Life*. Jesus is the One who points us in the right direction and leads us to the Father. St. Francis understood this and realized that in imitating Jesus we are uniting ourselves to the One who draws us into relationship with the Father.

The world is searching for Christ and finds in the life of Francis the living, vibrant, and fully understandable representation of Jesus, present in both historical and human form. This is why people feel attracted by Francis.

All that Francis did and what he became were the result of his *imitatio Christi* (imitation of Christ). Francis became an *alter Christus* (another Christ). This desire to imitate Jesus fully is what has inspired countless generations and attracted many to Francis' vision of Gospel life.

Being attracted, however, does not necessarily correspond to a vocation to bind oneself permanently into a "consecrated" Franciscan "religious" or "secular" form of life. An accurate discernment is necessary. It is necessary to understand, with the help of God, what He wants from us.

One can be inspired by Francis but not be destined to serve in a consecrated (religious or secular) Franciscan form of life.

Francis was chosen by God as an example, a model, for the entire People of God, for all mankind, not only for the "Franciscans."

To understand whether we have a genuine Franciscan Vocation, it is essential **to know Francis** and to strip away feelings based on romanticism and sentimentalism so we are free to discern whether we are being asked by God to follow in Francis' way.

To have a real Franciscan Vocation means to be called **to take the same path of identification and total conformity** that Francis took with *his Christ*.

To have a genuine Franciscan Vocation, whether religious apostolic, contemplative, or secular, means to verify our own availability to fully embrace this path.

This FRANCISCAN WAY requires:

- following Jesus without reservation in the footsteps of Saint Francis. In other words, to be ready, in our specific state of life, to follow Jesus just as Francis did;
- discovering, accepting and developing within ourselves the same Charism received by Saint Francis, making it present and bringing it to fruition in the world.

This spiritual "style" entails:

- a very intense *Eucharistic spirituality* (*kénosis* = self-emptying);
- a very strong *fraternal communion* – mutual equality;
- *simplicity*;
- love of *poverty*;
- *humility*;
- a genuine sense of *minority, or littleness* – *seeking to serve and not to be served*;
- a complete and active abandonment to God, which is demonstrated by *obedience*, particularly to the Church.

To have an authentic Franciscan Vocation means to desire to embrace these attitudes and behaviors that characterize our form of life; this charism-mission, this spirituality.

Those who, through proper discernment, recognize that their life's call and desire is to embrace this way of life, may express their commitment through a **public, solemn, and perpetual commitment** (Profession) before God and the Church.

This is the case for all Franciscans of the First, Second, and Third Orders.

The Franciscan vocation, therefore, is to be carefully discerned according to the letter and the spirit of the Rule to which the specific vocation refers.

Secular Franciscans, should refer particularly to:

- The entire Chapter 2 of the Rule.
- Articles 37:2-3; 38:1; 40: 1-2; of the CCGG (General Constitutions);
- Title I of Chapter 2 of the CCGG.

VOCATION, CHARISM, and MISSION are facets of this life and are linked, one to the other. Each of them presupposes and prepares the other.

Charism

It is a common observation that we all have *natural inclinations* toward certain things rather than others, and that we are attracted towards certain projects more than others. This being *inclined* is already a gift; it is the gift of perceiving life and the world around us in a specific way.

It is also a specific way to relate to reality. It is a way of being, a way of behaving, a personal "flavor" originating from this perception.

We consider these gifts as a specific *charism*, a seed God has planted in each of us that calls us to "*be that person who God intends and hopes we will be.*"

The Rule of the OFS begins by saying (Article 1):

"The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the People of God – laity, religious and priests – who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

*In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend **to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.**"*

We have just read that we Franciscans, all of us, have to make present in the world of our specific time, the **charism of St. Francis**. To accomplish this task, it is essential for us to understand the nature of the Franciscan Charism.

The word *charism* is not widely used today and is often less understood. It remained, for a long time, a way to speak only about the exceptional gifts of the Holy Spirit that were need-

ed to build up the early Church. The word charism began to be used in the last century and became commonly used just before the Second Vatican Council.

Let us now see what the Church (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* - CCC) teaches about charisms:

799. “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.

800. **Charisms** are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic prompting of the same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charism.³

801. It is in this sense that **discernment of charisms** is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church’s shepherds. “Their office is not indeed to extinguish the Spirit but to test all things, and hold fast to what is good,”⁴ so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together for the common good. (1 Cor 12:7)⁵

2684. In the communion of saints, many and varied spiritualities have been developed throughout the history of the churches. The **personal charism** of some witnesses to God’s love for men has been handed on, like the spirit of Elijah to Elisha⁶ and John the Baptist⁷, so that their followers may have a share in this spirit...⁸

A distinct spirituality can also arise at the point of convergence of liturgical or theological currents, becoming witness to the integration of the faith into a particular human environment and its history.

The different schools of Christian spirituality in the living tradition of prayer and are essential guides for the faithful. In their rich diversity they are refractions of the one pure light of the Holy Spirit.”

³ Cf 1Cor 13

⁴ *Lumen Gentium* (LG) 12

⁵ *Christifideles Laici* (CfL) 24

⁶ 2 Kings 2, 9

⁷ Luke 1:17

⁸ PC 2 (*Perfectae Caritatis* 2 – II Vatican Council Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life)

This last point leads us into the following themes, which intimately concerns us, i.e., the **charism of the founder** and what today, in theology, is called the **charism of the Institute or of the members of the Institute, (or for us as Secular Franciscans, Our Order)**.

The Charism of the Founder

The charism of the founder is the gift (or gifts) particularly granted by God to a believer which leads to the foundation of an Institute or religious movement, and which includes a **specific way of being** through the specific spiritual experiences that God grants to him.

The Charism of the Institute or of the Members of the Institute

The charism of the institute is the specific **mission**, the **goal**, the **apostolic task** of the members of an Institute, **transmitted by the Founder**, who, by **his example** and **his life**, draws and convinces others to follow him.

The members receive the **particular grace** of vocation to **follow this life experience** and, in some way, to **be associated to the charism of the Founder**.

The charism of the founder is, therefore, “transmitted” to his followers. We say, for instance, that the charism of Saint Francis has been transmitted to the members of the Franciscan Family, hence, also to the Secular Franciscans, *directly* from Francis.

But how can the *personal gift* (charism) of a founder be transmitted? How can a founder himself transmit it? Does it not come directly from God?

The charismatic personality of a founder is certainly *unrepeatable*. This does not mean, however, that his experience necessarily has to remain confined to the period in which the founder lived. Thus, in some way, the charism of the founder is preserved and passed down to subsequent generations of members, allowing the **unrepeatable to live on**.

The Religious Institute, generally through its specific Rule of Life, offers the way the charism is transmitted and made available to future generations the course of history (Karl Rahner).

Here we can see an **analogy** between 1) **Incarnation** and its **continuation** by the Church and 2) **Charism** and its **continuation** in the followers of a founder. Both occur by the action of the Holy Spirit: one, continuation of Incarnation in the faithful through **Baptism**, and the other, continuation of charism in the followers through **Profession**.

This is how **the same charism** of the founder, given as pure gift by the Holy Spirit to support the mission of the Church (in accomplishing of God’s eternal project), is transmitted (made repeatable) and *continued* in the followers.

Let’s now return to Saint Francis. **What is his “charism”?**

It is difficult to explain, and harder yet to define in a few sentences, a “living” entity such as a *charism*. Simply put, it is a God-given gift that is capable of re-shaping a person’s way of being, for his/her entire life. Francis is a living example of how a life may be re-shaped if offered into the hands of the Father.

For this section of the presentation I am largely indebted to the inspiring work of a great friend of the Secular Franciscan Order, Fr. Cristoforo Piacitelli, OFM.⁹

The Charism of Francis and His Family

The *mission* to which Francis was called had an exceptional character, and, as far as we know, it has remained unique in the history of the Church.

To an **exceptional mission**, there must be a corresponding **extraordinary charism** to accomplish it. This cannot be one or more virtues lived heroically, but a comprehensive gift that radically re-shapes a person’s whole life, in all its expressions, and which prepares it for a specific mission.

St. Bonaventure writes about Francis: “Surely he was the most Christ-like of men! His only desire was to be like Christ and imitate him perfectly, and he was found worthy to be adorned with the marks of his likeness; in his life he imitated the life of Christ, and in his death he imitated his death, and he wished to be like him still when he was dead.” (LMj XIV, 4¹⁰)

But what is the existential characteristic of **Christ**, the very essence of His life? This characteristic cannot but be that of “**being Son**,” the Son of the Father (NMI 24¹¹). His personality is a “son-like” personality. This filial quality penetrates the depth of his mystery.

We Franciscans understand the charism with which the Holy Spirit has endowed Francis as the **experience (ability) of truly feeling to be a “son” in the hands of the heavenly Father**, just like Jesus is Son.

Hence, Francis, by gift, came to think with the mind of the *son*, see with the eyes of the *son*, love with the heart of the *son*, and act with the abandonment and dedication of the *son*. This son-like love for all the Father creates enabled Francis to see all creation in terms of brothers and sisters. Those who would follow Francis are called to bring life to *fraternity* under the gaze of the heavenly Father. By virtue of this most particular gift that conforms him to Christ, who is *founder* of the Church, Francis can be the one who can “*repair*” the Church.

⁹ Fr. Cristoforo served for many years as National Spiritual Assistant of the OFS. This subject is treated in his two books: *La spiritualità del Francescano secolare*, Ed. Imprimenda, 2008, and *Con san Francesco n el mondo per il mondo* Collana Tau, 2003.

¹⁰ *Major Legend* by St. Bonaventure, Section XIV # 4

¹¹ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II, 2001

Francis' **charism**, therefore, at its fundamental core, consists of a **strong and radical son-like experience**, which is manifested in the joyful, loving, and trustful attitude of readiness to do the will of the heavenly Father. Francis used to say "*I desire to be found always and completely in harmony with and obedient to God's will alone in everything*" (1C, 2nd Book, VII, 107¹²), just like Jesus the Son, who said: "My food is to do the will of Him who sent me and to accomplish His work." (Jn 4:34)

The great and special gift Francis received was to be able *to perceive and to live in an exceptional manner*. Fundamental to his life was Francis' understanding of God's humility: the Father's total **self-surrender or complete self-giving [kénosis]**, exemplified by the Son.

Francis perceived and experienced the Father's *emptying and total giving of Self (kénosis)* with an unprecedented intensity. Francis understood that the **essence/nature of God is to pour Himself out in love for all His creatures**. This is God's desire, His original intention to enter into a lover/beloved relationship with mankind.

O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary piece of bread! (LtOrd 27)

This was the gift Francis was given: to perceive, as never before, God's own *humble essence*, the *depth of His love without reservation*, His *poverty*, His *simplicity* and all the consequences that derive from all this, which then became the lived experience and practices of Francis' life.

Jesus, *the beloved Son*, who is *the Way, the Truth and the Life*, is Francis' only **model**—the **mediator** between the God of Love and the world. Jesus, who incarnates the Father. Jesus, who has made the Father visible, audible, touchable (1Jn 1:1-3 and Jn 14:8-11).

Francis is totally focused on Jesus and unceasingly contemplates Jesus' total giving of Himself (*kénosis*) in the Incarnation: in the Manger, on the Cross, and in the Eucharist.

Francis perceives in the Incarnation, "*human-ation*" (Lat. *humus*=earth, soil – from which derive *hum-ility* and *hum-ble*); God taking on the matter of the earth and entering fully into human history, which unifies the vital sharing of God and all Creation, for the sake of Love. From this intuition comes all the typical Franciscan traits: the deep respect of all creatures, animate and inanimate, which are (by virtue of this vital sharing in God's life) brothers and sisters of Christ himself, and hence our brothers and sisters.

⁹ Celano's "First Life of St Francis"

God has given Francis the gift of this living intuition, and with this gift the grace to conform himself to the Son, a conformation that resulted in the imprinting in his flesh the signs of the Passion of Christ (stigmata).

In this sense, we now understand the Popes' affirmation of Francis being an *alter Christus*, "another Christ." Francis is not Christ. He remains always *alter* (other); however, he has become *christiform* (Christ-like) to a degree that no one else has ever reached.

This is the gift. This is the *Charism*.

Francis accepted, without reservation, being guided and molded by the Grace of the gift: *This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart* (1C, 1st Book, IX, 22).

From the living *charism* of Saint Francis, we have come to understand certain practices and behaviors, specific ways of being and of relating to God, i.e., a *spirituality* that we call "Franciscan."

This ***spirituality*** is characterized especially by:

- *An intense Eucharistic life* (contemplation of God's *kénosis*);
- *Poverty* (the consequence of *kénosis*);
- *Minority-Humility*, the consequence of *kénosis*;
- *Simplicity*¹³;
- *Obedience*, to conform to the eternal project of the Father¹⁴;
- *Chastity*¹⁵;
- *Fraternity*, as the specific characterizing element, also in its universal and cosmic implications, to be lived with special intensity;
- *The Franciscan evangelical radicality*, as the specific way Saint Francis followed the total Christ in simplicity and *sine glossa*¹⁶ (without splitting hairs on Gospel interpretation taking away, watering down, or adding to it).

All of us, the children of Francis (First, Second, Third Order), are called to **participate** in his exceptional gift (charism) and to continue his mission. Francis shows us the way

¹³ All can, and must, be referred to the single simple act of God's love: His complete donation of Self. God is simple. We render Him complicated. This is the reason Francis insists on implementing the Gospel, *sine glossa* (without adding anything to it). This is not aversion to study, but simply an exhortation to pick the essential, the simplicity of God, avoiding all that makes him complicated to our eyes, less understandable, remote. Moving away from the simplicity of God, His burning Love will crystallize in streams of colder and colder commandments, precepts, norms, which will eventually solidify and become incapable of generating life.

¹⁴ An essential characteristic of the spirituality of Francis is his obedience to the Church. In it, he recognizes the presence of Christ's Spirit in its fullness. His obedience to the Church and to its representatives is total, and he never stops exhorting his friars to be "catholic." For Francis, the Church is the infallible mediator through which he receives the confirmation of the goodness of the journey on which he has embarked. Her sacred pastors, the priests, the bishops, the Pope, are the object of his veneration, because Francis is rooted in the belief that there is no Church without Eucharist, and there is no Eucharist without those who consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ.

¹⁵ God donates Himself completely. What else can we desire? God alone is sufficient, there should be no more place in us after the inrush of God's fullness into our life. In Him we are made able to love everybody, much more and much better.

¹⁶ *Sine glossa* – without gloss, e.g., interpreting Scripture to prove our preconceived idea or reinforce our own position.

to follow, to fully live our vocation and effectively accomplish the mission entrusted, through him, to all of us.

Pope Pius IX reminds us of this in his prayer by the tomb of St. Francis: “You [Francis] entrusted the reforming mission to your children who responded well to this high task” (8/5/1857).

Deepening Our Understanding of the Franciscan Vocation

After this short introduction to *Charism*, we can resume the discourse already begun on the “*Specific Franciscan Vocation*.”

A truly “specific” vocation requires that we understand the deep reasons for our attraction to Francis. First, to desire and seek the same Jesus “found” by Saint Francis and then to ask whether we are ready to develop the same kind of “relationship” with Jesus that Francis lived.

If we are ready, we will discover in ourselves the germ of the *charism*, and gradually God’s desire for us will manifest itself more and more clearly.

If we find the humble God, the simple God, the servant God, the God who has emptied himself, and if we find him in the Son, and if in finding him, we make him not only an object of intellectual reflection but manage somehow to make Him the foundation of our life and practice, as Francis did, then this is Franciscan vocation.

Francis’ *charism*, then, starts working in us to transform us and enable us to undertake and continue his original mission, in a *personal* way, blending this *charism* into our own unique lives and making it our own.

If we have made the right discernment, however, we have to make sure we follow through and make every effort to fully develop our vocation. We cannot be apathetic or hesitant about living this *charism*; if we are not committed, then it is not a vocation.

“**Receiving his charism,**” therefore, means:

- **Receiving Francis** as our model, constant inspiration, spiritual brother, and guide;
- Receiving and accepting him enables us to **receive his “spirit”** in a way similar to the “two-thirds of the spirit” of Elijah, as requested by Elisha (2Kings 2, 9).

Together with **the Charism of Francis**, we also receive some fundamental gifts to fulfill our *vocation* and to accomplish our *mission* in the Franciscan way of life:

- A **special grace** God bestows on his children to help them and enable them to carry out this type of following and mission. This is a form of *grace particular to this new state of life*, springing from our Profession, which is a true and real life-long *nuptial*

alliance with God. This grace is the gift of the Spouse: we give our life to Him; He responds and gives His totally to us.

- Profession is a *liturgical* act: it realizes what it signifies. For this, a special gift of grace accompanies this consecration of ourselves.
- We receive **the intercession of Saint Francis**, whose spiritual children we become.
- We are **included** in the **reciprocal vital communion** of the whole Franciscan Family of today and of all times.

This new gift we have received in our call is added to all other particular gifts we have already received. “*Our personal charism*” makes us those unique persons whom God has loved and desired from eternity.

Mission

After dealing with Charism, it is necessary to examine the Mission of St. Francis and of his Family: TO REPAIR THE CHURCH (HOUSE).

This “mission” of Saint Francis, which at first looks so *generic* and *all inclusive*, is, in fact, Saint Francis’ “**specific**” Mission.

Jesus Christ Himself indicated the mission to Francis in the San Damiano Chapel when Francis “*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*” (LMj II, 1).

In that moment, Francis understood his mission and what would eventually become the mission of the whole Franciscan Family.¹⁷

What is the House-Church, and how is it repaired?

It is the Body of Christ. In it, Christ is the head; we are the members. But if the house is the Body of Christ, it can only be repaired with Christ Himself, through His Spirit!

The House-Church, Body of Christ, is healthy when those who look at it, and those who live in it, see the person of Jesus and, seeing Jesus, see and “hear” the Father. “Show us the Father, and it will be enough for us.” “Whoever has seen me, has seen the Father” (Jn 14: 8-9). To see the face of Christ, Way, Truth and Life (NMI 16 & ff), means to be on the way towards the Father, means to see the Father.

¹⁷ Paul VI reminds us: “*The vision of Innocent III is of Francis who is supporting the Lateran Basilica, in other words the Church, the mystical body of Christ in his historical and central, unified, hierarchical and Roman expression, has divined the vocation and mission of the great Franciscan family.*” (OFM General Chapter 23/6/1067)

He repeated to the Secular Franciscans: “*We hope and trust that the visible and human Church will be supported by you especially, dear tertiaries,*” recalling the vision of Innocent III (19/05/1971).

Francis repaired the Church “*not by way of criticism but by way of sanctity.*” “*His charism and prophetic mission were to demonstrate concretely and in an exemplary way that the Gospel is entrusted to the Church, and that it has to be lived and incarnated fully and in an exemplary way in the Church and with the approval of the Church.*” John Paul II, Message to the Franciscan Vigil in St. Peter’s 2/10/1982. See also Fr. Cristoforo Piacitelli, OFM, *Con Francesco nel mondo per il mondo.*, page 13, Collana Tau 2003.

“We want to see Jesus” (Jn 12:21).

This is what the man of the first century asked. This is what the man of the thirteenth century asked as well. **Today, this is still what we are asking.** This is what every creature asks for all eternity.

Now, as we look at Francis, we see Christ! Francis has become a *sacrament of Christ...* and Christ leads us to the Father.

It is essential, therefore, for us to rediscover or maybe discover for the first time, that at the very center of our charism is the heavenly Father (centrality of the Father) and to understand its importance for our spiritual journey and the realization of the mission.

This is the journey that Francis, guided by the Spirit, has done and what we have to do. Therefore, we must commit ourselves to become, feel, and behave as true *“children”*; to discover the infinite richness of the Father and draw from it the capacity to love, to give, and to forgive.

Jesus Himself wants the Father to be the norm and model, the inspiration and aim of all human beings. *“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”* (Mt 5:48; NMI 31)

This invitation carries with it a special meaning and responsibility for us, the children of Francis, whom the Spirit has endowed with the **special charism of sonship**. We are called to conform to the Son and to listen with a filial heart when He speaks to us of the Father and proposes to us the attitudes to imitate.

We now understand that there are no limits in the scope of the mission of Secular Franciscans, which is to enhance and support the Mission of the Church to the whole world.

We Secular Franciscans have to make ourselves available, like Francis, every time the Church calls, every time there is something, anything, 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 for nature, youth to love and to accompany, places to catechize, Liturgies to animate, and Christian communities to support in anything they might need, etc. These are the places where Secular Franciscans need to be found! There are no limits!

The children of Francis must continue his mission! What a responsibility!

Appendix 1 - Basic Sigma and Abbreviations

Writings of Saint Francis

Adm - Admonitions

2EpFid - Letter to all the Faithful, second red.

EpOrd - Letter to the Entire Order

FormViv - The "Form of Life" (to Saint Clare)

RegB - The Confirmed Rule (1223)

RegNB - The Unconfirmed Rule (1221)

SalBMV - Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Test - Testament

Writings of Saint Clare

BCl - Blessing of Saint Clare

2EpAg - Second Letter to St. Agnes of Prague

3EpAg - Third Letter to St. Agnes of Prague

4EpAg - Fourth Letter to St. Agnes of Prague RegCl - Rule of St. Clare

TestCl - Testament of St. Clare

Other Early Documents

1C or 1Cel - First Life of St. Francis, Thomas of Celano

2C or 2Cel - Second Life of St. Francis, Thomas of Celano

Fior - Fioretti (Little Flowers of St. Francis)

LegCl - Legend of St. Clare

LMj or LegM - Major Life of St. Francis, St. Bonaventure

LP or LegPer - Legend of Perugia

Proc - Canonization Process of St. Clare

SC - *Sacrum Commercium*

Other Documents

NMI - *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, John Paul II, 2001

RegSFO - The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (1978)

VC - *Vita Consecrata*, John Paul II, 1996

Franciscan Movement

Part 1 - The Journey of Francis

and

Part 2 - Your Own Journey

Jan Parker, OFS



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Franciscan Movement One: The Journey of Francis

Note: Those who enter Inquiry should be familiar with the life of St. Francis to some degree. In Orientation they are directed to read an overview of his life, perhaps from *The Digests* or a book such as *The Journey and the Dream* by Murray Bodo.

During Inquiry, and especially for use in this session, it is important that they have read a more scholarly presentation on the life of St. Francis; an example might be *St Francis of Assisi: A Biography* by Omer Englebert. Not all inquirers in the group need to read the same book, as the needs of each individual are to be considered when they are choosing various books about St. Francis.

Purpose

- To facilitate an in-depth study of the life of St. Francis of Assisi.
- To learn how God acted in Francis' life and how Francis responded to God's call.
- To broaden one's knowledge of those who shared in Francis' life and the world in which he lived.
- To come to an understanding of the source of the "Franciscan charism."
- To view the life of St. Francis as the touchstone of one's own call to the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To view a "Lifeline"¹ of St. Francis of Assisi in preparation for making and sharing their own "Lifeline."

Prerequisites

- A biography of St. Francis of Assisi – read prior to this session.
- A copy of the illustrated "Lifeline" of St. Francis and accompanying explanation¹ or the option to create one of your own.
- Discussion questions handed out in advance of this session. Inquirers are asked to reflect on these questions as they read the biography of Francis of Assisi.
- Items needed for the closing prayer service: Bible, San Damiano Cross, candle.
- The formator should have knowledge of "Mutual Invitation"² or similar skills.

Setting

- The discussion should take place in a comfortable, casual setting. Participants face each other in a circle or semicircle or are seated around a table.
- Two hours is minimal to adequately cover the material.

Procedure (Lesson Plan)

- Brief welcome and invocation of the Holy Spirit.
- Invitation to share overall impressions of the reading.

¹ The "Lifeline of St. Francis" illustration and accompanying explanation. See FUN CD

² A description of "Mutual Invitation" see OFS Resource Manual p.72 (also on FUN CD)

- Show the illustrated “Lifeline” of St. Francis³ and accompanying explanation. Post this as a visual aid during discussion.
- Invite all to share thoughts on the Reflection and Discussion Questions.
- Explain their assignment for “Franciscan Movement Two: Our Own Journey.”
- Prior to the Closing Prayer service, give an overview and some instruction to those participating in the service.
- Invitation to Closing Prayer Service.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What incidents from Francis’ life stand out to you? Made the most impact? What could you most relate to?
2. What inspires you about Francis? What puzzles you about him?
3. Discuss the impact Francis had on: his parents, the first brothers (Bernardo, Leo, etc.), Clare, Lady Jacopa, Luchesio and Buona Donna, Bishop Guido, Pope Innocent III, the wider Church, the people of his town.
4. What did you learn from Francis?

Closing Prayer Service

Gather in a circle or semi-circle. Place a Bible, a San Damiano Cross, and a candle in sight.

- Sign of the Cross
- Song: All sing or listen to a musical rendition of Francis’ Prayer before the Crucifix or of his prayer, “*Deus meus et omnia*” (My God and my All).
- Opening Prayer:
Most high, all powerful, good Lord, Yours are the praise, the glory and the honor and every blessing.⁴ Send us your Holy Spirit to enlighten our hearts and minds as we listen to your Word.
- Scripture reading: Matthew 10:7-20.
- Period of quiet reflection.
- All are invited to share one phrase, one word, or one thought that came to them as they listened to this reading.
- All are invited to share spontaneous prayers of praise, thanksgiving, or petition.
- All pray together the Lord’s Prayer.
- Leader: *Let us bless the Lord!* All: *And give him thanks!*
- Sign of the Cross

³ The illustrated “Lifeline of St. Francis” and accompanying explanation is available on the FUN CD

⁴ Canticle of Creatures, St. Francis of Assisi, 1225

Assignment for Franciscan Movement Two: Your Own Journey

As you look at the illustrated “Lifeline” of St. Francis, it is easy to see different steps of a conversion process as they apply to different events in the life of Francis. During this time of discernment, it is important for you to ponder the events of Francis’ conversion and vocation process, and to see how these might relate to your own conversion and vocation process. As a help, you might use the following steps in a conversion process as they apply to the life of St. Francis, and then ask yourself how they might also apply in your own life:

- ❖ Darkness that can lead to openness (Questions and confusion can propel us to God)
- ❖ Listening and hearing (Prayer)
- ❖ Choosing to follow
- ❖ Signs that strengthen our decisions and our walk
- ❖ Finding a new direction
- ❖ Life of Christ/Gospel as point of contact and reference
- ❖ Finding support in this newness
- ❖ Walking in faith
- ❖ Trusting even in darkness
- ❖ Darkness that can lead to openness
- ❖ As conversion is ongoing, we “begin again,” returning to the top.

Your Own “Lifeline”

To illustrate this process in your own life, please make a “lifeline” of your own to share at next meeting.

1. Draw a timeline representing your life, indicating different stages and time periods. You might use different colors that reflect how you felt at certain times.
2. Indicate your ups and downs and plateaus by the curves or angles of your line. Lines can also show times when you might have taken a “detour,” etc.
3. Draw symbols, if applicable, at significant points along your line, e.g., a rain cloud at a sad time, a flower for growth, a tombstone for the loss of someone, a cross for an especially difficult time, etc.
4. Be as creative as you like, or as simple as you choose, but take time to ponder as you make this life review. Give thought to your life’s journey thus far and reflect on its meaning. Feel free to express your thoughts and feelings creatively as you create your lifeline. Use words, symbols, and colors that have meaning to you.
5. Your lifeline is not meant to be a work of art – it is simply meant to be a visual tool to help you see God at work in your life.

6. After creating your lifeline, reflect on its meaning, using the questions that will be provided.



Figure 1: A Sample Lifeline

Questions for Reflection, Journaling, and Sharing Your Lifeline

1. As you look at your lifeline, what feelings well up inside you?
2. What new discoveries have you made about yourself?
3. What surprises you about your life?
4. Are there new insights now that you have recorded these key moments of your life journey?
5. What happened at the times you experienced God's closeness or absence in your life?
6. Over the course of your life, when did you feel closest to God? Did any event of your life mark a period of drifting or turning away from God? Did you feel God's presence more clearly during painful events or at pleasant times?
7. How has God spoken to you over the course of your life?
8. What is He saying to you now?

Franciscan Movement Two: Your Own Journey

Purpose

- To facilitate an introspective look at one's own life.
- To discover and share how God has acted in one's life, and how one responds to God's call.
- To broaden one's knowledge of those who have influenced their journey and to understand the circumstances of life during their journey.
- To view one's life in relation to the life of St. Francis as the touchstone of one's own call to the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To facilitate bonding within the group.

Prerequisites

- In an earlier session during Inquiry (Franciscan Movement One), the Inquirers are given the instructions for preparing a lifeline and reflection questions to ponder and guide their sharing. Sufficient time is needed prior to this session for the Inquirers to prepare and reflect.
- Inquirers should be aware that any self-disclosure will occur in a group comprised of other Inquirers with whom they have journeyed, and with a formator(s) (professed members or Spiritual Assistant) they have come to know and are comfortable with.
- Prior to this session, the formator individually confirms that each Inquirer is comfortable with this assignment. Any concerns should be handled honestly and with great charity.
- The formator(s) for this session is one who has come to know the Inquirers and is skilled in facilitating group discussions.
- The formator(s) for this session prepares a lifeline to share and will be the first to share with the group, using the reflection questions as a guide for his/her presentation.
- Inquirers should be made aware that all that is shared at this session will be held in strict confidence.
- A copy of the illustrated "Lifeline" of St. Francis⁵ posted to reference as needed.
- Items needed for the closing prayer service, e.g., Psalm 139 in song or written form and Francis' "Praises of God."⁶

Setting

- The session takes place in a comfortable, casual setting.
- There should be some assurance of privacy for this session.
- Participants face each other in a circle or semicircle.
- Two hours is minimal to adequately cover the material. For a large group more time may be needed.

⁵ The "Lifeline of St. Francis" illustration and accompanying explanation can be found on the "For Up to Now" CD

⁶ Ritual, page 99

Procedure (Lesson Plan)

- Brief welcome and invocation of the Holy Spirit.
- The formator asks that no one interrupt during any person's sharing of their lifeline. Insights can be shared, and questions can be asked after each presenter is completely finished; however, after presenting their lifeline no one is required to answer any question they do not wish to answer or to engage in ensuing conversation if they choose not to.
- The formator for this session is the first to show his/her lifeline to the group and to share with the group using the reflection questions as a guide.
- One by one, all are invited to share their lifelines and their thoughts on the Reflection Questions. Others may give insights and ask questions as noted above.
- Prior to the Closing Prayer service, give an overview and some instruction to those participating in the service.
- Invitation to Closing Prayer Service.

Questions for Reflection, Journaling, and Sharing Your Lifeline

1. As you look at your lifeline, what feelings well up inside you?
2. What new discoveries have you made about yourself?
3. What surprises you about your life?
4. Are there new insights now that you have recorded these key moments of your life journey?
5. What happened at the time when you experienced God's closeness or absence in your life?
6. Over the course of your life, when did you feel closest to God? Did any event of your life mark a period of drifting or turning away from God? Did you feel God's presence more clearly during painful events or at pleasant times?
7. How has God spoken to you over the course of your life?
8. What is He saying to you now?

Closing Prayer

- Sign of the Cross
- Scripture: Psalm 139 – prayed in song or read taking parts, or all together
- Period of quiet reflection
- All are invited to share spontaneous prayers of praise, thanksgiving or petition
- All pray together Francis' "Praises of God"⁷
- Leader: Let us bless the Lord! All: And give him thanks!
- Sign of the Cross

⁷ Ritual, page 99

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order

**Exhortation of Saint Francis to the
Brothers and Sisters of Penance**

In the name of the Lord!

Teresa V. Baker, OFS



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Prologue

Chapter 1 - Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them” (cf. Is 11:2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. Jn 14:23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ; we are brothers to him when we fulfill “the will of the Father who is in heaven”(Mt 12:50).

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give life to others by example (cf. Mt 5:16).

Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete.

Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:15) and prayed to the Father saying:

“Oh, holy Father, protect them with your name (cf. Jn 17:11) whom you gave me out of the world. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you; they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these I pray, not for the world (cf. Jn 17:9). Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (cf. Jn 17:20) that they may be holy by being one, as we are (cf. Jn 17:11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom” (cf. Jn 17:6-24).

Chapter 2 - Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance

But all those men and women who are not doing penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and live in vices and sin and yield to evil concupiscence and to the wicked desires of the flesh, and do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and are slaves to the world, in their bodies, by carnal desires and the anxieties and cares of this life (cf. Jn 8:41).

These are blind, because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ; they do not have spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God who is the true wisdom of the Father. Concerning them, it is said, “Their skill was swallowed up” (Ps 107:27) and “cursed are those who turn away from your commands” (Ps 119:21). They see and acknowledge; they know and do bad things and knowingly destroy their own souls.

See, you who are blind, deceived by your enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, for it is pleasant to the body to commit sin and it is bitter to make it serve God because all vices and sins come out and “proceed from the heart of man” as the Lord says in the Gospel (cf. Mt 7:21). And you have nothing in this world and in the next, and you thought you would possess the vanities of this world for a long time.

But you have been deceived, for the day and the hour will come to which you give no thought and which you do not know and of which you are ignorant. The body grows infirm, death approaches, and so it dies a bitter death, and no matter where or when or how man dies, in the guilt of sin, without penance or satisfaction, though he can make satisfaction but does not do it.

The devil snatches the soul from his body with such anguish and tribulation that no one can know it except he who endures it, and all the talents and power and “knowledge and wisdom” (2 Chr 1:17) which they thought they had will be taken away from them (cf. Lk 8:18; Mk 4:25), and they leave their goods to relatives and friends who take and divide them and say afterwards, “Cursed be his soul because he could have given us more; he could have acquired more than he did.” The worms eat up the body and so they have lost body and soul during this short earthly life and will go into the inferno where they will suffer torture without end.

All those into whose hands this letter shall have come we ask in the charity that is God (cf. 1 Jn 4:17) to accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted above. And let those who do not know how to read have them read to them.

And may they keep them in their mind and carry them out, in a holy manner to the end, because they are “spirit and life” (Jn 6:64). And those who will not do this will have to render “an account on the day of judgment” (cf. Mt 12:36) before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 14:10).

A View of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order Through the Lens of Humility

Session I: GOD Turns to Us

Opening

In the twelfth chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, the evangelist recounts for us that after trying to explain his Father's purpose for us and his right intention for all of our relationships, Jesus seems a bit exasperated. Having answered direct questions and sharing parables, those listening to him still do not seem to perceive what he is trying to share. We then come upon this desire of Jesus:

I have come to set a fire upon the earth, how I wish it were ignited!

Jesus has inspired people down through the centuries to ignite this fire, beginning with the Apostles, early Church Fathers, and the desert fathers and mothers. St. Benedict, father of western monasticism, founded an Order within which this fire could burn. Many different religious families developed within the Church followed his example. Francis was one of these persons who ignited this flame. Imagine how people turned their heads and opened their hearts to listen to the message of the Poor Man of Assisi. How the flame was turned up then!

Invocation

Francis, your wholeness
 haunts this broken world.
Centuries ago—
 you heard
 the windsong of the Spirit
 wrinkle gentle music
 through the stillness of your being.
you danced
 its unpatterned rhythms
 every moment of your life.
you splashed
 your laughter against the summits
 of wealth and aristocracy
 and with it transparent freshness.
you cleansed the leper,
 forgave the robber,
 freed the peasant poor.

you torched
a mediocre Church into flame—
seasoned wood caught fire,
and the fire burned,
and the fire spread,
and the fire enveloped the earth.

Today, Francis—
breathe your benediction
on this crumbling clay;
crushed, crippled, wounded,
it desires to dance.

Anoint with peace and goodness
the fragile fragments of peace and justice
struggling to be reborn in this weary world—
it seeks to laugh.

Bond your courage
to the stumbling steps of this pilgrim people.

Burn the power of your fidelity
into the Potter's clay—
the fire is ready.

—Margaret Halaska, OSF

Reflection

Examine your own life in light of Jesus' challenge to be a light to the world.

- How willing are you to allow God to mold you into the person he has created you to be?
- What areas of your life are you not yet willing to give to God?
- Why do you hold onto these so?
- Are you ready to take risk?
- Why are you hesitant with God?

Introduction

Secular Franciscans have been invited by the same message Francis preached, his charism. Secular Franciscans are daughters and sons of this Poor Man of Assisi and have answered the call to rebuild the Church and renew the world in the manner of Francis.

In 2009, the entire Franciscan Family celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Primitive Rule, those bits of Scripture that St. Francis and his followers took to Rome to ask the blessing of Pope Innocent III on their way of life. In April, members of the various branches of the Franciscan Family gathered in Rome to highlight this celebration with our Holy Father.

Pope Benedict XVI remarked:

Like Francis, always start with yourselves. We are the first house that God wants to restore. If you are always able to renew yourselves in the spirit of the Gospel, you will continue to assist the pastors of the Church to make more and more beautiful the Church's face, that of the bride of Christ. The Pope, now the same as then, expects this of you.

The Gospel passages Francis and Bernardo first discovered when opening the Bible to discern God's will for their life together comprise the basis of the Franciscan charism. Charism has so many meanings. I share with you one by Bishop Joseph Galante, Archbishop of Camden, New Jersey:

Charism is an intensely personal reading of the Gospel resulting in an inner enlightenment that changes the way a person relates to God, to self and to others. This new way of relationship is so powerful that it has the potential to attract others who sense in themselves the same desire and capacity to read the Gospel in this "new key."¹

Article 4 of the OFS Rule offers the challenge to "go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel." This was the pattern of Francis' life, and it is to be ours also. One of the main points that is quite visible in the life of Francis is his extensive time in prayer. Various source materials tell us of Francis often spending long hours in caves on the sides of mountains.

- Carceri, right outside Assisi – his earliest places of prayer
- In the Rieti Valley
 - Greccio, where he re-established the importance of the Christmas Crèche
 - Fonte Colombo, where he retreated to write the Rule
 - Poggio Bustone, where he realized his grave sinfulness; he asked God for forgiveness, and he was assured of that forgiveness
 - La Foresta, where he had his eyes cauterized toward the end of his life
- Mount LaVerna, which he ascended several times a year and where he ultimately received the Stigmata.

Francis went to these deserted places to be present to God, and then to discern what it might be that God would have him do. He was willing to leave behind anything that would encumber his relationship with God. After spending a lifetime in this constant relationship with God, he attained ultimate union with his Savior in receiving the Stigmata on Mount LaVerna in 1224. His response in prayer was the beautiful *Praises of God*, in which he enumerated the virtues of God:

¹ "Renewing Religious Life," unpublished lecture, as quoted in *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life*, Margaret Carney, OSF. (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 226.

<i>You are charity,</i>	<i>You are rest;</i>
<i>You are wisdom,</i>	<i>You are gladness and joy;</i>
<i>You are humility,</i>	<i>You are our hope;</i>
<i>You are patience,</i>	<i>You are justice;</i>
<i>You are beauty,</i>	<i>You are moderation;</i>
<i>You are meekness,</i>	<i>You are all our riches to sufficiency,</i>
<i>You are sincerity.²</i>	

Decades later, in 1257, St. Bonaventure also went to this mountaintop. After being elected the seventh Minister General of the Order, he went to Mount LaVerna, seeking a place of peace. He also received a vision of a seraph that led him to a unique understanding of the spiritual journey. There he began writing the *Itinerarium: The Soul's Journey into God*.

- Are you familiar with St. John of the Cross's *The Ascent to Mount Carmel* or *Dark Night of the Soul*?
- Are you familiar with St. Teresa of Avila's *The Interior Castle*?

Bonaventure's *Itinerarium* is our Franciscan spiritual journey masterpiece. Several definitions of the word *Itinerarium* are journey, journal, roadmap for the journey. The *Itinerarium* encompasses them all. The process of sharing envisioned in these sessions we spend together is to seek out some of the ways Bonaventure points us to God, coupled with one of the virtues Francis enumerated *to take a fresh look at our Rule*. We're going to focus on the virtue Bonaventure describes as *the root and guardian of all virtues: humility*.³ Humility comes from the root word, humus, dirt, or ground, and it suggests for Bonaventure the concept of being rooted or grounded. He saw it as the primary underpinning in Francis' life, as Francis tried to follow Jesus in his poverty and his humility. Humility is also the primary characteristic of God in Bonaventure's theology. He defines humility as being "totally turned to the other."

Our Focus:

this session will be to encounter the humility of God as we discover how God turns to Us.

In the *Itinerarium*, Bonaventure gives us two names for God: BEING and GOODNESS. In chapter 5, Bonaventure offers love as the highest good, the life force, if you will, of God. Following the teaching of Pseudo-Dionysius, Bonaventure insists that love is self-diffusive; it cannot be contained. Authors offer the overflowing abundance of Niagara Falls as a finite example of God's abundant love – a love that flows continually.

² All quotations of the original sources, unless otherwise noted, will be taken from the three-volume set, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents – The Saint, The Founder, The Prophet*, ed. Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellman, OFM Conv., and William J. Short, OFM. (New York: New City Press, 1999, 2000, 2001). *Praises of God* found in FA:ED Vol 1, The Saint, 108.

³ Bonaventure, *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, The Tree of Life, The Major Life of St. Francis*, trans. Ewert Cousins (New York: Paulist Pres, 1978), 129. All works of Bonaventure will be found in this volume unless otherwise noted.

Bonaventure continues, it is God's nature to choose to *communicate* goodness with another, because it cannot be contained. Within the Trinity of Persons, God the Father shares LOVE with a Being exactly like himself, God the Son—the Word. In turn, God the Son returns that LOVE to the Father. The love they share is a continuous outpouring one to the other, yet it is still not contained. The LOVE they share overflows to a third, God the Holy Spirit—the Gift. Bonaventure insists that this outpouring of Love is a primary example of the humility of God. He contends that the humility of God is shown in the fact that the Father chooses to turn to another—to be “other-centered.”

God continues to share this LOVE, this goodness, outside the Trinity. In time, God chooses to create and to love creation fully. Still more wonderfully, in time God entered creation in the person of Jesus Christ (Jn 1). Jesus came to share God's love with us and to show us how to love God in return. Jesus recounts this love exchange for us in the beautiful verses of John 16 and 17.⁴

In the humility of God, God as Trinity, God chooses to turn to someone outside himself – GOD turns to US.

St. Bonaventure tells us, “God humbly bends down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his very own person.”⁵ In the *Tree of Life*, he dedicates a whole section to the humility of God, describing Jesus as “humble Savior,” the “humble God laying in a manger who is the humble Christ.”⁶ For Bonaventure, humility is at the heart of God. It is the basis for the relational aspect of the Trinity. It is the basis for God's relationship with us and with all of creation. In this session we are striving to discover how humility is at the basis of the OFS Rule and its prescriptions for Gospel living.

REFLECTION

- How does God make his love known to you in your life?
- How do we see the Humility of God present in our Rule?
- How does God make Himself known to us through the articles of our Rule?
- Which articles speak to us of God's overflowing goodness?

⁴For a detailed explanation of the fountain fullness of God's love, please see Sr. Ilia Delio's book, *The Humility of God: A Franciscan Perspective* (Cincinnati Ohio: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2005), Chapters 1-3.

⁵ These are the opening words of Bonaventure's “Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord” in *What Manner of Man?: Sermons on Christ* by St. Bonaventure, trans. and intro. Zachary Hayes, OFM, STD (Chicago, IL: Franciscan Herald Press), 57.

⁶ Bonaventure, *Tree of Life* VI, 130.

Humility Embodied, Given Voice, and Lived Out in the OFS Rule

Envisioning how GOD turns to US in the OFS Rule

The humility of God is shown most explicitly in Articles 5, 4, 6, and 2, calling to mind the presence of Jesus among us, the Gospel accounts of his life and teachings, the Church he left behind to guide us, and the Franciscan vocation to this way of life that we have answered.

Article 5: Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of St. Francis, who often said, “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except His most holy body and blood,” should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.

Article 4: The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father’s love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel.

Article 6: 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. Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialog of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

Article 2: The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this [Franciscan] family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.

Before going on . . .

Meditate on the words of each article.

- Circle the particular word or phrase that speaks to you of God’s goodness, of his love for you.

- What gifts await you?
- How is God enticing you into relationship?

Allow Time for Discussion

HUMILITY: GOD turns to US embodied, given voice, and acted out in the OFS Rule . . .

The following are offered as guides to foster communication and discussion:

Article 5: Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to **encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity.** The faith of St. Francis, who often said, “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except His most holy body and blood,” should be the inspiration and pattern of their **Eucharistic life.**

Franciscan spirituality is Incarnational, based on this greatest gift of God to the human race, the Incarnation of his Son, Jesus Christ, the Word of the Father, who has taken on our very flesh in order that we might enter more fully into the life God has prepared for us. *The spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ,⁷ rather than a detailed program to be put into practice* (GC 9.1). Article 5 enumerates various ways by which we can develop our Secular Franciscan spirituality. Although not in the flesh, we are still able to encounter Christ in our brothers and sisters, in the Scriptures, within the Church and its sacramental life.

Reflection

- Name the components that shape your Franciscan spirituality.
- Call to mind times when you’ve encountered Christ in your brothers and sisters. Take as an example Francis and the leper: *what was bitter to me before has become sweet . . .* Test 2⁸
- How do the Scriptures enhance your life?
- How does the Church enhance your vocation?

Article 4: The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to **observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father’s love,** is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel.

⁷ See Rule of 1221, Chap. 22; Second Letter to All the Faithful 51.

⁸ FA:ED Vol.1,124

The core of our Franciscan life is the Gospel; it is the basis of the Franciscan charism. It is the example Francis has left behind. Celano records for us:

Francis' highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose, was to observe the Gospel in all things and through all things and, with perfect vigilance, with all zeal, with all the longing of his mind and all the fervor of his heart, "to follow the teaching and the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Celano XXX.84)⁹

Francis knew the Scriptures by heart. Secular Franciscans are not called to live the Gospel as Francis did, yet we are to discover our own "reading" of the Gospel. How does it speak to you? *The Secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture* (GC 9.2). How are we to incorporate the Gospel into our own lives? One way to carefully read the Scriptures is through *Lectio Divina*.¹⁰

Reflection

- What do the words *observe the Gospel* mean to you? How do you observe the Gospel?
- Which scripture passages do you know by heart – not necessarily word by word, but which ones are imbedded in your heart?
- How is Christ the center for your life?
- In what specific ways do you go *from Gospel to life and life to Gospel*?

Article 6: 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.** Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in **full communion** with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialog of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

Unlike many of the penitential groups that were formed during the Middle Ages, Francis chose to remain faithful to the Church and its teachings. By his very presence, his words, and his actions, he shared the teachings of the Church with those to whom he preached. Secular Franciscans are also to live in union with the Church and her teachings, and, like Francis, we are called to do so more by our BEing than by anything we DO. Take careful notice of the words, "their life and words" and "witnesses and instruments." *Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and the witness of building fraternity, sincerely and openly, are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love. They should*

⁹ FA:ED Vol.1,125

¹⁰ See accompanying handout for explanation

be recognized in it by their “being,” from which their mission springs (GC 100.3). Their preferred apostolate is personal witness (CG 17.1).¹¹

Reflection

- How would you share your understanding of the Catholic Church with someone who asks?
- In which ways do you make *your presence* known within your local and diocesan Church?
- In which *ministries* are you involved?
- List the various ways in which you stay abreast of current Church teachings?

Article 2: The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this [Franciscan] family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and **open to every group of the faithful**. In these fraternities the **brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity** in their own secular state. **By their profession** they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis **by means of this rule approved by the Church**.

How graced each Secular Franciscan is to have been called to this way of life, to this particular charism, to a local fraternity that is bonded with all other fraternities throughout the world, to live a Rule by profession that has the approval and blessing of Holy Mother Church! Beyond the Secular Franciscan Order, members are joined in this life with the other branches of the Franciscan family, the First Order friars, the Second Order Poor Clares and the sisters and friars of the Third Order Regular. According to Canon Law, *the Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church*¹² (GC 1.5), whose secular state *characterizes their spirituality and the apostolic life* GC 3.1).

Reflection

- List the various ways in which your profession into the local fraternity is a gift of God to your life?
- In what ways do you share your Franciscan life with other local fraternities?
- How involved are you in the workings of your regional and national fraternity?
- How often do you join with other members of the Franciscan family for prayer, celebrations, study, or recreation?

Recap

We have selected words in the Rule that speak of humility, of God turning to us, of God initiating a relationship with us.

¹¹ See General Constitutions, Article 17 for a detailed description of the many ways in which Secular Franciscans are called to be an active presence within the Church.

¹² See Can. 116; 301,3; 312; 313.

The Rule calls us to

- imitate Jesus;
- absorb Scripture;
- in communion with the Church Jesus founded;
- through our Franciscan calling.

God turned to us and gave us Jesus.

Jesus came to set a FIRE.

Examen

The intensity of Francis' vocation has only increased with time. How does the intensity of your vocation compare to the day you were professed?

How faithful have you been to your vocation? In what ways have you fallen short?

Share with your neighbor

Bonaventure gives us directives for coming to know God in our lives:
If you wish to know how these things come about,
ask grace not instruction,
desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading,
the Spouse not the teacher,
God not man,
darkness not clarity,
not light but the fire
that totally inflames and carries us into God
by ecstatic unctions and burning affections.
This fire is God,
and His furnace is in Jerusalem; and Christ enkindles it
in the heat of His burning passion.

Itinerarium 7.6¹³

Emmaus Walk (Optional)

Theme

- Jesus sent the disciples out two by two to prepare his way.
- Francis set the friars two by two to preach penance.
- Jesus met two disciples on the Road to Emmaus.

During this time we are going to take an Emmaus walk of sorts.

Share with your partner how you are living your vocation:

¹³ Bonaventure, 111-2..

- **Which area is the hardest for you at this present moment?**
- **Which area is the easiest at this present moment?**

**A VIEW OF THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
THROUGH THE LENS OF HUMILITY**

Session 2: WE Turn to God

Opening: Gasping for God

Each day the disciple would ask the same question: “How shall I find God?” And each day he would get the same mysterious answer: “Through desire.” “But I desire God with all my heart, don’t I? Then why have I not found God?”

One day the Master happened to be bathing in the river with the disciple. He pushed the man’s head under water and held it there while the poor fellow struggled desperately to break loose. Next day it was the Master who began the conversation. “Why did you struggle so hard when I held your head under water?” “Because I was gasping for air.” “When you are given the grace to gasp for God the way you gasped for air, you will have found God.”¹⁴

Reflection

- When was the last time you gasped for God?
- What was the occasion?
- Do you spend quiet time with God each day, time away from ritual prayer, silent time just to listen?
 - ❖ Note that the words *silent* and *listen* contain the same letters.
- Why or why not?

Introduction

It was this gasping for God that sent St. Bonaventure to La Verna. He tells us in the *Itinerarium*:

Following the example of our most holy father Francis, I was seeking this peace with panting spirit—I a sinner and utterly unworthy who after our blessed father’s death had become the seventh Minister General of the Friars. It happened that about the time of the thirty-third anniversary of the Saint’s death, under divine impulse, I withdrew to Mount La Verna, seeking a place of quiet and desiring to find there peace of spirit. *Itin Prol 2*¹⁵

¹⁴ Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 43.

¹⁵ Bonaventure, 54

St. Bonaventure journeyed to that place of ultimate transformation for Francis, La Ver-
na. There he also received a vision of the seraph as an explanation of the spiritual journey.
He recorded his insights in the *Itinerarium, The Soul's Journey into God*.

This session centers on the opening words of the *Itinerarium*:

*Here begins the reflection of the poor man in the desert*¹⁶

- What do the words *poor man* and *desert* mean to you?

For Bonaventure, poverty had a very explicit meaning. It stems from his understanding of our total dependency on God. He explains that human beings are poor because they are unable to sustain themselves. God gave humans all of creation to care for and upon which to depend. Think for a moment what would happen to human beings if God were not constantly aware of them.

Secondly, human beings are poor because we are dependent upon the grace of God for our final fulfillment. Human beings are not able to attain union with God for all eternity of their own accord. Salvation is truly a grace received from the hand of God. We are poor because we are dependent on the grace of God for our final fulfillment.

Human beings are poor in a third sense, because our sinfulness causes us to turn away from God, *the Summum Bonum, the Highest Good* (Bonaventure's name for God). Through our own fault, we deliberately choose to forgo the goodness God extends to us; we choose to be poor. By our very nature, created in the image and likeness of God, we are made to seek ultimate happiness in God alone, because God is the only good that will satisfy our soul.

What about the Desert? What connotations does desert hold for Bonaventure? The desert is a space apart from God's original plan for human beings. God created us to be in intimate relationship with him, but this is no longer the case. With the entrance of sin into the relationship between God and man, a veil exists, and St. Bonaventure explains this as a desert, human beings apart from union with God

Because everything we have is a gift of God, St. Bonaventure notes that the poverty of man is exemplified in that nothing is ours except our sins. Here Bonaventure reiterates Francis' teaching. However, God who is all merciful will cleanse us of our sin.

So the poor man in the desert is the one who is truly aware of his total dependence on God. Francis reminds us of this in Admonition 19: *we are what we are before God and nothing more*.¹⁷ But God wants us to be united with him again. Bonaventure goes on to tell us that

¹⁶ Bonaventure, 53

¹⁷ FA: ED Vol.1, 135.

Just as when a person falls,
it is necessary to remain lying there
until someone comes near to reach out and raise
the fallen person up (Isaiah 24:20),
so our soul could not be raised up
perfectly from sensible realities
to see itself and the eternal truth within itself
unless the truth, assuming a human form in Christ,
should become a ladder to repair the first ladder
that had been broken in Adam. Itinerarium 4.2¹⁸

We have seen how Christ has already entered into Creation to show us how to love God in return. So Bonaventure:

. . . invites the reader
to the groans of prayer
through Christ crucified . . . Itin. Prol 4,1¹⁹

And he tells us that

Divine aid is available
to those who seek it from their hearts,
humbly and devoutly . . .

Our Focus

This session will be to encounter how and why we are to turn to God.

Bonaventure tells us that our only way back to God is through the Crucified. (*Itin.* Prol 3) Christ is always turned to the Father in reciprocal humility. We are to follow his example.

Clare also knows that the way to God is through the Crucified. She gives this advice to Agnes of Prague, ***Gaze upon Him, Consider Him, Contemplate Him, as you desire to Imitate Him.*** (2LA 19)²⁰

❖ What image is she speaking of? The poor Crucified Lord.

We must humble ourselves before God. What exactly does it mean to humble ourselves before God in Bonaventure's mindset? Remember, the humility of God is shown in the fact that the Father chooses to turn to another – to be "other-centered." Our response to God, in humility, is to turn totally to him.

¹⁸ Bonaventure, 87-8.

¹⁹ Bonaventure, 55

²⁰ Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, trans. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap. (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute press, 1993), 46. All works of Bonaventure will be found in this volume unless otherwise noted.

This humility is not a sense of *I am not worthy*. We turn to God, not out of a sense of sinfulness, but in awe of his goodness. We freely desire to turn to God once again, as God always intended. We are to turn to God without an agenda.

Turning back to God is the essence of the penitential spirituality that is embodied in the OFS Rule. What does our penitential spirituality entail? In her article, “Reclaiming Penitential Spirituality for the 21st Century,” Sr. Margaret Magee, OSF, comments,

The fundamental value of penitential spirituality is integral to the continued development of Franciscan life and spirituality. The penitential life is not a matter of “doing penance” or accomplishing penitential acts, rather it is the **openness to grow, to be shaped, and formed in a life** that reflects the dynamic movement and **presence of Christ within. *Metanoia* is not something we do; it is God’s gracious gift.** Our participation in *metanoia* depends on our capacity to be receptive, bent low in prayerful and contemplative love, to dwell in Christ, and with Christ live in bountiful love and service to others.²¹

The primary focus of our spirituality is to turn back to God without an agenda, without a list of what I must do to atone for my misdeeds. We make ourselves malleable in the hands of our God. We allow ourselves to be formed, to be changed according to the presence of Christ within. We accept the *gift* of this particular form of spirituality that is at the core of the Secular Franciscan vocation and through it enter more deeply into the relationship God has had in store for us since the beginning of time. This understanding does not call us to a passive lifestyle, but one that is grounded in the cooperation with the workings of God within.

For both Francis and Clare, poverty, and hence humility, were necessary components of coming to God – a humility of our own choosing – a humility that allows nothing to come between our stance with God.

Francis reminds us:

Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves that He Who gives Himself totally to you may receive you totally! (Lt Ord 29)²²

Clare tells Agnes:

You also know that one who is clothed cannot fight another who is naked, because she is more quickly thrown who gives her adversary a chance to get hold of her (1LA 27).²³

²¹ Margaret Magee, OSF, “Reclaiming Penitential Spirituality for the 21st Century,” *The Cord* 57, No. 2 (April/June 2007): 152

²² FA: ED Vol. 1, 118.

²³ Clare, 37

Humility Embodied, Given Voice, and Lived Out in the OFS Rule

Envisioning how WE turn to GOD in the OFS Rule

Our turning to God in the stance of humility is shown most explicitly in Articles 7, 8, 9, and 10, calling to mind the penitential life to which we are called, the active and contemplative modes of prayer that form the basis of our existence, taking Mary as our humble, self-giving role model, and taking upon ourselves the redemptive obedience of Jesus.

Article 7: United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance” and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel calls “conversion.” Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace.

Article 8: As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

Article 9: The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to His every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.

Article 10: United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed His will into the Father’s hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to Him even in difficulties and persecutions.

What do we need for our journey?

Before going on . . .

Meditate on the words of each article.

- Circle the particular word or phrase that speaks to you of turning toward God?
- What examples does it give us?
- What aids are provided for us?

Allow Time for Discussion

**HUMILITY: WE turn to GOD embodied, given voice,
and acted out in the OFS Rule . . .**

The following are offered as guides to foster communication and discussion:

Article 7: United by their **vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance”** and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that **radical interior change which the Gospel calls “conversion.”** Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out **daily**. On this road to renewal the **sacrament of reconciliation** is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace.

The goal of our Franciscan vocation is the closer union God envisioned for us before time began. The grace to live out this call is a free gift of God to us. Because of our poverty, we are in need of consciously turning back to God each day. This *metanoia*, “turning back,” is accomplished by being open to the inner promptings of the Spirit and acting upon them. *The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.*²⁴ *Traditional among Franciscan penitents, penitential practices such as fasting and abstinence should be known, appreciated, and lived out according to the general guidelines of the Church (GC 13.2,3).*

Reflection

- What defines your life of penance?
- *Do you do penance, or do you live a penitential spirituality?*
- How malleable are you in the hands of God?
- What holds you back?

Article 8: As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let **prayer and contemplation** be the soul of all they **are and do**. Let them participate in the **sacramental life of the Church**, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

The bedrock of Secular Franciscan life is prayer, stemming from the example Jesus has given us in the Gospels. Jesus prayed before, after, and during each encounter of his day. He never moved into action without first being present to and communicating with his Father. It is this example that we are to follow. All that Secular Franciscans are and do stems from this communication with God. *The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church (GC 14.2), the source and summit of all its activity. They should participate in the sacraments of the Church. The brothers and sisters, as well as the fraternities, should adhere to the indications of the Ritual with respect to the different forms of participating in the liturgical prayer of the Church, giving priority to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours*²⁵.... *The brothers and sisters should try to find times of silence and recollection dedicated exclusively to prayer (GC 14.3, 4, 5).*

²⁴ See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff. found in FA:ED Vol. 1, 45.

Reflection

- How much time do you devote to contemplative prayer, to the silence of listening to God, each day?
- How does your being in prayer overflow into your actions?
- Which alternate forms of the Liturgy of the Hours do you practice?

Article 9: The Virgin Mary, **humble servant of the Lord**, was **open to His every word and call**. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by **imitating her complete self-giving** and by praying earnestly and confidently.

The world continually puts forth models for us to emulate. Nowhere will we find a better model of discipleship than the Mother of our Lord. *Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the Gospel virtues realized in her* (GC 16.1).²⁶ She was the first disciple and the only person recorded in Scripture to have positively responded to the call of God in her life. Notice that the Rule refers to her as the *humble servant*, the servant continually turned to God in all her undertakings. She is a model of kenosis, as Bonaventure would have us understand the term, a complete self-giving, being focused continually and totally on the other.

Reflection

- How is Mary a model in your life?
- Mary seldom speaks in the Scriptures. What lessons can you take from her words for your life?
- What lessons can you take from her silence, her pondering?
- In what ways can you exemplify Mary's humility?

Article 10: United themselves to the **redemptive obedience of Jesus**, who placed His will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the **poor and crucified Christ**, witness to Him even in difficulties and persecutions.

"Christ, poor and crucified," victor over death and risen, the greatest manifestation of the love of God for humanity, is the "book" in which the brothers and sisters, in imitation of Francis, learn the purpose and the way of living, loving, and suffering (GC 10). Our following Christ is accomplished only through obedience. Notice the small word contained in the middle of this larger one: obedience.²⁷ *With Jesus, obedient even to death, they should seek to know and do the will of the Father* (GC 12.2). Secular Franciscans are called to die to self, with its inclinations, its passions, and desires so to make room for the inclinations and desires of God.

²⁵ Ritual OFS, Appendix 26, 27.

²⁶ Francis of Assisi, Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary found in FA: ED Vol1. 163

²⁷ Fr. Roger Hall, OFM, shared during a homily

We are called to die to self so that the self God created us to be will take form. We are to give witness to Christ through the manner in which we accept and transform the difficulties that arise in our lives.

Reflection

- What does *redemptive obedience* mean to you?
 - In what ways have you united yourself to Jesus' redemptive obedience?
 - To what human inclinations do you still need to die?
-

Recap

We have selected words in the Rule that speak of humility, of our turning to God, of our response to God's initiating a relationship with us.

The Rule calls us to

- daily conversion
- prayer and contemplation
- frequent reception of Eucharist, Reconciliation, and the other sacraments
- through the example and intercession of Mary
- by imitating Christ's redemptive obedience

WE turn to God because we are to seek the FIRE that Jesus came to set.

What do we need for our journey?

We take as our "book" the poor, crucified Christ

our "inspiration" the writings of Francis, Clare, and Bonaventure

our "guide" the Holy Spirit,

our "model" Mary,

our "core" Gospel,

our "focus" the life of penance we profess to live,

our "sustenance" Eucharist, sacraments and prayer.

Examen

Are you able to acknowledge those habits that keep you from following Christ? Are you able to strip yourselves of them?

- How do you view suffering:
 - As a curse?
 - Or as an opportunity to enter into the redemptive suffering of Jesus?
- Is your heart and mind completely open to the will of God for your life?

- What is your comfort level? Has it changed any since you've professed this Rule?
- What are the Stations of the Cross in your life?

Bonaventure reminds us

There is no other path but through the burning love of the Crucified.

(*Itin Prol 3*²⁸)

How do we enter into the Crucified? Bonaventure offers us a way:

Christ on the Cross
 bows His head,
 waiting for you,
 that He may kiss you;
 He stretches out His arms,
 that He may embrace you;
 His hands are open,
 that He may enrich you;
 His body is spread out,
 that He may give Himself totally;
 His feet are nailed,
 that He may stay there;
 His side is open for you,
 that He may let you enter there.

– St. Bonaventure, *Soliloquy I*, 39²⁹

A VIEW OF THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER THROUGH THE LENS OF HUMILITY

Session 3: We Turn to Others

OPENING: There Are Two Seas

A Parable by Bruce Barton

There are two seas in Palestine. One is fresh, and fish are in it. Splashes of green adorn its banks. Trees spread their branches over it and stretch out their thirsty roots to dip of its healing water. Along its shore the children play.

The River Jordan makes this sea with sparkling water from the hills. So it laughs in the sunshine. And men build their houses near to it, and birds their nests; and every kind of life is happier because it is there.

The River Jordan flows on south into another sea. Here is no splash of fish, no fluttering leaf, no song of birds, no children's laughter. Travelers [sic] choose another route, unless on urgent business. The air hangs above its waters and neither man nor beast nor fowl will drink.

²⁸ Bonaventure: 54

²⁹ Bonaventure, "Soliloquy on the Four Spiritual Exercises," in *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. J. ose` de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1966), 69.

What makes this mighty difference in these neighbor seas? Not the River Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not the soil in which they lie; not the country round about.

This is the difference. The Sea of Galilee receives but does not keep the Jordan. For every drop that flows into it another drop flows out. The giving and receiving go on in equal measure. The other sea is shrewder, hoarding its income jealously. It will not be tempted into any generous impulse. Every drop it gets, it keeps. The Sea of Galilee gives and lives. The other sea gives nothing. It is named the Dead.

There are two seas in Palestine.

*There are two kinds of people in the world.
What kind are we?³⁰*

Reflection

- There are two kinds of people in the world. What kind are you?
- How often do you go out of your way for another?
- How often do you give in to another?
- Can you discern why you do the things you do?
- We must be empty to accept God's love.
- We must share God's love with others.

Introduction

This session takes us to the beginning of Francis' conversion. When in prayer before the San Damiano Crucifix, he asked God: "What would you have me do?" He desired to enter into relationship.

Relationship is what humility is all about. We are in true relationship when we are turned away from ourselves and totally turned toward the other.

In the Circular Letter of John Corriveau, OFM Cap, then Minister General, on Oct. 4, 2003:

To be humble is to glory in the fact that we were created in love and redeemed through love in order to have a loving relationship with the Triune God who created and redeemed us, and with all creatures with whom we share life.

A good barometer of how humble we are is an analysis of our dialog with another.

When the other is talking, are we truly listening with every fiber of our being?

OR

Are we busy formulating our response?

³⁰ Stephen C. Doyle, OFM, *The Pilgrim's New Guide to the Holy Land* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 1985), 136-7.

Is our mind wandering, contemplating all the other things that we could be doing with this time?

Francis entered into relationship with God; he wanted God to be his All in All. He chose God to be his Everything. He was so enamored with the love God had for him, as revealed in the Crucified, that he put aside everything that stood in the way of this relationship. We note the radical change in his life. He put aside friendships, occupations, recreations, possessions that would take him away from God.

Bonaventure tells us:

From then on, he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility, and eagerness for intimate piety. (LM 1.6³¹)

Moved by the love of Christ, Francis came to realize that he was not alone in his search for God. The love God had instilled in him had to be shared. As we saw with the Fountain Fullness of God's love in the Trinity, God's love could not be contained in Francis either. We have to look no further than his encounter with the leper to know the truth of this.

Bonaventure continues:

True piety had so filled Francis' heart that it lifted him up into God, transformed him into Christ, turned him to his neighbor and reconciled him with each thing, refashioning him to the state of innocence. (LM 8.1³²)

Everything in creation became his brother and sister because Francis realized that they all had the same beginning. No thing, no person was beneath him, because all were sons and daughters of God. He truly believed that Christ was the Word through whom all of creation came into being. We know from Colossians:

For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible—all things have been created through him and for him. (Col. 1:16)

Francis recognized the reality of his relationship with others because of his relationship with Christ. Each person, every created thing, has Christ as its center. Each radiates Christ to the world. Each is an expression of God's love, God's goodness in the world. Sr. Ilia Delio reminds us that as Jesus is the Eternal and Incarnate Word of God, each person or thing that exists can be considered a little "word" of God that speaks to us of God's love and goodness.

- What can creation speak to us of God?
- What unique gift of God does the other bring to us?

Bonaventure taught that there are two books by which we come to know God, Scripture and Creation.

³¹ Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior* found in FA:ED, vol. 2, 534.

³² Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior* found in FA:ED, vol. 2, 586

He warns us:

Whoever, therefore, is not enlightened
by such splendor of created things
is blind;
whoever is not awakened by such outcries
is deaf;
whoever does not praise God because of all these effects
is dumb;
whoever does not discover the First Principle
from such clear signs
is a fool.

Therefore, open your eyes,
alert the ears of your spirit, open your lips
and apply your heart
so that in all creatures you may see, hear, praise,
love and worship, glorify and honor your God . . .

Itinerarium, 1.15³³

Our Focus:

this session will be to encounter humility as we discover why We are called to turn to Others.

We are to live as an example of God's love and embrace those around us, those we meet, and those whom we do not know. We are to be poor and humble, turned always to the other, because God is humble and turned continually to us.

A God-centered life calls us to make room within ourselves
to receive the Other (God)
and go out and embrace others in love.

For Francis, humility was a necessary component of coming to God – a humility of our own choosing – a humility that allows nothing to come between our stance with God.

Francis reminds us:

Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves that He Who gives Himself
totally to you may receive you totally! (Lt Ord 29³⁴)

So we end where Francis began: *Kenosis*

How would you define *kenosis*?

Bonaventure defines *Kenosis* of one's self not as an emptying of self but as a total self-giving.³⁵

- Remember how Mary is portrayed in Article 9: her complete self-giving!

³³ Bonaventure, 67

³⁴ Francis of Assisi as Found in FA:ED Vol 1, 118

³⁵ Sr. Iliia Delio, OSF, *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy IL: Franciscan Press, 1998), 107.

Bonaventure claims that love is a union that results from the soul going out of itself to unite itself to another object, and he calls us to this union through compassionate love.³⁶

Bonaventure defines compassion as “sharing the pains of the utterly blameless, meek, noble and loving Christ.”³⁷

To follow this statement to its completion, when we reach out to the others in our midst, we are reaching out to Christ.

We are also called to see with the eyes of our heart. We have a reminder in 1Sam. 16:7:

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

Our purpose in turning to others is to share God’s goodness and love with them because God first shared his goodness and love with us.

Humility Embodied, Given Voice, and Lived Out in the OFS Rule

Envisioning how WE turn to OTHERS in the OSF Rule

Chapter 2, that portion of the Rule that lays out our Way of Life, contains many examples of how we are to turn to others. They are provided in Articles 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. There are also two instances given us in Chapter 3, pertaining to others in our life in fraternity, Articles 22, 24.

Article 11: Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother a poor and humble life, even though He valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the Gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children. Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

Article 12: Witnessing to the good yet to come and obligated to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.

Article 13: As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

³⁶ Delio, 100

³⁷ Delio, 101

Article 14: 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.

Article 15: Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Article 16: Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. A partnership with God.

Article 17: 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. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for His Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Article 18: Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

Article 19: Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Article 22: The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

Article 24: To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. The communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.

Before going on . . .

Meditate on the words of each article.

- Circle the particular word or phrase that speaks to you of how we are called in our Rule to turn to others.
- What specifics are laid out for us?

- How does humility show itself in our turning to the other?
- Pick out words in the Rule that speak of humility, of our turning toward others.

ALLOW TIME FOR DISCUSSION

HUMILITY: WE turn to OTHERS embodied, given voice, and acted out in the OFS Rule . . .

The following are offered as guides to foster communication and discussion.

Article 11: Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother a **poor and humble life**, even though He valued created things **attentively and lovingly**. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a **proper spirit of detachment** from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the Gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children. Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as **pilgrims and strangers** on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

This article of the Rule calls us to begin where Francis did, trusting in God, for without this trust we can do nothing. Francis chose exactly what Christ chose and nothing more: he chose a poor and humble life. Are we called to give up everything as Francis did? No, but we are to give up our inordinate possession of things. The rich young man, whom Jesus looked upon with love, turned from Jesus because his possessions were many. *Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes [Secular Franciscans] to promote a more just distribution of wealth (GC 15.1). In the Beatitudes “poverty” is the virtue of sharing: it calls us to communicate and share both material and spiritual goods, not by coercion but out of love, so that the abundance of some may remedy the needs of others (CCC 2546).*

Francis told his brothers to take nothing for the journey, to be pilgrims and strangers. In Francis’ time, there was a law for pilgrims, and Francis wanted it to be in place for his sons: “to be sheltered under someone else’s roof, to travel in peace, and to thirst for their homeland” (2C 59)³⁸. How graced our life would be if this were “our rule,” our guidance for life in this world. Nothing is ours; all is to be shared.

Reflection

- Our Secular Franciscan life calls us to a poverty of detachment: Do you own your possessions, or do your possessions own you?
- What stands in the way of your spending greater time with God?
- What obstructs your way when it comes to caring for your neighbor?
- Which Beatitude places the greatest challenge before you? Why?

³⁸ FA:ED Vol. 2, 286

Article 12: Witnessing to the **good** yet to come and obligated to acquire **purity of heart** because of the vocation they have embraced, they should **set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.**

We have already seen that one of the names Bonaventure gives God is “good.” Blessed John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan theologian and philosopher of the late thirteenth century, gives us a very basic definition of God. For Scotus, “God is Love.” This article of our Rule calls us to be God-like. As God’s instruments here on earth, we are to prepare a welcoming place for those whom we encounter. In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray “Thy kingdom come.” Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the kingdom of God is in our midst. He also warns that we cannot serve both God and mammon. We are to put aside those issues, those possessions, those fears that keep us focused on our self so that we are better able to focus on the other. Here again, Bonaventure’s notion of *kenosis* as self-giving comes to the fore.

Reflection

- What holds you bound?
- What must you do to set yourself free?
- How do you witness in your own space to the goodness of God in our world?

Article 13: As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit **accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.** A sense of **community** will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an **equal basis** with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

We cannot find a better model of accepting all people as gifts of God than Francis himself. He valued himself least of all of God’s people. He cared for all who came to him as if he were caring for the Son of God himself. Although Bonaventure referred to him as the *Altus Christus*, the other Christ, Francis would never have allowed that title to be used for himself; yet Francis would look on everyone else as an image of God. Like Francis, we are *to create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They [Secular Franciscans] should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others* (GC 13.2).

Reflection

- When a stranger approaches you, is your first reaction one of trepidation or of welcome?
- How do you involve yourself in caring for the less fortunate among us?
- In what ways are others images of Christ to you?

Article 14: 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.

Of all the branches of the Franciscan family, we as Secular Franciscans have the greater responsibility of making our world one in which all persons are treated as children of God. Not only from a human perspective but also from a deeper Catholic perspective, we are to seek the best for those who are unable to seek the good for themselves. A careful reading of *Gaudium et Spes*, *The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, a document of Vatican II, and subsequent papal writings, *The Development of Peoples* by Paul VI, himself a Secular Franciscan, and *Love in Truth*, a letter of Pope Benedict XVI, show the importance of our involvement in temporal affairs. We are further reminded of our duty as citizens of a local community and a global world through the General Constitutions: *Secular Franciscans should always act as a leaven in the environment in which they live through the witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations* (GC 19.1). *In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people* (GC 19.2).

Reflection

- How familiar are you with Church documents that call for Catholics to take a stand when the good of peoples is called into question?
- Are you aware of current situations in your neighborhood or state that require a Christian voice?
- How can you offer your gifts and talents in service to your neighbors?

Article 15: Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in **promoting justice** by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Justice for the underprivileged is a hallmark not only of our Franciscan vocation but also of our Catholic baptism. How many times did Jesus seek justice for those who were unjustly accused? How many times did he stand up for the underprivileged who had no one to speak for them? How many times did he condemn a law that was unjust or burdensome for the poor? *Secular Franciscans should “be in the forefront ... in the field of public life.” They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances* (GC 22.1). *The fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives . . . they should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice* (GC 22.2). We must always

keep in mind that the renunciation of the use of violence, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. . . the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love (GC 22.3).

Reflection

- Jesus told us to say “yes” when we mean “yes” and “no” when we mean “no.” When you witness an injustice, how bold are you to take a stance in conformity with your faith?
- Take a situation from your local newspaper:
 - In what ways might you be willing to effect a change?
 - In what ways might you not be willing to effect a change?
- What initiatives or projects can your fraternity adopt to make the world in which you live more just?

Article 16: Let them esteem **work** both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

Our Christian tradition has always held that our work is a partnership with God. It is a way for us to use our talents for the care of ourselves and the good of others. *For Francis, work is a gift and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood but also the opportunity to serve God and neighbor, as well as a way to develop one’s own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane (GC21.1). However, we are cautioned to maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to create meaningful forms of using leisure time (GC 21.2).*

Reflection

- How do you define work? In what ways do you esteem your work?
- How do you see work as a gift?
- How is your work redemptive and creative?
- How do you allow yourself leisure time, time that does not have an expected outcome?

Article 17: 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. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for His Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Above all, Franciscans herald the family as the basic unit of society. This has been attested to in Church documents especially since Vatican II. *Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and*

Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death (GC 24.1). The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world (GC 24.2). A Christian home is the bedrock from which children embark on their spiritual and vocational journeys. It is also the foundation from which children learn to embrace themselves and care for others.

Reflection

- What are your fondest memories of childhood? Which memories are not so pleasant? Which shaped your life more?
- In what ways can your Secular Franciscan vocation witness to the values of family life?
- In what ways are families invited to participate in your fraternal gatherings?

Article 18: Moreover they should **respect all creatures**, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

We need look no further than the writings of Francis to recognize the great importance he placed on the care of creation. In the *Canticle of Brother Sun*, he rightly called the elements his brothers and sister. We have a Scriptural mandate to care for all of creation from Genesis, when God told Adam to have dominion over the earth. Note Scripture says *dominion* not *domination*; our human history over the past 20 centuries and longer bears witness to our domination! Francis points out another basic reason for our care of creation, each bears the imprint of the Most High. In his *Itinerarium*, St. Bonaventure tells us that we are blind, deaf, and dumb if we are not awakened to the presence of God in our midst through his created world.³⁹

Reflection

- In what ways do you care for Creation?
- What lessons have you learned from Creation?
- How do you encourage others to appreciate Creation?

Article 19: Mindful that they are bearers of **peace** which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of **unity** and fraternal **harmony** through **dialogue**, **trusting** in the **presence of the divine seed in everyone** and in the transforming power of **love** and **pardon**. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring **joy** and **hope** to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

³⁹ See Bonaventure quote on p.193 of this document.

Pay heed to the virtues that are laid out before us in this one article of the Rule:

Peace Unity Harmony Dialogue Trust Love
Pardon Joy Hope

As Francis lay dying, he was informed that the bishop and podesta (mayor) were at odds with one another. The bishop excommunicated the podesta, who in turn would not allow anyone to fulfill the bishop's needs. Francis added a new stanza to the *Canticle of Brother Sun* and asked some of his brothers to invite the bishop and podesta to listen. This is the stanza:

*Praised be You, my Lord, through those who pardon for Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace,
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

In writing this stanza and sharing it with two men whom he greatly admired, Francis gave us an excellent example of how to live this article of our Rule. He then added the final stanza:

*Praised be You, My Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will
for the second death shall do them no harm.⁴⁰*

Even in suffering, Francis experienced confidence and joy from:

- ❖ the experience of the fatherhood of God;
- ❖ the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life;
- ❖ the experience of being able to meet and praise the Creator in the universal fraternity of all creatures.

Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans, therefore, affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future (GC 26.1).

Reflection

- How do you maintain peace in your heart through difficult situations?
- To whom or in what situation might you be able to offer yourself as an instrument of reconciliation?
- How prepared are you to meet Sister Death?

Article 22: The **local fraternity** is to be established canonically. It becomes the **basic unit** of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the **privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation** and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

⁴⁰ FA:ED Vol1, 119.

We must always keep in mind that the local fraternity is the basic unit of the Order. None of us would be Secular Franciscans without our being professed into a local fraternity. As Scripture tells us, all members are necessary for the body to function; so all members of the local fraternity are necessary to allow the fraternity to function properly. The fraternity serves several needs for the fraternity: prayer, formation, fellowship, encouragement, and business. Note the placement of business in this listing. So should it be in the amount of time given to each. Concerning our time of prayer and Gospel living, Fr. Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., preacher to the Papal household, when speaking to the Franciscans gathered in Rome to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Primitive Rule, offered this caution: At our gatherings, we should set aside time

. . . during the liturgical prayer itself when allowed, to have moments of real spiritual sharing among brothers or sisters. Otherwise there is the danger that in our communities we share everything except our faith and our experience of Jesus. We talk about anything, except about him.

Remember, we do not come to fraternity to be Franciscan. We come to fraternity to be fed so we can go out into the world and share our Franciscan spirit with others.

Reflection

- How does your fraternal life strengthen your vocation?
- What gifts do you offer to your brothers and sisters in fraternity?
- How do you spend time within the fraternal gathering challenging each other to live the Gospel?
- How is your vocation active in the world?

Article 24: To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and **frequent meetings** of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, **especially with youth groups**. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. The **communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them**.

Although the local fraternity is the basic unit of the Order, it is not an island unto itself. While the monthly gatherings are vital to the life of the members, how much more invigorating would times of sharing with other Franciscans be? These shared gatherings are advised especially during the time of initial formation. There are many other occasions when the local fraternities can join together.

Plan a Day of Recollection, a pilgrimage to a local shrine, a time to work at the local soup kitchen, a time to listen to a guest speaker. Attend each other's professions as a sign of solidarity. Take part in the gatherings planned by your regional council. Set aside a time to

remember the deceased members of your fraternities. Join with other branches of the Franciscan Family to celebrate some of our Franciscan feasts.

Most importantly, this article of our Rule reminds us that it is necessary to share our charism with those outside the Order, especially the youth. The stories of Francis and Clare as young people are ideal conversation starters.

Reflection

- Work with some of your fraternity members planning an activity and invite a neighboring fraternity to join you.
- Think of an innovative way of introducing the youth to Francis and Clare.
- How do you commemorate the deceased members of your fraternity?

Recap

Penitential life is *metanoia*, totally **turning** one's life and will over to the God of merciful and generous love so we may know our **true identity**, as **spouses** in our faithfulness, **brothers/sisters** when "we do the will of the Father who is in heaven," and mothers when we bear Christ in our hearts and give birth to him through our **humble and generous love**.⁴¹

Our penitential life encompasses our ability

- to be detached from the inordinate things of life;
- to be free and open to acknowledge God and care for those around us;
- to reverence the divine seed in the other;
- to promote
 - Catholic family values
 - *peace, justice and ecology as the basis of an egalitarian world*
 - work as a cooperation in God's creative activity
- to encourage youth and young adults;
 - in a spirit of perfect joy;
 - in fraternal community.

Examen

At the beginning of his conversion, Francis embraced the leper.

Who is a leper in your life? To whom might you be a leper?

To which stranger did you offer a smile?

In which area of social justice are you actively involved?

Name one positive thing you did to benefit creation.

When was the last time you gave away something that had great meaning for you?

⁴¹ Magee, OSF, 156

Closing

We call on Francis at the end of our examination of our OFS Rule as we did at the beginning.

INVOCATION

Francis, your wholeness
haunts this broken world.
Centuries ago—
you heard
the windsong of the Spirit
winkle gentle music
through the stillness of your being.
you danced
its unpatterned rhythms
every moment of your life.
you splashed
your laughter against the summits
of wealth and aristocracy
and with it transparent freshness.
you cleansed the leper,
forgave the robber,
freed the peasant poor.
you torched
a mediocre Church into flame—
seasoned wood caught fire,
and the fire burned,
and the fire spread,
and the fire enveloped the earth.
Today, Francis—
breathe your benediction
on this crumbling clay;
crushed, crippled, wounded, it desires to dance.
Anoint with peace and goodness
the fragile fragments of peace and justice
struggling to be reborn in this weary world—
it seeks to laugh.
bond your courage
to the stumbling steps of this pilgrim people.
burn the power of your fidelity
into the Potter's clay—
the fire is ready.

—Margaret Halaska, OSF

One day we will comprehend the power of love, and then humanity will have discovered
FIRE for the second time – Teilhard de Chardin

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation

Pat Brandwein-Ball, OFS



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JUSTICE, PEACE, AND THE INTEGRITY OF CREATION

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JPIC Session 1

Objectives

- *Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching
- *Define in terms of the entire Rule
- *Two-fold approach
- *Familiarity with JPIC mission and vision
- *Mission and goals of JPIC

Prologue

This chapter is intended to be an introduction to Catholic Social Teaching and Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation as reflected in the Secular Franciscan Order. The body of writing on the subject of Social Teaching is enormous and covers a breadth of topics relating to human dignity and our relationship to others and God. This chapter is not meant to be exhaustive of the subject. It is the hope that you will explore areas further as your faith and vocation mature. Resources to assist you are at the end of the chapter. If, on the other hand, you are well familiar with Catholic Social Teaching, please view this as a refresher and make the necessary connections with the Franciscan vocation. Again, the list of resources may be helpful to encourage you to delve deeper.

Introduction

Throughout the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Gospel living and Catholic Social Teaching (CST) go hand in hand. Thus, the OFS has a special team to enhance our understanding of CST with regard to our Way of Life. It is called Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation, also known as JPIC. We turn to a vast body of written work from the Church as an overview of Catholic Social Teaching. It must be noted at the outset of this chapter that the entire Part Three of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains CST. It is highly recommended that you spend time reading this. Perhaps using this during Lent would allow a structured time for reflection.

Catholic Social Teaching can be found in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents of the Church. From the late 19th century to the present day, this body of work gives definition and meaning to the Christian life through the Church. Catholic Social Teaching has as its cornerstone upholding human dignity in all circumstances and for every person. The World Synod of Catholic Bishops published *Justice in the World* in 1971. From this document we read: “49. Christians’ specific contribution to justice is the day-to-day life of individual believers acting like the leaven of the Gospel in their family, their school, their work and their social and civic life. Included with this are the perspectives and meaning which the faithful can give to human effort.”

The document goes on to say: “56. The basic principles whereby the influence of the Gospel has made itself felt in contemporary social life are to be found in the body of teaching set out in a gradual and timely way from the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.... As never before, the Church has, through the Second Vatican Council’s constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, better understood the situation in the modern world, in which Christians work out their salvation by deeds of justice. *Pacem in Terris* gave us an authentic charter of human rights. In *Mater et Magistra*, international justice begins to take first place; it finds more elaborate expression in *Populorum Progressio*, in the form of a true and suitable treatise on the right to development, and in *Octogesima Adveniens* is found a summary of guidelines for political action.”

In more recent times, *Centesimus Annus* gives further depth to the dignity of the human person and calls for a courageous effort to intensify our efforts for social justice by synthesizing the essence of all previous documents on CST. This creates a heightened focus and enumerates further challenges for the Church in its new evangelization. Most recent in our own time is *Caritas in Veritate* by Pope Benedict XVI. “In Christ, *charity in truth* becomes the Face of his Person, a vocation for us to love our brothers and sisters in the truth of his plan.” This encyclical is a reflection of *Populorum Progressio* of Pope Paul VI, 1967, in light of the signs of the times.

It is important to review the mission of the Church. As Secular Franciscans, by our Profession we pledge ourselves to “work intently to build the ecclesial community and fulfill its mission among all people” (Rite of Profession). Once again, we turn to *Justice in the World* for a brief review.

The Gospel Message and the Mission of the Church (quotes are from *Justice in the World*, World Synod of Catholic Bishops, 1971)

29. In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world.

30. In the Old Testament God reveals himself to us as the liberator of the oppressed and the defender of the poor, demanding from people faith in him and justice towards one’s neighbor. It is only in the observance of the duties of justice that God is truly recognized as the liberator of the oppressed.

31. By his action and teaching Christ united in an indivisible way the relationship of people to God and the relationship of people to each other. Christ lived his life in the world as a total giving of himself to God for the salvation and liberation of people. In his preaching he proclaimed the fatherhood of God towards all people and the intervention of God’s justice on behalf of the needy and the oppressed (Lk 6: 21-23). In this way he identified himself with his “least ones,” as he stated: “As you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me” (Mt 25:40).

32. From the beginning the Church has lived and understood the Death and Resurrection of Christ as a call by God to conversion in the faith of Christ and in love of one another, perfected in mutual help even to the point of a voluntary sharing of material goods.

33. Faith in Christ, the Son of God and the Redeemer, and love of neighbor constitute a fundamental theme of the writers of the New Testament. According to St. Paul, the whole of the Christian life is summed up in faith effecting that love and service of neighbor which involve the fulfillment of the demands of justice. The Christian lives under the interior law of liberty, which is a permanent call to us to turn away from self-sufficiency to confidence in God and from concern for self to a sincere love of neighbor. Thus takes place his genuine liberation and the gift of himself for the freedom of others.

34. According to the Christian message, therefore, our relationship to our neighbor is bound up with our relationship to God; our response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of people. Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every person is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a sibling of Christ, the Christian finds in every person God himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love.

35. The present situation of the world, seen in the light of faith, calls us back to the very essence of the Christian message, creating in us a deep awareness of its true meaning and of its urgent demands. The mission of preaching the Gospel dictates at the present time that we should dedicate ourselves to the liberation of people even in their present existence in this world. For unless the Christian message of love and justice shows its effectiveness through action in the cause of justice in the world, it will only with difficulty gain credibility with the people of our times.

36. The Church has received from Christ the mission of preaching the Gospel message, which contains a call to people to turn away from sin to the love of the Father, universal kinship and a consequent demand for justice in the world. This is the reason why the Church has the right, indeed the duty, to proclaim justice on the social, national and international level, and to denounce instances of injustice, when the fundamental rights of people and their very salvation demand it. The Church, indeed, is not alone responsible for justice in the world; however, she has a proper and specific responsibility which is identified with her mission of giving witness before the world of the need for love and justice contained in the Gospel message, a witness to be carried out in Church institutions themselves and in the lives of Christians.

37. Of itself it does not belong to the Church, insofar as she is a religious and hierarchical community, to offer concrete solutions in the social, economic and political spheres for justice in the world. Her mission involves defending and promoting the dignity and fundamental rights of the human person.

38. The members of the Church, as members of society, have the same right and duty to promote the common good as do other citizens. Christians ought to fulfill their temporal obligations with fidelity and competence. They should act as a leaven in the world, in their family, professional, social, cultural and political life. They must accept their

responsibilities in this entire area under the influence of the Gospel and the teaching of the Church. In this way they testify to the power of the Holy Spirit through their action in the service of people in those things which are decisive for the existence and the future of humanity. While in such activities they generally act on their own initiative without involving the responsibility of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, in a sense they do involve the responsibility of the Church whose members they are.”

We note in the above paragraphs many of the same words and phrases used in the OFS Rule and General Constitutions. Beginning with our own daily conversion, the penitential life revealed in our Franciscan tradition is truly the basis of our Gospel living and evangelization of the good news. To direct the faithful further, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has defined seven themes of social teaching. In doing so, they assist us with the knowledge that every area of life is in need of God’s grace and Christification.

From these seven themes, certain areas come into closer focus. The three pillars (as they are known) are Human Dignity, Common Good, and Subsidiarity and Solidarity. Sometimes these are expressed as Human Dignity supported by the Common Good, Subsidiarity and Solidarity. Regardless of how it is written, the meaning and intention are the same.

Seven Themes of the Social Teachings from USCCB

1. Life and Dignity of the Human Person

“At the center of all Catholic social teaching are the transcendence of God and the dignity of the human person. The human person is the clearest reflection of God’s presence in the world; all of the Church’s work in pursuit of both justice and peace is designed to protect and promote the dignity of every person. For each person not only reflects God, but is the expression of God’s creative work and the meaning of Christ’s redemptive ministry.”

—[The Challenge of Peace: God’s Promise and Our Response, U.S. Bishops, 1983](#)

“Being made in the image and likeness of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of the person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession, and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.” (CCC#357)

2. Call to Family, Community, and Participation

“It is imperative that no one, out of indifference to the course of events or because of inertia, would indulge in a merely individualistic morality. The best way to fulfill one’s obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one’s means and the needs of others, and also to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life.”—[Gaudium et Spes: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Second Vatican Council, 1965](#)

The human person is both sacred and social. Everything in our organization of society affects human dignity. Marriage and family are the core of society and require support and strengthening in all circumstances. With rights and duties to participate in society, all people together seek the common good. We are especially aware that the poor and vulnerable must be included in this participation.

3. Rights and Responsibilities

“It is agreed that in our time the common good is chiefly guaranteed when personal rights and duties are maintained. The chief concern of civil authorities must therefore be to ensure that these rights are acknowledged, respected, coordinated with other rights, defended and promoted, so that in this way everyone may more easily carry out their duties. For ‘to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the fulfillment of each one’s duties, should be the chief duty of every public authority.’” —[Pacem in Terris: Peace on Earth, John XXIII, 1963](#)

Everyone has the right to food, shelter, work, medical care, religious freedom, etc. These are rights given by God because of our dignity as human beings. Along with rights, we are responsible for committing our efforts to ensure that the rights of others are maintained. It is not enough to feel sorry for others, we are obliged to decrease what we have and give to others.

4. Option for the Poor and Vulnerable

“As followers of Christ, we are challenged to make a fundamental ‘option for the poor’ – to speak for the voiceless, to defend the defenseless, to assess lifestyles, policies, and social institutions in terms of their impact on the poor. This ‘option for the poor’ does not mean pitting one group against another, but rather, strengthening the whole community by assisting those who are the most vulnerable. As Christians, we are called to respond to the needs of all our brothers and sisters, but those with the greatest needs require the greatest response.” —[Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U. S. Catholic Bishops, 1986](#)

It is a basic moral test: how are the most vulnerable managing? Scripture tells us we must put the needs of the vulnerable and poor before our own... and not only when it is convenient.

5. Dignity and Rights of Workers

Society as a whole, acting through public and private institutions, has the moral responsibility to enhance human dignity and protect human rights. In addition to the clear responsibility of private institutions, government has an essential responsibility in this area. This does not mean that government has the primary or exclusive role, but it does have a positive moral responsibility in safeguarding human rights and ensuring that the minimum conditions of human dignity are met for all. In a democracy, government is a means by which we can act together to protect what is important to us and to promote our common values.—[Economic Justice for All: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy, U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986](#)

Work is a way of participating in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community, not only a means of making a living. The workplace must be a place where dignity

is maintained and respected. Workers' rights must also be upheld. These include (but are not limited to) the right to a fair and just wage, humane conditions, the ability to organize and join unions.

6. Solidarity

The solidarity which binds all men together as members of a common family makes it impossible for wealthy nations to look with indifference upon the hunger, misery, and poverty of other nations whose citizens are unable to enjoy even elementary human rights. The nations of the world are becoming more and more dependent on one another, and it will not be possible to preserve a lasting peace so long as glaring economic and social imbalances persist.—[Mater et Magistra, Mother and Teacher, Pope John XXIII, 1961](#)

Each person is interdependent with all of humanity. Collectively and individually we firmly commit ourselves to the common good. Solidarity comes forth from faith and is essential to the Christian view of social and political organizations. Pursuing justice and peace is the heart of solidarity.

7. Care for Creation

True stewardship requires changes in human actions—both in moral behavior and technical advancement. Our religious tradition has always urged restraint and moderation in the use of material goods, so we must not allow our desire to possess more material things to overtake our concern for the basic needs of people and the environment.—[Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2001](#)

Our care for creation is stewardship. All creation belongs to God. We are called to protect and use it in a manner that will last for all generations. Everyone has the right to clean water and air and to have places set aside to enjoy the beauty of nature. There are ethical and moral dimensions to stewardship.

We are obliged to be knowledgeable of the breadth of these teachings. No one theme stands alone, each is interdependent with the others. Thus, the Church calls all people to build a just society while living holy lives amid the challenges of today's world. Each of us is given a unique call to evangelization derived from our particular gifts, prayer life, personality, and life circumstance. Each of us must work "together with all people of good will... to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively." (Rule, Art. 14) Unless we work in concert with one another, knowing that it is Christ who sends us into the world, our efforts become out of balance and even divisive. It requires a maturity of person, faith, and OFS vocation to overcome the pettiness in ourselves and to rise to the challenge given us by the Church to reach out with the love of Christ to all. "United by their vocation as 'brothers and sisters of penance' and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls conversion." (Rule, Art. 7)

Being and Doing

In what way do your apostolic works reflect your relationship with God? Check out Catholic Social Teaching on the USCCB website www.usccb.org. Research one of the seven themes that you know little about. How are you moved to respond?

We also find that CST is incorporated into the Ten Commandments. It is found especially, but not exclusively, in numbers four and seven. An authentic interpretation of the Ten Commandments must include the moral precepts of Justice and Charity. As Catholics, and especially as Secular Franciscans, we are obliged to discover the truth of who we are called to be by the Church in our present day through prayerful review and study of the Decalogue as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. (2401-2463). The mission of the Church and the vocation of the laity to evangelize in our everyday circumstances by living holy lives make it more necessary than ever that the coming of the Kingdom mean more than personal piety.

We only need to turn to the words and example of Jesus. Let's review a portion of Matthew's Gospel. Recall the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:1-16). This includes the lines exhorting us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus gives us encouragement to think more deeply about the situations and suffering of earthly life. Mathew 4:23-25 tell us of Jesus traveling about teaching, proclaiming the good news, and curing "every kind of disease and illness." Moving on, we find two important exhortations: The Great Commandment in Mt 2: 34-40 and the Last Judgment in Mt 25: 31-46. In these we discover discipleship and our solidarity with the whole of humankind. Our OFS Rule and the CST clearly give direction for Gospel living and loving. Let us move on to a few quotes from the Commandments as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.¹

“Article 4 – The Fourth Commandment: (Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC]) Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land which the Lords God gives you.

2198. This commandment is expressed in positive terms of duties to be fulfilled. It introduces the subsequent commandments which are concerned with particular respect for life, marriage, earthly goods, and speech. It constitutes one of the foundations of the social doctrines of the Church.”

The Fourth Commandment outlines the duties of members of families, citizens, and those in authority, (with some overlap) to parents, teachers, employers, and civil authority. Respect and honor are towards those in authority. However, those in authority have a reciprocal duty to respect those in their charge. The depth of this commandment cannot be taken lightly, as the family is the cornerstone of society.

¹ See *Catechism of the Catholic Church* for their footnote references.

Article 7 - The Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal.[185²]

2401. The seventh commandment forbids unjustly taking or keeping the goods of one's neighbor and wronging him in any way with respect to his goods. It commands justice and charity in the care of earthly goods and the fruits of men's labor. For the sake of the common good, it requires respect for the universal destination of goods and respect for the right to private property. Christian life strives to order this world's goods to God and to fraternal charity.

2414. The seventh commandment forbids acts or enterprises that for any reason—selfish or ideological, commercial, or totalitarian—lead to the enslavement of human beings, to their being bought, sold and exchanged like merchandise, in disregard for their personal dignity. It is a sin against the dignity of persons and their fundamental rights to reduce them by violence to their productive value or to a source of profit. St. Paul directed a Christian master to treat his Christian slave “no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother... both in the flesh and in the Lord. [193]

2446. St. John Chrysostom vigorously recalls this: “Not to enable the poor to share in our goods is to steal from them and deprive them of life. The goods we possess are not ours, but theirs.” [238] “The demands of justice must be satisfied first of all; that which is already due in justice is not to be offered as a gift of charity.” [239] When we attend to the needs of those in want, we give them what is theirs, not ours. More than performing works of mercy, we are paying a debt of justice. [240]

2447. The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. [241] Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. [242] Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God: [243] He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none and he who has food must do likewise. [244] But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you. [245] If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? [246]

2448. “In its various forms—material deprivation, unjust oppression, physical and psychological illness and death—human misery is the obvious sign of the inherited condition of frailty and need for salvation in which man finds himself as a consequence of original sin. This misery elicited the compassion of Christ the Savior, who willingly took it upon himself and identified himself with the least of his brethren. Hence, those who are oppressed by poverty are the object of a preferential love on the part of the Church which, since her origin and in spite of the failings of many of her members, has not ceased to work for their relief, defense, and liberation through numerous works of charity which remain indispensable always and everywhere.” [247]

² Ibid.

Respect for the Integrity of Creation

2415. The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. [194] Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man's dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.[195]"

The Seventh Commandment also speaks of just societies and the limits and extent of the actions of governments, local, national, and international. This section of the Catechism is of great importance, as it requires of us maturity of faith. It is not in keeping with our call by God to remain in the simple understanding of the commandments taught to us as children.

In Terms of the Rule

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) "exists to bring about an awareness of the power of the OFS Rule to truly transform the life of the Secular Franciscan, thereby having a Gospel effect on the world and our society. In its broadly-based goals, it looks at the whole Rule in terms of peace making and bringing about a just society through the everyday experience of Secular Franciscans who, by right of the sacrament of Baptism, are called to create a more "fraternal and evangelical world." (Guidelines for JPIC Committee)

Through the integration of our Profession—permanent commitment to Gospel living, The OFS Rule, our way of life, and the General Constitutions—define our identity as Secular Franciscans. Candidates reflect upon the manner in which they respond to the vocation, "united more intimately with the Church... Go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words." (Rule, Article 6) In this reflection we can suppose that:

- There is a keener awareness of God's presence and power in our lives, which dictates our actions;
- There is a hunger for deepening our relationship with the Divine;
- There is an ability to make the right choices out of a faith conviction;
- The ability to reconcile is an integral part of our lives;
- Imitation of Jesus in His compassion becomes part of our nature;
- We become people of sure and certain hope.

"The lived experience of Secular Franciscans will necessarily be expressed in what is just, peaceful, and respectful of all created things and people." (Translating the Mystery, prologue to the JPIC Mission Statement) "In the spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, as works of charity, are the interactions with the brothers and sisters." (GC, Art 13.2)

For now, the focus is on “being” secular Franciscan (intentional lower case ‘s’). Our being, our Franciscan essence, springs forth from our many and continual conversions. Opening ourselves to God’s grace, waiting expectantly, we gradually see the truth of who we are and gain a glimpse of who we are invited to be by God, “to be truly myself, to fulfill all the dimensions of who I am in myself and in God.” (*15 Days of Prayer with Saint Francis of Assisi*, Thaddee Matura, New York City Press, Hyde Park, NY, 2009, p. 37)

Authentic conversion leads to life in Christ, not only for us but for all people and all creation. Our eyes open to the needs of others; our hearts are moved to respond as we become Gospel people. “Thus it is evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ, of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such, a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society. In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength according as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in his footsteps and conform themselves to his image, seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church History.” (*Lumen Gentium* 40.2) One of the saints who lived this life was Francis of Assisi. The Rule of life given to the Secular Franciscan Order by the Church gives expression to his manner of life according to the needs of the church today.

Our Rule, our penitential life, and our whole way of living are now more than ever hinged on the Catholic Social Teaching concerning the Dignity of the Human Person. The dignity of every human person comes from God. In the Genesis story of creation, God specifically created humankind. We were not created with the other animals. We were created out of the dust of the earth... an already created thing, not nothingness. Once formed, we are breathed into life by God; His very breath quickened us. No other creature has this distinction.

We are created in the image and likeness of God, image of the Son Jesus Christ, body and soul. Our soul is given specific faculties: intellect, memory, and will. These will remain forever with us. Created in the image of God who is in eternal relationship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, we are thus social beings. Our human nature requires us to be in relationship. Created by the same Father, we are of one and the same human family.

Two-fold Approach

We’ve talked about the personal conversion and the everyday circumstances of life. This is a necessary first step to understanding JPIC. The second intention of JPIC is on a larger scale. Secular Franciscans work diligently with other Secular Franciscans, other members of the Franciscan family, and the whole Church to bring Gospel values to all people through courageous initiatives to make changes in society at every level.

This requires recognizing the signs of the times, knowledge of issues of our day and Catholic Social Teaching in a Franciscan light. Thus aware of the needs of others, we unite our voices to strengthen the call for and support legislation with a preferential option for the poor and marginalized, upholding the dignity of life in every circumstance, striving “to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.” (Rule, Art 13)

In the General Constitutions, Article 18.3 states, “They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to ‘create worthy conditions of life’ for all and to work for the freedom of all people.” To this end, there are many resources available to us beyond JPIC of the OFS. Here are a few of these resources:

*USCCB - US Conference of Catholic Bishops www.usccb.org

*Catholic Charities www.catholiccharitiesusa.org

*FAN - Franciscan Action Network www.franciscanaction.org

*FI- Franciscan International www.franciscaninternational.org

All Secular Franciscans should be familiar with these and other organizations “to bring about a more fraternal and evangelical world.” (Rule, Art 14) Everything we do is concerned with serving God. Therefore, even the small day-to-day volunteering, work at a local food pantry, soup kitchen, child care while moms take classes... the list is endless and as varied as you and I are different. These daily activities are crucial in the plan of God. We cannot wait for the political realm to change everything... yet we must also work on the root of the problems. Feed the hungry and ask why people are hungry. Both problems need addressing. The “why” may have many facets.

World problems have both an immediate need and a far-reaching cause that demand time and energy that only the Spirit of God can direct. All are pathways to conversion and blessing. I’m sure you will think of many areas of life that have a basic here-now-today need and a larger root that requires many hands and much toil and commitment. Both here-and-now and larger needs require justice and charity.

Take note that Pope Paul VI reminds us the “justice is the minimum of charity.” With this in mind, and as a framework for living our Rule, we are able to see that both the “small” and the “larger” view are always necessary, that both are working towards social justice as defined by the Church.

Pause to Reflect

Look up one of the websites listed. Spend time exploring the themes of social justice. How do these impact my Secular Franciscan vocation? How do they call me to conversion? What action am I called to undertake?

Mission Statement for JPIC

The mission of JPIC is to assist Professed Secular Franciscans as they reflect on their relationship with God as manifested in the fruits of conversion in their lives.

*This with special regard to the daily choices made
in the areas of justice, peace making
and respect for all created things and people;
as brothers and sisters of penance,
bringing life to the Gospel and the Gospel to life.*

Goals of JPIC

- A. To foster an atmosphere in fraternity, the privileged place, where with openness and trust, we may share with each other the manner in which our personal conversions are shaping our Franciscan lives.
- B. To reinforce the appreciation of the dignity of the human person in the choices made in our professed lives by responding in charity and patience to all we meet and to respond as Franciscans to anything that would denigrate the dignity of the human person, beginning with our own personal communications with one another;
- C. To assist in the living out of obedience to the common good as intended by God so that the professed Secular Franciscan builds up all that is good for all of Creation and does nothing that would damage the fabric of communal interdependence;
- D. To strengthen the professed Secular Franciscans' commitment to solidarity with all of Creation, enabling them to make those choices in life that would bring about a more fraternal and evangelical world. (Build up the world fraternity)

Being and Doing

- Read and pray the Prologue and Chapter 2 of the Rule. Pay close attention to the phrasing and the strength of the verbs. Read Chapter 2 two or three times per week, then weekly. Each time, listen for something new, tie together the articles, one moving into the next, rather than one at time in isolation. Be sure to read the corresponding articles of the General Constitutions, especially Articles 17-27.
- What is the Church asking of me as my part in her mission? How does my daily conversion reflect upon this?
- What one new way can I find to energize my life in the Church?
- What one new way can I find, as a Candidate, to energize my life in Fraternity?

Suggested Reading

Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching, Kenneth R. Himes, OFM. Paulist Press, 2001

Catholic Social Teaching (Our Best Kept Secret), Fourth Revised and Expanded Edition, Edward P Deberri, James E. Hug, with Peter J. Henriot and Michael J. Schultheis, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 2003

Additional website: Office of Social Justice, Diocese St Paul/Minneapolis www.osjspm.org. This is an excellent “one-stop” site for basic information and expanded resources including full texts of encyclicals and Church documents. The site is user friendly.

Documents of interest: (this is not an exhaustive list)

Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of Labor), Leo XII, 1891

Quadragesimo Anno (Reconstructing the Social Order) Pius, XI, 1931

Mater et Magistra (Christianity and Social Progress), John XXIII, 1961

Pacem in Terris (Peace on Earth), John XXIII, 1963

Gaudium et Spes (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World), Vatican II, 1965

Dignitatis Humanae (Decree on Religious Liberty), Vatican II, 1965

Populorum Progressio (On the Development of Peoples), Paul VI, 1967

Octogesima Adveniens (Call to Action), Paul VI, 1971

Justitia in Mundo, (Justice in the World) Synod, 1971

Laborem Exercens (On Human Labor), John Paul II, 1981

Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (O Social Concern), John Paul II, 1987

Centesimus Annus (One Hundred Years of Catholic Teaching), John Paul II, 1991

Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, Benedict XVI, 2009

JPIC Session 2

Objectives

- Living the Rule: Chapter 2
- Special Assistance: Praying with Eyes Open
Theological Reflection

Living the Rule of the OFS

Though our Rule does not give a specific and detailed plan of life, it does form a path and shape our vision of Gospel living. As you know from other chapters in this text, The Prologue continually gives clarity to our daily conversions and reminds us that it is only by the grace of God that we are able to carry Christ in ourselves to others. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we respond to God and to others. There are radical consequences of transformation in Christ.

Our emphasis here is Chapter Two of our Rule, how we share Christ's mission through life in the Church. We note that Articles 4-6 tell the meaning of Gospel living in the Franciscan Tradition. They speak of intimate union with Christ through sacrificial binding of oneself to the person of Christ (Profession).

We seek the active and living person of Christ and share Christ's mission through life in the Church. Articles 7 and 8 give us the necessary preconditions for Gospel living: conversion and worship.

Articles 9-19 exhort us to evangelization, sharing the Good News.

We break this down further, as Articles 10-14, which give our manner of life, and 15-19, which tell what we do. It is in the "what we do" that CST becomes evident. Our Rule gives specific areas of life for evangelization and JPIC emphasis.

Review of the Articles of the Rule

Article 15: Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

The Church has much to say about the testimony of our lives and working together courageously to take up the call to service. These are not "optional extras" such as one may choose from in buying a car or a computer. The call to service is one and the same as fully living the Gospel. Several statements of the bishops and popes reflect this understanding and exhort us to broaden our scope of ministry.

What Church Documents Tell Us

"Our relationship to our neighbor is bound up with our relationship to God; our response to the love of God, saving us through Christ, is shown to be effective in his love and service of people. Christian love of neighbor and justice cannot be separated. For love implies an absolute demand for justice, namely recognition of the dignity and rights of one's neighbor. Justice attains its inner fullness only in love. Because every person is truly a visible image of the invisible God and a sibling of Christ, the Christian finds in every person God himself and God's absolute demand for justice and love." ([Justice in the World, 1971](#))

"It is imperative that no one, out of indifference to the course of events or because of inertia, would indulge in a merely individualistic morality. The best way to fulfill one's obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs of others, and also to promote and help public and private organizations devoted to bettering the conditions of life." ([The Church in the Modern World, #30](#))

"The life and words of Jesus and the teaching of his Church call us to serve those in need and to work actively for social and economic justice. As a community of believers, we know that our faith is tested by the quality of justice among us, that we can best measure our life together by how the poor and the vulnerable are treated." ([Economic Justice for All, #8](#))

Article 16: Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.”

This goes beyond work as a job. Everything we do is “work,” in the sense used in our Rule. We are called to be active participants in God’s plan. Human dignity takes on a new light. The dignity of those we encounter every day in the marketplace, government, schools, etc., all form the new society built of Christ. Workers have both rights and duties. Again we turn to the words of the Church to guide our way.

“Work remains a good thing, not only because it is useful and enjoyable, but also because it expresses and increases the worker’s dignity. Through work we not only transform the world, we are transformed ourselves, becoming ‘more a human being.’” ([On Human Work](#))

“All work has a threefold moral significance. First, it is a principal way that people exercise the distinctive human capacity for self-expression and self-realization. Second, it is the ordinary way for human beings to fulfill their material needs. Finally, work enables people to contribute to the well-being of the larger community. Work is not only for oneself. It is for one’s family, for the nation, and indeed for the benefit of the entire human family.” ([Economic Justice for All](#), #9)

“Created in God’s image, we were given the mandate to transform the earth. By their work people share in God’s creating activity.... Awareness that our work is a sharing in God’s work ought to permeate even the most ordinary daily activities.... By our labor we are unfolding the Creator’s work and contributing to the realization of God’s plan on earth. The Christian message does not stop us from building the world or make us neglect our fellow human beings. On the contrary it binds us more firmly to do just that.” ([On Human Work](#))

“Work is in the first place ‘for the worker’ and not the worker ‘for work.’ Work itself can have greater or lesser objective value, but all work should be judged by the measure of dignity given to the person who carries it out.” ([On Human Work](#))

Article 17: 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.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child. The family is the first and foremost foundation pillar and stands as a key for all else. The blessings of marriage and family, nurturing and educating children for the love of God, strengthen all of society.

Secular Franciscans through their own families honor the Trinity, model of all relationships and source of all love, inspiration, and grace. This article too goes beyond the immediate family. We are called to be caring and supportive of families everywhere. Family relationship is extended to all people—as secular Franciscan fraternity, family is at our core.

Our relationship to everyone is as brother, sister, mother, father etc—the family of God. Whether baptized or not, we are children of the same Father. Responsibility to be family, though not easy, is essential if society is to continue and grow in the Good News. This requires courageous initiatives and being mindful that Secular Franciscans are people of peace. Here are a few statements on Family.

“The most challenging work for justice is not done in church committees, but in the secular world of work, family life, and citizenship. ([Communities of Salt and Light](#))

“To overcome today’s individualistic mentality, a concrete commitment to solidarity and charity is needed, beginning in the family.” ([The Hundredth Year](#), #49)

“The first and fundamental structure for a ‘human ecology’ is the family, founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self as husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and grow up.” ([The Hundredth Year](#), #39)

“Economic and social policies as well as organization of the work world should be continually evaluated in light of their impact on the strength and stability of family life. The long-range future of this nation is intimately linked with the well-being of families, for the family is the most basic form of human community. Efficiency and competition in the marketplace must be moderated by greater concern for the way work schedules and compensation support or threaten the bonds between spouses and between parents and children.” ([Economic Justice for All](#), #93)

“The well-being of the individual person and of both human and Christian society is closely bound up with the healthy state of the community of marriage and the family.” ([The Church in the Modern World](#), #47)

Article 18: Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

We are stewards of the goods of the earth. They have been donated to us for the manifestation of the glory of God and proper use towards the common good mindful of generations yet to come. Listen as the Church speaks of stewardship, and care for all of creation.

Freedom and the capacity for moral decision making are central to what it means to be human. Stewardship—defined in this case as the ability to exercise moral responsibility to

care for the environment—requires freedom to act. Significant aspects of this stewardship include the right to private initiative, the ownership of property, and the exercise of responsible freedom in the economic sector.

“Stewardship requires a careful protection of the environment and calls us to use our intelligence “to discover the earth’s productive potential and the many different ways in which human needs can be satisfied.” ([Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](#), USCCB, 2001 #16)

“True stewardship requires changes in human actions—both in moral behavior and technical advancement. Our religious tradition has always urged restraint and moderation in the use of material goods, so we must not allow our desire to possess more material things to overtake our concern for the basic needs of people and the environment. Pope John Paul II has linked protecting the environment to ‘authentic human ecology,’ which can overcome ‘structures of sin’ and which promotes both human dignity and respect for creation.” ([Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good](#), USCCB, 2001 #18)

“God destined the earth and all it contains for all people and nations so that all created things would be shared fairly by all humankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity.” ([The Church in the Modern World](#), B)

“Material goods and the way we are developing the use of them should be seen as God’s gifts to us. They are meant to bring out in each one of us the image of God. We must never lose sight of how we have been created: from the earth and from the breath of God.” ([On Social Concern](#))

“By the work of our hands or with the help of technology, we till the earth to produce fruit and to make it a dwelling place fit for all of humanity; we also play our part in the life of social groups. In so doing we are realizing God’s plan, revealed at the beginning of time, to subdue the earth and perfect the work of creation; at the same time we are perfecting ourselves and observing the command of Christ to devote ourselves to the service of our sisters and brothers.” ([The Church in the Modern World](#), #57)

Article 19: Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

This is the summation of living the Rule: transformation in Christ, messengers of peace and hope in a world with ever more violence, marginalization, secularity, and poverty. Our task is enormous, but by the grace of God and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we will continue to be Good News to others as we await the Father's arms. Again, we hear from the Church writings.

“Biblical justice is more comprehensive than subsequent philosophical definitions. It is not concerned with a strict definition of rights and duties, but with the rightness of the human condition before God and within society. Nor is justice opposed to love; rather, it is both a manifestation of love and a condition for love to grow.” ([Economic Justice for All](#), #39)

“To wage war on misery and to struggle against injustice is to promote, along with improved conditions, the human and spiritual progress of all men, and therefore the common good of humanity. Peace cannot be limited to a mere absence of war, the result of an ever precarious balance of forces. No, peace is something that is built up day after day, in the pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among men.” ([On the Development of Peoples](#), #76)

“Listening to the cry of those who suffer violence and are oppressed by unjust systems and structures, and hearing the appeal of a world that by its perversity contradicts the plan of its Creator, we have shared our awareness of the Church's vocation to be present in the heart of the world by proclaiming the Good News to the poor, freedom to the oppressed, and joy to the afflicted.” ([Justice in the World](#), #5)

Pause for Reflection:

Reread Mt 25: 34-46 and the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy. Spend time in prayer and meditation. Specifically, how are you called to a Eucharistic life and to a greater awareness of other peoples' needs?

Creating worthy conditions of life and the ability to work sharing in creation, redemption and service to the human community, once again require transformation.

Our fallen nature tends toward the self in all its negative connotations. Overcoming (chipping away at) this tendency through prayer, personal discipline, vigilance, frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist keeps us aware of the glory of God in the mundane and difficult. Rejoice in the blessings of God the Father!

Our Rule gives us many phrases to ponder and use as everyday words of wisdom. Living these phrases expands our consciousness of the world around us, opens our hearts and eyes to the situations that cry out for compassion and action. Read these phrases carefully and prayerfully. Allow them to become ingrained in your mind and heart.

Examples of the phrases are:

- Christ inspiration and center of life
- careful reading of the Gospel
- encounter the living and active person of Christ
- Eucharistic life (thanksgiving)
- living members of the Church
- more intimately united with the Church by profession
- proclaim Christ by life and words
- radical interior change
- courageous initiatives
- esteem work
- move from the temptation of exploiting creation
- Franciscan concept of universal kinship
- fraternal harmony
- council and minister: animate and guide (collegial)
- Holy Spirit, the Comforter

Living justice, peace and protecting the integrity of creation is courageous Gospel living.

- How do the above phrases change your perception of living with Christ as your center? Re-read the Prologue and Chapter 2 of the Rule.
- What new insights do you now have?

Special Assistance I

Praying with Eyes Open

There is an Eastern Catholic and Orthodox tradition of gazing at an icon and keeping one's eyes open while praying. Through this practice, relationship develops and deepens with the "subject" of the icon. Using an icon or Western depiction of Jesus, Mary, saints, or an event as a focus of meditation is nothing new. Keeping our eyes open the entire time is new. One begins to see with the eyes of Jesus—you become what you gaze upon.

In a letter to Agnes of Prague, St. Claire outlines a prayer tradition in a similar manner, a Franciscan prayer tradition:

Gaze... to look at with loving attention

Meditate... thoughtfully consider

Contemplate... oneness with, listening/openness

Imitate... become what you contemplate

With eyes open, our gaze is intermixed—Christ with the surrounding world. We often close our eyes in prayer to rid ourselves of distractions. Yet the distraction begs for our prayer and attention. I don't mean the idle wandering of the mind when I speak of distract-

tion, rather a particular person or situation coming to mind. This compels listening for how to respond.

Praying with eyes open broadens the view of the world around me. Everything is more vibrant, more alive, perhaps more real than previously experienced.

Every decision to respond to the needs of others is sacred and filled with all that is holy. Every decision not to respond is empty of sacredness. Praying with our eyes open transforms us and aids in making present the Kingdom of God.

Pause for Reflection

Being and Doing

Pray with your special holy image with your eyes open. Ask for the grace to see with the eyes of Christ and to respond with a transformed heart.

Throughout the day, interiorly return to the image. Allow your prayer time to slow down the hurry of life and awaken a sense of the sacred in you towards everyone and all of creation.

Be blessing to others and receive blessing from those you bless. Pope John Paul II says this returned blessing is the other half of our conversion. (*Rich in Mercy*, John Paul II)

Special Assistance 2

Theological Reflection

There are many issues in our time that require careful examination and an authentic Catholic/Franciscan response. The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) speaks to these issues. Our common sense in the light of faith is appalled by recent greed and violence, to name but a few areas that beg our attention. There are ways to effectively review and evaluate our response. One such way is Theological Reflection. JPIC encourages all fraternities to frequently incorporate this style of ongoing formation in regard to the questions of our time.

1. **Preparation:** A well-prepared reflective session is essential. What specific social issue/question are you pondering? Write it out; name it. Gather background material; e.g., What does the USCCB say about this issue? Does the Catechism of the Catholic Church deal with this issue? Does Vatican II address this? What does our Rule and Constitution express? Etc. Make sure there is a review of materials ahead of time by the planners and that the resources are available for study by the fraternity.
2. **Personal experience:** Begin the session with an introduction of the issue to be explored, then give time for the individual to pause to think about his/her own experience of life that may bear on the topic. If the issue is given to the fraternity ahead of time, give time for the members to “re-collect” their thoughts. Does any of my culture play a role in how I think about this issue? For example, I grew up in the Midwest; is this reflected in how I view issues in New England? You may come up with your own examples of culture on its many levels. Go beyond the obvious. Reflect in terms of your religious tradition. Again, go beyond the obvious!

3. **Mutual Conversation:** Use group discussion and group review of the supporting materials. This may be handled in smaller groups for a large fraternity. Mutual invitation is a great way to begin the session. The RESPECT guidelines may also enhance the reflection time. When this phase is done well, it inspires creative thinking and leads to transformation of the person.
4. **Transformative Action:** What flows from mutual conversation becomes the “lens” we use for setting a course of action. Some examples are: “It appears we function as agents to make Christ present in the world when....” Or “Our neighborhood has need of....” “We are motivated by our charism to....” Etc. Look at the resources available: people, talent, time, and of course funds. I’m confident you will come up with your own list of resources.
5. **Evaluate:** Once the plan is implemented, it is essential to evaluate it. Are we true to our Rule and the Church’s teaching? Did we meet the needs of others as intended, or did we impose on them our need to do something? How is God calling me now? Begin the reflective process again.

Like anything new, Theological Reflection takes more time in the beginning. More than one fraternity gathering may be required to complete the process, or you may come together for an entire day or weekend.

The possibilities are open. Many issues may be reflected upon in this manner with your fraternity. If used on a regular basis, Theological Reflection can be a tool that opens the door to integrating the Rule in ways never imagined.

Adapted from: *Theological Reflection for Transformation*, prepared by Dianna Bergant, CSA; Faustina M. Crus, SM; Kathleen Dorsey-Bellow; Bernard J. Lee, SM; Maureen R. O’Brien, The Center for the Study of Religious Life, Chicago, IL

Pause for Reflection:

Being and Doing:

- Consider again Matthew 25:34-46 or Luke 10:25-37 What new insight do you now experience?
- How is God calling you now? Formulate a plan of action, be specific.
- Go to the websites listed in JPIC Chapter I. What support do these sources give you? What other initiatives do these sites inspire you to take?

St. Francis and His Approach to Divinity

**Adapted from CIOFS Material
by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS**

This segment on St Francis and his approach to Divinity is based on the work of our brother Benedetto Lino, OFS, coordinator of the Formation Commission of our International Presidency. This material, originally released in the CIOFS “Forming the Formators” manual, has been adapted for use by the OFS in the USA by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS, National Formation Chair of the National Fraternity of the United States.

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Part 1: A Relationship with God

Spirituality

Spirituality is based on one's unique experience of God.

"...the spirituality of any saint is his particular way of picturing God to himself, of speaking of Him, of approaching Him, of dealing with Him. Every saint has his or her own unique way of contemplating the Mystery of God, and this approach to the Divine gives rise to a specific understanding and hence spirituality." In our brief study, the spirituality we are most concerned with is that of St. Francis and its development by the early masters of the young Franciscan Order.

I must pause for a moment to say that the Catholic Church is richly blessed with a number of excellent spiritualities, or ways/paths traveled to approach God. All are good and are focused toward the same end, namely God Himself. But all of them do not follow the same path in this approach to God our Father. This section is aimed to help you discern whether the Franciscan Way of Life is the best match for your journey toward God. The process will require some understanding of our unique Franciscan spirituality and of your prayer and discernment to see whether this is truly your vocation, to approach God in the manner of St. Francis.

The Franciscan experience will require us first to look at God through the eyes and insights of St. Francis and the early Franciscans to gain an understanding of God as Trinity, focusing on the "Primacy of the Father." Next is Francis' image and understanding of Jesus, and lastly how we are called into a special relationship with our loving God.

Where Francis begins to differ from other saints/founders is in his approach to Jesus. Where most seek to emulate one or more aspects of Jesus' life, Francis becomes totally immersed in the reality of "all" of Jesus. Ultimately, the spiritual goal of a Franciscan is to struggle to become a total imitator of Jesus, to become "*alter Christus*" (another Christ) touching all of God's creation as Jesus did. This is no small goal or challenge, but a path that will ask you to look deeply into how you set your life's priorities and how you live them out day to day.

This fundamental concept was wonderfully expressed by the Cardinal R. Etchegaray in his sermon on the occasion of the Great Jubilee of the Franciscans, on April 9, 2000: "*The Franciscan charism has never been more present offering the total Christ to a broken world that is afraid of a united brotherhood of all men without exclusion.*"

And this task is also up to us, Secular Franciscans

“The world needs this Franciscan spirit, this Franciscan vision of life. It is expected that you, beloved children, know it deeply, love it with passion, above all that you live it with the perfection that your state allows.” (Pius XII, To the Secular Franciscans of Italy, 1 July 1956)¹

Spirituality is born and strengthened by a continuous personal relationship with God.

If you look at the life of St. Francis and read accounts of the early brothers (as well as St. Clare and her Poor Ladies), it becomes evident that they spent a good amount of time deliberately building relationships with God and one another. Contemplating the goodness of God was not relegated to a few minutes when available, or only on Sunday; this prayerful contemplation formed the foundation of all they did and became. It began the day and served as a spontaneous expression of joy when they came back together to share the wonders God enabled them to do. [Don't think great miracles for the word “wonder”; think a kind word or smile or gesture of forgiveness freely given to someone you can't stand. A similar concept today might be “random acts of kindness,” but done all the time to all you meet].

This time of being “alone” with God is essential to fully live the Franciscan spirit. To build relationship with anyone takes time, effort, and presence, and that includes relationship with God. If we are willing to constantly make the effort, the Holy Spirit will lead us to the relationship we seek, and for the Franciscan effect the peace and joy we need to love and serve all God's creation, simply because it is God's and it is good.

So how did Francis envision and experience God and put this insight into practice in his daily life?

Francis, Trinitarian Man

Every approach to God must be through Jesus. Christ is the way; He told us this. No one knows the Father except the Son. and he to whom the Son wants to reveal Him (Lk 10, 22).

While Francis desired to imitate Jesus as far as humanly possible (often called being Christo-centric or centered on Christ), Francis viewed Jesus as the only true way to approach the Father. It is this ultimate relationship with the Father that compels and attracts Francis: to be loved by the Father as deeply as the Father loves the Son.

Francis yearns for relationship with the Father. The Father is the goal of all Francis' desires. As Jesus is the Beloved Son, Francis strives to conform himself to the image of Jesus so he might realize that he is also a beloved son and experience as much as possible the wonder of the Father's love.

¹ Be careful, however, not to fall into or nourish an unfounded sense of superiority; that would be radically contrary to being “Franciscan” and above all to the thought and life of Francis.

God, the Father, gives full meaning to his life, and Francis turns to Him with trust, familiarity, astonishment, and thankfulness, being fully aware of his smallness and unworthiness. On the contrary, it is exactly this awareness (that God loves him in spite of his “unworthiness”) that makes him burn with an ever greater love, with a more determined desire to join Him.

Francis has difficulty believing that God loves him so much that He is willing to give all through His Son, and he wants to reciprocate this love, offering himself completely, like the Son, to join in total conformation and unity with Him.

Since Francis understands that the Holy Spirit is the source of power and inspiration that opens our hearts to relationship with the Father (and the Trinity), Francis pursues a vital relationship with all three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity, distinguishable but never separate, and to whom he turns because singularly they transform him, for him to live his relationship of love in the heart of the Life, the perfect Trinity and simple Unity of God, to the fullest.

The Theology of Francis

When we read the written documents of Francis, we run into **God’s** omnipresence on each page. Designated by His name (219 times), or more frequently, as **Lord** (364 times), God is the central reality from whom everything draws origin and toward whom everything is oriented.

God is always understood and proclaimed in a Trinitarian perspective. The proclamation of the Trinity is not an empty theoretical formula. Francis presents the internal divine union, insisting on the pre-eminence of the Father, who is always in the first place. Francis’ most common expression for God is “Perfect Trinity and Simple Unity,” and this is the reality Francis charges all his family to recognize and hold dear in all they do.

“Fear and honor, praise and consecrate, thank and adore the omnipotent Lord God in the Trinity and in the unity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, creator of all things” (Rnb 21, 2: FF 55).

It is this expression “*perfect Trinity and simple unity*” that reveals in Francis the deep intuition of the otherness that characterizes the relationship between the divine Persons that, however, does not call into question their “simple unity”: the perfect difference exists in the bosom of total unity. Otherness always focuses one on the complete care of the other, never acting for self, and it is this understanding that will ultimately found the Franciscan family, not on hierarchy of authority, but on the foundation we call littleness and fraternity (the desire to be a servant of everyone else, focusing on the other and thereby being a more effective imitator of Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve!).

The Primacy of the Father

In his approach to the Trinity, Francis always reserves **the central place for the person of the Father.**

In the majority of his writings and prayers, Francis focuses on the Father; for example, in the act of thanksgiving in chapter 23 of the Earlier Rule, he calls Him “Holy and just father,” (John 17, 11-25), “Lord of heaven and earth” (Mt 11, 25), uniting the titles that Jesus gives to God in the two Gospels. More or less the same words are repeated in the Praise of the God Most High: “Holy father, king of heaven and earth” (Lod Al 2: FF 261).

In the first Admonition, Francis brings us back constantly to the relationship between the Father and the Son, that “Father who lives in an inaccessible light” and who can only be seen in the Spirit (Am I, 5-7: FF 141).

Also, the concluding prayer of the Letter to the Whole Order (FF 233), even without naming the Father, speaks about the beloved Son and about the Spirit, which leads man to “the Most High, who lives and reigns gloriously in the perfect Trinity and in simple unity.”

In analyzing all the documents written by Francis, “Father” (attributed to God) is used 97 times.

This relationship of Francis with the Father, his basic longing, is also his gift (his charism: He experienced the grace of feeling like a son. These are points of reference that are essential in understanding the central importance of *fraternity* for Francis.

Unlike in other orders, Francis did not want to hear himself called “Father” (he preferred brother Francis), because he understood the Father as singular and referring only to our heavenly Father. Francis desired to be a perfect disciple of Christ, in whom we do not recognize “paternal” attitudes but rather “filial” and “brotherly” ones. Jesus teaches us the perfect prayer, which is directed to the Father, His and ours.

In his beautiful [*Paraphrase of the Our Father*](#) (FF 266-275), Francis asserts that “our most holy Father, light, love and highest good” already reigns “in the angels and in the saints,” giving them full knowledge, setting them on fire with love, and filling them with happiness. As for us, we ask that his name be sanctified, that it grow and bring fulfillment in us, the full knowledge of the “width, length, height and depth” of his mystery as a Father, which still escapes us. Only when the Father “calls us to his Kingdom” will we finally have “a clear vision, a perfect love, a blest company, an eternal joy” of Him.

Therefore, when Francis prays as the Son has taught him, he addresses himself to the Father: Of his 15 prayers, 11 are directed to the Father, two to Jesus, and two praise the Blessed Mother (T. Matura, op. cit.).

The Father is at the center of the Trinity, source of every action to whom everything returns: nothing summarizes this vision better than the final prayer of the Letter to the Entire Order (FF 233):

“Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery that we may do for your sake alone (propter temetipsum) what we know you want us to do, and always want what pleases you; so that, cleansed and enlightened interiorly, and fired with the ardor of the Holy Spirit, we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, and so make our way to you, Most High, by your grace alone, you who live and reign in perfect Trinity and simple Unity, and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever.”

Our experience or vision of the Father may be nonexistent or minimal, though we regularly say the prayer that Jesus taught us. We often settle for prayers or devotions to Mary and the saints (good if they bring us to Jesus and foster our desire for relationship with the Father), because we feel them more approachable than the Father.

The Franciscan approach is to use all prayer to lead us to imitate Jesus for the purpose of entering and deepening our relationship with Our Father, the source of Love unimaginable.

As “Franciscans,” we must re-discover the “Father” and reconnect, establishing a truly vital relationship with Him in order “to convert ourselves” into authentic “Trinitarian” men and women, like Francis, to reach out to the Father, through and with the Son, by means of the grace of the Holy Spirit.²

The Christology of Francis

The Christology of Francis is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Trinity, and therefore this Christo-centrism of Francis is based fully on his understanding of the Trinity.

Only through Jesus, the way, can we “see” and come to know the Father (John 14, 9), otherwise inaccessible, and be joined to Him in unity.

Only by following Jesus can we enter into an authentic intimate and vital relationship with the Father.

Francis rediscovers the Christ who offered EVERYTHING to EVERYONE to lead everything and everyone to the Father who is at the heart of the Trinity. His union with Christ becomes ever more intimate, until it becomes a total conformation in every sense on LaVerna.

In his Letter to the Faithful, Francis leaves us a testimony of this intimacy he experienced, when he describes it by means of the figures of the most intimate family relationship—

² A splendid treatment of Paternity and the Paternity of God as essential elements of the spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is found in *The Spirituality of the Secular Franciscan*, Cristoforo Piacitelli, OFM, 2008, pages 61-73.

brothers, spouses, mothers, declaring without hesitation that this is not a project for a few chosen ones but **for all** who will put themselves sincerely on the road to conversion—penance.

The Christology of Francis focuses on the divine dimension of the Word, “The Most High Lord, God of the universe,” and leads Francis to a descending Christology that emphasizes strongly the humbleness and the poverty of the Incarnation and of the Eucharist. Humility and Poverty will become the hallmarks of all of Franciscan Spirituality, and it will become necessary to understand that the actions of God, which we often call unconditional love, also show God’s poverty and humility and His desire to be in relationship with us His creatures.

God is fully complete within God’s self, yet by choice God desires to be in relationship with us, not as Lord and Master, but as a Lover with His beloved. This unimaginable invitation to love is another characteristic of Franciscan Spirituality. Atonement for the sin of Adam is not at the heart of our Tradition; the Love of the Father is.

Francis and later Franciscan tradition revolve around the actions of the Trinity as driven by love, the choice to love and the desire to be loved.

In an act of love and supreme poverty and humility, Jesus, the Beloved Son of the eternal Father, by the power of the Holy Spirit and in the womb of the Blessed Mother, takes on all the frailty of our humanity, just to show us the face of the Father.

The Incarnation, then, becomes for Francis the first moment of experiencing the greatest love possible and becomes the one single and most important event in all human history. God is physically with us as one of us, able to touch and be touched and showing us our salvation.

God’s love continues without condition all the way to the cross, where not even life is more precious than the continued outpouring of unconditional love, which does not fade in the face of diversity.

Francis does not write about or focus on the Cross, which is most unusual for Medieval theology, and in many cases in today’s theology. Francis instead continues to dwell on God’s poverty and humility and desire to remain with us, hidden within the Eucharist. The Eucharist is God’s action to continue to love and nourish us, giving us Himself, in the poorest and humblest form of food, bread and wine, (our food and drink).

As in the Gospel of John, where we find Jesus kneeling at and washing our dirty feet, again he humbles Himself through the example of simple service to others. Jesus completes the action of God’s love through another gesture of loving humility, choosing to remain with us in the Eucharist.

Jesus, God the Son, second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Beloved Son, Our Elder Brother (St. Francis’ expression for Jesus), who gave up the benefits of divinity to become

human, and who gave his life to reveal to us the depths of the Father's love, shows us more than just the face of the Father.

Jesus reveals to us the very nature of the Trinity and the Gracious Mystery that patiently waits for us to respond to the Father's invitation to find love and all fulfillment in Him.

For Francis, as in the Creed of the Church, the Christ-event is lived practically in its entirety in everyday life. Jesus' life emphasizes for us all the supreme expression of the love of God and reveals in his total offering of himself through his death on the cross that his own essence and being are inseparable from the Father.

For this reason, the Eucharist has particular importance for Francis (a supreme concrete expression of the love of the Father for his creatures and of the revelation of his essence), in which the true encounter with God and his creation is achieved in all dimensions of existence, human and spiritual ("*...the Spirit of the Lord, who lives in his faithful, is He who receives the most holy Body and the Blood of the Lord*" and "*...in such a way the Lord is always present with his faithful...*" Admonition I).

Because of the Eucharist, Francis held a special reverence for priests everywhere, not based on their worthiness, but on their faculty to make the presence of Jesus real in the Eucharist. This special gift of "understanding" established the church as a basic value, and he recognized that there is no Church without the Body of Christ, and there is no Body of Christ if there are no priests. It also recognizes that this Church is not composed only of clergymen: it is the people of God in all their functions and social conditions. It is this reality of Church stemming from the Eucharist that causes Francis to place all parts of his spiritual family at the service of the Church, to carry out the mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

Given the numerous movements of his day, most of which became antagonistic to the clergy, Francis' insight kept his family firmly within and at the service of the Church. Today, unlike many "Third Orders," the Secular Franciscan Order is and remains directly linked to the Holy See, and our guiding documents and interpretation of our Rule for modern times remain a function of the Holy See.

Following this brief primer on Franciscan Spirituality as Trinitarian and Christological, it would be a good time to reflect and discuss how this view or approach to God either fits or does not fit our own vocational call.

Let us meditate on the Rule and the General Constitutions, which exhort us (GC Art. 12, 1, 2 and 3 and the Rule of the OFS 1978 C2 Art. 8 and 10):

Article 12

Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of Francis and, above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father. They should bear witness to this faith before all:

- in their family life;
 - in their work;
 - in their joys and sufferings;
 - in their associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father;
 - in their presence and participation in the life of society;
 - in their fraternal relationships with all creatures.
1. Uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed His will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to Him even in difficulties and persecutions.
 2. As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

Discussion

1. What type of relationship do I have with the Father?
2. Look at your prayer life; to whom do you most often pray?
3. How would you currently describe your own spirituality?
4. Describe your feelings when you hear God is poor and humble.
5. What do the Incarnation and Eucharist express to you about God?

Part 2: Fundamentals of Franciscan Theology

The God Who Reveals Himself

The first concept I want you to understand is “*kenosis*,” meaning self-emptying (self-giving). It is essential for all Christians, and especially for us Franciscans, to understand this idea. As an aside, I want to insert the meaning of *kenosis* as understood by Bonaventure, as I think it more to the point and understandable for us today. *Kenosis* is the complete, total and unconditional “self-giving” of all God is (and by extension it is our challenge also) for the good/well-being of the other. (N.B. remember that the highest “good” is defined as love.)

“There is no greater love than this: to give His life for his friends” (John 15, 13). The key words are: “to give His life” and “friends.”

What greater sacrifice or gift can one give than life itself, that the other, the one who is loved, might thrive? Giving your life is in fact the gift of everything. God has revealed to us that we have been created in His image and likeness³ and that our fundamental nature is created to love and be loved. All are called to love everything and everyone completely, including our enemies (John 13, 34; 15, 17; Mt 5, 44; Luke 6, 27 and 35; Romans 5, 8).

From St Paul in the beautiful hymn at the beginning of Philippians we hear the following:

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in his very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing [*kenosis* = emptied himself], taking the very nature of a servant, he appeared in human form. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil 2, 5-8)

Pope Benedict XVI amplifies St. Paul’s words, saying, “The love of God for us, initiated with the creation, became visible in the mystery of the Cross, in that *kenosis* of God, in that emptying and humiliating debasement of the Son about whom we have heard proclaimed by the apostle Paul in the magnificent hymn to Christ in the Letter to the Philippians.

Yes, the Cross reveals the fullness of the love of God for us. A crucified love, that does not stop with the scandal of Holy Friday, but culminates in the joy of the Resurrection and Ascension to heaven and in the gift of the Holy Spirit, Spirit of love, through whom sins will be forgiven and forgiveness and peace will be granted.... In fact, while it is love that offers to man everything that God is..., it is also a love where the very heart of God, the Omnipotent one, awaits the “yes” from his creatures....”⁴

St. Francis knew well and understood this self-giving on God’s part, extending to all of us an eternal unconditional love: the self-emptying we call the Incarnation, where Jesus descends from the heart of the Trinity and takes on our complete humanity; the self-emptying on the cross, where Jesus gives up the precious gift of life so we might know just how consumed God is for love of us. There is nothing God would hold back (of Himself, for Himself) out of love for each one of us.

And lastly, in the Eucharist, God continues to stoop down even lower, that we might be able to see and respond to His great love for us.

Oh admirable Highness, oh wonderful condescension! Oh sublime humbleness! Oh humble sublimity, that the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, lowers himself down so much even to hiding himself, for our salvation, under the tiny piece of bread!

³ In every creature, animate and inanimate there is the imprint and substance of God, who in His Son, he has created us in His image and likeness from all eternity (Adm. V, FF 153,...he has created and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body and similar to Him according to the *spirit*). Everything is, therefore, by its birth essentially “lovable” and gives love because it comes from God and is loved by Him.

⁴ Sermon, celebration of penance, youth in preparation XXII GMG, Rome, March 29 2007.

*Admire, brothers [and sisters], God's humility and open your hearts to Him!
Be humble, as well, and you will be exalted by Him.
Therefore, hold back nothing of yourselves, so that you are completely received by
The One who completely offers himself to you." (St. Francis, Letter to the whole Order)*

This self-giving is God's eternal action of offering everything He is to be in a loving relationship with us, His creatures. We are, each one of us, the apple of God's eye, the object of His love, the one God has called into being to be in relationship with Him for all eternity. This is *kenosis*!

Francis identified this self-emptying of God on our behalf as the "poverty of God," discussed by St. Paul in 2 Cor 8:9⁵, and adopted by Francis as a motivation for his choice of radical poverty for himself and for his followers. The poverty of Francis, then, is first of all "conforming to the poor Christ." This expression was his way of understanding and responding to the fullness of the love God showers on us without reservation. A God who in His Son became humble and poor out of love for us. Radical poverty became Francis' solution to be able to respond to God's love as fully as he was humanly able, to remove anything and everything that might come between him and his ability to respond to the Love of the Father.

This experience of the humble and poor Jesus Christ, the revelation of humility and of poverty, of the love of God and the road to a humble and poor answer to such love on the part of man, is the insight and response on which Francis' life is based and that will guide everything he does up to the end of his earthly life.

It is this that constitutes the Franciscan characterization of the experience of God, of man, of the world.

The encounter of love between God and Francis (God who loves without condition and who desires to be loved back, and Francis who loves Him back with all his being in the astonishment of being loved by the Highest God) is the living representation of the realization of God's eternal plan for every man and woman, as it was for Francis.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, there are many spiritualities fully accepted by the Church. Most have their focus on the salvific action of God through Jesus' actions as expiation for sin (Doctrine of Atonement). This is expressed in the writings of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury, in his writing *Cur Deus Homo* (Why the God-Man?), and it forms the basis of many schools of theology. Over the centuries, this became the primary theology of the Church.

⁵ "You know, in fact, the grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ: from rich as he was, he became poor for you, because you became rich by means of his poverty."

But there is a fully accepted alternate theology, just as old, that survives today in the Franciscan Family.

For Francis, instead, Jesus in his humble, poor kenotic form of existence, is the revelation of the humble God.⁶ The alternate theology of the Franciscan school kept alive the radical love-centered image of God.

In his work on the Primacy of Christ, Franciscan theologian John Duns Scotus firmly rooted the Franciscan Family in understanding that God's plan is based solely on Love, and that the Incarnation was always God's plan (desire) to share Himself with us. This is the reality intuited by Francis.

The ultimate result of this movement away from the primary theology in the Church defines the Incarnation as the original intention/plan of God for all creation. The Incarnation is too important an event to suggest that something man has done or failed to do could influence God's intent to love and be loved.

Original sin is not the reason for the presence of God-with-us in human reality and history (Incarnation); God's love and free choice is!

The focus of all of God's self-emptying actions is to draw us into a freely chosen relationship with the Trinity, cooperating with the Spirit to lead us to Jesus, imitating Jesus who is our elder Brother and the beloved Son of the Father, and to allow Jesus and the Spirit to lead us into relationship with the Father.

Yet there is a challenge here, especially for us Secular Franciscans. In coming to understand this great love and invitation to share in it, we are charged to live in the world in a way that reflects this great love. Love is only love when it is given away, and the more love that is shared, the greater abundance we will receive.

It is a hard challenge, because as people we often refuse to see the image of God in the "other," and therefore we refuse to love (think "take up our cross"). We are not called to love only family and friends, and maybe God, we are called to be love, and to live so that love shines in the darkness.

This is the insight Francis came to understand, to believe, and to live with every fiber of his being. Did he fail sometimes? I am sure he did, being as human as the rest of us. But the important thing is the desire to live our lives in constant conversion (*metanoia*), day after day trying to be just a bit more open to receive love and to respond with love.

⁶ "G. Iammarrone, *Franciscan Spirituality*, page 50

The first article of our Rule⁷ charges us to follow Jesus in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi, making present our charism in the life and mission of the Church. How do we make this consecrated lifestyle present in our world today?

Discussion

1. How do you imitate Jesus in your life?
2. Explain the poverty and humility of God.
3. What is your image of God?
4. Father?
5. Son?
6. Spirit?
7. How does Franciscan theology differ from other theologies in the Church?
8. What do you feel about it?
9. How is our focus different?
10. How might this difference alter our perception about God?

⁷ Rule of 1978 approved by Pope Paul VI

Understanding Franciscan Theology, Tradition, and Spirituality

Robert L. Fitzsimmons, OFS



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Part 1 - Understanding Franciscan Theology, Tradition, and Spirituality

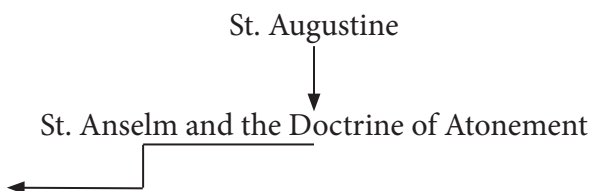
In order to better understand the different focus of the two main theologies in the Catholic Church, we need to understand, or at least revisit, the primary theology that is taught, and which is the basis for our religious education programs.

The following diagram, though much simplified, can aid in setting us on our basic path to understanding. We will look at the two main theologies from the Middle Ages: the Primary Theology adopted by the Church (i.e., The Work of the Dominican School) and the Alternate Theology in the Church, (i.e., the Franciscan School).

I am not here speaking of Spiritualities, of which there are many fine paths that can lead us to experience God. I am speaking only of the foundations in theology that give rise to the many varied and equally excellent approaches to God (spiritualities).

As with all Orders, we have much in our development that is based on the insights and writings of both St. Augustine and St. Anselm. So to help us understand the different focuses that have become the foundations of the basic spiritualities accepted in the Church, we need to look at these two major schools of thought, The “Dominican” School and the “Franciscan” School.

Let’s begin with the chart below for our discussion.



Thomas Aquinas (Dominican School – The Primary Theology)

- Atonement centered.
- Jesus seen as expiation for sin.
- Jesus—Incarnation would not have been necessary if Adam and Eve had not sinned
- Pope Leo XIII, in his encyclical *Aeterni Patris*. 1879, made this school the primary theology taught in all Catholic schools of religion and theology.
- Primary theology in the Church.
- Juridical, or law-based (Commandments, laws, rules).

Western (Latin) Fathers

St. Augustine

- Though much of St Augustine’s writing is based on seeing God as love, he still emphasized the fall of man characterized by Original Sin—this foundation places our focus on the sin of Adam and Eve (pride, disobedience, possibly trying to take by force [fruit of the forbidden tree], that which cannot be taken or earned, but which

can only be given). Nonetheless, with original sin predominant, we develop a spirituality based on our need for redemption, penance, and restitution. The love of God is very much present, especially for Augustine, but it is still viewed in light of the fall.

St. Anselm

- Doctrine of Atonement—Middle ages. This doctrine was developed to reconcile the love of God and His forgiveness with the human need for retribution or atonement. It is an answer to cheap grace, or a God too loving and gracious to desire punishment. Sin can be forgiven through the love and mercy of God, but it must be atoned for through penance and punishment. Investigate the writing *Cur Deus Homo* or *Why the God Man*.
- This Western (Latin) theology was championed by St. Thomas Aquinas and became identified as the Dominican School, It might have a view of creation as depicted below. (Again, remember this is much simplified to emphasize the basic foundational difference in approaches to God. The various theologies overlap in many areas, and all are directed to the same goal of unity with God.)

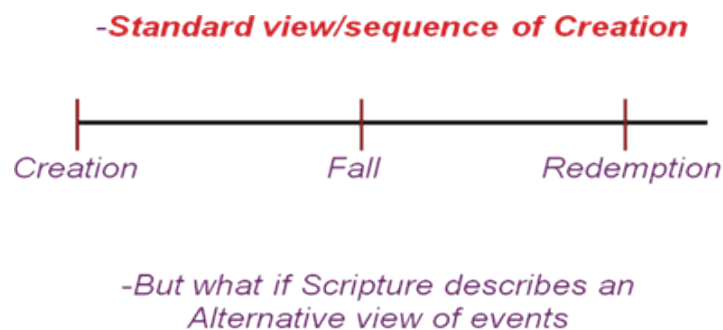


Figure 1: Basic View of Creation

This diagram highlights what we generally understand as the sequence of Creation, taken from Genesis. Creation is the beginning of God’s wondrous activity. As we know also from Genesis, it seems that sin and the fall from grace, along with expulsion from the Garden of Eden, followed hot on the heels of God’s work. As we sing in the *Exultat* every Easter vigil, “O wondrous fault, that earned us so great a redeemer.”

But what if there is an alternate view of how these events unfolded? There is the possibility of a different understanding of God’s plan that will find some voice among the Eastern (Greek) Fathers and will later become the foundation of the Franciscan School and its understanding of God’s plan for creation.

Comparison of Schools of Theology

<p>The Western or Latin Fathers <i>Saint Augustine</i> <i>Saint Anselm of Canterbury</i> <i>“Cur Deus Homo”</i> <i>Doctrine of Salvation</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Dominican School Thomas Aquinas</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus comes (Incarnation) as atonement and expiation for sin</p> <p>without sin – Incarnation was unnecessary</p> <p style="text-align: center;">redemption- and salvation-centered</p> <p style="text-align: center;">atoning for personal sins.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">This path became the Primary theology of the Church</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pope Leo XIII (OFS) – <i>Aeterni Patris</i> 1879 More judicially based on rules and moral codes</p>	<p>The Eastern or Greek Fathers <i>(Cappodocians)</i> <i>Athanasius, Basil the Great</i> <i>Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory Nazianzus</i> <i>Pseudo-Dionysius</i> <i>The Victorines</i> Rupert of Deutz (Benedictine) Robert Grosseteste</p> <p>The penitential movement in the Church</p> <p style="text-align: center;">The Franciscan School Bonaventure of Bagnoregio John Duns Scotus</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Jesus comes (Incarnation) because this was always God’s desire and intention</p> <p>Incarnation was never dictated by any need of man, but by God’s free desire</p> <p>God is the ultimate Good = Love Love is the reason for creation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Redemption and salvation are the result of God’s love conforming oneself to Jesus in radical sonship</p> <p>This path toward humility and poverty remains as an alternate and accepted theology</p> <p>Based on the gift of the Father’s love</p>
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Figure 2: Alternate (Franciscan) Tradition

Franciscan Tradition (Alternate Theology)

The theology of the Franciscan School develops from an insight of the Eastern Fathers, namely, that the Incarnation is too important and too great an event to have been initiated by sin. This insight stimulates a new understanding and hopefully an appreciation of the fullness of God's love for creation.

Pseudo-Dionysius, and later the Victorines, developed the understanding of God as goodness, and the ultimate good is love. And this goodness is self-diffusive, or is constantly being given to others.

Rupert of Deutz (a Benedictine) around 1127 was possibly the first to articulate the idea that since God was good and therefore could not will evil, then the Incarnation was fore-ordained so God could be present and rejoice with His people. The Cross was the result of man's fall, but the Incarnation was not.

Later, in the 1230s, Robert Grosseteste, (secular clergyman and later bishop), a noted Scripture scholar at Oxford, came up with an original theological conception quite appropriate for a natural scientist. He believed the whole universe reflected the glory of God. It was a great educational machine, meant for the instruction of humanity.

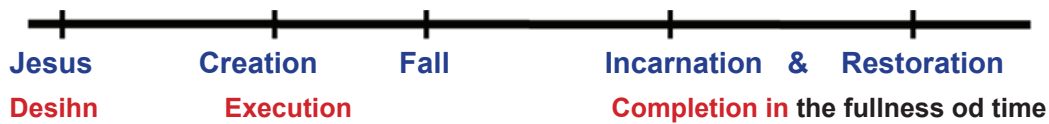
For Grosseteste, Christ's incarnation was not a last-minute plan devised to rescue fallen humanity. It was part of the plan from the beginning. Christ, God incarnated in man, had always been meant to be the capstone of creation. This teaching resonated with the Franciscans at Oxford, where Robert taught theology to the new friars.

The writings and thoughts of both Rupert and Robert would eventually come to the fore in the work of Bl. John Duns Scotus, OFM, and would form the basis of thought for the theology of the Franciscan School.

Jesus was not an after-thought that happened because mankind did not keep our part of the covenant with God. Sin was not the reason for Jesus, and nothing man could have ever done could force God to act. The Incarnation was not a reaction, but the initial action that caused creation in the first place. In other words, the Incarnation was not God's "plan B," set into motion after "plan A" failed.

God always intended Incarnation before and regardless of the existence of man or any of his subsequent (to creation) actions.

In the Franciscan vision, creation might look more like this: all creation begins with Jesus, who is the blueprint for creation and is the ultimate goal of creation.



Franciscan view of creation

- based on Jesus always being the blueprint and basis of creation. It was always God's intention in the fullness of time to Incarnate.
- Jesus rhe Master Plan - Ephesians 1:4
- First born of Creation - Colossians 1:15-18
- Pre-existent Word - Logos - John 1
- Center, focus, reason for creation
- goal of creation - **All things created through, for Him, and have their goal/fullness in Him.** Colossians 1;15-18

Figure 3: Franciscan Sequence of Creation

Now with the possibility of a starting point different from the traditional one of the first sin, we can look into the events beginning with the life of St. Francis, the inspiration of St. Clare, and the wisdom of St. Bonaventure and Bl. John Scotus that moves sin out of the fore-front and replaces it with overwhelming love of a Creator overjoyed and passionately in love with creation.

Francis of Assisi—Vernacular Theologian

Though not formally educated in theology, Francis, through gift and experience, was able to articulate the loving presence of God in a way understandable to the poor and unlettered masses, those relegated to second class places by both church and secular institutions.

The foundation stones for Franciscan theology, spirituality, and life are based in the **humility and poverty** of God. This poverty is known as *kenosis*, or God's total giving/self-emptying to be born into the human condition. God freely chose to become human to rejoice in creation.

In Jesus, God the Father expresses utter humility in His turning completely in love, to Jesus and through Jesus to us.

Francis, in his "Canticle of the Creatures," expresses his understanding of this poverty and humility, turned in love toward creation, and goes on to declare that God alone is good and worthy, while man in his exalted position (within the created and ordered world) is little more than a worm compared to the greatness of God. In all this, Francis is humbled and in awe of God, who despite all His majesty, desires us and stoops down low in love for us, a love that surpasses and covers everything.

The Franciscan path is a Spirituality of descent, a way of becoming little and a way to imitate the humility and poverty of God.

Taken to its conclusion, the Franciscan view is that in ourselves, we can never be worthy and earn our salvation. “Only God is good.” There is only one way in our grasp and that is a simple “yes” to accept God’s love as pure gift and to live life reflecting that love. (Yes, it is a sacramental vision of life.)

God desires to be in a deeply loving relationship with us and constantly invites us and offers us opportunities to enter into that relationship. On our part, we will still need to make a fundamental option to either accept God’s invitation or to reject it. As God, through His free will, has chosen us, we too, in our free will, must choose Him.

Before going on to Bonaventure and Scotus and a brief look at their contributions to our Franciscan traditions, let us pause and review the foundations of Franciscan life and spirituality.

Two Key Beliefs as Foundation of Franciscan Life and Spirituality

- **Poverty of God**—Perfect love requires the lover to hold nothing back from the beloved! God freely, by choice, empties Himself for the good of the other (self-communication—*kenosis*).
- **Humility of God**—God turns toward Jesus completely **(God’s full self-expression in one other than Himself)** and through Jesus, the Father turns toward us **(finite self-expression of Jesus)** and all creation.
- **Our poverty and humility are based on our understanding and embracing our absolute dependence upon God for existence and our need for otherness (relationships).**

Figure 4: Foundations of Franciscan Spiritual Tradition

Think about what these two statements say to you about the nature of our God and what challenges they ask of you.

St. Bonaventure

Bonaventure (Italian: *San Bonaventura*; 1221–15 July 1274), born **John of Fidanza** (Italian: *Giovanni di Fidanza*), was an Italian **medieval scholastic theologian** and **philosopher**, the eighth **Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor**. He was a **Cardinal Bishop of Albano**. He was **canonized** on 14 April 1482 by **Pope Sixtus IV** and declared a **Doctor of the Church** in the year 1588 by **Pope Sixtus V**. He is known as the “Seraphic Doctor” (Latin: “*Doctor Seraphicus*”). St Bonaventure is often referred to as the Second Founder of the Franciscan Order.

Here are some of the highlights from the works of Bonaventure on which to reflect:

- **Incarnation** is God's complete self-communication/expression of Himself to creation.
 - Sin is the least important reason for the Incarnation. (Bonaventure does not totally leave the theology of the Dominican school.)
- **Trinity**
 - Humility, poverty, self-emptying (*kenosis*) are essential aspects of God's nature
 - God is the highest good. As Francis would say "God is good, the most high good, the supreme good, You who alone are Good."
 - The Trinity might best be understood as "fountain-fullness," or the source that is constantly overflowing to fill us.
 - Trinity is total and mutual relationship.
 - God's nature is the highest good/love, which is constantly given away in the act of creation.

"*Bonum est sui diffusivum*" ("goodness is diffusive") or directed outward to the other—this is the heart of Franciscan theology!

It is appropriate that we begin our look at the development of Franciscan Spirituality from the place where it all begins, the Most Holy Trinity.

Bonaventure begins his journey into the depths of the Trinity with the solid understanding that the ultimate act of God's love was the Incarnation, God's total self-emptying (*kenosis*) in order to fully communicate and express Himself (His nature) in a way understandable to mankind, through Jesus.

Much of Bonaventure's work leads us deeply into the mystery of the Trinity, and the image of a fountain is possibly the best way to understand the life of the Trinity in his writings. Trinity is a community of perfect loving relationship (i.e., total self-giving, total receiving by the other, and total reflection back to the giver), so intense and complete that it is an ever-flowing fountain or spring, constantly drenching creation with sustaining love.

To be perfect, love cannot and does not by nature withhold anything of itself from the object of the love (Lover and Beloved).

The relationship of love within the Trinity is internal (intra) to the nature of the Trinity, and all creation is the product of that "perfect" and totally shared love. (In Francis' day it was called the fecundity of God, and it was understood that perfect love shared perfectly must be fertile and productive.)

Franciscan thought brings about the insight that this internal relationship within the Trinity is intrinsically connected to the ongoing act of creation and through the act of Incarnation, we, humanity, are given a special invitation to enter into relationship with the Trinity.

In his writings, Bonaventure will go on to explore the images of God found throughout creation (one such work is the *Breviloquium*), relating the presence of God existing in all things.

Using the model of a book, Bonaventure, in the first chapter, describes the Trinity as being present and shining forth in all of creation. All the created world in its own way and capacity bears the marks of its creator and offers its own song of praise, whether as a vestige, an image, or lastly, a similitude.

- The **vestige** is the reality and presence of God in all created things and creatures.
- **Image** is the gift given to rational beings (people), who have the presence of God within them and by free will are capable of touching the spirit of God within or rejecting it. Note, however, that our choice of rejecting does not reduce or eliminate the presence of God within.
- **Similitude** is the goal of Franciscan spirituality (St. Clare's gift), where we are, like Francis, not to only accept and acknowledge before the world the presence of God within, but are called to conform ourselves to become an external view of that internal reality. We are called to be transformed into imitations of Jesus.

The first part alluded to in the *Breviloquium* is the Book of Creation, where we begin to see, albeit dimly, the traces of God throughout all of creation—an image or trace that becomes clearer as we transform ourselves into purer and more complete imitations of Jesus.

Still, at this time in medieval history, the predominant theological thought was that Jesus came to die for our sins. This remained true for Bonaventure, who, though he acknowledged sin as the last and least important reason, still believed that sin, was one of the reasons for the Incarnation.

Following the work of Bonaventure, and succeeding him to the Chair of Theology at the University of Paris, was Friar John “Duns” Scotus.

John Duns Scotus

Blessed John (*Johannes*) **Duns Scotus**, OFM, (c. 1265-8 November 1308) was one of the more important **theologians** and **philosophers** of the **High Middle Ages**. He was nicknamed Doctor Subtilis for his penetrating and subtle manner of thought. Scotus has had considerable influence on **Catholic** thought.

John's writing, though not as well organized as the *Summa* of Thomas Aquinas, moved the Franciscan School away from atonement-based theology, which had become the primary theology of the Dominican school. After many years of debate, the Dominican-based approach would become the most widely held theology within the Church, though the position of the Franciscan School as secondary remained, and still remains today, a fully accepted

tradition or alternate theology within the Church, so much so that many of our Roman Pontiffs became members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Scotus will take the final step in establishing the Franciscan approach/school and our approach to God by explaining that the Incarnation was always the primary goal for all of God's creation, a plan that could not be changed or altered by mankind's activities.

It was God's desire to embrace, and in turn be embraced, and this desire, not the sin of man, was the reason for the coming of Jesus, the fulfillment of the intention that became creation. Bl. John Scotus expresses this understanding in his work, *The Primacy of Christ*, the theological foundation that stems from the lived reality of Francis of Assisi.

Scotus places Jesus and the Incarnation firmly at the absolute core of Christian belief. Not starting with the need for a sin offering as is still done today (we Franciscans often start here too), but at a beginning based on a total and completely free expression of God's love and otherness. We don't deny that Jesus redeemed us and died because of sin, but Jesus was always God's first intention or master plan and would have become incarnate (taken on our humanity) regardless of sin or anything else.

Jesus came to show us the depths of God's love and desire to love us, and to offer us the invitation to be loved by us in return. He gave us a true model of how to live life through love and respect for each other.

Jesus' passion and death shows us that God loves us so much there is nothing He would hold back on our behalf. Such complete, unconditional, and steadfast love on God's part is the wonderful journey we come to understand, through Scripture, through community, and through living authentic lives that seek Jesus.

Scotus affirms that Jesus is the reason, not just for the season as the popular slogan proclaims, but for the existence of all creation. All was made for Him and will return to Him (as we read in the prologue to the Gospel of John 1:1-18).

It is through God's choice and total freedom that Jesus fills the role of savior and redeemer, but God was never constrained or forced to the cross to complete the act of salvation. God could have chosen any method including simply willing salvation. Instead, He chose the cross, not from necessity, but to demonstrate the reality and depth of free, unconditional love.

In this unconditional Love, the welfare of the other is always the central focus of the love. Nothing can be held back, whether through God's initial self-emptying communication (Incarnation) or the absolute demonstration of self-giving and sacrificial love.

All is freely given up for you!

Bl. John Duns Scotus Primacy of Christ

- The Incarnation is not a divine afterthought or reaction to any event, but the cornerstone of the whole plan of creation.
- Everything that was, is, and ever will be is based in Christ.
- The relationship between divinity and humanity, God and humanity, is intrinsically united, and all creation is centered in Jesus.
- **Creation is based on God's absolute freedom and love, i.e., God's very nature, and not on a need.**

Figure 5: Scotus - Primacy of Christ

John's insights into the nature of God lead us to another important concept, "thisness" (in Latin "*haecceitas*"). This concept relates to each of us, as unique individual gifts of God, and, as gifts, we are loved simply because we "ARE," not because of anything we accomplish.

Think of it this way: Before you were born, there were an infinite number of possibilities for the "you" that would eventually come into creation. Once you were created, the created "you" is the specific one, of all the infinite possibilities, that God always desired and loves, unconditionally, and this love is what called you into being.

You are the unique and specific one that is the apple of God's eye.

Thisness [*haecceitas*]

The doctrine of thisness applied to the human person invests each individual with a unique value as one single individual wanted and loved by God, ***apart from any trait, attribute, accomplishment, similarity to others, or any contribution to society.***

Of the infinite possibilities for a "you," the specific, unique "you" is the one wanted and loved by God and called into being.

We are a unique, customized, gift from God.

Figure 6: Scotus - Thisness (*haecceitas*)

The Franciscan Spiritual tradition, though one of many in the church, is focused on encouraging all Franciscans, First, Second, and Third Orders, to move beyond a "Me and God" faith to a faith that truly lives the great commandments of Love. The essence of the Rule of all the branches of the Franciscan Family is simple: "To observe the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

Until we can see God rather than ourselves and our own wants as the center of the universe, we cannot fully understand what the Father is offering us in Jesus. Until we decide to begin the difficult journey inward, to become fully mature in Christ, to become Eucharist, blessed, broken, and given for others, we cannot break out of the consumer-oriented, performance-based spirituality of ascent ("upward spiritual mobility") and embrace the path of descent, or littleness, walked by Jesus and later by Francis.

Until we understand that we stand alone and naked before God, without any accomplishments and without any successes, and understand/experience that God is totally consumed with love for each of us, we cannot fathom the depth and passion of God's love and His desire to share this love with us.

We are contingent beings; we do not exist by our own force of will, and we do not hold ourselves in creation. We are completely dependent on another for our very existence. We are dependent on God. This is why Francis could call himself a worm, as worth nothing, because alone he was nothing—God is everything, and Francis found himself in awe of this greatest of lovers.

The beauty here is that God wills our existence and continues our existence, simply because He loves us, desires us, and hopes we will love Him in return.

Here in our absolute littleness and “creatureliness” is where we can experience the embrace, peace, and joy of a love beyond any loves, and here alone can we become aware of our totally gifted beloved-ness.

The summary is compliments of Friar Joe Schwab, OFM, director of the Franciscan Renewal Center “The Casa” in Scottsdale, Ariz.

Summary and Conclusions: Franciscan Spirituality in Seven Steps

Franciscans view the world and God's creative presence in a particular way. How we understand this and our relationship to God is at the heart of what we call Franciscan spirituality. Following are key themes in Franciscan theology (how we understand God) and consequently in Franciscan spirituality (how we relate to God). We owe this understanding to the experience first of St. Francis, then to his followers throughout the ages, particularly St. Clare.

1. God is absolute love, being, and creativity. Creation is dependent upon God to exist.

No created thing exists because of its own capacity to be. Only God is capable of being without depending on something else. The development of created things through time reflects God's inexhaustible ability to be creative and to remain the source of demonstrated love.

2. God freely chose incarnation (taking on human form) before the human choice for sin.

Jesus Christ comes to us because God loves us, not because we sin. Because of sin, Jesus comes in a particular way out of free will, not because a particular method of human behavior is needed to save us. God can simply will salvation because God is always free. Christ chooses to be with us physically now through the Eucharist until he comes again. This is reflective of God's willingness to be with us in humble ways and to nourish us physically and spiritually.

3. Christmas is of primary importance to us.

Easter is the outcome of Christmas. The Incarnation is the greatest thing God could do for creation. The death of Jesus on the cross remains a mystery, because even given human sin, God was not constrained to act in this unbelievably self-sacrificial way. It was done to attract us to divine love.

4. Christ is the perfect image of who God is for creation.

He is the mirror of who and what all humanity and created things are meant to be. Creatures participate in this perfection to the capacity of their natures. Humans can choose to not participate in Christ. Mary is the human person who has most perfectly chosen to participate in imaging God, both physically and spiritually.

5. Every creature is unique, gifted, and living in relationship.

No human life is a mistake, because everyone is uniquely gifted. The relationships of life are meant to be deepened according to the nature of the creature. This reflects the nature of God, who lives in Trinity and is therefore capable of the greatest depth of relationship.

6. Nothing humans have the ability to do has the capacity to make God do something.

God is always freely choosing love for humanity, even when we don't see that the choice is the best. Our knowledge is too limited by space and time, while God is not limited by them. We all remain poor at God's table, because God doesn't owe us anything.

7. Mercy, forgiveness, and justification are God's actions.

They do not result from our actions. We work on our salvation, while recognizing that even our capacity to want to do good comes as a gift from God. We must do what we can—the freedom to choose comes from God—but realize that God is behind the ability to do good. God respects our freedom so much that he asks us to cooperate with him.

Franciscan Spirituality (God is Love)

God always intended to incarnate (become human) into creation whether or not humans chose to sin. The sin of Adam and Eve does not make God “decide” to become incarnate and act as a redeemer. God incarnates because God loves creation and wants it to experience His love in a way appropriate to creatures. We can be intimate with God because of the incarnation. Because of the human choice for sin, however, God incarnate (Jesus Christ) comes as a redeemer, not because it's the only possibility but because God wants to show us that self-sacrifice is the strongest way to demonstrate love and to conquer sin.

Part 2: St. Clare of Assisi and Her Gift to the Franciscan Family

***Lectio Divina* Compared to Clare's Mirror of Eternity (a Franciscan *Lectio*)**

In her instructions to her sisters, Clare placed the starting point of their spirituality at the Incarnation and focused her instructions on the goodness of God, the goodness of all creation, and the idea that God could not be found apart from world.

In fact, God was connected to and his presence permeates all of creation, hence true spirituality requires an immersion into and embracing of nature. God himself became human, took on a human body with all its trappings, and, through that action, denied that sanctity was found in the soul severed from the body.

Even the Gospels record Jesus' concern for the bodily welfare of people, contrary to the medieval monastic separation. Jesus' and Clare's concern was for the whole person, not just one or another part. This earthiness incorporated into spirituality is a major shift from the contemporary spirituality of her day.

For Clare, Jesus showed the totality and completeness of God's love and challenges us to aspire to the same heights of care and concern for each other. Clare called on her sisters and all, especially her beloved brothers (Friars), to realize that heaven is not so much a place out there, but is very much a relationship based on unconditional love. We are also on the path of littleness, called to understand and embrace our complete and absolute dependence on God, and that we continue to exist only because of His love.

As with Francis, this littleness is based on the poverty and humility of God, who chose to empty Himself, take on human estate and enter into a fully mutual relationship with us. This pair, Poverty and Humility, if embraced, open to us the doors to transformation.

- Jesus reveals the totality/completeness of God's Love and the heights to which we are called to aspire.
- Everything that exists is dependent on God, is uniquely and completely loved by God.
- For Clare, to enter the door to transformation requires understanding the depth of God's love for each and every one of us, unconditionally and, armed with that knowledge and understanding, to embrace poverty and humility.

Poverty and Humility—Doors to Transformation

In Franciscan Spirituality, the poverty and humility of God form the foundation of our entire theology. God's desire to love us and to be physically with us is manifested in Jesus, the Word of the Father. Our God is a God not of vindication but a God of reckless abandon, giving everything (*kenosis*) to complete His desire to love each one of us.

This is what fed the insatiable desire of Francis to conform himself to Jesus, imitating Him as completely as possible. Francis sees Jesus in the same light as the Father, poor and humble, but the beloved (totally loved) Son of the Father. Francis too wants to become a beloved son of the Father and pursues a life imitating his (as he remarks) elder brother Jesus, who alone can lead him to the Father.

For this reason, Francis for himself sets out on a path of poverty and humility in imitation of the life Jesus lived. This is the only way he sees it possible to move beyond personal needs and wants, beyond ourselves, and to reach the place of transformation and surrender.

These are the keystones:

- Poverty is our approach to God from a place of littleness and emptiness. It is not necessarily a poverty of want or need, but a poverty of fully embracing our humanity and recognizing our complete and total dependence on God (contingency).
- In our nothingness, we stand in awe of God's total love of us, God's emptying Himself in order to become our Lover. The only question is whether we will allow ourselves to be the beloved.
- Humility is our ability to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to enter into mutual, not using, relationships with each other. As God our Loving Father stoops down low to embrace us in Love, can we also stoop down low to embrace each other in love? This is the example of Incarnation!

Transformation

Why Transformation? We often sing that we are the body of Christ, yet most often we do not treat and respect each other in a way that shows the same respect Jesus showed. We often sing the tune, but don't enter the words and become that which we sing about. In the same way, Clare's goal was to give the Franciscan family the tools necessary to in fact become what you sing, become what you love.

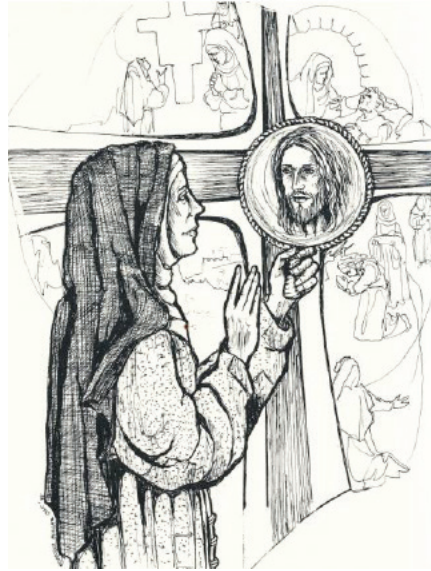
She emphasizes our uniqueness and lovability, pointing out there is nothing in our power that can put us beyond God's love and hopes for us. Our dignity (John Duns Scotus would later define this as our "thisness") comes from just being. We are individually unique and chosen by God as His beloved.

We are challenged by Clare to become what we love, to become the image of Jesus.

This image of God we seek to see in the mirror (Mirror of Eternity) is the image of Christ, and our actions are his actions of accepting our call (vocation) and becoming great by becoming the servant of all.

Time out for a rest and to reflect!

The Mirror of Eternity Reflection Questions



Try this exercise: get a hand mirror and look into it.

- Describe what you see in the mirror.
- What service does the mirror provide?
- What do you see when you gaze on the Cross of Jesus?
- Consider the Cross your mirror—what do you see?
- Whose image is reflected?

I talk about a mirror, because for Clare the tool to transformation is called the mirror of Eternity—it is the cross of Christ. Now put morbidity aside and repeat the same exercise using the cross (with corpus please) in place of the mirror, and journal or share what you see reflected in the cross.

Sure, Jesus on the cross is not pretty. We get an image of the cruelty of man and his willingness to inflict pain and horror in the name of “somebody’s” justice or rule of law, but look past the physical horror that was inflicted.

There is more there than pain and suffering, a lot more (you can use the gazing exercise at the end of the section). Look deeply into the eyes of Jesus and find there that which you have always longed for!

What message is God giving you in the face of Jesus?

Clare asked her sisters to gaze on the face of Jesus until they could begin to see their own face there. Then they would be at the start of the path that leads to true imitation of Christ.

It’s not for the weak or faint hearted. Francis was rewarded with the stigmata after a slow, lifelong process of transformation.

Consider the cross as a mirror. Does the outward image there reflect the reality of the person within? (Flip back to the hand mirror and ask the same question.)

Is not following Christ, i.e., being a Christian, about reflecting to the world the visible reality of Jesus, and in reflecting back Jesus to the world to share in the suffering of the Cross? Or is Christian just a name to feel good about?

Consider the Eucharist, is it a private me and Jesus moment, an exercise in personal piety? Or do I see Eucharist as sacrament I too must become?

Does it affect the transformation of those who receive and become an invitation in which like Jesus we are blessed, broken, and given for many?

Clare's Gift—the Transforming Tool, the Mirror of Eternity, the Cross

- The Cross of Christ is Love made visible.
- The Mirror of Eternity defines the depth of God's love of us.
- Inward image of ourselves.
- The image we reflect to the world.
- How the cross transforms us to be blessed, broken and given in love for many.
- Eucharist is not personal piety, but the Body and Blood of Jesus combining with our own body and blood, transforming us into what we love and becoming visible in the world.

Lectio Divina* and Franciscan *Lectio

I mentioned earlier that Clare, though forced into a cloistered life, maintained her evangelical spirit and embrace of all creation. For her and her sisters, and as a gift to all future Franciscans, she left us the mirror of perfection exercise, which in prayer form follows the monastic *lectio divina* but arrives at a different place with a different challenge.

Look at the differences below, between *lectio divina* and the Mirror of Eternity. St. Clare grounds us firmly in God's creation, so with our feet planted firmly on God's earth we may come to experience our Creator in nature (all creation), not separated from it.

At times throughout life, we make poor and unloving choices. We sometimes fail to recognize that everything God creates is good and is loveable and calls us back into relationship. There is no dualism here, but a healthy holistic spirituality that truly embodies the experience of God's love from both Francis and Clare.

Where *lectio* stops, in the contemplative quiet, for the Franciscan, much like the example of Jesus, contemplation becomes the condition of experiencing God that gives us fuel to move from the mountaintop to the valleys where all creation waits to be loved and embraced.

Lectio Divina Compared to Clare's Mirror of Perfection

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Lectio Divina</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Clare's Mirror of Perfection</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Components of this monastic prayer Reading Sacred Scripture</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Read (<i>lectio</i>) a Scripture passage—read silently and out loud—savor the words, take your time. It's not speed reading; linger on the text, taste and see. 2. Meditate (<i>meditatio</i>) on the text—place yourself into the story, become one of the participants, enter into the experience. 3. Pray (<i>oratio</i>)—allow the text/story to move you into prayer, praise, thanksgiving, supplication. 4. Contemplate (<i>contemplatio</i>)—just sit quietly and be still, this part is waiting on God—be patient and allow God to be God. If you are patient and persistent, God is then free to become more united with you and allow you some escape from the world. 	<p style="text-align: center;">Franciscan form of <i>Lectio Divina</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Gaze upon Him—gaze at the cross of Christ and visually embrace the love you see there. 2. Consider Him—think of all the things Jesus has done for you. How do you participate in His life, loving, forgiving, healing others? 3. Contemplate him—move beyond care for self and into care, love and service to others—get out of yourself and take the path of humility so you can be emptied of self and filled with God. 4. Imitate Him—The goal of Franciscan Prayer is to enable us to imitate Jesus. Our prayer is affective (feeling, experiential, relational); we do not seek to escape from the world to find God, but to immerse ourselves in the world because God is there, and all creation is good. <p><i>Where Lectio ends with a quiet waiting, our affective prayer insists that after our time of quiet solitude with God we become active in imitating Jesus in our relationship with all creation.</i></p> <p><i>Franciscans use Lectio to enlighten our minds and experiences, but then we must become "of the heart" to transform ourselves and the world.</i></p>

To follow Clare's way of being truly Franciscan, we must push ourselves to transform ourselves into becoming not just a Eucharistic people, a people who gather in thanksgiving, but a people who become Eucharist, and are blessed, broken, and given for each other and for the true life of the world! As we transform ourselves into the image of Jesus we are also becoming sacrament, yes, an outward sign of Jesus meant to be an occasion of grace for others.

Mirror of Eternity Meditative Prayer of Gazing

- Gaze upon Him—visually embrace the crucified Christ, look deeply into His eyes, allow him to gaze into yours.
- Consider Him—how are you part of each other’s lives (how do enter into the life of Jesus and how do you let Him enter into yours)? Do you dare to enter into the relationship of lover and His beloved?
- Contemplate Him—take a long, loving look at the divine (also when in Eucharistic adoration). Can you see, feel, experience the depth of love as Jesus embraces the poverty of the cross, of the bread, as He further empties Himself for love of you. How can you move beyond yourself? This is the Franciscan way of embracing our own littleness and utter dependence on God
- Imitate Him—you cannot stop with an academic understanding of love, prayer, God, but must descend into your own heart, find God already there and desire Him above all else—only this desire can fuel our own transformation into Love. Here within, with God alone, is the only place we can discover our true self, as the supreme lover’s beloved!

Note: One of Francis’ true sufferings was to understand his unworthiness and to be awed by the complete love of the Father nonetheless. This is the foundation of Francis’ desire to be a beloved son of the eternal Father, the reason he sought to conform himself to his elder brother, Jesus, the beloved Son of the Loving Father.

It is said that Francis would often emerge from prayer weeping and uttering “Love is not Loved! Love is not loved!” With these words, Francis was trying to tell everyone he met that God is madly in love with us, but we fail to respond with the same kind of burning love!

“One day Francis was heard crying
in a wooded area where he went to pray.
He was agonizing over the indifference
and the coldness of so many
toward Jesus
and what he went through to win our salvation.
This was his response:

“Love is not loved, Love is not loved”.

In his own response, he tried to make up
for the ingratitude of so many.

*The following photos in the visual meditation
were taken by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS, at
Our Lady of Peace Retreat Center in Beaverton, Ore.
June 2005*

Visual Meditation

Gaze on Him

visually embrace the crucified Christ

“Who are you O God, and who am I?”



Consider Him

How do I participate in His life?

Loving, forgiving, and healing, hold and return His loving gaze



Contemplate Him

Spend some time and take a long loving look at the divine.

Move beyond ourselves and allow ourselves to be transformed to imitate.

What does Jesus' gaze express?



Imitate Him

Become that which we love in reality and action.

Leads us to see God in all creation and invites our participation.



Profession and the Secular Franciscan

Theological and Liturgical Foundations

Robert L. Fitzsimmons, OFS

*Do you wish to embrace the Gospel way of life
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,
which are at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?
You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God
and to build a more fraternal world based on the Gospel
together with all people of goodwill.*

*Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?
You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.
Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community
and fulfil its mission among all people?*

Yes, this is what I want.

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Somewhere between November 15-22 of 2008 in Hungary, Fr. Felice Cangelosi, then Vicar General of the Capuchin friars, gave a presentation entitled “Profession in the OFS: Gift and Commitment.” He did this at a plenary session of the General Chapter of the OFS. I was personally overwhelmed by what he had to say. Even after working with the Seculars since 1968, I had never before heard anything like this concerning Profession. I was on fire. At that moment, I promised that for the next year or so, whenever I would be asked to address the Seculars, my topic would be the unpacking of Fr. Felice’s address. As the General Presidency of the OFS has asked that this topic be a part of the new course of studies for formation in the OFS, we are happy to include this reflection on this important theme in this manual. The subdivisions are taken directly from the Chapter address.

I. Profession: A Gift of the Spirit

Right from the beginning, we are to convince ourselves of the truth that this entire idea about vocation to and profession in the OFS is something driven by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we approach these realities as if everything depended on us... our knowledge, our input, our time and talent. We miss the point if we do not allow the Spirit to breathe throughout our deliberations and reflections. God gives the call and, through the Spirit, will see it through if it is meant to be. Throughout the formative process, the voice of the Spirit will be heard through all the agents of formation, and especially through the local Council. Being attentive to that Spirit voice is constitutive of the Secular’s understanding of vocation and desire for permanent commitment.

The moment of Profession is a specific moment. It doesn’t just happen. It is prepared for and is joyfully anticipated. It is specific so we know exactly what is happening and why. It is a moment not to be forgotten, whose impact is transformational and dictates all we do and say from the moment of profession on. Fr. Felice says it is the “foundational moment in the identity of the Professed.” This moment changes everything. During this time, the Lord speaks to the Professed and the Professed speaks to the Lord in intimate ways that bind the two together for life.

The very liturgy of Profession gives one the opportunity to make an appropriate response to God—the One who gave the call in the first place. Participation in the Profession Rite is a “confession of faith—*confessio fidei*” on the part of the one being professed. It says we believe in such a way that we are willing to allow our words and actions betray the fact that we are true followers of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

1) The Grace of Profession

At this point, we are given an opportunity to consider the role of *grace* in our lives. Richard McBrien would say that grace “is essentially God’s self-communication to us and, secondarily, the

effect(s) of that self-communication.”¹ The Church officially teaches that grace is the “...free and undeserved gift God gives us to respond to our vocation.... As sanctifying grace, God shares his divine life and friendship... that enables the soul to live with God, to act by his love. By actual grace, God gives us the help to conform our lives to his will. Sacramental grace... help[s] us live out our Christian vocation.”²

God does not allow us to make promises He is not willing to help us to keep. When spouses take their vows during the sacrament of Matrimony, they receive the necessary graces to persevere in their resolutions. Those making their Baptismal promises receive the same Divine assistance. Those just absolved from their sins receive the grace necessary to amend their lives. Why should it be any different with Seculars who are promising to be faithful in living out the Rule of the OFS by bringing the Gospel to life and life to the Gospel for the rest of their lives?

The professed Secular Franciscan will need the grace to make good on the promise to “dedicate myself to the service of His Kingdom”—words that are pronounced during the moment of Profession. How can this happen and by whose strength? It is a nice idea to want to serve the Lord and bring about the Kingdom, but we cannot do this by our own strength. It cannot happen without God’s grace.

At Profession, we are also graced with the Holy Spirit, who has given the vocation in the first place. The call is made and responded to. The Spirit will now see it through if it be the will of God and for the good of the person and of the Order. It would be impossible to serve God and His Kingdom without recognizing the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is why the Holy Spirit is called down upon those to be professed during the ceremony. Yes, it is the local Minister who calls down the powerful presence of the Spirit upon the assembly. It’s not just a nice, passive hope that the Spirit will grace us with its presence, but a command that the Spirit be present at this moment to sanctify and consecrate the person about to be professed in the Order. It is the same type of invocation prayed at Mass upon the gifts of bread and wine so they are transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

2) Profession: An Action of the Church

We know that everything we have comes from God. As God continues to intervene in our lives, He works through Christ. For example, usually our public, liturgical prayers begin by addressing Almighty God and our petition is made *through* Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as One God. As Franciscans, we see this as the ongoing mystery of the Incarnation—the Word made flesh—operative in our lives. Christ’s humanity is the connecting point between God and us. Christ then acts through the Church—Her sacraments, etc.

¹ McBrien, Richard; *Catholicism*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1994, page 180

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Catholic Conference, 1997, sections 1996 and 2000; cf. 654

With this understanding, we can say that the act of Profession is not something accomplished only by the initiative of the person being professed. It is an action of Christ and of the Church... the Church being the whole body of Christ; head and members. It is to be seen as a communal act, an ecclesial act. But it is not just an action.

Profession is an *event* in the life of the Church. It is part of the saving action of Christ—the ongoing effects of the redemption won for us by Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, Fr. Felice would say that Profession is an event in *kairos* time. We are used to *chronos* time. We ask, “What time is it (now ... this very minute)?” Or we say, “It’s time to go (now rather than later).” *Chronos* is how we mark time as the day progresses. *Kairos* is more expansive... it is out there somewhere... like “Once upon a time....” *Kairos* is God’s time... a more existential type of time. Profession is an event that takes place in *kairos* time. Although it takes place at a specific *time* (Saturday at 10:00 a.m., for example) it is an event that takes place in the *history-time* of the Church as part of God’s saving plan *in time* for us.

If we always see Profession as something that happened on a certain day at a certain time during a certain year, it is quickly forgotten and is tucked away in our memory. But when we see Profession as something belonging to God’s eternal plan, something that exists in the continuum of the Church’s time, then it takes on more importance—not only for the Church, but also for us. It is quite a significant event in our lives—a transformational event—a life-changing event in God’s time.

3) Profession and Fraternity

We are beginning to speak about Profession as the important, transformational, ecclesial event that it is. In all of this, we cannot forget the people who will play an important role in the event itself. Grace builds on nature, and nothing happens between God and us that does not require the cooperation of human beings. We need to give meaning to the idea of Church and of the ecclesial event of Profession. We are very fond of reminding ourselves that “we” are the Church. That is a truth. But sometimes we live our lives without regarding ourselves in that light.

How and in whom is the action of Christ and the Church manifested? The answer is the community of brothers and sisters... the local fraternity of the Order. The members of the local fraternity make the presence and the action of the Church visible. This is such an important fact that Profession should take place in the presence of the fraternity.³ Cangelosi translates this as “*must* take place in the presence of the fraternity.” The fraternity, especially when gathered for the liturgy of Profession, is a visible sign of the Church. The Rule of 1978 states that this fraternity is a “privileged place.”⁴ It is the whole fraternity assembled and in

³ Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 5; 3:31

⁴ Rule of the OFS; Chapter III, #22

union with the Spirit celebrating the mystery of salvation revealed and communicated to us in Christ (Cangelosi).

In addition to being the Church visible, the fraternity is the recipient of a great gift in the persons of the newly Professed. After the Profession formula is said, the local minister says, "...I receive you into this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. *Your membership in the fraternity is a cause of great joy and hope for the members of this community.*"⁵ This should cause us to be careful about the people we approve for Profession. It is true that after Profession, some prove to be problems instead of sources of great joy for the fraternity.

Those to be Professed in the OFS should realize that from now on they will belong to a special family within the Church, which will entail not only rights but also obligations and responsibilities. Once again, directors of formation and members of local councils, all agents of formation, should make sure that candidates for the Professed life understand what those obligations and responsibilities are.

4) Ministries in the Celebration of Profession

As the visible Church assembles, all have their own ministry in the celebration of the Rite of Profession: the candidates, the fraternity and its minister, and the presbyter.

a) In the first place, there are the **candidates** themselves. What do they bring to the celebration? What gives them the power and the right to perform the act of Profession? Here we have a good example of why it is important to make sure that candidates for Profession have received all of the Sacraments of Initiation—Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. The candidates are already in our midst as baptized people, having been gifted by the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, they are a priestly people conformed to Christ as priest, prophet, and king. They may now receive all other sacraments. They come to us as people having been spoken to by God Who gave the call of vocation to the OFS. They are Confirmed in these Baptismal promises and received the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit. This same Holy Spirit then empowered them to be able to receive our Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist—His very Body and Blood. They are now able to perform the priestly act of Profession. Why is this a priestly act? Because there is the offering of sacrifice of one's life (oblation) and the transformation of that life by conforming oneself to the life of Christ. This is the dynamic that the candidates bring to the ceremony. Are you beginning to feel that a Profession Ceremony is something not to be missed? Good!

b) In the second place, is the ministry of the **fraternity**, whose role was discussed previously but also deputizes the local minister to act on its behalf. The Church is visible through

⁵ Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 24.

the fraternity and dynamically through the local minister, who receives the Profession in the name of the Church and the fraternity. It will be the minister who will call down the Holy Spirit on those about to be Professed. Now we will have some very important company at the celebration. Who could ever possibly think of being absent for this? More about this amazing gesture later on.

c) Thirdly is the ministry of the **presbyter** – the priest. Before I go any further, let me ask a couple of questions. Is it possible to have the ceremony of Profession without a priest present? Is it possible to do the rite of Profession without a Mass? The answer to these is yes. The Ritual states, “In *exceptional* circumstances, when a lack of priests calls for it or makes it necessary, the candidates pronounce their profession before the fraternity (emphasis mine).”⁶ The Ritual also says “It is fitting that the profession be made during the celebration of the Eucharist or at least within an appropriate celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.”⁷

There is a way of reading documents from Rome. If something is not explicitly forbidden by name, it is permitted with prudence. If something is termed “exceptional” it means truly, truly rare because of the most dire of circumstances. If it is “fitting” to do something, it is highly, highly suggested... just short of ordering it done. How many times has a higher fraternity, wishing to respect the principle of subsidiarity, used soft language to persuade a lower fraternity to do something for the good of the Order? In this way, the higher authority appeals to the sense of good and hopes that the other will respect the “spirit” of what is being asked. This is the case with this section of the Ritual regarding the celebration of Profession.

The “spirit” of the norms is that a priest will be present and that the Rite will take place within a Mass. My contention is that if Profession is an important day in the life of a fraternity and in the life of the one to be professed, a fraternity would want to prepare for the event *well in advance*. Part of the preparation is obtaining the services of a priest—not two weeks before the ceremony, but perhaps two months! So what is the priest called to be and to do during the rite of Profession?

d) He is the witness of the Church and of the Order. Although Profession is not a Sacrament, it is still *sacramental* in nature. It reminds us of God’s interaction in our lives and has a beneficial effect in those lives. For that reason, the priest is interested in how Profession will affect a person... that is, the role of sanctification. It is not only important that certain words be spoken and gestures made, but that the candidate appreciate the effect of grace on his/her soul. The priest assures that all has taken place to ensure the beginning of the process of sanctification now that a permanent commitment has been made.

⁶ Fonck, OFM, Benet, *The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1985, page 6; 3:35

⁷ Ibid; page 5; 3:31

e) The priest will vouch for the validity of the event. Even if he is a stranger to the Fraternity, but more ideally, if he is the Spiritual Assistant, the priest knows something of the candidates and their journey to this point in their lives. He sees that all has taken place as it should and vouches that everything possible has been done to make the rite efficacious.

f) He confirms what has indeed taken place, because it is he who asks the candidates the questions in the name of the Church. In this way, he is reasonably assured that the candidates know what they are about to do and understand all the implications regarding the professed state.

In short, the priest is **witness** who manifests the action of the Church. He is the **guarantor** and reassures the Church as to the suitability of the candidates. He **ratifies** or confirms the promises made in the name of the Church.

With all of this richness connected to his ministry, it would be foolish to be so irresponsible as to not want to have the presence of a priest at a Profession.

5) The Gift of the Spirit in the Celebration of Profession

Fr. Felice begins his treatment of this theme by saying, “Sanctification is always the work of the Father, but it is channeled through the mediation of Christ and of the Church and is realized in the Holy Spirit.”

Previously, I mentioned an amazing gesture performed by the local minister during the rite of Profession. He or she calls down and invokes the Holy Spirit upon the candidates. This is the same thing done to the gifts of bread and wine at Mass so they are transformed into the Eucharist. It is the same calling down of the Spirit upon those about to receive the Sacrament of the Sick... upon those about to be confirmed... upon those about to be ordained. When the priest does this at Mass by spreading his hands over the host and chalice, it is called the *epiclesis*. Cangelosi, making the connection with the OFS, calls the moment of Profession an *epicletical* moment... another Pentecost when the Spirit comes to dwell with us in a dramatic moment. The Spirit will assist in the actions of consecration and transformation.

Did you ever realize this was happening at a profession? It makes us wonder why we put up with insipid and banal celebrations of the Rite without practice, good worship aids, good music and a fitting retreat for the candidates before taking this important step in their lives.

6) Profession and the Eucharist

This was perhaps the most eloquent part of Fr. Felice’s talk. He actually shared with us the theology of the liturgy of Profession, thereby giving the best reasons the rite of Profession should take place within the context of Mass.

Another aspect of the ministry of the priest during the rite is to connect the promises made during Profession with what happens at the Eucharist. Mass emphasizes what takes place at Profession; that is, there is a *sacrificial dimension of self-giving* taking place. Remember my saying that the candidates, as baptized persons, have a priestly/victim nature. Cangelosi puts it this way, “*They, [the candidates] by promising to live the Gospel life, make themselves entirely available to God and place their own bodies (persons) on the altar of Christ’s sacrifice, as a holy victim pleasing to God.*” Whew! I don’t know about you, but I think that’s pretty heady stuff!

When was the last time you even thought that that’s what you did on your Profession day? The connection between the act/event of Profession and the dynamic of the Eucharist are very clear. These two sacrifices—that of Christ the priest and that of the newly-Professed—are lives offered to God, and they are made real at one and the same time. I underlined the phrase “entirely available to God” because that’s where the sacrifice comes in. Day in and day out, both when convenient and inconvenient, in good times and in bad—the Professed Secular Franciscan is to place him/herself at God’s disposal.

A life of grace flows from the ritual action, and the liturgy gives glory to God. There’s a lot going on here. It may do well to stop here for a while to digest what is being said, and maybe to reflect on the meaning of it all in your life. Profession, as Fr. Felice says, is a commitment of life for life. The ongoing connection of the Eucharist to Profession takes a whole lifetime to appreciate and to act out in one’s daily professed life.

7) Baptism and Profession

In this section, we are reminded of the connection between Baptism and Profession. The grace of Profession helps one live out his/her baptismal commitment. Remember the effects of Baptism.

It *consecrates* a person. When we use the word consecration, we usually mean that moment within the Mass when the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Christ. Or we may be speaking of “consecrated” virgins; or in another time, the “consecration” of a bishop. In any case, in our mind, consecration is a big deal. And it is! We are consecrated through Baptism... the sacrament makes us holy—or at least puts us on the path of attaining holiness. Profession helps us reach this goal.

Another effect of Baptism is that it configures us to Christ’s passion, death, and resurrection. What Christ has endured, so shall we. Profession in the OFS aids us in our faithfulness in being persons made similar to Jesus—configured to Him.

Baptism also makes us living members of the Church... the People of God. Profession enables us to understand this status better. The liturgical act of Profession makes the connection with Baptism clear. Cangelosi says:

“Commitment to live out one’s baptism, in principle required of all Christians, arises for Secular Franciscans after profession as a result of a liturgical action and a saving event, which have an impact upon baptism itself. It seems to me, therefore, possible to say that although baptism is “one” and that Profession is not to be seen as a “new” Baptism, it is also true that Profession produces particular effects on the supernatural organism of a Christian, generated by Baptism. The Ritual highlights the specific action of Profession on Baptism by the use of the verbs renew, manifest, and activate.”

Profession memorializes Baptism. I do not mean that it gives us a chance to merely remember the moment when we were baptized. Profession actually revitalizes our promises and allows us to draw new strength from the baptismal promises made years ago. “Profession acts upon Baptism, impacts upon it, seals and develops it, founds a new entity and produces a new outpouring of the Spirit.” (Cangelosi)

8) Relationship with the Church

We are already incorporated into the Church through baptism. Profession relates us to the Church in a new way. Fr. Felice would say, “Profession gives rise to a new relationship with the Church,, the basic baptismal relationship... is made “**stronger**” and “**closer**.” He quotes the Rule, “*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.*” (Rule 6)

Earlier, I mentioned that there are questions asked of the candidates so the Church can be assured that the candidates know what they are doing in asking for Profession. One of those questions, which has to do with the strengthening of the relationship with the Church and is found in the rite of Profession is, “You have been made members of the people of God by your baptism, and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words. *Do you wish to bind yourself **more closely** to the Church?*”⁸

9) Witnesses and Instruments of the Church’s Missions

The Professed Secular Franciscan shares something unique with St. Francis. That is the call to rebuild the Church. It is as if the Profession ceremony brings us to the foot of the crucifix of San Damiano. This is the way Franciscans ARE in the Church. We, as a society, are too accustomed to defining ourselves by what we do. This is not so with the OFS. The definition of *who* we are is answered by how we exist in the Church. We exist as rebuilders of the

⁸ Fonck, OFM, Benet, *The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1985, page 22

Church... the “house” of the Church—not the structure, but the heart—the relationships that make up the fabric of the Church. Profession gives us the grace to accomplish this. This is where the dynamic of Gospel to life—Life to the Gospel—comes in. It is through our everyday life—the give and take—that our Profession is lived out.

At this point, Cangelosi makes an astonishing statement, **“The Brothers and Sisters of Penance are asked to offer, constantly and in all the circumstances of life, the supreme proof of their fidelity to God.”** There is no place where the Secular Franciscan is excused from living out the Rule. There is no circumstance where the Secular Franciscan cannot find a way to preach the Gospel by word and deed. In this way, the Secular Franciscan extends the tremendous gift of “hope” to a world in despair.

II. The Commitment of Profession

10) Consecration

Once again, the word “consecration” is used to speak of the totality of the commitment made at Profession. A definition is offered by Fr. Felice: *“...to dedicate, to reserve something, to destine a person for God and His exclusive service.”* This is quite a statement. There is no doubt here that Profession will be a sacrifice if it is taken seriously. This means that you willingly allow yourself to be “set aside”—all is now ready for the infusion of God’s grace in order for you to be able to fulfill your Profession promises. You have two choices. Seek and cooperate with those graces, or continue to live your life for yourself and squander those graces.

These are the things that should make Secular Franciscans think twice before absenting themselves from Fraternity gatherings and Regional events, not accepting nominations for various offices, etc. Lest we think we are left to our own devices in living out the Profession, we should remember that in the act of making those promises, we hold out our hands so the Lord may take hold of them. We will never be alone on the journey. For that reason, Profession underscores the idea that from that day forward the Professed Secular Franciscan no longer belongs to him/herself but is at God’s total disposal. The graces of Profession allow us to be led wherever the Lord wishes to take us for whatever reasons He may have. The Professed person becomes God’s own property so she/he may be transformed from within.

You ask how you can live a life of poverty while in the world? Well, if you can let go enough of self so that the life of God may live in you—so that you can truly belong to Him, you will be exercising the highest poverty. You will also be living out the promise of obedience by quieting your own voice enough to be able to hear what the Lord has in store for you.

11) The Value of Profession in the SFO

In this part of his talk, Cangelosi speaks about how the Church regards the legislation (Rule, Constitutions, etc.) and the significance of Profession in the OFS. There is no doubt

that from the earliest times the Church has regarded the Order of Penitents to be a serious thing. The promise to live the Gospel life was taken so seriously that one could not leave the Order unless to go to something higher—of “greater intensity.” Profession contains an **obligation contracted before God**. This is both personal and communal—something to which the fraternity and the congregation at the Profession rite witness. As we have seen previously, Profession also involves **a commitment to observe a form of life or Rule**. By means of Profession, there is also the **definitive incorporation into the Order**. All of this not only suggests but confirms the fact that “...Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order has the dignity of a solemn and religious commitment entered into with God and the Church, and it cannot be considered inferior to that of ‘religious’...” (Cangelosi).

So we begin to see that Profession is not a reward given to someone who has successfully completed their initial formation. It is not just a nice little ceremony. Profession has TEETH. Formators need to be attentive to the obligations that Profession demands and make sure that those in formation receive the wherewithal to make a good and informed decision to be Professed Secular Franciscans for life.

12) After the Manner of St. Francis

At Profession and throughout our lives as Franciscans, we endeavor to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ “after the manner of St. Francis.” What does this actually mean? Do we constantly have to go through life asking ourselves the question, “What would Francis do?” Do we need to approximate 13th century Italy in our daily lives? What about radical, material poverty? Must we empty our bank accounts and walk around in rags? Remember, we become Franciscans NOT to become other Francises, but rather to journey toward Christ and eternal life with God. As one speaker so bluntly put it, “Francis is dead!” The audience let out a gasp... perhaps it was shocking, but a reality nonetheless. His spirit is alive, of course, and that is the basis for living a life in his manner. But to what extent?

The most important thing we should take care to know about St. Francis is his relationship to God and his journey to Him. This was made possible through knowledge of the Gospels. Francis’ whole life was based on a radical living out of what he considered to be his calling to be a man of the Gospel. What we need to know is how Francis regarded what he read of the Gospel and what thought processes he went through to make it a reality in his life. There are factors that made Francis do what he did with the Gospel... geography, temperament, personality, view of religion and of the Church, etc.

He saw poverty—this colored his reading of scripture. He witnessed injustice—this influenced the way he treated people. He saw political and ecclesiastical grasps for earthly power—this helped him to appreciate total dependence on God. He experienced violence and prayed for peace and actually became a peacemaker.

You can see the next question coming. What is our experience of life up against our reading of scripture—especially the Gospels? How will we regard all people as the creatures God has created and loved? How will we depend on God and abhor violence? How will we make Christ accessible to others? How will we see the heart and spirit behind the words of Scripture and allow them to affect our sisters and brothers?

Francis' approach to the Gospels was radical. His approach was joyful and brought life and light into the world. How will we do that in our own times, in our societies—today in this century? This will be the Franciscan gift to the world.

13) Gospel Life for Discipleship or “Following Christ”

For Francis, following Christ meant observing the Gospel—there was no complication about this fact. The Ritual also speaks in these terms. As I mentioned earlier, it was through the Gospels that Francis came to know Christ. What was the truth of the Gospel for him? It certainly was not totally theological as we analyze theology today, but rather the *following of a person*. Fr. Felice outlines some of the ways Francis lived the Gospel: *by following Christ's poverty, following Christ's humility, following the life of Christ, following the precepts of Christ, following the doctrine of Christ, following the will of Christ, following the goodness of Christ, following the spirit of the Scriptures, following the Good Shepherd, following the footsteps of Christ.*

All professed Secular Franciscans have to find their own way of doing this. We will not follow everything Jesus did, and we will not go where He went. What is important, however, is to “...structure the whole of one's life on the set of evangelical demands, sharing in and imitating the action of God, who emptied Himself to the point of dying on the cross for the salvation of the world.” (Cangelosi)

Francis' life came together at Alvernia when he most resembled the crucified Jesus. His vocation was to follow Christ to Calvary and to be transformed by the process.

14) Christ, Center of Life

St. Francis of Assisi “made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.” With this quote from the Rule of the OFS, it is apparent that if this is the major way Francis desired to go about his relationship to God, then anyone professing the Franciscan life must hold the same sentiment. In another section, the Rule also reinforces the fact that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life—thereby making Him the center of all things. From the very beginning, the Rule stresses this relationship of Christ to us—to all we are and do in His name. Since the Professed Secular Franciscan unites him/herself to Christ, she/he is also united in the desire to do God's will in all things. He is center stage. *Deus meus et omnia... My God and my all!*

15) The Original Penitential Identity

The call to live a life of penance is squarely rooted in the Gospel. We have only to call to mind John the Baptist, who called for acts of repentance and conversion as pre-requisites for the welcoming of the Messiah. Fr. Felice speaks of earlier Rules, and especially Francis' Letter to the Faithful, which serves as a Prologue of the OFS Rule of 1978. He believes this letter is the basis for the Penitential character of the OFS. It is evident that Francis is calling the people who wish to have a rule of their own to a more radical form of Christianity—a lifestyle that shows the seriousness of wanting to follow Jesus Christ and to be conformed to Him. Through penance, the ways of living in this world with all of its values are completely transformed—radically changed. Francis was aware of the fact that he was going against the tide by the way he was living. He purposefully asked those who wished to follow him to do the same.

This is an everyday changing of habits and attitudes that are not life giving. It is a joyful lifestyle. For the Secular Franciscan, it is Lent every day—not a drudge, but a joy. In the “turning toward the Lord” we find our joy and peace. He becomes more present to us as we begin to see Him more clearly in all the facets of our lives. Cangelosi closes this section of his talk with this quote from the Rule: *“United by their vocation as ‘brothers and sisters of penance,’ and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, [they should] conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls conversion. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.”* (Rule 7)

16) Secularity

The professed Secular lives IN the world and FOR the world. Let's forget about that pious little phrase... “We are in the world but not of the world.” There's no getting away with it... we are IN the world... a good world created by God. It is up to Franciscans to show others the good that is in our midst; remember, the Kingdom of God is among us! The Order has not made you secular... you were BORN secular. It will be the duty of the Professed to seek out and find the “theological dimensions” of that secularity.

Cangelosi makes the argument that what we consider to be human and secular—that which we sometimes consider to be unimportant or nothing special—actually does assume a theological significance. Since our desire is to get to heaven, it stands to reason that the way to get there will be through what is familiar to us here on earth—other people, friends, our daily routine, the illnesses we bear, etc. This is the special way given to the Secular Franciscan to realize and to give witness to salvation. There are still a few people who are upset with the term “secular” Franciscan thinking that it denotes something flawed—having come in contact with the wicked world. But this is all we have to work with. Fr. Felice reminded

his listeners that “*You can only be a Secular Franciscan in the world... to wish anything else would be a betrayal of your Profession.*”

Points for Reflection

- What moments in your life could you consider to be life-changing? Why?
 - Does the way you live your life betray the fact that you are a Christian?
- 1) The Grace of Profession
 - Are you aware of grace in your life?
 - How does the Holy Spirit keep you faithful to your Profession?
 - 2) Profession, an Action of the Church
 - Did you ever think yourself so important that God would include you in His plan of salvation?
 - How does this understanding of an ecclesial event change your idea of your Profession in the OFS?
 - 3) Profession and Fraternity
 - What could a fraternity do to ensure that all its members attend Profession Ceremonies?
 - What do you consider to be your obligations to God and to the members of your fraternity because of your Professed status?
 - 4) Ministries in the Celebration of Profession
 - Prior to the Profession ceremony, what should be done to ensure that everyone appreciates and knows how to carry out their particular ministry?
 - If you asked a priest to represent the Church and the Order during the Rite of Profession and he didn’t know what exactly Profession was all about, how would you enlighten him so he could be the witness he should be?
 - 5) The Gift of the Spirit in the Celebration of Profession
 - How do you define *epiclesis*?
 - What is this *sanctification* that the Holy Spirit is to accomplish in the lives of the Professed?
 - 6) Profession and the Eucharist
 - What struck you most in this section? Why?
 - What should be our understanding of what is happening at Mass and what is happening to us at all the Masses we attend as a professed Franciscans?
 - 7) Baptism and Profession
 - What do you think of the idea of “consecration”?
 - What does it mean to live out the Paschal mystery of Christ?

- 8) Relationship with the Church
 - The deepening of one's relationship with the Church may be difficult to gauge. How would you see this happening in your life?
 - What obligations would a Secular Franciscan have to the local (diocesan) Church?
- 9) Witness and Instruments of the Church's Mission
 - How could a fraternity "build up" the Church?
 - How could we assist in the mission of the Church?
- 10) Consecration
 - Does becoming God's property make you feel uneasy? Why? Why not?
 - Is the idea of "consecration" too exalted for you? Explain.
- 11) The Value of Profession in the OFS
 - Why is your Secular Franciscan Profession not inferior to the Profession of the friars and the Clares?
- 12) After the Manner of St. Francis
 - How would doing things "after the manner of St. Francis" challenge the way you presently live?
 - Give an example of looking at the Gospel as Francis did and how it could be a part of your Franciscan life.
- 13) Following Christ
 - Does the idea of the cross unsettle you? Why?
 - What must you do to arrive at your own "Alvernia"?
- 14) Christ as the Center of Your Life
 - Many things take center stage in our lives: spouses, children, jobs, etc. How can Christ be the center of all you do and are?
- 15) The Original Penitential Identity
 - We know what all Christians are obliged to do because of their common Baptism. How could you live this commitment in a radical (radical = from the roots) way?
- 16) Secularity
 - How do you theologize about the world?
 - How does one come to salvation through the world?

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Penitence – Conversion

Spirituality of Conversion

Conversion is the particular character of Secular Franciscan spirituality—it is the signature concept that specifies the uniqueness of the Secular Franciscan spirituality within the Franciscan family, even as minority is for the Friars of the First Order. So what is conversion, or, as we find it referred to in Franciscan writings, “doing Penance”?

Current theological writings devote a good deal of attention to the explanation of the phenomenon of conversion. In reviewing some of the current writings on the subject, it becomes clear that conversion, in both its personal and communal dimensions, cannot be easily explained. Conversion is a complex process of transformation involving various conscious movements of the human person. These dynamics, such as the distorting power of bias and the clarifying endeavor of questioning, are themselves complex movements of the intellect. In attempting to explain the conversion experience, the greatest dilemma for understanding Christian spirituality is the working of grace, which is itself a mystery. Conversion is caught up in the mystery of grace operating within the human person.

We can only truly comprehend conversion in glimpses. The whole experience of conversion is a journey of discovery. The movements and scope of the conversion process, brought about in grace, cannot be easily categorized or explained. However, certain elements can be helpful in attempting to grasp the concept of conversion and hopefully to clarify its meaning.

The Personal Biography

The clearest understanding and example of the experience of conversion can be discovered through the personal biography. A biography offers a unique understanding of conversion for several reasons. The story of a life, in its various stages and crises, can offer insight into the unfolding history of a specific person. The life stories of many of the saints are classic examples and stories of conversion. For us Franciscans, the many biographies of St. Francis help us grasp his conversion story concretely. The biography helps show us the experiences and relationships that are worked out in the transformation of the person. In this context, the life story gives an account of the movement of grace and its implications in human life. Finally, the life story offers insight into the worldview of a person and how, in the process of conversion, the worldview is developed, integrated, and transformed. While the life story offers the clearest portrayal of the conversion experience in context, we can also gain important insights from other sources.

Insights from Sacred Scripture

The experience of conversion is central to the biblical and spiritual traditions of both the Old and New Testaments. Within the Judeo-Christian scriptures, conversion means a two-part turning: first, it is a turning away from alienation and sin, a movement ordinarily called

repentance; second, it is a turning toward the living God, a movement often called enlightenment. The Christian Scriptures refer to this process by two Greek words: *metanoia*, a turning from sin, and *epistrophē*, a turning toward God.

Christian spirituality has traditionally placed an emphasis on conversion as repentance. In more recent years, however, a more complete understanding of conversion has come to include the biblical insight into understanding the process as a turning from and a turning toward. An emphasis has been placed on the transformational character and on the role of God's gift of grace within this process.

In both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, the call to conversion and repentance is central. In the Bible, we can find many great stories of conversion. Scriptural persons such as David, Zacchaeus, the Samaritan woman, the Prodigal Son, and Paul tell the story of the importance of this experience. The prophetic tradition within the Old Testament is the classic example of the emphasis placed on conversion. This tradition is a constant reminder of the need not only for a personal but also for a communal turning to the God of the covenant. When Israel forgets the covenant, the prophet proclaims the need for conversion and calls the community back.

The prophetic ministry of the Old Testament is brought forward into the Christian tradition in the person of John the Baptist, who preaches conversion in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. In the Christian Scriptures, the call to conversion finds its clearest proclamation in the ministry of Jesus, who gives flesh to the experience of human transformation.

Conversion and Sacrament

The renewal of the liturgy in the Catholic Church has emphasized the relationship between the celebration of the sacraments and the movements and periods within the experience of conversion. This is most clearly seen in *The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* (RCIA). The revised RCIA, which was promulgated in 1972 following the Second Vatican Council, outlines a dynamic process of catechesis and liturgical formation that provides a useful pattern for understanding conversion and supporting the experience; it also reflects the formation process we employ to prepare candidates for entry into the Secular Franciscan Order.

The RCIA process leads an adult through stages of conversion to an embrace of the Gospel and the celebration of the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, and the Eucharist. In the case of the OFS, the process of formation experienced in stages leads to Profession of the Rule. The RCIA recognizes that conversion is a process by which the grace of God leads a person away from sin into the mystery of love. The model of journey is used by the rite to describe the conversion process. Moreover, it is made clear that the conversion journey is not undertaken alone; new members journey together with others in a community of ongoing conversion and faith commitment.

Similarly, the OFS Candidate journeys with the grace of God into a deeper experience of the Gospel life—an intensification of the Baptismal commitment through profession of the Rule in the context of the Franciscan fraternity journeying together and supporting the candidate.

The RCIA outlines the conversion process in four periods. This four-part process has been employed by catechists, formation directors, and spiritual directors as a paradigm for understanding and encouraging conversion in other settings of Christian formation and is helpful in understanding initial formation into the OFS.

1. The period of the *precatechumenate* is a time for the first hearing of the Gospel and for what the rite calls initial conversion. Initial conversion means a gradual and beginning movement to make sense of one's life and to find the difference for one's existence in the encounter with Christ as proclaimed within the Church. Once initial conversion is discerned by the catechumenal leaders of the community, the inquirer is publicly brought forward to profess the desire to journey further in the knowing of God within the community's Liturgy of the Word. The inquirer is signed with the cross and is given the name "catechumen."

For the Secular Franciscan, the precatechumenate experience is similar to the Inquiry Period in the Initial Formation process. The ritual of reception to Candidacy similarly marks the movement into the Candidacy phase of formation, even as the person moves in the RCIA process into the Catechumenate.

It is interesting to note that the RCIA marks each stage of conversion with a public ritual and a new name, indicating the movement in the journey of conversion and deepening of membership within the community. The same elements are seen in the initial formation process of the Secular Franciscan Order.

2. The period of the *catechumenate* is marked by various rites that focus on hearing the word of God. The word proclaimed is understood in the RCIA as the main symbol of God's grace inviting the catechumen into a deepening of the initial conversion. Together with the word proclaimed, the deepening of relationships within the community, as well as apostolic activity, brings the catechumen into a new affiliation with the Christian community.

At this point of the journey, the RCIA understands conversion to Christ and membership in the community as inseparable. One comes to know and follow Christ in the community of discipleship. Conversion, therefore, becomes a reorientation of one's relationships with God, with oneself, and with a community of faith for the life of the world.

In the same way, the experience of the Candidate in initial formation into the OFS includes a gradual hearing of the Franciscan Gospel life, a deepening of relationships in Frater-

nity and entering into the apostolates of the Fraternity. In this way, the Candidate gradually embraces the new identity of being a Franciscan, and this new relationship with God and others is marked by this reality.

Following a second deliberation by the RCIA ministers of the community, the catechumen is brought forward to the celebration of the Rite of Election. This rite, celebrated both in the local parish community and at the cathedral with the bishop on the First Sunday of Lent, proclaims God's election of the catechumen and the movement of grace and conversion. The catechumen is now called "elect" and begins a 40-day fast with the Church in preparation for Easter. While this parallel in the OFS initiation process is not as clear, many fraternities offer a special retreat experience for the candidate as the day of Profession draws near.

3. The period of *enlightenment* is normally seen as the 40 days of Lent. The RCIA understands this period as a Lenten retreat of spiritual preparation for the sacraments of initiation. Included within this period are the three rites of scrutiny celebrated on the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Sundays of Lent. These rites call upon God to assist the elect in their final turning away from sin and the power of evil. They celebrate the scrutinizing power of the Spirit and the transforming grace of Christ. In the context of the RCIA, the Lenten season has been offered as a new appreciation of a season of ongoing conversion for the entire Christian community.

At the conclusion of the 40 days, the sacraments of initiation—Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist—are celebrated during the Easter Vigil. The conversion of the elect is completed in water and anointing with oil and in the sharing of Christ's Body and Blood at the altar. Sharing at the Eucharist is considered the highpoint of initiation and the chief sacrament of conversion in the Christian community. The newly-baptized person is given the name "neophyte" and is offered a special place in the community. Similarly, at the conclusion of Candidacy and a prayerful retreat time, the Candidate is called to make profession or permanent commitment to the rule of the OFS.

4. The fourth period described in the RCIA is called *mystagogia*, which means "a breaking open of mystery." This period has traditionally been equated with the 50 days of Easter and is a time for sacramental catechesis. The neophyte, along with the rest of the community, examines the stories of the risen Christ with the converted eyes of faith as a means of supporting the neophyte's continuing journey of conversion. Similarly, in the process of initial formation in the OFS, the newly professed should be supported in a special way during the first year after profession to deepen and mature their experience of membership in the OFS.

From the RCIA, and the process of initiation that it supports, several insights about conversion can be noted:

- Conversion is symbolized as a journey of transformation led by the movement of God.
- It is a communal experience involving the entire community in its encouragement and witness.
- The RCIA considers conversion as an ongoing process, celebrated in stages and finding its greatest Christian expression in the celebration of the Eucharist.
- Conversion is not a one-time experience, but rather a lifetime transformation that is absorbed in appreciating the mystery revealed in Christ.

The RCIA sees and understands conversion as central to the sacramental celebrations of initiation. These rites are a celebration and an acceptance of the gift of conversion in the life of the individual and the community.

Conversion in Theology Today

Modern theologians have placed conversion at the heart of theological work. They have explored the dynamics of conversion and have attempted to explain the experience in clear types. Different models have been offered as ways of explaining and understanding the experience of conversion. These explanations have often used developmental theories from modern psychology. The writings of psychologists such as Freud, Jung, James, Erikson, Kohlberg, and Piaget have helped the theological understanding of conversion. The writings of James W. Fowler are noted for their study of faith development using the developmental-stage theory of Erik Erikson.

In recent years, the work of Bernard J. F. Lonergan, S.J., has proved to be especially important in understanding conversion. Lonergan's work sets up explanatory categories of human consciousness.

From this standpoint, he explains conversion as a set of judgments and decisions that move the human person from an established horizon into a new horizon of knowing, valuing, and acting.

In this way, he identifies and explains the activity of human consciousness and identifies three kinds of conversions: intellectual, moral, and religious. In the same way as climbing up to a higher point makes it possible for us see further and beyond the limit of our sight, a conversion experience moves us to a new horizon.

- Intellectual conversion is understood as a deep clarification of experience and meaning that allows the person to eliminate stubborn and misleading ideas about reality and knowledge. In this way, intellectual conversion allows the human person to differentiate various levels of meaning, to understand the limit and the horizon of one's own knowing.
- Moral conversion is the shifting of one's criteria for decision-making from the satisfaction of the self as basis of choice to the uncovering and pursuit of value. Moral conversion allows the person to choose the truly good. The morally converted

person is able to understand one's own biases thus allowing for authentic decision-making.

- Religious conversion occurs when one is completely grasped by ultimate concern or love. It is a falling in love unconditionally, leading to surrender to the transcendent, to God. Lonergan further differentiates the religious conversion with the additional category of Christian conversion as God's love flooding our hearts through the Holy Spirit given in Christ.

Interpreters of Lonergan have differentiated even more kinds of conversion. For our purposes, we can speak of Franciscan conversion as the process supported by initial and on-going formation in the OFS as a further category within Christian conversion, helping the Franciscan acquire the intellectual, moral, and religious values that are uniquely identified with the Franciscan story.

Conversion is a complex experience that transforms the entire human person. Within a Christian community, it is a process of hope whereby persons are caught up into the promise of the new creation and the transformation promised in Christ. For Secular Franciscans, conversion is the singular character of the Order, which is supported by the initial and on-going processes of formation in the life of the fraternity. In the end, conversion is shot through with mystery. While personal stories, biblical insights, the sacraments of initiation, theological reflections, and psychological categories are helpful to understand and explain the experience, the Christian tradition in the end must stand before the grace of God in silence and wonder.

[The following portion concerning the historical perspectives on the Order of Penitence relies heavily upon and is an adaptation of the material on this subject as found in the CIOFS *Forming the Formators* Manual on Formation.]

The Order of Penitence in History

Conversion, or "doing penance," is the critical element and character of the Secular Franciscan Order. In the earliest time, the members of the Secular Franciscan Order were known as Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

In St. Francis' own life, it was his plan to devote his life to "doing penance." The Franciscan Gospel life emerged from those who, in Francis' day, were living according to an ancient form of life finding its origin in the third, fourth, and fifth centuries. These were people who voluntarily chose to live a life of penance, which was the same as embraced by those who were living a life of public penance imposed as a means of reconciliation after serious and public sin.

In the early Church, persons who were guilty of serious public sin were excommunicated and were required to do public penance in order to re-enter the community. Penitents could not attend Mass with the community, but instead, remained outside the worship space and

asked for the prayers of the faithful. After a sufficient time of public penance, the penitent would be reconciled publicly with the community, usually at the Easter vigil.

Such was the origin and celebration of the Sacrament of Penance in its earliest form. It was a once in a lifetime opportunity for a “second chance”—a kind of “second baptism.” Unlike our own day, when the Sacrament of Penance can be celebrated privately over and over again, at this earlier time in the church’s history it was thought that even as baptism was celebrated only once; this sort of public Penance was possible only once in one’s life.

Public, external acts of penance were considered as outward expressions of an inward reality—conversion of heart. It was not that external acts brought about conversion; rather they were seen as an outward sign of the inward change they signified.

Once readmitted to the community after public penance and reconciliation, the individual was received into the Order of Penitence by means of a laying on of hands signifying a lifetime commitment to live a very strict and rigorous penitential lifestyle designed to assist the penitent to remain faithful to the commitment of baptism.

This was understood as entrance into the Order of Penitents. Membership in the Order was so strict that many postponed Reconciliation until the end of their lives, and bishops were very cautious about who would actually be called to Reconciliation and admission into the Order of Penitents.

From this earlier form of penance, there evolved various forms of voluntary public penitential practices, including the pilgrim, the hermit, Oblates, Virgins (not liturgically consecrated), Recluses, and pietists. In addition to these forms, after a time some who wished to deepen their spiritual life as committed disciples chose to voluntarily accept the penitential lifestyle as a way of seeking spiritual growth and “perfection.”

These people, (*the voluntary penitents*) had not been separated from the Christian community through serious, public sin, but they nevertheless took upon themselves the lifestyle of the “Order of Penitents” voluntarily and remained in it for their entire lives, living according to the rigorous, austere penitential practices prescribed for members of the Order. This could have included the wearing of special penitential clothing (tunic, staff, satchel, sandals, and Tau), working with lepers in hospitals, rebuilding churches, burying the dead during epidemics, dedicating oneself to a life of prayer, complete continence for the unmarried and periodic continence for married couples, avoidance of dances, festivals, and banquets, refusal of public offices (judge or advocate), refusal of military service, refusal of carrying weapons and participating in war, abstaining from commercial activity, and avoidance of travel on horseback or donkey. These practices were put in place in the 5th century and remained more or less the same to the time of Francis.

While penitential practices have changed, as have authentic ways of expressing faith, there is much to be learned from the “spirit” of these early penitents and how we can come to understand ourselves as their spiritual successors. St. Francis, himself was one of these early penitents. It was in his “refounding” of the Order of Penitents for those penitents who wished to follow his Gospel way that we can find the origins of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The Time of Francis and the Beginnings of the Order of Penitents of St. Francis

In St. Francis’ time, not all the members of the Order of Penance were in harmony with Church leadership. This was a time of clerical corruption and worldliness of the hierarchy and lax and abusive conduct of the clergy. This often led to dissociation from the Church leadership and heresy by those attempting reform but carrying their efforts too far.

Francis went in another direction. As a penitent, Francis sought God with his whole heart and aimed to focus on personal conversion. He saw the Church as the Body of Christ and wished to relate to it as an obedient son rather than as a critic. In order to maintain his bond with the church, he sought out the approval of the Pope.

Francis wished to rebuild the Church, but to do so not through criticism but rather through holiness of life. Having received the approval of the Holy Father to live the “form of the Gospel,” he began preaching in public with startling results:

“...many, casting aside earthly concerns, gained knowledge of themselves in the life and teaching of the most blessed father Francis and aspired to love and reverence for their Creator. Many people, well born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration, began to come to Saint Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of these, the holy ones of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly grace, watered with showers of gifts and adorned the field of their hearts with the flowers of perfection. He is without question an outstanding craftsman, for through his spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching, and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved. Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation. (1Cel37)

St. Bonaventure echoes the words of Celano:

“He went about the cities and towns proclaiming the Kingdom of God, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in the power of the Spirit. To those who saw him, he seemed to be a person of another world as, with his mind and face always intent on heaven, he tried to draw them all on high. As a result, the vineyard of Christ began to produce buds with the sweet smell of the Lord and, when it had produced flowers

of sweetness, of honor and respectability, to bring forth abundant fruit. For set on fire by the fervor of his preaching, **a great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance according to the rule they received from the man of God. Christ's servant decided to name this way of life the Order of Brothers of Penance.**

As the road of penance is common to all those who are striving toward heaven, so this way of life admits clerics and lay, virgins and married of both sexes."

(LMj, Chapter IV, 6).

These are only two examples.

Historians speak of an immediate and dramatic increase of people who bound themselves to this penitential way from 1215 onwards. It is no coincidence that this happens to be the year in which the first Form of Life was given by Francis to his penitents (the Earlier Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, which forms the prologue to our present Rule). It is probably inaccurate to speak of St. Francis "founding" the Order of Penance as such, since the idea of voluntarily embracing a life of penance existed from early in the church's history.

Rather, we can say that he refocused, reanimated, and refounded an already existing entity within the Church, intentionally founding his own movement of Penitents—the Order of Franciscan Penitents—that is, that group of penitents who wished to follow his Gospel way, to follow his inspiration and live according to his example and teachings and participate in his mission to restore the Church alongside the friars and the Sisters of the Second Order.

In one sense, we can say that Francis really gave his three orders only one rule, that is, to follow the Gospel (as applied to their particular way of life) and to live a life of continual conversion to the Gospel ("to do penance"). Living a penitential life was central to all three Orders, enabling them to preach about both penance and conversion from their own lived experience.

However, just as he had provided for the other Orders he founded, St. Francis wished to provide a simple written way of life for his penitents based upon the words of the Gospel.

Scholars agree that the *First Letter to the Faithful* is the first or Proto Rule. Here we find the recommendations of St. Francis for anyone wishing to walk beside him on this road of permanent conversion. In it we find five fundamental elements for the penitential lifestyle:

1. To love God;
2. To love our neighbor;
3. To resist the sinful tendencies of our fallen nature;

4. To receive of the Body of Christ in the Eucharist;
5. To act or live in conformity with our conversion.

Even today, more than 800 years later, there is little more that can be added to live a sincere and authentic penitential life. Living according to this plan will immerse us in the very life of God in the Trinity itself. We have Francis' own words to confirm this:

- The Holy Spirit will come to rest on his penitents and dwell in them.
- We are children of the Heavenly Father when we do His will.
- In the Holy Spirit we are united to Jesus.
- We become spouses, brothers, and mothers to the Lord Jesus.
- We carry him in our hearts and bring him forth by means of our holy works.

Truly, one cannot be more closely united to God than this. This is the Franciscan life in a nutshell. It is always important for Secular Franciscans to read and re-read the Prologue to our Rule where we find this First Letter to the Faithful, in order to constantly renew and revisit the original inspiration of Francis for the Secular Franciscan Order. It is here that we will experience the meaning of conversion from the uniquely Franciscan viewpoint.

Appendix 1 – The Prologue to the Rule

Exhortation of Saint Francis to the Brothers and Sisters in Penance

In the name of the Lord!

Chapter 1

Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon the” (cf. Is 11:2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. Jn 14:23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (cf. Mt 5:45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mt 12:50).

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ; we are brothers to him when we fulfill “the will of the Father who is in heaven” (Mt 12:50).

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. 1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give life to others by example (cf. Mt 5:16).

Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and Holy Father in heaven! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete.

Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:15) and prayed to the Father saying:

“Oh, holy Father, protect them with your name (cf. Jn 17:11) whom you gave me out of the world. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you; they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these I pray, not for the world (cf. Jn 17:9). Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (cf. Jn 17:20) that they may be holy by being one, as we are (cf. Jn 17:11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom” (cf. Jn 17:6-24).

Chapter 2

Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance

But all those men and women who are not doing penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and live in vices and sin and yield to evil concupiscence and to the wicked desires of the flesh, and do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and are slaves to the world, in their bodies, by carnal desires and the anxieties and cares of this life (cf. Jn 8:41); slaves of the devil whose sons they are and whose work they do.

These are blind, because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ; they do not have spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God who is the true wisdom of the Father. Concerning them, it is said, “Their skill was swallowed up” (Ps 107:27) and “cursed are those who turn away from your commands” (Ps 119:21). They see and acknowledge, they know and do bad things and knowingly destroy their own souls.

See, you who are blind, deceived by your enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, for it is pleasant to the body to commit sin and it is bitter to make it serve God because all vices and sins come out and “proceed from the heart of man” as the Lord says in the Gospel (cf. Mk 7:21). And you have nothing in this world and in the next, and you thought you would possess the vanities of this world for a long time.

But you have been deceived, for the day and the hour will come to which you give no thought and which you do not know and of which you are ignorant. The body grows infirm, death approaches, and so it dies a bitter death, and no matter where or when or how man dies,

in the guilt of sin, without penance or satisfaction, though he can make satisfaction but does not do it.

The devil snatches the soul from his body with such anguish and tribulation that no one can know it except he who endures it, and all the talents and power and “knowledge and wisdom” (2 Chr 1:12) which they thought they had will be taken away from them (cf. Lk 8:18; Mk 4:25), and they leave their goods to relatives and friends who take and divide them and say afterwards, “Cursed be his soul because he could have given us more; he could have acquired more than he did.” The worms eat up the body and so they have lost body and soul during this short earthly life and will go into the inferno where they will suffer torture without end.

All those into whose hands this letter shall have come we ask in the charity that is God (cf. 1 Jn 4:16) to accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted above. And let those who do not know how to read have them read to them.

And may they keep them in their mind and carry them out, in a holy manner to the end, because they are “spirit and life” (Jn 6:64).

And those who will not do this will have to render “an account on the day of judgment” (cf. Mt 12:36) before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 14:10).

FRATERNITY AND FRANCIS

**Tom Bello, OFS
National Minister
Secular Franciscan Order**

and

FRATERNITY AS A FUNDAMENTAL ELEMENT OF ST. FRANCIS' SPIRITUALITY

**Fr. Irudaysamy, OFM Cap
Conference of General Spiritual Assistants
to the Secular Franciscan Order**

Editor's note:

You might wonder why we have two titles and two independent articles on Fraternity. Unlike other Orders within the Church, fraternity emerges from the very beginning of the Franciscan Family, one of the fundamental building blocks of our entire "Propositum Vitae" or our proposed way of Gospel Life.

'Along with the charge to "Observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," "Fraternity" defines the structure of the entire Order.

All are equal, all are family, all are sisters and brothers, and we live out this way of life, not alone as solitaries, but within the home of FRATERNITY!

That said, we will explore, with our brother Tom, fraternity based on the Rule of the OFS, and, with our brother Irudaysamy, fraternity as a foundation to Francis' own spirituality!

*Bob Fitzsimmons
OFS National Formation Commission
2-17-2011*

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Fraternity and Francis—Outline and Key Concepts

- I. 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 (OFS Rule #14).
- II. The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities (General Constitutions, Article 3.3).
- III. Therefore, if at the heart of the Franciscan call is Christ, then around that heart is fraternity.
- IV. Why this emphasis on Fraternity to Franciscans?
 - A. God is love, and love is always more than self. Thus, God as God is not alone; Christ as God is not alone; the Holy Spirit as God is not alone.
 - B. God is a Fraternity of a Trinity. The basic mystery of the Trinity reveals a unity in community that shows what fraternity should look like.
 - C. Further, Christ as man is not alone. He had a Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. He called to Himself, not just one to follow Him, but twelve, a fraternity of apostles.
 - D. Christ will command: “Love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13 NAB).
 - E. The Call that Francis receives is a Call with his Fraternity of Friars to follow the Way of the Gospel.
 - F. Francis calls all of us Seculars, not to follow him individually, but together, as “Brothers and Sisters of Penance.”
 - G. Fraternity is more than the local gathering. Fraternity is with all the human family, for all of us, all men and women, are brothers and sisters of the same Father.
 - H. Indeed, St. Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters to all of God’s Creation, with Brother Sun and Sister Moon and Stars, Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth, even with Sister Death (The Canticle of the Creatures).
- V. Fraternity is thus a call to build a community of love in harmony with all of God’s children and all of God’s creation to reflect Love back to the God of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Fraternity and Francis **In Following the Franciscan Way**

by Tom Bello, OFS

At every step in following the Franciscan Way, from Inquiry to Ongoing Formation, in prayer, one should journey with Sacred Scriptures in one hand and the Secular Franciscan Rule and General Constitutions in the other hand, and with both eyes, as clearly as possible, focused on Christ and Francis.

The very first words of “Chapter Two: The Way of Life” of the Secular Franciscan Rule offer sufficient justification for such a stance: “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.”

Thus, in this reflection on the importance of the concept of “fraternity” to St. Francis, and to us, his secular Franciscan followers, let us begin with our own Secular Franciscan Rule and General Constitutions: “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” (OFS Rule #14). We work together to build a more fraternal world.

“The Secular Franciscan Order is divided into fraternities of various levels—local, regional, national, and international” (OFS Rule #20). Our smallest unit is not the individual: no, we join fraternities in which individual members belong.

Or perhaps more succinctly, we may read in the General Constitutions: “The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities” (Article 3.3).

Therefore, if at the heart of the Franciscan call is Christ, then around that heart is fraternity.

Where does this strong language for fraternity come from? Let’s start with God. By Divine Revelation, God is love (1 John 4:8,16 NAB), and love is always more than self. Thus, God as God is not alone; Christ as God is not alone; the Holy Spirit as God is not alone.

God is a Fraternity of a Trinity. Three in One. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Thus, the basic mystery of the Trinity reveals a unity in community that shows what fraternity should look like.

Further, Christ as man is not alone. He had a Holy Family: Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. He called to Himself, not just one to follow Him, but twelve, a fraternity of apostles.

When Christ raises the daughter of Jairus, or is transfigured, or is praying in the Garden, He is with Peter, James, and John; again, not just with, say, Peter alone.

Christ will promise, “Again, (amen,) I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:19-20 NAB).

In John’s Gospel, the Lord will pray, “I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:20-21 NAB).

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:12-13 NAB).

Like his Lord, Francis was not intended by God to go his own way. St. Francis writes in his Testament: “When God gave me some friars (brothers), there was no one to tell me what I should do; but the Most High Himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of the Gospel” (*Omnibus*, p. 68). Please note that according to his own Testament, Francis receives his friars, his fraternity, before he understands his way of life according to the Gospel.

His *Exhortation*, which provides the Prologue to the current Secular Franciscan Rule, is written to “the Brothers and Sisters in Penance”; again, not only to one.

In his Rule of 1223, or the Later Rule, Francis writes, “Wherever the friars meet one another, they should show that they are members of the same family. And they should have no hesitation in making known their needs to one another. For if a mother loves and cares for her child in the flesh, a friar should certainly love and care for his spiritual brother all the more tenderly” (Chapter 6, *Omnibus* pp.61-62).

In his November 22, 2002, Address to the Secular Franciscan Order, Pope John Paul II said that Holy Mother Church “wants your Order to be a model of organic, structural, and charismatic union at all levels, so as to present yourself to the world as a ‘community of love’,” (OFS Rule #22).

Our Holy Father continued, “For this reason, you are asked first of all to bear a personal witness in the place where you live: ‘before all: in [your] family life; in [your] work; in [your] joys and sufferings; in [your] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father; in [your] presence and participation in the life of society; in [your] fraternal relationship with all creatures” (OFS General Constitutions Article 12.1).

Please note: “in [our] associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father.” Fraternity is more than just the local gathering.

St. Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters to all in the Church. St. Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters to Moslems and Jews. St. Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters to sinners and lepers. St. Francis calls us to be brothers and sisters with all men and women. Fraternity is with all the human family.

Further, “in [our] fraternal relationship with all creatures,” St. Francis calls us to fraternity with Brother Sun and Sister Moon and Stars, Brother Wind and Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth, even with Sister Death (The Canticle of the Creatures).

Thus, fraternity is a call to unity and harmony with all our brothers and sisters, all of whom are children of the same loving God.

Fraternity is a call to unity and harmony with all of creation, plant and planet, all created by the same loving God.

Fraternity is a call to build a community of love that reflects Love back to the God of Love: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Reflection: Discussion Questions for Part 1

Reflection Question 1. What does “fraternity” mean to you?

Reflection Question 2. How might you help your Secular Franciscan fraternity better present itself to the world as a “community of love?”

Fraternity as a Fundamental Element of St. Francis' Spirituality

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Introduction

“Calling” is a basic concept found throughout the Scripture. It is exemplified by the call of Abraham in the Old Testament, the call of Jesus in the New Testament, and the call of Saint Francis in the 12th century.

Realizing that God initially “calls” a person to the Secular Franciscan Order, every person within the Order still has the responsibility to nurture the genuine call. The purpose of the entire formation process is to accompany the person on his or her journey of discovery of God, discovery of St. Francis, and discovery of the individual’s own call.

When the first apostles were seeking Christ, His response to them was “come and see” (John 1:39). This also is the basic attitude of Secular Franciscans toward those women and men seeking to follow Christ today.

“The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and People.” (OFS Rule 4)

Formation in and for the Secular Franciscan way of life is understood as the realistic fostering of the growth of the individual Secular Franciscan and fraternities so the way we live in today’s world conforms more and more to the example of the Holy Gospel. Formation must happen through small groups of members sharing their faith experiences. Life in fraternity is an effective agent of formation. Fraternity life contributes to the growth of interactive relationships, to the formation of the Franciscan personality and character, and to the development of Franciscan attitudes.

1. Franciscan Heritage

What began for Francis as a particular answer to an individual call was not to remain that way in the mind of God. Francis originally believed that the Lord’s call to his life was for his own conversion. He believed that the call to change his life was an individual call to reform the wayward paths of his youth. So much of his youth had been spent with little or no regard for the message of the Gospel. This truth gradually became clearer to him through his imprisonment, his illness, his visits to the caves outside Assisi. The Lord’s call to change his heart was crystallizing. This call was truly God’s will for his life.

Francis might have been pleased to remain in this position, but that was not God’s intent. How surprised he must have been when the knight Bernardo of Quintavalle asked to join in his way of life after secretly observing Francis in a night of prayer. The canon Peter also asked to become part of his company. From the fields, the farmer Giles journeyed to join.

There was something Francis had captured that drew others to follow in this way of life. Francis’ basic question seemingly was “what form of life?” It was at this juncture that he went again to the Scriptures and to prayer to discern what the Lord desired of him. Francis came to comprehend this more clearly, as he recounts in his Testament that:

When the Lord gave me brothers, there was no one to tell me what I should do, but the Most High himself made it clear to me that I must live the life of Gospel (Test 14).

Francis used the term “brothers” to refer to those men who asked to join him. Never did he refer to them as followers or sons as was the case in other religious orders. Francis wanted this group that God had set apart to be known as a family. Even the name he chose for them, the Order of Friars Minor, the Lesser Brothers, gives us an insight into how Francis

viewed himself and those with him. They were not to be set above, but to be servants, following the example set by our Lord. Within their own community, no one person was to be set above the others. The one who was to care for the others was the guardian, guardian of all that would keep them close to God. Francis chose the family as his model of relationship.

Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need to the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the spirit! (Later Rule 6.7,8)

Let each one love and care for his brother as a mother loves and cares for her son in those matters in which God has given him the grace. (Earlier Rule 9.11)

Beyond making their needs known to one another, they were to care for the sick among them; they were to correct one another humbly and charitably; they were not to remember the faults of another. When in hermitage, the relationship between those praying and those caring for them was described by Francis as being the relationship of a mother and her sons.

Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be “the mother” and have two “sons” or at least one. Let the two who are “mothers” keep the life of Martha and the two “sons” the life of Mary (Rule for Hermitage 1).

This small band of men, this brotherhood, would be the basis for the rebuilding of the church.

As Secular Franciscans, the Lord gives us brothers and sisters too. “The Rule and Life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ....” We do this by “following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.”

Fraternity is the means by which, and the environment through which, we are called to live the Gospel.

The vocation of the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion.

For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities called “fraternities.” Brothers and sisters are there to provide support and encouragement. They are there to teach. They are there to correct. They are there to help me live the Gospel, and I am there to help them live the Gospel.

2. Fraternity: Model of the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Jesus Christ

The fraternity is the basic cell of the Order, visible sign of the Church, a supernatural reality based on the paternity of God and on brotherhood in Jesus Christ experienced in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

It is a gift of the Spirit to its Church to be received in gratitude, sharing gifts in order to become a sign of communion and unity “for those who believe in me because of their message” (Jn 17:20).

The fraternity is called upon to provide a prophetic and charismatic presence within the Church and to assist her in her universal mission. The Fraternity is the special place where its brothers and sisters are assisted in becoming more aware of their baptismal dignity, in living their belonging to the Church, in making present within the Church the Franciscan charisma, in maturing their faith and becoming witnesses of Christ’s resurrection.

The OFS in the world is the body, and the Fraternities are the parts of this body that sustain it.

Each Fraternity has its own configuration and physical make-up, but it is not and cannot be isolated from the others. This could be stifling. It is damaging to weaken the sense of belonging to the entire Secular Franciscan Order and remain closed within the small environment of one’s own Fraternity, because it deprives us of that vital life the Order transmits.

The Fraternity is a living gift that should always be carried inside oneself, which is quite different from just having meetings: these only mark the rhythm of making the journey.

It has its Council, which animates and guides it, organizing its meetings so its members grow on doctrinal, spiritual, psychological, and social levels. This is all done to lead the Fraternity to becoming a mother that continually raises up Francis’ followers, and a teacher that educates and forms them.

During this time of formation, we will hopefully come to see and appreciate the necessary aspects of fraternal life. It must be a community of love, it must be a place for ongoing conversion, and it must be a place of support for living the Gospel in the world.

Referenced sources quoted in this chapter include the words, Friars, Brothers, Sisters and Seculars. These writings, which are filled with wisdom, are also applicable to all in the Franciscan Family, including the brothers and sisters, men and women, of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The Franciscan ideal of Fraternity derives its basis from the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of Jesus Christ. The Trinity is unique, in that no person of the Trinity is superior to the others. Though this radical equality is not true of creaturely relationships, it is a model that teaches what it means to be made in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26) and offers a vision to which humans aspire for themselves.

Humility opens human hearts to the experience of Divine relationship. In his “Praises of God,” St. Francis proclaims: “You are humility!”¹ because our Trinitarian God is relational by nature, i.e., a free communion of persons without domination or subordination.

Because they are made in the likeness of God, humans slowly become a free communion of persons without domination or subordination, thus achieving true humility. St. Bonaventure tells us that in the Incarnation, “God humbly bends down to lift the dust of our nature into unity with his own person” (St. Bonaventure: Sermon II on the Nativity of the Lord).

The Trinity is the foundational relationship that creates the Church: “The universal church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (LG 4). “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home in them” (Jn 14:23).

Zeal to keep the word of Jesus inspired Francis to make the Gospel the very foundation of fraternal life.² Established on Fidelity to the Gospel, fraternal evangelical life draws us into the intimate relationship of the Trinity.

Francis embraced the plan of God for his creatures as a family of sisters and brothers: brother sun, sister moon, etc.³ He never referred to himself simply as “Francis” but always as “Brother Francis.” “Brother” revealed the relationship with every creature to which God called him. “Brother” also revealed his mission to heal relationships through submissive humility (see CtC 10-11, 7th plenary council p 6-7).

3. Life in Fraternity

“Fraternity” is the key model for Secular Franciscan Gospel life. The divine call to live in perfect charity, to strive for holiness and to build the kingdom of God culminates and takes shape in fraternity life and the collective efforts of a group.

The fraternity aspect of the OFS has already been referred to by the Rule in various contexts: The OFS is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world (Rule 1:2)⁴. In a life-giving union with the entire Franciscan family, they make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father (Rule 1b), and they are traditionally called “Brothers and Sisters of Penance” (Rule 7a).

A deep and sensitive brotherhood was an outstanding mark of the early friars, an ideal proposed to them by St. Francis. “The Lord gave me brothers,” says Francis in his Testament, and established that they be called as “Lesser Brothers.”

¹ Praises of God, 4

² *Regula non Bullata* –Rule without a Bull (Papal approved seal)

³ Canticle of the Creatures

⁴ Rule refers to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978.

In his Rule, he made it plain that precepts and statutes alone do not regulate Franciscan brotherhood. Faith, love, and grace have their part. The earlier rule to the friars exhorts: “And each one should love and care for his brother in all those things in which God will give him grace, as a mother loves and cares for her sons.”

In his later rule this receives a different wording:

“If a mother has such care for her son born according to the flesh, should not someone love and care for his brother according to the spirit even more diligently?”

a. Fraternity of Love

The fraternity, summoned by the Holy Spirit in Christ's name, is an aspect of penitential life that is highly meaningful and irreplaceable. The brothers help each other to grow in the love of God through reciprocal love, encouragement, fraternal correction, and so forth. Together they overcome difficulties, are freed from selfishness, and give witness of conversion to God.

Francis' writings suggest that he understood the gift of brothers as more than simply supportive instruments of the Lord. They were both necessary conditions and necessary expressions of the Gospel life, which demands witness to the community of God's Love, that is, the Trinity. In order to bring to birth the “spirit of the truth of the Gospel, he needed brothers according to the Spirit.”

When the Friars or sisters love each other mutually, the Spirit of God lives in them, and God Himself, the Father Almighty, the Son and Spirit set up their dwelling among them. As sons of the same heavenly Father, and as a unity, called to share the divine life, they are brothers of Christ. “Oh how holy and delightful....to have such a brother.” Both in teaching and practice, Francis has given birth to a fraternal life which is intense and rich with overtones.” (*The Cord*: volume 48, no. 3, 137)

The fraternity, first and foremost, must be a community of love. In her testament, St. Clare tells us, “Loving one another with the charity of Christ, let the love you have in your hearts be shown outwardly in your deeds so that, compelled by such an example, the sisters may always grow in love of God and in charity for one another.” (*The Cord*: volume 48, no. 3, 136)

The OFS fraternity, according to the Rule, is a group of brothers and sisters who are led by the Holy Spirit to strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their Profession they pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis.

We know that the Fraternity is founded on the fatherhood of God and the fellowship in Jesus Christ witnessed within ourselves by the Holy Spirit, guided and guaranteed by the teachings of the Church. All this is lived by means of the example of St. Francis and through his gift of Fraternity.

We learn from the Rule that the Fraternity is “the basic unit of the whole order,” meaning that there are other units too, forming together the whole body. Therefore, an exchange of vitality, relationships, and experiences among the various units is necessary to grow together and to avoid isolation in a closed circuit that makes it wither and die.

The Fraternity is “a visible sign of the Church, the community of love.” From this comes the duty to show the characteristics of the Church by a marked way of life and building up each other.

The Fraternity “should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.”

That means that the Fraternity has to learn over and over again to develop those values and to make authentic Franciscans of those whom it has generated into Franciscanism. Only thus will it become that right and privileged place, not only by a sense of duty towards its own vocation, but even more so by its authenticity and the human wealth it offers.

In the Constitutions, we read that “the Fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of Francis of Assisi, to whom the Most High revealed the essential Gospel quality of life in fraternal communion” (Testament 14), and that it should promote the “collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence both in the local and in the universal Church” (Const. 28).

The members of the Fraternity, “the brothers and sisters, are co-responsible for the life of the Fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS... throughout the world.”

This requires personal presence, witness, prayer and active collaboration, in accordance with each one’s means and possible obligations for the animation of the Fraternity” (Const. 30).

b. Fraternity, the lived experience of togetherness, unity of mutual love

An important quality of community is the lived experience of togetherness. The implications of this quality for life in community are as follows:

1. Fraternity is a gift to be discovered and lived out; it is dependent upon the urgings of grace and the demands of God’s initiative, not only upon one’s own categories of acceptance, whims of decision, or choice of partners.
2. Fraternity is based on a free and responsible acceptance of a call; it is togetherness because of personal self-giving, willful decision, and the obligation flowing from intimacy, not only legislation or communal structures. It is a concrete expression of “one body, one spirit in Christ,” the being of “one mind and one heart,” not a togetherness based on regular observance or uniformity.

3. Fraternity life has to reflect the Father's loving us intensely, his choosing us to come together in Jesus Christ, his giving the energy of the Holy Spirit to restore all things in Christ.
4. Life in Fraternity recognizes the dignity of every person to be a chosen child of God, to be redeemed by Christ, to have the potential to respond to the Spirit's urging, to be the artisan of one's own world, to embody a unique blend of characteristics or talents (Benet, *The Cord*, vol. 48 no. 3).

"The fidelity and authenticity of our commitment, manifested in community, provide a model for those in the world of what a life with God can mean and demonstrates to them the possibilities of their own hearts to strive for holiness." The earliest Franciscans, freed from all selfish love, poured all their affection into the heart of the fraternity so Fraternal love would display unity for the world to see.

The unanimity of the sisters (Poor Clares), "possessing the one love, united in spirit and ideas" (Phil.2.2), was the countenance of God's gentleness, the sacrament of God's tenderness, the witness of God's kindly regard. As Jesus prayed, "that they may be one in us so that the world may believe that you sent me" and "that their unity may be complete so that the world may know... that you love me" and "that your love for me may live in them and I may live in them" (Jn.17:21,23,26), so life in fraternity is meant to both show and secure the gentle, loving, and caring presence of the Most High." (*The Cord*, Volume 48, No. 3, 138).

c. Fraternity, as Sacrament of Gospel Living

Life in Fraternity is to be communicated as the "sacrament" of Gospel living, which expresses and brings about the whole gamut of living in union with Christ as the center and inspiration of our lives. Life in Fraternity has this sacramental quality because it is:

- an effective support system for evangelical growth;
- a productive experience of group spiritual direction;
- a context of stability for grounding and maturing Gospel values and praxis;
- a concrete, human manifestation of a deeper spiritual reality;
- a real sign of the Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation of the Reign of God.

d. Components of Life in Fraternity

Life in Fraternity, as the ideal and normative situation for Gospel living, has the following components:

- A particular structure (OFS Rule 20-22)
 - a real *Fraternity* (not a club or sodality) existing on various levels;
 - animated and guided by the leadership of a Council;
 - fulfilling a particular ecclesial, apostolic, and Franciscan function.

- A necessary vitality (OFS Rule 23)
 - brought alive by adequate *formation*;
 - deepened through the *permanent commitment* of its members;
 - matured through *dialogue* and harmonious problem solving.
- Sustaining forces that nourish Fraternal life (OFS Rule 24-26)
 - regular and frequent meetings of the Fraternity and its council;
 - on-going support of the members;
 - adequate spiritual assistance;
 - pastoral and fraternal visits.

e. Fraternal Service

The Gospel fraternity finds its basis in Christ, firstborn of many brothers, who makes of all men one true fraternity. Fraternal life is built in welcoming the option of the ***kénosis*** (kenotic or self-giving love) of the Incarnation and of Easter, and in following in the footprints of Christ the Servant. In fact, “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:28).

Ever since Christ gave his life for others, service has implied the aspects of renunciation, humiliation, and suffering. Service finds its natural context in the expectation of solidarity in sorrow, not in that of reward and recognition.

The commitment to fraternal life is made real through *the gift of service rendered as a sacrifice, and gratuitously.*

- *Gift*, because we are talking about serving our brothers, and not of being served by them.
- *Sacrificial service*, because it is service wherein there is sacrifice; service costs something.
- *Gratuitous service*, because it does not demand recompense, because it does not find its own motivation in the constraints of slavery, but in the freedom of love, in the need of a caring charity for others and for the fraternity.

What service?

- *The service of “carrying one another’s burdens”*

It is the first and fundamental form of fraternal *diakonia*, because the brother is not an object to be dominated, but a “burden” to be borne, and he is brother precisely because he weighs heavily on the shoulders of others.

Fraternal communion is realized in “support,” just as the communion between God and men is realized in support. In fact, God supported men in the Body of Christ, because “He

was burdened with our sufferings, he has taken on himself our sorrows...; he was pierced for our sins, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment which gives us salvation fell on him..." (Is. 53:4-5).

Fraternal communion is the communion of the Cross; it is present whenever one feels the weight of the other. On the other hand, there would be no Christian communion and the law of Christ would be disowned if one did not feel the burden of the brother.

- *The service of good example*

Good example finds its place always in connection with and in dependence on *metanoia*, which enjoins self-transformation, by doing violence to one's own passions and evil desires.

Fraternal life is not built with discussions, it is not the outcome of a defense of the fraternity; it is founded instead on the example of the one who is ready for sacrifice; the one who overcomes the reluctance of his own nature to carry out tasks that imply renunciation, weariness, and distress; the one who does not allow himself to become disheartened by the opposition of a mediocrity for which "good example" is a reproach.

Fraternal life is the result of a humble and simple witness: it depends on personal readiness to die (to yourself, your own desires and will) like the grain of wheat and placing the "good" of the other in the position of importance.

4. Fraternity: A Place of Conversion

A fraternity should be a place of conversion and a launching pad for apostolic activity of the members. OFS Constitutions Ch. 3, "Life in Fraternity" tells us that

"the local fraternity... becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of us members."

The local fraternity is the basic living organism of the whole OFS. It is the center for spiritual growth, apostolic outreach, and loving union among members. Fraternity should be a place where we are offered an opportunity for conversion, for spiritual growth. There are two facets of Fraternity Life. One is internal calling and other is external calling, internal spiritual growth, and external apostolic works. Both are important for the life of OFS. The Rule of the OFS calls Secular Franciscans to go from Gospel (conversion) to life (apostolate).

5. The Eucharist: The Center of Life in Fraternity

The plan of penance and ongoing conversion involves the choice of participating fully in the Eucharist so that the Body of Christ will become a main source of our support and accountability for our decision to bring renewal, renewal which comes through the cross and reception of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Eucharist as covenant, sacrifice, meal, celebration, community-builder, reconciliation, and life-style is a primary experience of intimate real presence to activate and actualize the union between the penitential and the loving Lord.

6. The Challenges of Fraternal Life

A fraternity is made up of all kinds of people, and we are not all alike. These differences should be respected. Mary Ann Julian, OFS, writes:

Our fraternities are the nurseries where God prepares, nurtures, and strengthens us for our work in the world. In these “gardens of love,” all plants (us) are unique, varied, and purposeful. Each has the capacity to give honor to God and to benefit others in some way. Now temptations blow through the garden and often the way we “rub against each other” causes us to become irritated. If we rely on, or take pride in, our own gifts, friction and division will occur. If we learn to die to self and submit to the loving care of the Gardener (and our lawful superiors), His beauty, His love, and His peace will increase in us and overflow to all the world. (*The Cord*, Volume 48, no.3, p. 138)

Lester Bach, OFM Cap., also indicates that all is not peaches and cream:

The community will experience the Exodus experience again and again. Some problems persist beyond their time. Failure is not easy to handle.... We will have more than our share of humanness. Still, we are committed to create a climate where humanness is understood and accepted. On the other hand, we have good celebrations. We have prayer experiences that move us to tears of joy. We are gently surprised by the dedication of a brother and sister. We are impressed with the joy of one who suffers. We realize our strength as a people dedicated to Jesus, willing to “keep on keeping on” no matter what the price. We learn so much from the example of others in the community. It is good to know we are not alone on this pilgrimage to God. We learn about Jesus through the honest sharing in community. We learn to celebrate the ordinary gifts that life brings. We find joy in our covenant with the poor. Service brings us satisfaction. New members bring us happiness in seeing another person answering the Gospel call of Jesus. When Sister Death calls someone home, we gather together both in grief at our loss and thanksgiving for eternal life. When our experience helps someone else, the gift is mutually satisfying. (*The Cord*, Volume 48, No. 3, 138-139)

The family is faced with the degradation of fundamental values, a wrong conception of independence of married people, an ambiguity in the relationship between parents and children, divorce, abortion, sterilization, a contraceptive mentality, and corruption of the idea and experience of liberty.

The family is a victim of the many forces bent to destroy and deform it. The world's dominating secularism is added to immature psychology and social-economic and political causes that shake the ethical and moral values of the family. The results of this reality are the problems of irregular couples and the growth of civil weddings without sacraments.

Serious situations of misery, hunger and desperation caused by unemployment, lack of decent living areas, lack of education and health services, etc., demonstrate clearly that we are constantly challenged by the death culture (imperialism, family planning as understood and sponsored by the government, wars and guerilla warfare, kidnapping, terrorism, drug traffic, etc.).

The OFS accepts the challenge to make its choice for the formation of the family so young people and children find the security and orientation and an adequate paternal and maternal image, which contributes to the maturity of their personality. This choice means caring and a constant battle against the attacks of a consumeristic and hedonistic society, with its lack of respect for the dignity of each person, and a reality where women, in many cases, are the only ones who sustain the family and educate the children.

No one enters and remains a single unit. Entering the Franciscan Order, in any of its branches, involves entering a family, a fraternity. In Francis' journey, there was no rule, no way of life until God gave Francis brothers. This fact holds true for us today.

The basic unit of the Secular Franciscan Order is the local fraternity. It is comprised of persons who have received an individual call (vocation) from God to live more deeply the radical call of Gospel life. In the Franciscan framework, this call is to be lived, supported, challenged, and honored with others.

The local fraternity is the home in which the vocation of each member is nurtured and guided. This was the vision Francis received from God. Family was important to Francis, and so it is important to the entire Franciscan Order.

Conclusion

The very nature of the Franciscan charism begs for fraternity. Whenever Seculars get together, fraternity is experienced.

- In the conduct of the business of the Executive Council, fraternity is formed.
- The basic unit of the Order is the local fraternity.
- This is the privileged place where we are involved in apostolic and social activities, where we experience spiritual growth, and where we experience family love.
- The Friars or Spiritual Animators (religious, diocesan clergy, religious sister, or certified Secular Franciscans) contribute to the Fraternity by their participation as an

equal member of the Executive Council, provide ongoing formation, preside at the liturgies, and most important, are present with brothers and sisters of OFS at their gatherings.

May St. Francis and St. Clare and their communities continue to be an inspiration to us in our life in fraternity. Let us journey together as brothers and sisters, following in the footsteps of Christ and St. Francis, prayerfully remembering that initial and ongoing formation is the key to renewal and updating in the Secular Franciscan Order.

Reflection Questions–Part 2

- How has fraternity helped your Franciscan vocation growth?
- In what ways has it been a hindrance?
- What contributions have you been able to make to develop the spirit of “family” in your Fraternity?

FRANCIS AND THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

Susan Simeone, OFS



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Introduction

“The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently” (Rule, Article 9).

Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocations. We, like Francis, seek all the Gospel virtues realized in her. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most holy virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.

Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love (OFS Constitutions: Article 16. 1, 2).

To develop a true understanding and love of Jesus Christ, the Son of God made Man, requires a sincere devotion toward His mother. Mary was with Him from the womb to the tomb. She responded to God’s call. The Holy Spirit came upon her, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her (Luke 1:35). She gave birth to him. She and Joseph presented him at the Temple. She raised him and taught him, with Joseph, how to pray. She sought him until she found him in the Temple. She was with him when He left us at Calvary. Saint Francis recognized Mary’s powerful and extraordinary relationship with her son in light of our salvation. Therefore, Francis implored his followers to love her as their self-effacing gentle queen and mother.

The Role of the Blessed Virgin in the Plan of Salvation

The role of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, and our Savior in salvation is illustrated in both the Old and New Testaments, as well as in esteemed tradition. The books of the Old Testament describe the history of salvation, by which the coming of Christ into the world is slowly revealed. The earliest documents in the Church are understood in the light of further and full revelation. A woman, Mother of the Redeemer, is gradually brought into clearer light. Considered in this light, she is already prophetically indicated in the promise of victory over the serpent, which was given to Adam and Eve after their fall into sin (Gen.3:15). She is the virgin who shall conceive and bear a son, whose name shall be called Emmanuel (Is.1:14; Mic.5:2-3; Mt.1:22-23).

Mary stands out among the poor and humble of the Lord, who confidently hope for and receive salvation from him. She is the exalted Daughter of Zion.

The plan of salvation is established when the son of God has taken human nature from her, so he might in the mysteries of his flesh free man from sin (*Lumen Gentium*, 55). St. Irenaeus says, “Being obedient became the cause of salvation for her and for the whole human race.”

The early Fathers asserted in their preaching: “the knot of Eve’s disobedience was untied by Mary’s obedience: Eve was bound through her disbelief, while Mary was loosened by her faith.” Mary is compared to being the new Eve and our mother. *Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*, 56.

A document of Vatican II from *Constitution of the Church: Paragraph 55, Vatican II in Plain English*, Huebsch/Thurmes, pages 62-63. states:

Mary is acknowledged as both the Mother of God and Mother of the Redeemer. Because of this, she has a place of honor both in the Church and in heaven.

She has a unique relationship to God and a special relationship to the Church. And although she is unlike us in these ways, she is also like us in the most fundamental aspects of her nature: She is in need of salvation, not because of any sin, but simply because she is human. Mary does not stand above Christ, but stands with all of us who need a savior. What a remarkable relationship this is! Jesus depended on Mary for the things of this earth. Mary depended on Jesus for the things of heaven.

This, of course, means that Mary is a member of the church and an excellent example of faith and charity. We Catholics, therefore, honor her with childlike affection.

The church has granted her several titles of distinction. Some of those titles include Advocate, Helper, Benefactress, and Mediatory. Other titles will be discussed later. Mary is our helper on the road to salvation; she always points the way to Jesus, never to herself. She is a model for the universal Church, leading others to Christ. Mary’s title as “Mother of God,” or *Theotokos* (literally the “God-bearer”) was declared at the Council of Ephesus in 431. An explanation of why Mary is referred as “Mother of God” can be found in the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Paul VI, *Marialis Cultis, For the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary*, disseminated on February 2, 1974. Pope Paul VI goes into depth concerning Mary’s place in liturgical worship, and proper mention of her in the Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Liturgy of the Hours. Her prominent place on the liturgical calendar is explained as well.

Mary, a young, Jewish woman, obedient to the Lord, holds a special place in the life of the Church. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is given honor because of her closeness to Jesus. She is a strong woman of faith and accepts responsibility for her service to God who calls her. Her role is clearly described in this text:

Christ is the one Mediator between God and humanity. Because of the Holy Spirit, we have a direct friendship with Jesus, who can bring us into an intimate relationship with God. Our devotion to Mary must never diminish that. But since she played such a pivotal role in the life and work of Christ, we now realize that she is the first to receive the grace we seek. And even though Mary's place is subordinate to Christ's, nonetheless, we still understand her to be a great helper on our way to holiness.
Constitution of the Church: Paragraph 60-62, Vatican II in Plain English, Huebsch/Thurmes, pages 65-66.

The Role of Mary to Franciscans

Mary's role to Franciscans is to lead us to her son. She is not to overshadow Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit in our Franciscan life. Jesus and Mary belong together. The mother continuously points to her son and brings us to him. Mary then holds an extraordinary yet subordinate role in our Franciscan life.



As Franciscans, we live our Rule. The OFS Rule identifies qualities we might emulate: humble servant, open to Jesus' every word and call, complete self-giving, earnest and confident prayer.

We do not know a great deal of Mary's life, but what we do know is that she lived an ordinary life, performing the services of family life. Her heart was open to God's word when the Angel Gabriel visited her. At the

Anunciation, the Angel Gabriel tells Mary "Behold, you shall conceive in your womb and shall bring forth a son, and you shall name him Jesus.... The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:31-35). She immediately, responded to God's call. She replied to the Angel Gabriel, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1: 38).

Mary was a prayerful woman and recited the daily prayers said by all Jews. Through prayerfulness, she became receptive to the call of God in her life. She would have recognized, as at the Annunciation, that God's ways may be mysterious, but faith allows them to be embraced.

In the Magnificat, we see her inner manner of trusting God and looking for the ways God acts on behalf of the poor. She did inquire about the angel's message because of her innocence. By placing herself in the hands of God she becomes the first Christian disciple. She is the model for all.

Her response is continuous. In the Infancy narratives, Mary is provided with testimony that God is doing something amazing. She was concerned about her cousin Elizabeth, who was much older and pregnant, so she traveled more than





60 miles to serve her. She left the comforts of her family during the latter part of her pregnancy and gave birth in a strange place with no comforts of home or basic amenities. She cared for her newborn. She allowed shepherds to view the baby Jesus. She allowed Joseph to take her and baby Jesus to a strange land, fleeing from those whose only purpose was to kill children because they were threatened by a new “king” being born. She was constantly concerned about her son’s welfare. As an ordinary mother she cleaned and cooked, cared for and protected him.

Throughout her life, Mary was constantly attentive to Jesus. Nothing separated her from Jesus. They were united, even when she did not understand some of the things he said and did. She listened attentively to his words and pondered what they might mean. When she said yes to the angel, she said yes to be with Jesus at every step of His life on earth. The “yes” meant she would be completely self-giving and do whatever was necessary to fulfill the word of God. She said “yes” to visiting Elizabeth. She said “yes” to leaving her family. She said “yes” to attentiveness to Jesus’ words and directions. She said “yes” to conversion; to be willing to do what her son knew must be done. Jesus’ teachings provided her the opportunity to allow her son’s perspectives to bring her to a new understanding of her faith. She said “yes” to allow her son to do things in his time as in the wedding of Cana, where Jesus performed his first miracle (John 2:1). She directed others to do what her Son asked of them. She said “yes” to watching her son be tortured and brutalized and marched through the public to be placed on the cross to die a slow and agonizing death. Even near Jesus’ death, Mary said “yes” to being the mother of John. (John 19: 26).

Reflect on your life. Are you willing to say “yes” to God’s call, especially when the call comes from people we may not trust or may not understand the mystery of the call? Are you willing to say “yes” when the timing is not convenient for you? Are you willing to say “yes” when others may not understand you or perhaps even mistreat or disrespect you? Do you say “yes” even though you think your authority has been compromised or even ignored? Are you willing to say “yes” even when you probably know that you may not receive any recognition for your efforts and work? Do you say “yes, Lord, here I am.”

Imitating this humble service is completed in the ordinary places of everyday life. The spirit of humble service needs both nourishment and expression to grow. Reflect on your daily life. How do you replicate this humble service of Mary? Humble service is a key word for Secular Franciscans. We do not seek to dominate, even when we must advise and correct. Whatever we share is done to serve others and not to illustrate how smart or how witty we are. We imitate Mary by humbly serving others without fanfare or detection.

Mary's life was one of obedience, open to the call and word of her son. No matter what suffering and pain it might bring, Mary would never evade the call, even when the call brought her to witnessing her son being condemned as a criminal and put to death on the cross. She understood the importance of Jesus' words and call.

She respected the words of her son and did not misinterpret them to her improvement or benefit. She was never the queen waiting to be served. She ignored earthly power and material possessions and rewards. She was and continues to be the humble servant, always building up the body of Christ. Can we do less?

Mary gives Franciscans a model to follow by the way she embraced the changes in her life. We face many changes in our faith. Vatican II, as well as many other events in recent decades, has invited us to new perspectives in our faith. We are well aware of the declining numbers of men entering the priesthood and women entering religious orders.

We know that closing and combining parishes sometimes brings distress and apprehension to the parishioners in those parishes. The sexual abuse scandals and loss of trust are serious issues to confront and work through in our lives. The violence we read of or hear about in our world increases fear among us, and sometimes the violence exists within our immediate neighborhoods and community, and sadly we are sometimes the victims of violence.

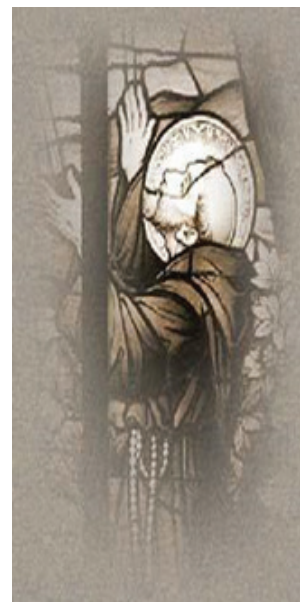
New findings that bring new insights into Scripture are not always easy to accept. The rapid and invariable growth of technology sometimes brings us to crossroads in our faith. These and other events in our world challenge us. By studying and accepting Mary as a model for embracing change, we find a safe harbor, "a Star of the Sea," to reflect and to move on through the changes in our lives.

Our Franciscan Heritage

As Franciscans we are called to serve. The spirit of humble service needs both nourishment and expression to grow. Reflect on your life.

Francis embraced the Mother of our Lord Jesus with indescribable love because, as he said, it was she who made the Lord Jesus our brother, and through her we found mercy. After Christ, he put all his trust in her and took her as his patroness for himself and his friars. In her honor, he fasted every year from the feast of Saints Peter and Paul until the Assumption. (Major Life IX, 3. Omnibus, p. 699)

As he was living there by the church of our Lady, Francis prayed to her who had conceived the Word, full of grace and truth, begging her insistently and with tears to become his Advocate. Then he was



granted the true spirit of the Gospel by the intercession of the Mother of Mercy, and he brought it to fruition. (Major Life III, 1. Omnibus, p.646)

Toward the Mother of Jesus, he was filled with an inexpressible love, because it was she who made the Lord of Majesty our brother. He sang special praises to her, poured out prayers to her, offered her his affections, so many and so great that the tongue of man cannot recount them. But what delights us most, he made her the advocate of the order and placed under her wings the sons he was about to leave that she might cherish them and protect them to the end. (II Celano 198, Omnibus, p.521; also Writings of Saint Francis 4 Salutation of the Blessed Virgin (p.135); Celano, First Life 24 (248); Legend of the Three Companions Ch. V 15 (905); Mirror of Perfection 55 (1177).

Reflect on how you serve others.

How do you nourish your spirit to serve others more humbly and express your service more deeply?

Consider how Our Blessed Virgin Mary is protectress of Franciscans and how she nourishes you to do more for others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Franciscan Reverence and Devotion

Francis was known for his great devotion, reverence, and imitation of Mary, the Mother of God. He acknowledged the unique position given her by God. Mary's Immaculate Conception makes her the daughter of the Father, the virgin mother of the Son, and spouse of the Holy Spirit.

From the titles Francis has attributed to Mary in the Praises, we can see the great respect and devotion he had for the Mother of God. The first titles share with us the ways in which Francis envisioned Mary as holding within herself the Son of God. Palace, Dwelling, Robe, and Tabernacle are all words that invoke thoughts of enclosure. Mary held within herself, both physically and spiritually, the Word of God.

One of the first examples of Mary Francis tried to emulate was her hearing and obeying the will of God.

In addition to the titles for Mary mentioned earlier, other titles have been given to Mary through the centuries, but not necessarily by Franciscans also reflect her role in the salvation of us. Those titles speak to our Franciscan spirituality. They include: Mother of Sorrows, Queen of the Universe, Queen of Peace, Woman Clothed with the Sun, Refuge of Sinners, and Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

As humans, we experience our share of sorrows. Mary did not allow her sorrow to conquer her when she witnessed her Son being ridiculed or his life threatened (Luke 4:28) or his eventual public humiliation and death among throngs of people.

She understood that her Father's Will would triumph, and she accepted both the happiness and sadness when she first listened to God's voice. We can offer our torments and sufferings through the heart of Mary because she remembers clearly how it is to suffer.

We long for one universal church. Through the close connection between God's abundance of love in sending his Son and Mary's obedience, we understand that Christ is King of all creation. Mary is Queen of the Universe.

Although in our world those titles conjure ideas of those who govern with great material wealth, both came to serve. Both the Son and His Mother intercede for us. We strive to serve Jesus through Mary. Both continue to serve through their virtues. Her mission is to unite all humankind with the heart of Jesus.

Franciscans strive to live peacefully in all they do. Our lives are to be lived as prayers. Mary, Queen of Peace, is given this title because her life exuded peace. Her inner focus on our Father enabled her to live through many troubles and difficulties. As Jesus addressed his disciples "*Peace be with you*" (John 20:21) our Queen of Peace, the first disciple of Jesus, seeks to intercede on our behalf to obtain the peace of Jesus. She has continually called for our prayers through her appearances on earth.

In Revelations 12:1, Mary is presented as "*A woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.*" Mary is robed with brilliance of Christ's gift of grace. She is clothed in the sun, but she is also clothed with the Son. The book of Revelations concludes the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, showing Mary engaged in the final battle between the Woman and Satan.

Mary, Refuge of Sinners, helps us to flee quickly to her when we sin. She is our comforter and protector. She encourages us to resume the path to her Son, Jesus Christ. She never turns away, but is constant in her desire to bring us to Jesus. As Franciscans, we constantly strive to do the will of God. We are called daily to conversion, and when we fall short, Mary is there to intercede for us.

Francis persistently turned to Mary for everlasting help. As Mary never turned away from her Son but always toward Him, so did Francis always seek Mary and Jesus. Can we do less?

Several Marian traditions have been attributed to the Franciscan charism. Legend holds that the Angelus might be one of them. While visiting the Sultan in 1219, Francis was inspired and awed by the Muslims call to Prayer five times a day. On his return home, in a Letter to the Rulers of the Peoples, he exhorted them: "*that every evening an announcement be made by a messenger or some other sign that praise and thanksgiving be given by all people to the all-powerful Lord God.*"

As stated previously by Pope Paul VI, our own Franciscan tradition holds up for our consideration two devotions to Mary as alternative means of praying the Liturgy of the Hours: the Franciscan Crown Rosary and the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin. Francis noted Mary to be the first disciple of our Lord. He followed her example unreservedly. He urges us to do the same.

In the Office of the Passion, Francis made an exception. He wrote an Antiphon to the Blessed Virgin to be prayed before and after each psalm. In it, he praised Mary in her tri-fold role as Mother, Daughter, and Spouse. He also petitioned her to pray for us from her privileged place at the side of her Son.

A deep and abiding love for Mary, the mother of Christ and our spiritual mother, is a characteristic mark of the Franciscan Order. The Constitutions of the OFS fix this love in Secular Franciscan life (Article 16). Saint Francis himself prayed to her before each hour of the Office:

“Holy Virgin Mary, there is none like unto you born in the world among women, daughter and handmaid of the most high king, the heavenly Father! Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ, spouse of the Holy Spirit, pray for us with Saint Michael the Archangel and all the virtues of heaven and all the saints, to your most holy, beloved Son, our Lord and Master. Amen.”

Francis, devoted to Mary, praised her in his Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Francis of Assisi: The Saint*, Volume 1, page 163):

Hail holy Lady, most Holy Queen, Mary, Mother of God, you are the Virgin made Church, chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven, whom he consecrated with his most beloved Son and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete, in whom there was and is all fullness of grace and every good. Hail, his tabernacle! Hail, his dwelling! Hail, his vesture! Hail, his handmaid! Hail, his Mother—and all you holy Virtues that by the grace and light of the Holy Spirit are infused into the hearts of the faithful, that from faithless souls you may make souls faithful to God!

Mary calls us to come to Jesus. She calls us to radical conversion by holding her hand and we holding her—the Rosary.

The Franciscan Crown Rosary also shows honor to the Blessed Virgin Mother. It is the rosary of the seven joys of Mary and is appropriate for Franciscans to recite. The story behind the Franciscan Crown Rosary came about in the year 1422, when a young man who daily adorned a statue of Mary with a wreath of flowers was upset that he could not continue to do so since he had entered the friary. As the story is told, Mary appeared to him and asked him to give her a crown of flowers in the form of reciting seven decades of Hail Marys in honor

of her seven joys: The Annunciation, the visit to Elizabeth, the Nativity, the adoration of the Magi, locating Jesus in the Temple, experiencing the Risen Jesus on Easter, and her Assumption. This devotion quickly came to be said throughout the Franciscan family. At a later point, the seven decades were followed with two Hail Marys in honor of the 72 years it is believed she lived. One Our Father and Hail Mary were also added for the intentions of the pope.

Franciscan Doctors, Philosophers, and Theologians

Following Francis' devotion and footsteps, the members of the Franciscan Family have always held Mary in high esteem. Two followers in particular have championed her cause. One is the beloved Saint Anthony of Padua, the "Evangelical Doctor." In his many sermons, Anthony praises Mary for her role in our redemption, from her initial "Yes" to her stalwart stance at the foot of the Cross.

A second Franciscan worthy of mention in regard to Mary is Blessed John Duns Scotus. He was a Franciscan philosopher and theologian who, against most of the prominent voices of his time, including Saint Thomas Aquinas and Saint Bonaventure, held firm to the concept that Mary was conceived without the stain of Original Sin. Duns Scotus' argument for the Immaculate Conception was very simple. In Latin, "*Potuit, deuit, ergo fecit*" translates to "God could do it, should do it and so he did do it." It was possible for God to grant this favor to Mary, her release from Original Sin before the actual act of redemption, and he chose to do so. These two teachings held so firmly by our Franciscan forbears are two of the three dogmas proclaimed infallible by the Church, Mary's Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854, by Pope Pius IX, and her Assumption on November 1, 1950, by Pope Pius XII. These dogmas were reaffirmed by the Council Fathers of Vatican II in *Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church*.

Franciscan Spirituality

From the beginning of time, God loved us and continues to love us even after we commit sin. The primacy of Christ (Bl. John Duns Scotus, OFM) is one key element of Franciscan spirituality. The other key and major focus of Francis is the Primacy of the Father in Trinity and simple unity.

Jesus was sent because of the love God has for us, not because we sinned. Creation is based on God's absolute freedom and love because God's very nature is love. (Col 1: 12-20). He needs nothing. The Incarnation is the single most defining act of God's love. Love is more powerful than anything. He sent His only son to be with us and live with us and show us how God loves us. He accepts us as we are. He calls us by name. In Mary, God provided an act of perfect redemption. She was preserved from a sinful state and did not commit sin. (*Franciscan Spirituality* presentation by Fr. Joseph Schwab, OFM)

Our love for Jesus includes his mother. Saint Francis loved Mary as a devoted son. As the spouse of the Holy Spirit, she not only made Jesus, the Son of God, our brother, but Francis saw how she shared his poverty and suffering. Being our mother too, she gives her example to strengthen us in our efforts to be poor and humble servants of the Lord.

Mary is the mother of the whole Church, of all those baptized into the death of her Son. Through her union with his sufferings on Calvary, she gave birth to his Body the Church. Francis wanted us to be like Mary... a mother.

We are all mothers pregnant with Jesus. “*We carry him in our heart and body*” (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20). He awaits us to “*give birth to Him*” in order to “recreate” with Him the world (*Rule*, Prologue, Ch.1; cf Mt. 5:16).

Francis called Mary the Queen and Mother of his Franciscan Order. He wanted her to love and protect those of her children who give her honor by serving the Church according to a lifestyle that reflects her Son’s earthly life—and hers. Francis loved her so much because he felt she showed him how to fulfill his desire to follow wherever Christ would lead him. Mary was the model of strength, gentleness, trust, patience, openness, and perseverance (Luke 1: 26-38; Luke 1: 46-56).

Mother of the Franciscan Order

The poverty of our Blessed Mother is her royal cloak and crown.

The cradle of the Franciscan Order was the Portiuncula (“The little Portion”), the poor little church outside Assisi dedicated to Our Lady of the Angels. It was no accident that this greatest of mothers should stand again at a poor cradle. To Francis, the Portiuncula was a royal castle, such as the other one at Bethlehem, for poverty was the badge of the noble children of God. He said, “*Poverty is a royal virtue, because it shone so brightly in the King and Queen.*” (Celano, *The Life of Saint Francis*)

Like all good mothers, Mary teaches us. Above all, she teaches us humility. It is beautifully expressed in the song of Mary, the Magnificat. Mary was humble in recognizing her complete unworthiness before God. She trusted confidently in the perfect love of God, always eager to lift his creatures up to divine childhood and perfect joy.

The Magnificat shows us what Mary valued and lived by in her life. She prays: He has brought down the powerful from their thrones... He has sent the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53). Mary’s insight into the true meaning of being God’s handmaid is evident in “he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts” (Luke 1:51). She joyfully prays:

“His mercy is for those who fear him... He has lifted up the lowly.... He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, according to the promise he made to our ancestors, to Abraham and his descendants forever (Luke 1:50, 52, 54-55).

Her prayer provides us a momentary look into her approach to life.

Her prayer shows us her trust in the Lord. She invites all of us to trust our loving God, made present in Jesus, who gifted us with the Spirit.

By her example, Mary invites us as Franciscans to surrender and follow her earnestly and confidently in prayerfulness. *Let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do* (OFS Rule, Article 8).

Wherever Mary has appeared, whether at Lourdes, Fatima, Mexico, her message helps us realize that God’s love is always with us. We are called to follow Jesus and the Gospel passionately. We cannot isolate Mary from her son, our Father, or the Holy Spirit.

Francis and the Blessed Virgin Mother, Mary, did indeed have an exceptional relationship. Francis understood she was the model for Christians, and therefore she is the “virgin made church.” She is the protectress of our Franciscan Family. She is directing us to her son, “do what he tells you.”

Reflection and Discussion Questions

1. What qualities or attributes of Mary most stir you? How do you imitate those qualities/attributes in your daily routines?
2. How is the Magnificat a world-shattering prayer? What is it calling us to do?
3. What is Mary’s role in the life of the Church? Explain why we honor Mary so much.
4. Why is Mary the Mother of the Franciscan Order?
5. How did Duns Scotus contribute to the argument for the Immaculate Conception?
6. Identify events in Mary’s life that bring you closer to her as your mother?
7. Reflect on how often you recite the rosary. What does it mean to you to recite the rosary? What part of the rosary speaks to you the most, and how does it apply to our Franciscan lives?
8. How do you, like Mary, welcome the Spirit to create a community of love? (OFS Constitutions, Article 16.2) What steps do you take to help your fraternity to be a community of love? What steps would you need to work on more diligently to help your fraternity be a better community of love?
9. Compare and contrast the text from Luke 1:46-55 and Luke 2:41-52. Offer your own reflections on what the texts say about Mary and her perspectives.



10. Mary was the first Christian, disciple and apostle. Explain how she became this and what it means for the Franciscans.

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ST. CLARE OF ASSISI

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Abbreviations Used in the Study of St. Clare¹

1LAg	The First Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague
2LAg	The Second Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague
3LAg	The Third Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague
4LAg	The Fourth Letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague
FLCl	Form of Life (1253)
TestCl	The Testament (1247-1253)
BICl	The Blessing
FLHug	Form of Life provided by Cardinal Hugolino (1219)
PrPov	The Privilege of Poverty of Pope Gregory IX (1228)
FLInn	The Form of Life provided by Pope Innocent IV (1247)
PC	The Acts of the Process of Canonization
VL	The Versified Legend (1254-1255)
BC	The Bull of Canonization
LCl	The Legend of St. Clare
1C	The First Witness of Thomas of Celano (1228)
AP	The Witness of the “Anonymous of Perugia” (1240-1241)
L3C	Legend of the Three Companions (1241-1247)
AC	Assisi Compilation (1244-1260)
2C	The Second Witness of Thomas of Celano (1245-1247)

Medieval Society and a Woman’s Place

Medieval society in the thirteenth century was a time of transition. A rising wealthy merchant class began challenging the long-standing noble families. It was a time of conflict between warring city states (those loyal to the nobility versus the newly rich merchant class, those loyal to the emperor versus the pope, the poor versus the rich), all encumbered by various alliances and intrigues. The Church, being an integral part of medieval society, was also a part of this conflict. It was seen as corrupt and gluttonous. In addition, the Church lacked spiritual credibility due to the scandalous actions of its priests and leaders.

Noble women at the time were seen as a means to extend wealth and power for their noble families. Women were schooled in reading, sewing, embroidery and running a household. They were hidden from public view inside large palaces to preserve their virginity and marriage marketability and essentially led semi-enclosed lives. Marriages were arranged among powerful families to extend wealth and power and to preserve peace.²

If a noble woman entered a monastery (sometimes to settle a daughter without marriage prospects or to obtain indulgences for the family), she was expected to bring a dowry

¹As used in Regis Armstrong, OFM, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*. New York: New City Press, 2006

² Joan Mueller, *Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*, 8

with her to the monastery, which would provide an income of support for the rest of her life.³ Monasteries acquired lands, orchards, and goods, which they were able to use to support themselves in a very comfortable manner. In fact, a noble woman could even bring with her servants to maintain her standard of living in the monastery. (Later, St. Colette was noted for reforming some of these practices that had crept into Poor Clare life.)

In addition, monasteries were not always immune to the violence that surrounded them.⁴ At times, nuns were raped and their monasteries pillaged. The cloister became the means to protect the nuns with their holiness, silence, and enclosure. Some well-connected monasteries sponsored by powerful families even received the special papal privilege of a threat of excommunication for anyone who harmed one of its inhabitants.

However, at this time, not all spiritual women became enclosed. Some became “beguines” who led a consecrated penitential life in prayer and works of mercy but could also keep their property. There were many groups of such women in Umbria. Some of these beguines eventually followed the “third rule” and developed into the Penitents of St. Francis (currently the Secular Franciscan Order), but some also gravitated to become spontaneous, self-made leaders who were often opposed to the discipline and eventually the doctrinal teachings of the church.⁵ Some even assumed a life of preaching and sacramental ministry. That is why Francis insisted on Church approval for his rule of life.

Clare of Assisi

Clare, born in 1193 or 1194 in Assisi, was the daughter of Offreduccio di Favarone and his wife Ortolana. The family fled to Perugia while Clare was a young girl. Perugia was more favorable to a noble family than was merchant-oriented Assisi. Later they moved back to their palace in Assisi when peace was negotiated between the merchants (Assisi) and the nobles (Perugia).

Clare’s home, next to the Cathedral of San Rufino, was a happy one. Ortolana schooled Clare in the traditional ways of a noble woman, but also with a deep religious and spiritual training. She was expected to be married at the appropriate time to another noble family for the traditional reasons. However, Clare had developed a deep prayer life and practiced mortification while still young, and at the age of 16 decided she would consecrate her life to God. When she was 18 years old, she heard St. Francis preach during Lent at the Church of San Giorgio in Assisi, and she became determined to live the same Gospel life as Francis. On Palm Sunday, March 20, 1212, Clare escaped from her home, accompanied by her Aunt Bianca and another companion, leaving through the door of the dead (*porta di mortuccio*), which was blocked by heavy stones and wood. This door allowed only the dead to be carried

³ Joan Mueller, *St. Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*, p. 26

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 14-5

⁵ Raffaele Pazzelli, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, p. 64.

out, feet first, from the family home and was surrounded with superstitious fear. Those who went out this door never returned.⁶ Clare met St. Francis and his brothers at the chapel of the Portiuncula (Our Lady of the Angels), and there Francis and his friars accompanied her with lit candles and accepted her vows to live in the service of the Gospel. Clare put aside her rich clothes, and Francis cut her hair (tonsured) and clothed her in a rough dress and veil as a sign of her consecration.

Initially, Francis placed Clare temporarily in the monastery of the Benedictine nuns of San Paolo. (Some say this was to ensure the papal protection the monastery enjoyed.)⁷ Francis gave her a simple “form of life” (*formula vitae*) to begin her life. Her father, hearing of her decision to share in Francis’ Gospel living, went to the monastery and tried to persuade her to leave, and even tried to drag her out by force. After seeing her shorn head, her father left without Clare. Francis then transferred Clare to another Benedictine monastery of St. Angelo in Panzo. There, Clare was joined by her younger sister, Agnes. The family attempted to recover their second daughter by forcibly removing Agnes. It was said that Agnes grew so heavy that she could not be moved. Eventually Clare was joined not only by her sister, Agnes, but also by her mother, Ortolana, a younger sister, Beatrix, and her aunt, Bianca. Understanding the need for a specifically Franciscan monastery, Francis was able to move the fledgling foundation to a rustic dwelling he built next to the chapel of San Damiano, which the Benedictines allowed him to use. It was there, as he had previously prophesied, that he would house his “Poor Ladies,” also called “Damianites:”⁸ *“Ladies will again dwell here who will glorify our heavenly Father throughout his holy, universal Church by their celebrated and holy manner of life.”*⁹

Throughout Clare’s life, she was, as she herself described it, “the little plant of our father, Francis.” It was written in her testament, *“When the Blessed Francis saw, however, that, although we were physically weak and frail, we did not shirk deprivation, poverty, hard work, trial, or the shame or contempt of the world... he greatly rejoiced in the Lord. And moved by compassion for us, he bound himself, both through himself and through his Order, to always have the same loving care and special solicitude for us as for his own brothers.”*¹⁰

Much against her will, Clare was appointed Abbess by St. Francis, and under her spirituality, other foundations of Poor Ladies were started in Italy and throughout Europe. Her daily life was filled with prayer, and what was left over was used for manual labor. (Clare was known for spinning a fine thread to be woven into beautiful corporals that were given to churches around Assisi.) Throughout Clare’s life, she was a confidante and aide to Francis, helping him to discern whether he should retire into a life of contemplation or remain active.

⁶ Karen Karper, *Clare: Her Light and Her Song*, Chicago Illinois, St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1990, p. 76.

⁷ Joan Mueller, *St. Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*, p. xvi.

⁸ Legend of the Three Companions (L3C), in *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, 24.

⁹ *TestCl*, 14.

¹⁰ *TestCl*, 27-29

Ties with the Franciscan brotherhood were strong, since the brothers provided spiritual care and assistance to the poor ladies.

When Francis knew his time of death was near (in the year 1226), he came to visit San Damiano for the last time, and there the nuns erected a little wattle hut for him close to the monastery. There he composed the last section of the “Canticle of the Sun.” At the end of his life, Francis left a blessing to St. Clare absolving her from any failings she might have and told her that she “should put aside her grief and sorrow over not being able to see me now. Let her be assured that before her death, both she and her sisters will see me and will receive the greatest consolation from me.”¹¹ After his death, Francis’ remains were brought to the monastery at San Damiano, where a grill was removed so Clare and her sisters could say their goodbyes for more than an hour.

One night in 1234, Frederick II’s army, on its way to assaulting Assisi, scaled the walls of the monastery at San Damiano. The nuns were in great fear, and Clare, rising from her sick bed, took the ciborium from the chapel and faced the invaders. It has been related that as Clare raised the ciborium, the soldiers fell backward as if dazzled and then took flight and the monastery was spared. This is why St. Clare is so often depicted as holding a ciborium.¹²

Later, on June 22, 1241, a much larger force returned to attack Assisi, and Clare gathered in prayer with her sisters before the Blessed Sacrament, praying that the town might be spared. A huge storm rose up, scattering tents and soldiers everywhere and causing such panic that the army left. The people of Assisi showed such gratitude to their “Seraphic Mother” that she became enshrined in the hearts of the common people, and this date is celebrated by people to this day.¹³

Clare’s health was not good, and she spent many years as an invalid, being bedbound but still participating in the life of the monastery when she was able. During one Christmas (as it was described during the testimony for her canonization) Clare was unable to leave her bed to participate in the liturgy. She prayed, “Lord God, look, I have been left here alone with you.” She immediately began to hear the organ, responsories, and the entire Office of the brothers in the Church of Saint Francis, as if she were present there.”¹⁴ She described this experience to her sisters with such detail and joy, even though it had been impossible for Clare to physically attend the liturgy.

Clare’s influence was felt far from the hills of San Damiano. Agnes of Prague was one noted follower who learned of Francis through the itinerate preaching of the brothers. Agnes was the youngest daughter of King Premysl Otaker I and Queen Constance of Hungary and

¹¹ AC13

¹² PC 174-5

¹³ PC 175

¹⁴ PC 161

was betrothed at a young age to Henry VII of Germany. When this betrothal dissolved due to war, Agnes' father considered a marital alliance with the English, but instead another proposal for marriage was made by Frederick II of Germany, the father of Henry VII. Agnes appealed to the Pope for his help, and Frederick II's proposal was refused. Agnes was now free to choose her own future. She chose poverty. She built a monastery and hospital from her own funds and requested papal protection for the monastery. Clare sent five German speaking sisters from Trent to assist with this new foundation and to help Agnes and her sisters follow the form of life of St. Clare at San Damiano. It is Clare's letters to this Agnes of Prague that have come down to us and reveal Clare's rich spirituality and wisdom.¹⁵

As Clare felt her death approaching, she received the last sacraments from Cardinal Rainaldo. Pope Innocent IV came from Perugia to visit the saint. Clare called her sisters around her and exhorted them to persevere faithfully in evangelical poverty and reminded them of the many benefits they have received from God. Like Francis, the Passion according to John was read, and before dawn on August 11, 1253, Clare died peacefully in the company of Brothers Leo, Angelo, and Juniper, three of the earliest companions of Francis. Clare lived 27 years after her inspiration of the Father in religious life, passed onto his heavenly reward.

The Rule of Life of St. Clare and the Privilege of Poverty

Francis' *Formula Vitae*

The first directive or Rule of Life was from St. Francis himself, when he gave the sisters the *formula vitae* when Clare consecrated her life to the service of the Gospel. It reads: "Since by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and servants of the most high King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have that same loving care and special solicitude for you as [I have] for them."¹⁶

Eventually, Francis' directives were inadequate to guide the growing numbers of women leaving homes and following St. Clare. In response to a letter written to Pope Honorius II by Cardinal Hugolino concerning the new foundations being made for religious women in the Spoleto valley, Pope Honorius II made these new foundations exempt from the jurisdiction of the local bishops and placed them directly under the Pope.¹⁷ He made note that "[Some people] are not afraid, thereby, of impeding the salutary resolutions of these women."¹⁸ Remember that many of the early followers of Clare were nobility and were "fleeing the pomp and wealth of this world"¹⁹ and might need the protection of someone not in the local community,

¹⁵ Joan Mueller, *St. Clare of Assisi: Letters to Agnes*, p. xvii-xviii.

¹⁶ Form of Life Given to St. Clare and her Sisters, in Armstrong and Brady, *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works*. New York, Paulist Press. 44.

¹⁷ Letter of Pope Honorius III to Cardinal Hugolino in Regis Armstrong OFM, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents: The Lady*. New York: New City Press, 2006, p.71.

¹⁸ Letter of Pope Honorius III, 72.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

where family influence was widespread. The Pope removed local influence and personally took the nuns of St. Clare under his protection.

The Privilege of Poverty

Finally, between the end of the Lateran Council and his death in 1216, Pope Innocent III wrote in his own hand the text of the Privilege of Poverty, which stated, “No one can compel you to receive possessions.”²⁰

Hugolino's Rule

Shortly after, Cardinal Hugolino (1219) wrote a rule (FLHug) guiding the fledging foundations.²¹ It was designed to ensure a more stable form of life, with both more formal spiritual and administrative assistance. Some foundations of women were experiencing neglect due to the wandering nature of the Franciscan friar communities. However, this Rule was based upon the Rule of St. Benedict (since after the 4th Lateran Council of 1214, all new foundations of religious orders were required to use an already existing Rule)²² and specified enclosure and use of the Benedictine version of the Divine Office²³. Francis' Rule for the brothers was exempt from this requirement, since it had already been approved. However, Clare's vision of life was not exempt, even though it was based upon Francis' Form of Life.

Needless to say, the use of a Benedictine Rule in a Franciscan foundation invited difficulties. The most serious difficulty for the Poor Ladies concerned poverty. Clare yearned to remain poor as the Crucified Christ and to maintain the “privilege of poverty,” which was living without possessions. However, church leaders were protective of women and feared neglect by their brothers in religion. Without assurance for the upkeep of the monastery, the church feared for the wellbeing of women religious. Clare had no such fear. She relied on the Lord to provide as He had for the birds of the air and for her brother Franciscans.

Hugolino's rule also began defining enclosure as more restrictive than it had been in actual practice and it became more concrete and severe in subsequent rules. Although “San Damiano was an eremitical community right from the start... they [the Poor Ladies] sought to live their life of prayer in isolation and separation from the world. Enclosure was not added later but was there from the beginning. However, it is no contradiction that right from the beginning Francis and Clare thought of San Damiano as being an open community. In this sense, the spirituality of enclosure (at least as it emerges from Hugolino's Constitutions) was never introduced at San Damiano.”²⁴ “Seclusion for her [Clare] is really openness to the world, isolation is the fullness of spiritual communion.”²⁵ There is evidence,²⁶ however, that

²⁰ PrPov 84.

²¹ FLHug. 73. .

²² Constitution 13 (*Ne nimia...moasteriis praesidere*). *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils Text, Translations, and Commentary*, H.J. Schroeder, O.P. (New York: Herder, 1937) 255.

²³ Joan Mueller, *St. Clare of Assisi; Letters to Agnes*, p. 10

²⁴ Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, p.85-6.f.

the early Poor Ladies allowed a more relaxed enclosure when it involved the brothers of Francis, the sick, and certain ecclesial authorities.

Clare appealed directly to Pope Innocent III for a papal exemption to Hugolino's Rule, citing the need for the privilege of poverty. As the numbers of Poor Clares greatly increased, many were not satisfied with Hugolino's Rule and its insistence on professing the Benedictine rule. Agnes of Prague, a noblewoman who rejected a royal suitor in favor of a life as a Poor Clare, explicitly asked that the Benedictine rule be omitted from the Form of Life (Rule) used in her monastery.²⁷

Dispensation from the Privilege of Poverty

In 1227, Cardinal Hugolino, now Pope Gregory IX, dispensed the Poor Ladies from the Privilege of Poverty and removed the Friars Minor as chaplains, except for those to whom special permission had been given by the Apostolic See.²⁸ Clare moved into action. She said, "Let him now take away from us all the brothers, since he has taken away those who provide us with the food that is vital." At once she sent back to the Minister all the brothers, not wanting to have the questors who acquired corporal bread when they could not have the questors for spiritual bread."²⁹ The Poor Ladies' fast from bodily food, when faced with a fast from spiritual food, did not go unnoticed. In 1228, Pope Gregory IX restored the Privilege of Poverty and the ministry of the Friars Minor to the community.

Innocent IV's Rule

The next pope, Pope Innocent IV, found many women's monasteries throughout the world facing extreme deprivation from their male orders' neglect and was forced to intervene in many cases. In order to force the mendicant orders to assume jurisdiction over the convents associated with them,³⁰ he wrote a rule that reconfirmed the Hugolinian rule and promulgated his rule of 1247 (FLInn),³¹ which omits reference to the Benedictine rule, lessens fasting, and permits possessions, while still refusing the full privilege of poverty. It did, however, reflect more of the Poor Ladies' wishes to have their charism and ideals incorporated into the Church's official documents. The rule of 1247 was enforced by papal decree, in spite of the fact that it was not widely accepted by the Poor Clare communities.

St. Clare's Rule of Life

In the meantime, St. Clare never gave up her pursuit of the privilege of poverty and constantly petitioned the pope to let her follow fully the ideals of the Franciscan charism.³² Clare

²⁵ Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, p. 97.

²⁶ Murray Bodo, *Clare: A Light in the Garden*, p. 45 (footnote).

²⁷ Regis Armstrong, OFM, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, p. 89

²⁸ *Quo Elongati* in *St. Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, The Saint*, p.575.

²⁹ LCI 312.

³⁰ Margaret Carney, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life*, p. 75.

³¹ FLInn 89-106.

³² Regis Armstrong, OFM, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, p. 89.

wrote her own Rule of Life (FLCI) based upon the Franciscan insistence on poverty and began her long efforts to win its approval. This Rule was the first Rule ever written by a woman³³ and reflected many provisions from the Later Rule of the friars.³⁴ Clare continued to press for the passage of her rule, even when the Pope visited the by now well-loved holy Clare. Finally, by 1250, Pope Innocent IV absolved the Poor Clares from following his rule of 1247 but still did not allow the privilege of poverty.

St. Clare's Rule described a life that "had three salient characteristics: life in common, work with their own hands, and, above all the choice of poverty.... This choice of absolute poverty led to what could be called the economic paradox of San Damiano: working in order to give away, and begging in order to live. From such a perspective, work was not an economic factor, but rather became the hallmark of the choice of poverty."³⁵

Likewise, all the sisters worked with their own hands. In other monasteries, there were those who "served" and were called "lay sisters," and those who primarily prayed, were well educated, and were from aristocratic backgrounds and were called "choir nuns." "At San Damiano, too, there were sisters who were called 'those who served'; these were the sisters who went outside the monastery as occasion required. At San Damiano, however, 'those who served' was not a category apart, for all the sisters were obliged to work and the work itself was not divided into more or less servile work."³⁶

In addition, Clare's way of life in common was quite democratic for its time. All the sisters voted upon the acceptance of a Candidate, since this new woman would impact the whole community. Abbesses were elected by the community and were considered servants of all, and the Abbess was to confer with all her sisters about what concerned the welfare of the community.³⁷

Finally, after years of praying and lobbying for her own Rule of Life, on August 9, 1253, approval was granted for Clare's written Rule of Life and was delivered to her one day before her death, along with the papal bull of Pope Innocent IV. On the original manuscript, found in the folds of her mantle, Pope Innocent IV wrote: "For reasons known to me and the protector of the monastery, so be it!" It was also noted that Blessed Clare touched and kissed it many times out of devotion.³⁸ St. Clare died on August 11, 1253, secure in the knowledge that the precious Privilege of Poverty and the unique Poor Clare Way of Life was accepted and blessed by the Church.

³³ Ibid., p.106.

³⁴ Margaret Carney OSF, *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi and Her Form of Life*, Appendix: Comparison of the Rules, p. 260-261.

³⁵ Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, p.75.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 66.

³⁷ FICI 106-128.

³⁸ Regis Armstrong, OFM, *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, The Lady*, pp. 106-1079.

Spirituality of Clare

St. Clare always described herself and her order as “the little plant of our Father Francis.” In this way, she acknowledged the role of Francis in the development of the feminine expression of the Franciscan charism.

The Clarian (that which is attributed to St. Clare) charism is essentially Franciscan in nature, with the same emphasis on following the Gospel life, conformity to the Crucified, poverty, simplicity, and the brotherhood/sisterhood of all creation. St. Clare articulated these qualities in a specific contemplative and feminine expression.

One of the best ways to understand Clare’s spirituality is through her writings, especially in her letters to Agnes of Prague. In them, she described her contemplative path of spiritual marriage to the Crucified, her use of the mirror image, mystical marriage/spiritual motherhood and holy unity. Clare’s writings do not dwell on the costs of living the Gospel life but are filled with descriptions and blessings that such a life obtains. Like Francis, she dwelt in the praise of God; the result of continual self offering, prayer and sacrifice. Her spirituality is not a negation of life but a whole-hearted turning to the fullness of Love.

Clare's Contemplative Approach to Prayer

“O most noble Queen, gaze [on him], consider [him], contemplate [him], as you desire to imitate [him]. If you suffer with him, you will reign with him. [If you] weep [with him] you shall rejoice with him, [if you] die with him on the cross of tribulation, you shall possess heavenly mansions in the splendor of the saints and, in the Book of Life, your name shall be called glorious among people.”³⁹

These are Clare’s directives for contemplation to St. Agnes of Prague. Notice the difference between Clare’s directives and the classic steps of *lectio divina* (or the monastic path). Classic *lectio divina* begins with “*Lectio*” (to hear the Word of God), “*Meditatio*” (to reflect upon the Word), “*Oratio*” (the Word touches the heart), and finishes with “*Contemplatio*” (to rest in God). Clare begins with a “visual reading,” a gazing on the image of the crucified Christ, which leads to meditation or consideration of Christ, then to contemplation and imitation of Christ. Whereas the monastic path ends at contemplation, for Clare, the goal of prayer is imitation. It is not simply that we arrive at union with God; rather, it is that we become what we love. Prayer forges us into the likeness of the beloved, and thus it brings Christ to life in the believer. This is the evangelical life; bringing Christ to life by participating in the Christ mystery. Prayer is the energy of evangelical life because it transforms the desire for Gospel life into the practice of Gospel living. Clare’s template of prayer—gaze-consider-contemplate-imitate—is the template of evangelical life and the relationship with God that makes this life alive.”⁴⁰

³⁹ 2LAg 20-21

⁴⁰ Iliia Delia, *Franciscan Prayer*. p.9-10.

This transformation is the heart of Clare’s spirituality. We cannot bring Christ to others if we are not transformed into His likeness. Clare wrote how this develops by describing it to her friend Agnes of Prague: *“Place your mind before the mirror of eternity! Place your soul in the brilliance of glory! Place your heart in the figure of divine substance! And transform your entire being into the image of the Godhead itself through contemplation. So that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness that God Himself has reserved from the beginning for those who love Him.”*⁴¹ Notice the three stages of this transformation.⁴² Initially there is a stop, rest, contemplation (*Place your mind before the mirror of eternity, place your soul in the brilliance of glory!*), followed by a movement of the will and the emotions (*Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance!*), and finally, is the place of pleasure and delight (*“So that you too may feel what His friends feel as they taste the hidden sweetness that God has reserved from the beginning for those who love Him!”*) Clare knows very well the passion and poverty of the Lord. She also knows the sweetness of the Lord, for that is what sustains her through her efforts to obtain the privilege of poverty! *“Whose affection excites, Whose contemplation refreshes, Whose kindness fulfills, Whose delight replenishes.”*⁴³ *“Clare’s way of contemplation is central to relationship with God. It is not the goal, but the means of union and transformation.”*⁴⁴

The Mirror of the Cross

St. Clare wrote: *“Gaze upon that mirror each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face within it, that you may adorn yourself within and without with beautiful robes, covered, as is becoming the daughter and most chaste bride of the Most High King, with the flowers and garments of all the virtues. Indeed, blessed poverty, holy humility, and inexpressible charity are reflected in that mirror, as, with the grace of God, you can contemplate them throughout the entire mirror.”*⁴⁵

Clare, using an image common during the medieval ages, uses the mirror image in two ways. First, Jesus is seen as the mirror of God, giving us reflections of the qualities of God. In a mirror, light (the expression of the presence of God) enlivens it. Secondly, the mirror can also remind us that as Christians we are transformed through contemplation; we in turn have to become mirrors and to reflect God.⁴⁶

The mirror has three parts: the border, the surface, and the depth—each representing the life of Jesus.⁴⁷

⁴¹ 3LAg 12-14.

⁴² Claire Marie Ledoux, *Clare of Assisi: Her Spirituality Revealed in her Letters*, p. 65-66.

⁴³ 4 LAg, 11-12.

⁴⁴ Iliia Delio, *Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love*, p. 63.

⁴⁵ 4 LAg 15-18.

⁴⁶ Brian E. Purfield, *Reflects dans le miroir. Images du Christ dans la vie spirituelle de sainte Claire d'Assise* (Paris: Editions franciscaines, 1993), back cover. Translation by Colette Joly Dees. This work appeared first in English as *Reflections in the Mirror: Images of Christ in the Spiritual Life of St. Clare of Assisi* (1989) a dissertation at St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, New York.

⁴⁷ Ledoux, p. 95.

The border of the mirror represents the poverty of Christ, who was born in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes. The surface refers to His life on earth. The depth refers to the death of Christ on the cross. Like a mirror of the Middle Ages (which were blemished and filled with imperfections), we are also imperfect and do not reflect the full image of Christ until we are transformed by Him. As Clare used the image of the mirror in contemplation, we are urged to contemplate the “mirror of eternity”; we are to become transformed with poverty, humility, and love through the image of the Divine (the mirror without blemish) and become who we see, the image of God in whose likeness we were created. *“Therefore, that Mirror, suspended on the wood of the Cross, urged those who passed by the way, look and see if there is any suffering like my suffering!”*⁴⁸

As Beth Lynn, OSC, states: “The idea here is reflection. All created reality each in its own way is an image of God the creator. We see a finite reflection of God in everyone and everything around us.”⁴⁹ We are challenged to reflect God to others by our lives.

Mystical Marriage/Spiritual Motherhood

Clare, acknowledging what her sisters and she herself had given up by choosing Christ as their spouse instead of a noble marriage, said to Agnes of Prague: *“You have taken the noblest of husbands, the Lord Jesus Christ...”*⁵⁰ Clare saw virginity as the precondition for a much richer human and spiritual fecundity,⁵¹ and it was this relationship to the Crucified that was the goal of Poor Clare life: *“Therefore, beloved sister—or better: lady who is worthy of great honour because you are the beloved and the mother and the sister of my Lord Jesus Christ...”*⁵² It was also this relationship that was seen as an invisible martyrdom by the sisters as they were transformed into a mystical union with Christ: “O Bride of Christ, because, just like the other most holy virgin, Saint Agnes, you have been most marvelously wedded to the Lamb without blemish who takes away the sins of the world, for you have laid aside all the emptiness of this world.”⁵³

For Clare and her sisters, as they were transformed by God in their spiritual marriages, they witnessed how they gave birth to Him to each other and for others. They realized how they bore Him in their bodies and in their lives. In other words, they became mothers of Him as Francis wished. As Ingrid Peterson, OSF, puts it, “mystical union which binds the soul to God, inflames the soul with action. It fills the heart with generosity, especially to instruct others in the way of perfection.”⁵⁴

⁴⁸ 4 LAg 24.

⁴⁹ Beth Lynn OSC, “Love Willing to Suffer” in *Doing what is Ours to Do: A Clarian Theology of Life*, by the Poor Clares of the Holy Name Federation and the Mother Bentivoglio Federation, p. 27.

⁵⁰ 1 LAg 7

⁵¹ Marco Bartoli, *Clare of Assisi*, p. 128

⁵² 1 LAg 11.

⁵³ 4 LAg 7-8.

⁵⁴ Ingrid Peterson, 287

Clare also became “mother” to all of her spiritual daughters who followed her way. She called herself “sister and mother of you” in her final blessing to her sisters and to all of the sisters to come.⁵⁵ She modeled her life after the poor Mary, who could only clothe her child in poor little clothes, when she admonished her sisters to always dress in poor clothes as the infant was clothed.⁵⁶

Holy Unity

Because of Clare’s mystical marriage to the Crucified, she united herself to the Godhead itself (Holy Unity) through the transforming power of prayer. In the prologue to the Rule of the Poor Clares, given to them by Father Francis when the rule was confirmed by Cardinal Rainaldo, it states: “According to [this form of life] you should live together in unity of spirits....”⁵⁷ The Poor Clares are to show in the unity of their cloistered life with each other, the same unity of the Trinitarian love among Father, Son, and Spirit, which we share in our life with God. As Pope John Paul II writes in *Vita Consecrata*: “Fraternal life, whereby consecrated persons strive to live in Christ with one heart and soul, is put forward as an eloquent witness to the Trinity. It proclaims the Father, who desires to make of all humanity one family. It proclaims the incarnate Son, who gathers the redeemed into unity, pointing the way by his example, his prayer, his words, and above all his death, which is a source of reconciliation for a divided and scattered community. It proclaims the Holy Spirit as the principal unity of the Church, wherein he ceaselessly raises up spiritual families in fraternal communities.⁵⁸ The Eucharist is the sacrament of this life together. As one Poor Clare wrote, “In this Presence we are made one in Triune Love. Together we call upon the Spirit, together we join ourselves to Jesus to praise and thank our God. And all of us with our unveiled faces like mirrors reflecting the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the image that we reflect in brighter and brighter glory (2Cor. 3:18).”⁵⁹

Therefore, the Poor Clare’s life is to mirror the Trinity of God, not only to each other but to the outside world. It is in this relationship where the “enclosed” eremitical lifestyle of the Poor Clares opens out to embrace all creation.

The Poor Clares Today and the Secular Franciscan Order

The Poor Clare monasteries in the United States today, founded nearly 134 years ago, are independent from each other, but loosely affiliated into Federations. You will find many “flavors” of Poor Clare life, ranging from monasteries tracing their roots directly back to San Damiano, Capuchin Poor Clares, Poor Clares nuns derived from Third Order contemplatives, as well as Colettine Poor Clares (those tracing their roots to the reforms of St. Colette). Some monasteries are very traditional, with floor-length habits and veils, with bare feet, sandals,

⁵⁵ BICI 6.

⁵⁶ FLCI, 2, 24.

⁵⁷ Prologue to The Form of Life of St. Clare of Assisi, in *The Lady: St. Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* edited and translated by Regis J. Armstrong, New City Press, New York, NY, 2006.

⁵⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

⁵⁹ Mary Frances Hone OSC, “God Is Happening: A Trinitarian Theology” in *Doing What Is Ours To Do*, p.65.

or shoes, and some have shorter habits with or without veils. Color is also variable, ranging from white in warm climates to light beige to dark brown. All profess the same Rule, but with different traditions and interpretations. In any event, they are all Poor Clare nuns professing the Rule of St. Clare with the four vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and enclosure.

Not every Secular Franciscan fraternity is blessed to be geographically close to the Second Franciscan Order. But those who are not geographically close can still develop a relationship. (See the website <http://poorclare.org> for a list of monasteries by state.) Since the Poor Clares are an enclosed contemplative order, mail, email, or phone contact can be maintained. Attending the Transitus of St. Clare along with her feast day Mass celebrations can strengthen ties with the Second Franciscan Order. Occasional fraternity visits to a monastery might be arranged. Some Poor Clare monasteries (but not all) offer spiritual direction, which is a great help to a Secular Franciscan. Relationships with a Poor Clare monastery enrich a Secular Franciscan fraternity with prayer support, fraternity, and sharing of the Franciscan charism. We can offer our prayers, material assistance (driving, shopping, etc.) and donations to assist our sisters. Our Second Order sisters have much to offer the Secular Franciscan order, and we as Secular Franciscans have much to offer in return.

Sample Reflection Questions

1. As you use St. Clare's "gaze, consider, contemplate, and imitate," describe its impact on your life.
2. In what ways have you been drawn to imitate the Crucified? In what ways has this transformed your life?
3. How do you see Christ in your "mirror?" How are you a "mirror" of Christ?
4. Describe how you will give birth to God for others by your intended consecration as a Secular Franciscan.
5. Describe ways you can give evidence of unity with the Father, Son, and Spirit in your life in fraternity.
6. Do you have a relationship with the Poor Clares? What has this meant to you? If not, how can you foster one?

Ending Prayer Ritual

The Formator reads from the Legend of St. Clare, Chapter X, “The Miracle of the Multiplication of Bread.”

“There was only one [scrap of] bread in the monastery when both hunger and the time for eating arrived. After calling the refectorian, the saint told her to divide the bread and to send part [of it] to the brothers, keeping the rest for the sisters. From this remaining part she told her to cut 50 [pieces] according to the number of ladies and to place them on the table of poverty. When the devoted daughter replied to her “We’ll need to have the ancient miracles of Christ happen to receive 50 pieces from such a small [piece of] bread,” the mother responded by saying:” Confidently do whatever I say, child.”

The daughter hurried to fulfill the command of her mother; the mother hurried to direct her pious aspirations for her sisters to her Christ. Through a divine gift, that little piece increased in the hands of the one breaking it and a generous portion existed for each one in the convent.”

(Time for reflection on the reading)

At the end of the reflection, the Formator prays the Blessing of St. Clare over the bread with hand raised as all bow their heads.

Blessing Attributed to St. Clare

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and be merciful to you. May He turn his countenance to you and give you peace.

I, Clare, a handmaid of Christ, a little plant of our holy Father Francis, a sister and mother of you [omitted “and the other Poor Sisters”], although unworthy, ask our Lord Jesus Christ through His mercy and through the intercession of His most holy Mother Mary, of Blessed Michael the Archangel ,and all the holy angels of God, and of all His men and women saints, that the heavenly Father give you and confirm for you this most holy blessing in heaven and earth. On earth, may He increase His grace and virtues among His servants and Handmaids of His Church Militant. In heaven, may He exalt and glorify you in His Church Triumphant among all His men and women saints.

I bless you in my life and after my death as much as I can and more than I can with all the blessings with which the Father of mercies has and will have blessed His sons and daughters in heaven and on earth Amen.

Always be lovers of God and your souls and the souls of you Brothers and Sisters [changed from Sisters], and always be eager to observe what you have promised the Lord.

May the Lord be with you always and, wherever you are, may you be with Him always. Amen”

**At the end of the Blessing, each person in Formation
tears off a bit of bread and consumes it.**

Blessing sung and composed by the Order of St. Clare nuns,
Andover, Massachusetts. Used with permission

St. Clare of Assisi: Important Events of Her Life

- | | |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1193 July 16 | Clare Offreduccio is born in Assisi, Italy |
| 1199 | The Offreduccio family is exiled from Assisi to Perugia |
| 1206 | Francis’ conversion, his prayer before the crucifix at San Damiano, he repairs the church and predicts the coming of the Poor Ladies |
| 1209 | Francis’ Rule receives the approval of Pope Innocent III |
| 1210 | Clare hears Francis preach in Assisi |
| 1212 | Palm Sunday, March 20, Clare makes her flight to the Portiuncula and receives the habit from Francis |
| 1212 | Clare is moved from San Paolo in Bastia to Sant’ Angelo di Panzo |
| 1212 | Clare begins the foundation at San Damiano with her sister Agnes—originally called the order of San Damiano (the Damianites), commonly known as ‘The Poor Ladies’ |
| 1214 | Sister Bolvina, Clare’s companion, founds a community of Damianites in Spello |
| 1215 | Pope Innocent III calls the Fourth Lateran Council |
| 1216 | Clare reluctantly, but obediently, accepts the role of Abbess of San Damiano |
| 1215-16 | Pope Innocent III grants Clare and the Poor Ladies the Privilege of Poverty |
| 1217 | Cardinal Hugolino arrives in Tuscany as Papal Legate |
| 1219 | Cardinal Hugolino issues a Rule based on that of St. Benedict, but not including Privilege of Poverty or ministry by the Friars Minor |
| 1219 | Agnes is sent as Abbess to Monticello, near Florence |
| 1224 | The beginning of Clare’s illness; Francis receives the Stigmata |
| 1226 Oct 3 | Francis dies at the Portiuncula |

- 1227 Pope Gregory IX (formerly Cardinal Hugolino) dispenses the Poor Ladies from Clare's ideals of Poverty and removes the Friars as chaplains
- 1228 Gregory IX restores the Privilege of Poverty and ministry by the Friars Minor
- 1229 Princess Agnes, the daughter of the King of Bohemia, establishes a monastery in Prague, becomes its Abbess and eventually becomes St. Agnes of Prague
- 1230 Francis' body is transferred to the Basilica of St. Francis
- 1240 Saracens attack the monastery of San Damiano. Clare repels the attack with her prayer before the Blessed Sacrament
- 1241 Miracle of the liberation of the city of Assisi from Vitale d'Aueria on June 22 by the intercession of Clare before the Blessed Sacrament
- 1247 Rule of Pope Innocent IV lessens fasting, permits possessions. The "Damianites" to the Franciscan Order. Rule of St. Benedict abandoned
- 1250 Pope Innocent IV declares Poor Ladies not bound to his Rule
- 1252 Cardinal Raynaldusco approves Clare's Rule, September 16
- 1252 Clare's fourth and last known letter to Agnes of Prague
- 1253 150 monasteries of Poor Ladies have been established throughout Europe
- 1253 Pope Innocent IV visits Clare at San Damiano
- 1253 August 8 Clare has a vision of the Virgin Mary with heavenly virgins
- 1253 August 9 Clare's Rule is finally approved by Papal Bull *Solet annure*
- 1253 August 11 Clare dies peacefully at San Damiano
- 1253 October 18 Pope Innocent IV orders inquiry into Clare's life
- 1253 November Death of Clare's sister, St. Agnes of Assisi
- 1255 August 15 St. Clare is canonized by Pope Alexander IV (formerly Cardinal Raynoldus)
- 1260 The Poor Ladies are transferred from San Damiano to the Basilica of St. Clare within the walls of Assisi
- 1263 Rule of Pope Urban IV. The Poor Ladies from here on will take the name "The Order of St. Clare"
- 1850 August 30 Sarcophagus and remains of St. Clare are found
- 1872 Clare's body is placed in the new crypt of Basilica of St. Clare
- 1893 Original Rule of St. Clare is found in a fold of her mantle

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A Brief History of the Secular Franciscan Order and Its Rules

William Wicks, OFS

Beatus fr̄ciscus duob; anis ante mortē suā fecit quadrā
gestinā in loco dlueme ad honorē beate v̄ginis m̄rie māris d̄is beat
m̄ichael archaḡli a f̄cto d̄ilupp̄iois f̄ct̄ m̄rie v̄ḡis d̄is f̄ct̄ f̄ct̄
equipat̄ sep̄t̄ib; 7 facta est sup̄ eū manū d̄ni p̄r uisionē 7 Allocut̄
orit̄ seraph̄y 7 in p̄thorē stigmat̄ū ūp̄e suo f̄ct̄ h̄at̄ l̄ndel̄ ex alio
latere manū sep̄t̄is 7 manū sua sep̄t̄is f̄ct̄ ḡēt̄ d̄o d̄e b̄n̄ct̄ō s̄ibi
collato

Benedicat tibi d̄n̄s 7 c̄ullo
diat̄ te ostē d̄at̄ faciem
suā t̄ibi 7 misereat̄ tui.
cōuertat̄ uultu suū ad te
7 uideat̄ nob̄ in pacē

¶ Beatus fr̄ciscus scriptis manū sua d̄n̄s b̄n̄ct̄ōnē in fr̄i l̄os



¶ Simili modo fecit d̄n̄s ḡm̄ ih̄u eū capite manu sua

The Blessing of Brother Leo

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History of the Secular Franciscan Order and its Rules

Overview

St. Francis entered the penitential movement in the first decade of the thirteenth century. In 1209, at St. John Lateran in Rome, Pope Innocent III authorized Francis and his followers to live the life of a penitent and preach the Gospel. From this event sprang the three Franciscan Orders established by St. Francis, which over time brought about a rebuilding of the Church, which at the time was falling into ruin. The rebuilding continues today.

This chapter presents a brief history of the Secular Franciscan Order. It is presented as indicated by the following topics.

- Penitential Movement – Pre Francis
- Francis of Assisi – 1181-1226
- Francis’ Conversion Process – 1206
- Francis’ Approval by Innocent III – 1209
- Francis’ Exhortation to His Followers and the Rule of 1221
- 1228-1289
- The Rule of Nicholas IV – 1289
- The Rule of Leo XIII – 1883
- Declarations of Popes Succeeding Leo XIII
- The Pauline Rule of 1978
- The International Organization
- The Local Fraternity and Formation
- The History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States
- Epilogue

Penitential Movement – Pre-Francis

For the first five or six centuries of church history, members were required to avoid serious sin. The penalty for serious sin was excommunication from the community. However, one was allowed to rejoin the community on a “second chance,” very restrictive, basis. This reconciliation required severe penance, such as lifelong fasting, abstinence from attending church functions and from reception of the Eucharist, external displays of self-degradation—sack-cloths and the like. In time, these strict rules became canon law, with the bishop authorizing and overseeing reconciliation.

Changes in restorative penance in Europe and Asia were influenced by Celtic monks, who practiced “private” penance: the priest would assign a penance at his discretion, the severity in accordance with the gravity of the sin.

At about the same time, there were those who volunteered to become penitents, with the same obligations as the canonical penitents, in order to become holy—to live like Jesus and the Apostles. These volunteers were the precursor of the penitential movement as embraced by St. Francis of Assisi.

“With the growth of private penance (given by a confessor), there was a clear distinction between the public penitents and the voluntary penitents. These first made expiation for their sins in the manner prescribed for days, months, and years, as established by the Penitentials; the second group, the voluntary penitents, remained in *Ordo Poenitentium*¹ for the rest of their lives. These are the two aspects of the *Ordo Poenitentium* through the middle ages.

“The same concept of conversion as the internal and external act by which the Christian, not weighed down by serious sin, and therefore not obliged to do so, publicly decided to abandon the way of life he had formerly led and to devote himself to God in one of the various forms of penitential life, reveals that the ultimate goal of such a choice was to make God one’s point of reference and the very reason for life; this end was obviously very spiritual. This interior decision, however, was also externally visible by means of the penitential habit.”²

“...It seems legitimate to affirm that the dominant element always present in the various religious movements of the twelfth century was the continuation and diffusion of the desire—already present in the second half of the eleventh century—to return to the Gospel life of the apostles, considered as the norm and model of poverty and of evangelization for the whole Church.

“...This is a fundamental point for an understanding of the ‘new penitential climate’ of the twelfth century. While in the past only monks had been considered followers of apostolic life, during the reform the conviction spread that this life was identified with the Christian life, and must be followed by all believers.

“At the same time, especially in the first fifth of the twelfth century, the concept of the apostolic life acquired a new element in addition to that of poverty, namely, preaching, especially in an itinerant lifestyle.”

It Was the Time of the Preacher

“The first itinerant preachers, canons regular, were the most significant examples of this. They left the canonical life first to become hermits and later to begin their itinerant preaching in strictest poverty, precisely because at that point they felt that these two elements—a life of poverty and preaching—were the essential components of a truly apostolic life.

¹ G1 Order of Penitence

² Pazzelli, Raffaele, *St. Francis and the Third Order*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, IL, 17. [It should be noted that private penance was not officially sanctioned by the church until the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215.]

“It is most important to note that the itinerate preachers—who began their wandering at the beginning of the twelfth century, lived in poverty, preached as the apostles did, and gathered groups of followers—found themselves immediately faced with the problem of how to insert themselves and their followers into the structure of the Church, which did not envision groups whose members, while aiming at the perfect evangelical life, did not at the same time live according to a rule and in a monastery. Thus, there was no place for the groups who roamed about the countryside. This presented a threefold development.

“Many of the itinerant preachers and their followers entered the pre-existing religious orders or formed new ones. Many lay men and women who had followed the itinerant preachers joined the penitents, that is, they entered into the canonical penitential state established by the Church for repentant public sinners. Others were incautiously attracted by the growing poverty movement, which rebelled against the ecclesiastical orders, and which soon became heterodox.

“Unfortunately, what was lacking in the twelfth century was the foundation of a religious order that would have as its ideal not only the apostolic and poor life of the Gospel, but also preaching in the midst of the people to encourage, support, and guide those who aspired to an apostolic and evangelical Christianity.”³

Other Penitential Groups

There were groups that preceded Francis whose penitential lives were approved by the Holy See. Among the more famous were the Waldensians, formed by Peter Waldo, the Humiliati, which arose among wool workers and merchants, and the Cathari, who adopted a Manichean dualism (the body was evil and the spirit was good). The Cathari were condemned as heretical.

“Waldo, a rich merchant from Lyon, and some of his disciples went to Rome, where they presented themselves to Pope Alexander III and the Third Lateran Council, which was then in session (1179). [After his orthodoxy had been examined, the Pope admitted them and] was struck by what he saw—they were barefoot, dressed in rough wool, without baggage, having all things in common like the apostles; naked, following the naked Christ. The Pope approved their life of poverty, but ruled that, in the matter of preaching, Peter Waldo and his companions would have to submit to the decision of the local bishop.

“The Waldensians continued to preach, some say without the permission of the local ordinaries—and they preached in dioceses that were not appreciative of their preaching—and they were, in certain locales, associated with those of suspect orthodoxy. So in 1184 the Council of Verona included them in the same category as the Cathari in its condemnation.”⁴

³ Ibid, 44, 45, 49, 50

⁴ Ibid, 58, 59

The Humiliati arose sometime in the decade before the birth of Francis. “The first Humiliati lived with their families and took part in their work. They ‘humiliated themselves for God,’ adopting rough clothing and ‘untinted cloth’ in sharp contrast to the fine colored fabrics of the time.... [The Humiliati] developed three distinct, but not separate, groups. The clerical element... formed the ‘first order,’ constituted according to canonical norms; it also included nuns, solemnly consecrated to religious life as it was then understood, that is, ‘in choir.’ An associate of monastic life—lay brothers and sisters, living in adjoining houses—formed the second order. The religious-worker association of men and women remaining in the married state comprise a third order. Innocent III approved them in 1201.

“...Together with the Franciscans, they enjoyed the popular support of the people.... In the fourteenth century, their numbers began a slow decline; the order was suppressed by St. Pius V in 1569.”⁵

“The development of the penitential movement from a ‘state of life’ into a group or fraternity or non-monastic order did not happen without conflicts or difficulties before it became a reality accepted by the Church and later an institution recognized and approved by the Church.”⁶

“Was this, then, the atmosphere that Francis found when he entered the penitential movement immediately after the ‘vision’ at San Damiano? In addition to his desire to be a penitent-apostle, was there another element that motivated him—namely, did he begin his itinerant preaching to be a guide and master of ‘true penance’ to those who already belonged to the penitential movement? These are interesting questions that shall await reply.

“Nevertheless, it is a fact that when Francis gave life to ‘his’ penitential movement he imprinted on it new ideals, new aspirations and characteristics. It was ‘his’ movement that eventually provided the answer to the aspirations of the Christian people.”⁷

Francis of Assisi

Francis was born in Assisi, in the region of Umbria in 1182, of a rich merchant family—that of Pietro di Bernadone and his wife, Lady Pica.

Francis grew up during a time of political uncertainty, as well as a time of dramatic cultural change. The feudal system with lords and fiefdoms was the society that was diminishing, and a mercantile society was emerging. Francis was not of noble birth, but his father, a cloth merchant, was rich. So Francis did associate with the sons of nobles and, it is said, partied with them.

⁵ Ibid, 60, 61

⁶ Ibid, 64

⁷ Ibid, 66

It was also a time of chivalry, and Francis had heard stories of knights rescuing ladies fair. This environment influenced Francis to don the armor of a knight and go off to battle, which made his father proud.

At that time in history, there were city states overseen by nobles who had allegiance either to the emperor or to the Holy See.

In 1160, “Frederick Barbarossa declared Assisi a free city under the protection of the empire.... However, the presence of a handful of imperial soldiers did not impede the local political situation’s evolution towards autonomy.... From 1162 to 1184, there was continuous growth and uprising of autonomous city-states, referred to as communes, throughout... which the imperial authority was too weak and too far away to prevent.

“...The main reason, however, that Assisi was ‘imperial’ was that its traditional rival, Perugia, was ‘papal.’”⁸

“The period from 1174 to 1210 marks the last and definitive collapse of the feudal structure in Assisi. In 1174, the city was destroyed by imperial forces. In 1198, when Francis was sixteen years old, Assisi was freed once and for all from imperial domination.”⁹

“In the period immediately preceding the birth of Francis, and even more during the years of his youth, a deep change took place in the social classes, even in Assisi.... There were now two powers struggling, two groups whose pride was hurt. The vassals envied the wealth of the ‘nouveaux riches,’ while the latter wanted to imitate their neighbors in high positions of honor, arms, and even knighthood.

“Another element played an important part in the psychological development and orientation of the young Francis, the knightly element or ‘chivalry’ remained within the saint.”¹⁰

“It was November of 1202, and Francis was twenty years old. The Assisians, convinced they were able to win [the war against Perugia] prepared with all the means at their disposal and with great enthusiasm. Francis, young, rather rich, and with a great belief in the cause of the weak against the mighty, was among the most enthusiastic of all. The skirmish took place at Collestrada, where from dawn to dusk the battle raged, waned, and gained momentum.

The Perugians, stronger in the long run, won. Francis, wounded, found himself among the prisoners.”¹¹

⁸ Ibid, 69

⁹ Ibid, 70

¹⁰ Ibid, 72

¹¹ Ibid, 79

“In those days a prison was really a prison—for the most part caves dug in the basement of a large municipal palace. They were dark and damp; the prisoners had little more than bread and water.

“For Francis this was his first encounter with a reality far different from his youthful dreams of pleasure and glory, and the beginning of a long and profound crisis. If it had not been for the defeat at Collestrada, perhaps we would never have had a Francis of Assisi.

“Francis could keenly feel that something had betrayed him. Money, more and more money. Yet, what advantages had it given him? Beautiful clothes, the latest styles, friendship, affirmation in leading the youth of Assisi, organizing dinners and entertainment. Yet what had he gained? Where were his friends now?”¹²

Francis’ Conversion Process

The steps of Francis’ conversion leading up to the official approval by Pope Innocent III of his request to live, with his brothers, the life of a penitent, are listed here. The topics are addressed briefly in following paragraphs.

- Francis’ “Servant or Master Dream” in Spoleto – 1205
- Pilgrimage to Rome – Changing Clothes with a Beggar – Spring 1206
- Embracing the Leper – Early 1206
- San Damiano – Giving Money to Priest – 1206
- Scene Before Mayor and Bishop Rejecting Money and Clothing – 1206
- Francis Is Called to Rebuild San Damiano – 1206
- Francis Leaves for Rome with His Companions for Pope’s Approval of His Way of Life. – 1209
- Francis Preaches the Kingdom of God

Francis’ “Master or Servant” Dream in Spoleto

After Francis’ return home from prison in Perugia, he still embraced his visions of winning glory by returning to the battlefield. Count Walter of Brienne, a “folk hero” in his time, was recruiting soldiers for a campaign in Sicily. On the way, Francis fell ill at the town of Spoleto. There he had a vision: a voice demanded of Francis where he intended to go: “Who do you think can best reward you, the Master or the servant?” Francis answered: ‘The Master.’ The voice questioned further, ‘Then why do you leave the Master for the servant, the rich Lord for the poor man?’ Francis replied in the same words of St. Paul on the road to Damascus: ‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ He received the same answer that Saul did: ‘Return to your own place, and you will be told what to do.’ (Acts 9:6-7).¹³

¹² Ibid, 80, 81

¹³ Ibid, 83, 84

Pilgrimage to Rome – Changing Clothes with a Beggar

“In the Spring of 1206, Francis joined a group of pilgrims for a visit to the Basilica of the Apostles. In front of St. Peter’s there was a multitude of poor people, clinging to the gates where the pilgrims passed. They implored, cried out, and held out their hands. The pilgrim from Assisi asked himself, ‘What is it like to be really poor?’ He traded clothes with the beggar and joined the others in front of the basilica, begging in the Provincial language.... It left him with a vivid emotional impression and experience of fraternity; he took that impression with him back to Assisi.”¹⁴

Embracing the Leper

“One day, as Francis rode along the plains of Assisi, caught up in his own thoughts, his horse suddenly reared. Francis looked up and was struck with terror. A leper stood before him, staring at him. Francis’ first impulse was to throw him a coin and flee, but this was impossible—what he now was, or was becoming, stopped him from doing this. He slowly dismounted; went toward the leper, and let some coins fall into that disfigured, outstretched hand. He felt in some mysterious way that he himself was alone transformed into that suffering mortal; and in that transformation he understood the essence of Christianity: God is in every person. Alms could never be enough.

“Francis reverently kissed the leper as one kisses a sacred object. Even on his deathbed, he recalled the transforming effect of that encounter: ‘that which seemed bitter to me was changed to sweetness of the soul and body.’”¹⁵

San Damiano – Giving Money to the Priest

“The decision [to become a penitent] was actually put into practice on the way home from a business trip to Foligno where, as usual, he sold everything he had with him and, successful as a merchant, he left behind even the horse he was riding. He stopped at San Damiano and told the ‘poor priest’ of his decision. He offered him money he had with him, telling him what he proposed to do. The priest was astonished and, wondering over a conversion so incredibly sudden, refused to believe what he heard. And because he thought he was being deceived, he refused to keep the money offered him. For he had seen him just the day before, so to say, living in a riotous way among his relatives and acquaintances and showing greater foolishness than the rest. But Francis persisted obstinately and tried to gain credence for what he said asking earnestly and begging the priest to suffer him to remain with him for the sake of the Lord. In the end the priest acquiesced to his remaining there. Francis asked and obtained permission to be accepted at San Damiano as a conversus, thus becoming an oblatu, or donatu, or conversu, an official form of penitent....”¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid, 83

¹⁵ Ibid, 96

¹⁶ Ibid, 87, 88

Scene Before Mayor and Bishop – Rejecting Money and Clothing

“[Francis’ father, Pietro de Bernardone], exhausting all his efforts to convince his son to return home, turned to the civil authority [making use of his political position] and accused his son of rebellion and dissipation. The statutes of the commune of Assisi punished anyone found guilty of such an offence with banishment from the city.... The civil authorities did not want to press the issue and said to Pietro that ‘as Francis had entered the service of almighty God, he was no longer their subject.’

“...Francis, resolute, bade farewell to all, publicly, before his father Pietro di Bernatone and Guido, the bishop of Assisi.... [T]he bishop, before asking Francis to give back the money to his father, advised him to think about the fact that this was the condition necessary for him to become a conversus: ‘If you really want to consecrate yourself to the Lord, you must give back the money you have.... Francis replied, ‘Since I have decided to dedicate myself to the service of the Lord,...I shall give him back not only money...but also the clothes.’

“Francis left the scene of the renunciation, officially recognized as a penitent by the bishop of Assisi and, as a penitent, he will permanently reside at San Damiano.”¹⁷

Francis is Called to Rebuild San Damiano

“One summer day, in 1206, Francis was walking in the vicinity of San Damiano when he felt an interior tug of the Spirit to go inside to pray. Obeying the inner voice, Francis entered and fell on his knees before the familiar icon [the San Damiano Crucifix], his own spirit alert to what the Lord might wish to convey.

“In eager anticipation, Francis looked up into the serene face of the crucified Lord, and prayed this prayer: ‘Most High, glorious God,’ he prayed, ‘cast your light into the darkness of my heart. Give me, Lord, right faith, firm hope, perfect charity, and profound humility, with wisdom and perception, so that I may carry out what is truly Your holy will. Amen.’ Ever more quietly he repeated the prayer, lost in devotion and wonder before the image of his crucified Lord.

“Then, in the quietness, Francis heard Jesus speaking to him from the Cross: ‘Go, Francis, and repair my house, which as you can see, is falling into ruin.’”¹⁸ So, in obedience, Francis proceeded to follow Jesus’ word, literally.

“While restoring the church at San Damiano, Francis led an eremitical penitential life, for two years. Until the work of restoring the church at San Damiano was completed, blessed Francis still wore the garment of a hermit with a strap to serve as a belt, and he carried a staff and had sandals on his feet.... Two years after his conversion, several men were drawn to follow his example of penance, and they left everything in order to join him.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid, 88, 89

¹⁸ Rebuild My Church History: toalltheworld.blogspot.com/2009/06/rebuild-my-church.html

¹⁹ Pazzelli, St. Francis..., 89

After these two years, Francis was brought to the decision to be not only a solitary penitent, but also an apostle.... A factor of primary importance in this period of Francis' maturation and planning of future action was the closeness to Bishop Guido, who counseled him on the steps he should take."²⁰

"We believe that the closeness, guidance, and advice of Bishop Guido were essential elements of the success of Francis' work with the penitential movement or 'Third Order' which took its name from him as well as the 'Order of Friars Minor' and that of the 'Poor Ladies.'"²¹

Francis' Approval by Innocent III

Francis Left for Rome with His Companions for Pope's Approval of His Way of Life

Pope Innocent III was wise enough to see the benefit to the Church of the penitential movement; he was harsh, of course, in dealing with those in the heterodoxical elements movement. Knowing this, Bishop Guido was easily able to guide Francis among the rocks that had destroyed many of his predecessors in the penitential movement. A good part of the success of the young man from Assisi can probably be attributed to the wise advice of the bishop of Assisi.

"When, only two years later, in the spring of 1210 [many historians believe it was 1209], Francis and his companions went to the Lateran, asking the pope for approval of their 'fraternity of itinerant preachers,' based on poverty, but also on the two pillars of a 'complete adherence to the Church' and 'obedience to the hierarchy,' Innocent III, assured of their 'fidelity' either directly or through Cardinal John of St. Paul, had little or no hesitation to give them permission to 'preach penance to all.'"²²

Pope Innocent's Dream – "At his first meeting with Francis, Innocent III was perplexed at receiving the request to approve Francis' way of life. In *Vita Seconda*, Celano states that the following night the pope dreamed that the Lateran basilica was beginning to fall when a tiny, scraggly religious held it up with his shoulder so that it did not fall. He recognized in that 'religious' the man whom he had sent away the previous evening and, as a result of this dream, he immediately 'granted the request'"²³

Francis Preached the Kingdom of God

Francis "went about towns and villages announcing the Kingdom of God, preaching peace, teaching salvation and penance unto the remission of sins.... He acted boldly in all things because of the apostolic authority granted to him, using no words of flattery nor seductive blandishments. Men and women, clerics and religious hastened to see and to hear the holy man of God who seemed to all to be a man of another world."

²⁰ Ibid, 90

²¹ Ibid, 92

²² Ibid, 98

²³ Ibid, 84

Francis' Exhortation to His Followers and the Rule of 1221

“Unfortunately we do not possess the *forma vitae*, which, according to the explicit affirmation of the biographers of St. Francis, the saint gave to those groups of penitents—old as well as new—who desired to follow him; or, at least, we do not have sufficient information to identify it positively from any of the documents that we do possess.

“Nevertheless, we have irrefutable sources that enable us to know the directives, the new ideals and aspirations which Francis wanted to give to those groups of penitents. They are mainly two: the *Recensio prior* and the *Letter to All the Faithful*. In regard to the organization, even their externals, of these same groups of penitents, we have a third document: the *Memoriale propositi*, or *Regula antique Fratrum et Sororum de Poenitentia* of 1221-1228.”²⁴

Recensio Prior – Earlier Version of the Letter to All the Faithful

Francis' first Letter to the Faithful, “contains Francis' very first teachings that he set in writing. It is addressed, in letter form, to the penitents who, in ever greater numbers, turned to him for directions....”²⁵

This is the “Earlier Exhortations To the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, the first version of the Letter to All the Faithful (1209-1215).... The earliest manuscript of this writing, located in the city of Volterra, introduces it with these words: ‘These are the words of life and salvation. Whoever reads and follows them will find life and draw from the Lord Salvation.’ While Kajetan Esser entitled it ‘The first Version of the Letter to the Faithful,’ it has been more correctly seen as an exhortation given to those first penitents who came to Francis desiring to share in his Gospel way of life. [In] 1976,...Kajetan Esser brought the text into prominence.... [It presently serves] as a Prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.”²⁶

Robert Stewart, OFM, refers to David Flood's “The Commonitorium,” published in *Haversack* in 1979. Flood uses the word to describe Francis' intentions in writing the First Version. “In Medieval Latin, the term *commonitorium* signified a letter which was both an exhortation and a reminder in order that a commitment be followed.”²⁷

Letter to All the Faithful (Second Letter)

“The addressees of this work, as well as the relation between them, cannot refer to all Christians in general, but must be understood to have been individuals and communities united in a special way to Francis, who had given them a *forma vivendi* closely resembling the form of life of the Friars Minor.... The most probable date for the composition of this work is around 1221.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibid, 109

²⁵ Ibid, 110

²⁶ Armstrong, Regis, O.F.M. Cap., Hellman, Wayne, OFM Conv, Short, William, OFM, *The Saint – Volume I of: Francis of Assisi Early Documents*, New City Press, New York, 1999, 41

²⁷ Stewart, Robert M., OFM, *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order; Origins, Developments, Interpretation*, Instituto Storico Dei Capuccini, Roma. 1991, 138

²⁸ Pazelli, St. Francis, 113

“The writing may have been written upon Francis’ return from his journey to the Middle East in the Spring of 1220, for not only does it speak of his weakened condition, but it also suggests the post-conciliar concerns of Pope Honorius III. At the same time, it recalls Francis’ earlier exhortations to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance and encourages its observance in light of many of the teachings of the Fourth Lateran Council.”²⁹

Robert Stewart writes, “The emphasis has shifted somewhat in the Later Exhortations (as compared with the Earlier Exhortations). Francis describes in much greater detail the way of penance for his followers. Most of the development in the Later Exhortation concerns elements that characterize the penitential movement in the Middle Ages, among others: charity, humility, service, prayer, fasting and abstinence, and the restitution of goods unjustly acquired. In part, these emendations can be attributed to Francis’ concern to keep the movement orthodox, that is, to avoid the heretical positions to which some of the other thirteenth century penitential movements had evolved. In fact, given that Francis uses the strong injunction ‘we must’ (*debemus*) in speaking of those obligations, Esser suggests that Francis must have been addressing abuses that had crept into the movement. But for whatever reason, in the later text Francis continues to exult and to exhort others to penance by becoming more specific concerning the life of penance.”³⁰

Memoriale Propositi

“The increase in numbers of penitents following the preaching of Francis and his early companions in the period between 1210 and 1220 must have been enormous...”³¹

It should also be noted that special privileges were granted to the penitents. “The fraternities were asserting their exemption from the obligation of pledging loyalty, bearing arms, and assuming civil positions. The first pontifical bulls, written between 1221 and 1228 in favor of the penitents, are indisputable proof...”³² These privileges, in time, angered the civil authorities.

In 1221, an “official” rule, *Memoriale propositi*, was promoted by Cardinal Ugalino³³ and verbally approved by Pope Honorius III.

According to Robert Stewart, OFM, “While Francis presented an exhortation to penance, the *Memoriale propositi* presents juridical norms regulating the life of penance for those followers of Francis. Apparently the *Memoriale propositi* was the Church’s official response to

²⁷ Stewart, Robert M., O.F.M., *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order; Origins, Developments, Interpretation*, Istituto Storico Dei Capuccini, Roma 1991, 138

²⁸ Pazzelli, *St. Francis*, 113

²⁹ Armstrong, Hellmann and Short, *The Saint*, 45

³⁰ Stewart, *The Rule*, 175, 176

³¹ Pazzelli, *St. Francis*, 128

³² *Ibid*, 130

³³ Some historians spell Ugalino with an H (Hugalino)

the need for more organizational structure and control among these penitential groups. Prior to the approval of the *Memoriale propositi* for Franciscan penitents, other 'rules' or the 'Ways of Life' of other penitential groups had received papal approval. In fact, the text of the *Memoriale propositi* for the Franciscan penitents evidences a dependence upon the *propositium* of the Humiliati (1201), of the Poor Catholics (1206) and their Penitents (1212), and of the Poor Lombards (1210, 1212)

"Thus, no serious scholar today would attribute the authorship of the *Memoriale propositi* to Francis. Most scholars assume the text comes from the hand of Cardinal Hugolino or a group of jurists connected with Hugolino.³⁴

"The *Memoriale propositi* of 1221 is no longer extant as it must have come from the hands of Francis, [Cardinal] Hugolino, and, perhaps, some of his jurists. The earliest extant copy is that of the final edition of 1228.

"...A quick overview of the contents of the *Memoriale propositi* shows that the organization of the Order of Penance and its insertion into society are based on an austere principle of personal sanctification.

"The rule is strict and demands vocation and dedication. The law of poverty, as we have seen, the foundation of the whole penitential movement of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries, contradicts the 'worldly' life because conversion demands a renunciation 'of the world.' Humility in dress and abstention from entertainment and dancing, abstinence and fasting, prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments, examination of conscience and religious instruction of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance are fundamental characteristics of their identity.

"Like the other two Franciscan orders, the Third Order is 'the school of the Gospel' and demands adherence to it of thought and action.

"Most of all, it demands a life of prayer and more intense sacramental life than is asked of 'plain Christians.' Those who know how to read will say the canonical hours, as clerics do, and the others will say the office of the Paters and Aves. All will nourish spiritual growth through daily examination of conscience and monthly instruction.

"On those spiritual foundations, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance will carry out in a very special way the main Christian virtues, beginning with justice and charity."³⁵

"There is no written proof that Pope Gregory IX gave written approval to the *Memoriale propositi* (in 1228). However, there is circumstantial evidence that it was assumed to be a

³⁴ Stewart, *The Rule*, 183, 184

³⁵ Pazzelli, *St. Francis*, 134, 135

forma vitae, a rule for the brothers and sisters of Penance. The legislative text did include the words *tale est*, the usual formula the popes used to introduce a *Propositum* they approved with a papal bull.... It is also generally accepted that the extant *Memoriale propositi* is not identical to the original one of 1221... it obviously underwent modifications and additions from 1221 to 1228. It is, however, equally well known that, from 1228 on, the *Memoriale propositi* was considered an unchangeable rule, one that should not be touched, in the same way as the rules of St. Augustine and St. Benedict.”³⁶

Francis and His Followers Living the Rule

“The Rule or Way of Life of Francis and his early followers did have roots in the preceding religious experiences and expressions: eremitism and penance, solidarity with the lepers, and itinerant preaching. The novelty [author’s underline], that which made this way of penance ‘Franciscan,’ was Francis’ insistence on a radical metanoia combined with an absolute fidelity to the Church.”³⁷

The term *Novitas Franciscana* is used by Benedetto Lino in his unpublished paper on the History of the Secular Franciscan Order. “Francis of Assisi introduced it into the life of the Church and of the world something new and original.... *Novitas* is a Latin word meaning novelty. By speaking of *Novitas*, we refer to the new and essential elements introduced by Saint Francis of Assisi in the Ecclesiology of his time and in religious life.”³⁸

Prospero Rivi, OFM Cap., writes, “Francis himself was of the people. Although he was probably a deacon and greatly loved liturgical forms of prayer, he did not... present himself as a schooled cleric but, having long lived as a layman among the laity, and having retained many tastes and ways of expression of his original environment, he found himself in immediate accord with a people well known by him, who often perceived the learned culture and religion developed by the priests and monks of the time as being distant from them.

“The genius of Francis seems to be identified precisely in his fine capability of freeing and expressing within orthodoxy the fundamental demands of a popular sensibility, which for so long had been prevented from participating authentically in religious life and which increasingly risked straying towards heretical forms.”³⁹

“[Francis’ preaching] generally made use of the vernacular language to give voice to the strong religious instinct of the people.... It would come from physical contact with its listeners and would reach much more deeply and effectively into the popular circles and the new

³⁶ Ibid, 136

³⁷ Ibid, 200

³⁸ Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished paper, The History of the Secular Franciscan Order

³⁹ Rivi, Prospero, O.F.M. Cap. Francis of Assisi and the Laity of His Time, Greyfriars Revies, Volume 15, 2001, Padova: Edizioni Messaggero, 1989, Translated by Heather Tolfree, 45

classes, who would immediately welcome a transition of the evangelical message no longer alien to their own culture.”⁴⁰

1228–1289

“Since the fraternity was, for the most part, constituted of persons living *in domibus propriis* [in their own homes or locally] and therefore in various parts of the city, it met for its monthly meeting in a church chosen by its minister..., and they had the hour and place of the meeting announced by the nuntius of the fraternity, who notified all the members by visiting each one in his own home. When there was more than one fraternity of penitents in a larger city, it became normal for each one to meet in a neighborhood church of an area most convenient for the members of each fraternity. When the fraternities were in a parochial territory, they would meet in the parish church.... When, towards the middle of the [thirteenth] century, owing to the increasing clericalization of the Friars Minor, the Franciscans began to have their own churches, it became natural for the meetings of the fraternities to be held mainly in them.”⁴¹

“According to the norms of the *Memoriale propositi*, at their monthly meetings, the fraternities of the penitents, if it be convenient at the time... are to have some religious who is informed in the word of God to exhort them and strengthen them to persevere in their penance and in performing the works of mercy.”⁴²

“Always keep in mind that the juridical and moral life of the fraternity was under the jurisdiction and responsibility of the bishop; we must suppose that the choice of the visitor must have been at the discretion of the bishop. This supposition, however, was not always followed by the penitents; there are cases where they elected their own visitors. This probably caused disagreement with the bishops and the Friars Minor. The problem was finally resolved in the Rule of Nicholas IV.... Nicholas [specified] that the visitor should be taken from the Order of Friars Minor because the present form of life (of the penitents) was instituted by blessed Francis.”⁴³

“Two contrasting elements (attraction to the Friars Minor, held in highest esteem by the Apostolic See and the natural possessors of the Franciscan ideal, contrasted with the desire for independence) help to explain the less than ideal relationship between the penitents and the friars.... The independent spirit sometimes caused the penitents to elect their own visitor rather than ask the bishop for one, which seemed rather unorthodox and eventually put them in conflict with the bishops.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 47, 48

⁴¹ Pazzelli, *St. Francis*, 141, 142

⁴² Ibid, 144

⁴³ Ibid, 145

“The other important element involved the conflict between the penitents and civil authorities [regarding special privileges granted to Penitentials]. Taking the side of the penitents or defending them would have involved the friars in the dispute as well.

“For this reason (and perhaps some others we cannot identify), after the Generalate of Brother Elias (1227-1239) the Friars Minor began to be less involved in the Fraternities of the penitents.”⁴⁴

Most Penitents were independent of the First Order—until they were subsequently corralled by the bishops, then the popes, initially Pope Innocent IV in 1247. The pope ordered the Ministers Provincial of the Friars Minor to take an interest in the Third Order.

The Rule of Nicholas IV

“Nicholas IV became the first Franciscan Pope on February 15, 1288. Shortly after his election to the papacy, he received requests from some local communities of penitents that he grant his official approval to their Rule. Thus, on August 18, 1289, he issued the bull *Supra Montem*, which contained the Rule for Franciscan penitents.”⁴⁵

“What the pope had approved in fact, was the rule of Friar Caro*, with some modifications. Metanić observed that the texts of both are almost identical; there are a few noteworthy differences. The Rule of Nicholas IV is, most of all, more ‘Franciscan’ because it affirms that the present way of life (of the penitents) had its beginning in blessed Francis.

“Consequently, Nicholas IV, in contrast to the norm that the visitor could be ‘of any approved religious order’ and that, in the monthly meetings the penitents should receive exhortations of ‘a religious who is informed in the word of God’ advised that these persons, both visitators and instructors should be members of the Order of Friars Minor.

“It seems, however, that there were complaints and opposition against this fact,...[but] Nicholas IV reasserts his desire that all the penitents belonging to an order ‘begun by St. Francis’ should have visitators and directors of the Order of Friars Minor.

“Another ‘Franciscan’ detail included in the Rule of Nicholas IV concerns the color of the habit. The *Memoriale* made no mention of it, but the Rule of 1289 stipulates that it be neither ‘all black nor all white.’ That is, gray. The Rule of Nicholas IV, accepted universally, remained the ‘Magna Carta’ of the Franciscan movement of penance, which from that time on was commonly called ‘The Third Order of St. Francis.’ This rule, in fact, remained in effect for the Secular Franciscans until 1883.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Ibid, 147, 148

⁴⁵ Stewart, *The Rule*, 202

⁴⁶ Ibid, 151, 152

* The contribution of Friar Caro is disputed by Benedetto Lino in his unpublished papers on the history of the Third Order, 13

“The promulgation of the Rule of the Third Order by Nicholas IV was an important factor for the development of the common life among Franciscan penitents. This rule, with its more orderly and organic organization, also gave greater emphasis to the religious nature of this order, gave it a partially new configuration in which the two pre-existing realities within it, namely, the life in *domibus propriis* and community life, could develop.

“...Around the turn of the century, the practice of profession of religious vows developed among those penitents living in community. This was the decisive step in the complete ‘regularization’ of the order. Pope John XXII, with the Bull *Altissimo in divinis* of November 18, 1323, approved and praised this action, which represented an approval of the ‘regular religious life’ within the Third Order.”⁴⁷

The Rule of Leo XIII

“The political situation in the 1700s and 1800s (suppression of Religious Orders and of the Third Order—the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, France, Italy, etc.), as well as the religious situation (Protestantism) played their part in the decline of the Third Order.

“The friars of every family, as soon as they were able to recover from the suppression, undertook a lot of activity to put the Third Order back on its feet. However, this did not occur haphazardly. Two factors certainly played a decisive role in the rediscovery of interest in the Third Order; on the one hand there was the desire on the part of the religious to make a contribution to reconstructing the fabric of Christian society..., on the other there was the strong encouragement of Pope Pius IX (1846-1878), who was the first of a succession of seven Popes who were Secular Franciscans. Our brother the Pope said: ‘Promote, promote the Third Order. You cannot image the amount of good it is destined to produce.’”

“Cardinal Giacchino Pecci, Archbishop of Perugia and the future Pope Leo XIII, was a convinced, enthusiastic, and tenacious supporter of the necessary role of the Third Order for the society of his time.”⁴⁸

In 1883, in an effort to recreate the Franciscan movement during his time, Pope Leo XIII wrote a rule that was shorter and less rigorous than the Rule of Nicholas IV. “My Social Reform is the Third Order,” proclaimed the pope. His purpose for a new, less rigorous, rule was to make it more accessible and more appealing to more Catholics.

“The new Rule was promulgated in the Apostolic Constitution *Misericors Dei Filius* of May 30, 1883. The text consisted of three chapters, followed by another three in the form of an appendix, setting out the indulgences and privileges of Tertiaries. Reduced to the bare essentials, it retained as much of the old Rule [Rule of Nicholas IV] as could be adapted to the

⁴⁷ Ibid, 153

⁴⁸ Beneditto, Lino, O.F.S., Unpublished papers..., 18 – 20

life of any keen Christian and modified or completed whatever parts of it seemed outdated or excessively harsh.

“Having taken this momentous step, the Pope lost no opportunity during the next few years of involving the whole Catholic episcopate in the propagation of the Franciscan Third Order Secular, either by encyclicals or by exhortations and encouragement. The hierarchy responded obediently to the Pontiff’s wishes, ordinary Christians were fired with enthusiasm, and within a short time there were several million Tertiaries.”⁴⁹

The ferment generated by the action of Pope Leo XIII was also marked by the celebration of regional, national, and international congresses, both during and after his pontificate.

International Congresses

“The idea of congresses was born... at a meeting of the First International Study Commission, which was held at Val de Bois (France) from 18-20 July, 1893...

“...The most important of these was certainly the International Congress promoted by the Ministers General of the Friars Minor, the Conventuals, the Capuchins, and the Third Order Regular. It took place in Rome from 22 to 26 October, 1900.... [S]eventeen thousand Tertiaries participated in this congress.

“[Out of the International Congress] two factions became clear:

- ‘the individualists’ who intended to preserve the Third Order’s character as an association for Christian perfection;
- ‘the socials’ who, without failing to assume the above fundamental point, wished to direct the activity of the Tertiaries towards social issues following the directive of the Pope.”⁵⁰

“In the International Congress of 1921 [held in Rome], the following topics were treated:

- The sanctification of the Tertiaries;
- The running of the fraternity;
- The Franciscan reform of society;
- Promotion and apostolate.”⁵¹

The major output of the 1950 International Congress was the declaration: Votum 10. The Ministers General’s response to the request by the national fraternities to better define Votum 10 resulted in the following statement as part of a larger response.

⁴⁹ Shorrocks, Christopher, O.F.M. Conv., A Brief of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, www.franciscans.org.au/sfo/2sforule.htm

⁵⁰ Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers....,24

⁵¹ Ibid, 28

“In three parts of the letter we shall treat:

- 1) Of the importance of the Franciscan Third Order toward leading a perfect Christian life with all its demands, especially at these present times;
- 2) Of the religious and social activity of the Third Order;
- 3) Of our grave duty and responsibility with regard to providing for it and promoting collaboration and coordination of all our forces.

[Item 3 was welcomed by the Tertiaries: the Ministers General directed the friars to assist the Third Order. The Ministers General also provided their brief definition of the Third Order:]

“Though it is not a religious order in the strict sense of the word, the Tertiary nevertheless shares the basic advantages of the religious life. He enjoys in fact:

- 1) A profession, which consecrates him morally to God;
- 2) A rule, to serve as a discipline for him;
- 3) A special spirit to sustain and inspire him.”⁵²

Declarations of Popes Succeeding Leo XIII

“In *Tertium Franciscarium*, Pope Pius X [who succeeded Pope Leo XIII] declared, on September 8, 1912, “The Third Order (Third Order Secular) does not differ from the other two (The First Order and the Second Order of St. Francis) in nature, but only in so far as it pursues the same purpose in a way peculiar to itself.”⁵³

“Pope Pius X saw involvement in social reform on the part of fraternities as a deviation from the Franciscan charism and prohibited such action. Personal sanctification, a movement inward, was seen as the duty of the Tertiary, and the Order was thought of in some circles as a ‘society for a happy death.’”⁵⁴

Benedetto Lino further states, “Under his [Pius X] Pontificate, the history of the OFS is marked by two noteworthy events of varying importance, which cast their influence on the life of the Secular Fraternity even today.

“The First Fact is the plan to establish a Federation of the various fraternities. The Second Fact, which had a profound effect on the life of the OFS and which conditioned its existence till the middle of the 20th century... the prohibition, without exception, of members of the Third Order as such, becoming involved in civil or purely economic matters.”⁵⁵

⁵² Franciscan Herald and Forum, 1952, 34 - 41

⁵³ Habig, Marion A., O.F.M. and Hegener, Mark, OFM, *A Short History of the Third Order*, Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1963, 43

⁵⁴ Anonymous Writing, 11 (It should be noted that during the time of the papacy of Pius X, there were many active social groups that were seen as anti-Catholic, such as the socialist and communist movements. The pope did encourage social action if it were under the auspices of the local ordinary.

⁵⁵ Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers. 26, 27

“...The new Code of Canon Law promulgated on May 18, 1918, did not change the nature of the Third Order, for, in *Sacra prope diem*, January 6, 1921, Benedict XV clearly stated: ‘He (St. Francis) founded the Order of Tertiaries, an Order in the true sense of the word, not indeed bound like the other two by religious vows, but distinguished by the same simple life and practice of penance.’

“A similar statement is found in *Rite expiatis*, the encyclical issued by Pius XI on April 30, 1926: ‘The general restoration of peace and morals was advanced very much by the Third Order, which was a religious order indeed, yet something unexampled up to that time, insofar as it was not bound by vows, while it offered all men and women living in the world a means of both observing the commandments of God and of pursuing Christian perfection.’⁵⁶

“In some audiences granted to various groups of Tertiaries, he recalled that what constituted ‘the profession of life of a good Franciscan Tertiary is not the rigor of vows, or life in common, or religious life according to the letter, but according to the spirit. It is the spirit of life and of that perfection lived within the family, in daily living, in ordinary life within the world.’

“He then recalled the need to qualify the secular Franciscan vocation: ‘If they are to be faithful Christians like the rest, there is no need for them to be Tertiaries.... A Franciscan Tertiary calls for a special title... which cannot be usurped—and it would be usurped if it did not imply something special.’⁵⁷

“And in the discourse to the Tertiaries of Italy on July 1, 1956, Pope Pius XII said: ‘You are an Order: a lay Order, but truly an Order, an Order in the true sense of the word, as our predecessor Benedict XV of holy memory called it.’

“...all the sovereign pontiffs since Leo XIII have again and again recommended the Third Order to the Catholic world. All of them, as well as the predecessor of Leo XXIII, Pope Pius IX, and the present Holy Father Pope John XXIII have also set an example by joining the ranks of the Franciscan Tertiaries themselves.”⁵⁸

The Third Order remained basically a devotional society over the years. The phrase that defined the Third Order at the beginning of the twentieth century as the happy death society was an unfair judgment—that perceived identity was misleading, in a way, in that the Tertiaries performed many good works and supported the friars in their good works.

⁵⁶ Habig and Hegener, *A Short History*...43, 44

⁵⁷ Lino, Benedetto, *Unpublished Papers*...29

⁵⁸ Habig and Hegener, *A Short History*... 44

The Pauline Rule of 1978

In March 1966, shortly after the conclusion of the Second Vatican Council, the Ministers General gave their blessings to begin work on the formulation of a new Rule for the Third Order Secular. The letter included an invitation to the national fraternities to participate by making suggestions as to the content of a new Rule. Surveys were taken in the United States and forwarded to the rule project commission in Assisi. An international Obediential Council reviewed the input from the contributing national fraternities.⁵⁹

A first draft of the new rule was completed in 1968 and sent to the national fraternities for critique. The response of the United States and other national fraternities to this first draft was very negative. A summary of the U. S. critique is given here:

- Does not conceive people as they are now actually living in the world;
- Lacking...the need to participate in the needs of the world;
- The concept of Vatican II is absent;
- The ecumenical spirit is lacking;
- The eschatological view is blurred;
- Not enough stress is put on the Third Order as essentially a lay order;
- Chapter III deals too much with the rights and powers of the priests... not mentioned is the mutual responsibility of the First and Third Orders;
- Nothing is mentioned about the Third Order message and mission to the world;
- We reject Chapter III because it does not envision the order as a community, but as an institution and organization;
- Francis' spirit is not expressed in the rule of life;
- Chapter I mentions the Gospel as the Tertiary's rule of life. After that there are only moral regulations and invitations to devotional practices;
- The rule is... presented without the spirit of seeking, of openness, and without giving any room for Mystery;
- Only benevolence is spoken of, but not brotherly sharing;
- Nothing is said about the need for continuous conversion;
- The text does not get across the spirit of renewal;
- The draft of the rule is composed for a dying Third Order, not for tomorrow's Third Order."⁶⁰

The Rule Commission took these very perspicacious and revealing critiques into consideration. Many deliberations were conducted and redactions made during the twelve-year process of formulating a new Rule for the Third Order.

⁵⁹ It should be noted here that the starting point for the formulation of a new Rule was directed to be the Rule of Leo XIII. Robert Stewart, O.F.M., and others, would have preferred that the starting point be the Early Exhortation (Recensior Prior)

⁶⁰ *Franciscan Herald and Forum*, December 1968, 364, 365

The Rule Commission met again in January 1969. At that meeting, they recognized that there were no Third Order members present. To correct this oversight, Tertiary leaders, both men and women, were invited to participate in the next gathering—the Assisi Congress held in October of that year.

Allowing laypersons to participate in the writing of their Rule was unprecedented. It would be proven that this inclusion made a world of difference. A special commission that included both friars and lay men and women was assigned the task of producing essential elements for a new rule. They came up with seventeen:

1. To live the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis;
2. To be converted continually (*metanoia*);
3. To live as brothers and sisters to all people and all creation;
4. To live in communion with Christ;
5. To follow the poor and crucified Christ;
6. To share in the life and mission of the Church;
7. To share in the love of the Father;
8. To be instruments of peace;
9. To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal, and liturgical;
10. To live in joy;
11. To have a spirituality of a secular character;
12. To be pilgrims on the way to the Father;
13. To participate in the Apostolate of the Laity;
14. To be at the service of the less fortunate;
15. To be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her ministers;
16. To be open to the action of the Spirit;
17. To live in simplicity, humility, and minority.⁶¹

These elements were to become the essence of the new Rule. One of these elements, dear to the layman, was that the rule should have a spirituality of a secular character.

It should be noted that during the process of developing a new rule, experimental rules were permitted. The North American Federation requested of Third Order Provinces that each submit an experimental rule. Five provinces participated, and in 1969 the experimental rule from St. Joseph Capuchin Province was chosen. Third Order Provinces were invited to use the experimental rule, “Way of Life,” until a new rule was, approved by the Holy See (in

⁶¹ Stewart, Robert, O.F.M., *The Rule*, 250

1978). The experimental rule did not preempt the following of the Rule of Leo XIII, by which Tertiaries professed to live.

After seven or eight redactions, the new Rule was promulgated by Pope Paul VI in June 1978, 12 years after the Rule Project was inaugurated. The rule called us to go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel. Paragraphs on Peace and Justice, Ecology, Work, and Family were included as essential paragraphs in this Rule. The Rule challenged the Secular Franciscans to interface with the world in which they lived.

The Rule presents “the spirituality of the Secular Franciscans, at least as it had been defined within the Rule Project:

1. To Live the Gospel;
2. Following Francis;
3. Through Conversion/*Metanoia*;
4. In Community;
5. As Seculars;
6. In Life-Giving Union with All Franciscans.”⁶²

“The Rule of 1978 followed the guidelines initially set by the Assisi Congress in 1969. Essentially, the Rule of 1978 represents the results of several years of refining, organizing, and integrating the 17 essential points of Franciscan spirituality outlined by the Congress. The only exception within the process was the insertion by the Ministers General of Francis’ Earlier Exhortation as a Prologue to the Rule.”⁶³

The process of educating the Tertiaries in the content and spirit of the New Rule fell to the competence of the friars and with articles in the *Franciscan Herald*.

The transition from a “less devotional” Order to a “more apostolic” Order was helped by the National Fraternity Council of the United States with the creation of four Apostolic Commissions: Peace and Justice, Ecology, Work, and Family.

The International Organization

“...From 5 September 1946, an International Interobediential Council had been functioning, although only experimentally, set up by the Ministers General of the First Order and the TOR and consisting of four religious who exercised the office of Commissaries General for the OFS.”⁶⁴

An International Organization was officially formed (as the World Council) in October 1973, with Manuela Mattiole from Brazil the appointed Minister General. Also, a presidency was appointed, and a Council was formed. The United States was represented by four coun-

⁶² Ibid, 307

⁶³ Ibid, 312

⁶⁴ Lino, Benedetto, Unpublished Papers, 30

cilors. Ms. Mattiole was elected to continue as Minister General in 1978, along with a new presidency. International Councilors were elected by their national councils.

Emanuela DeNunzio, OFS, from Rome, Encarnación del Pozo, OFS, from Spain, the current Minister General [as of 2011], succeeded Emanuela as elected Generals for the Third/Secular Franciscan Order. Presently, the International Council is called *Consiglio Internazionale Ordine Franciscano Secolare* (CIOFS). It is composed of a Minister General and a Presidency, with Councilors representing each member nation.

The Local Fraternity and Formation

The Local Fraternity

Local Fraternities, the basic unit of the Order, are canonically attached to friar provinces. In the early days, prior to the formation of a national fraternity, and for a while after, the local fraternity was “run” by a friar Director. The Director provided formation and decided on the aspirants’ “readiness” for profession. During the time of renewal of the Order in the mid-1960s, Tertiaries began to take on more responsibility, as directed by the 1957 International Constitutions. After that, local fraternities were represented at the provincial/regional gatherings by their fraternity minister and, it should be noted at this time, that provinces were represented at the national gatherings by a lay provincial/regional minister.

Formation

In the first six decades of the twentieth century, formation was conducted by the fraternity friar Director. In 1985, a National Formation Commission was formed, and in July 1986, Formation Guidelines were published. Tertiary Formation Directors existed for decades prior to the establishment of the Formation Commission; however, they took on a more significant role after that time. It should be noted that the fraternity Spiritual Assistant was a member of the Formation Commission. Today, a Formation Commission is active at all levels of fraternity.

The History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States

Franciscan Immigration to the United States flowed from Europe beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century. The first wave was from Germany. At the turn of the century, there were more German-speaking fraternities in the United States than there were English-speaking fraternities.

Immigrants settled in existing parishes—and some built their own parish churches. They needed priests who could speak their language. Bishops begged for priests to pastor the local non-English-speaking flock. This need was fulfilled over time. Also, friars from these European countries began to establish Third Order fraternities in their own parishes—and associated with their own provincial houses.

Tertiary immigration from Europe reached its peak over the latter quarter of the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century. A list of language-based fraternities compiled in 1935 illustrates this.⁶⁵

English Speaking Fraternities	400	Polish	250
German	35	Slovenian	35
Italian	30	Lithuanian	30
Spanish	10	Hungarian	5
Croatian	5	French	5
Bohemian	3		

It should be noted that today there is an increase in fraternities whose membership does not use English as their primary language. Among them are Spanish, Vietnamese, and Korean fraternities. More than 5 percent of fraternities in the United States are Korean.

In 1944, there were an estimated 100,000 Third Order Secular Members in the United States. Today, (2011) there are approximately 15,000 members, in approximately 700 fraternities.

The Formation of a National Organization

“On November 28 and 29, 1917, a conference of the Third Order Friar Directors and Tertiaries met at St. Joseph College in Teutopolis, Illinois. It was an epic moment in the history of the Third Order in the United States. At this meeting, the first Third Order Province was formed, under the auspices of Sacred Heart OFM Province.”⁶⁶ Also at that meeting, the idea of a National Congress was proposed, to take place in 1921, the 700th anniversary of the first approved Rule of the Third Order of St. Francis.

Forty-three hundred people were present at this first national congress, held in Chicago in October 1921. At that congress, the delegates proposed that a national organization be formed. A year later in 1922, a national constitution was approved, thereby officially establishing a National Third Order Federation.

The Third Order of St. Francis was legally incorporated in the city of Cincinnati in September 1976.

Organizational Structure

In 1921, it was proposed that a “National Directive Board [be] composed of the Ministers Provincial of the First Order, representatives of the Friars Minor, the Capuchins, and the Conventuals, likewise the Ministers Provincial of the Third Order Regular.... [A] second... governing board was called the National Executive Board, consisting of one member from

⁶⁵ Poppy, Maximus, O.F.M. and Martin, Paul, *Survey of a Decade*, R. Herder Book Co., St. Louis

⁶⁶ Wicks, William, OFS, *A History of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States*, Volume I, 1917 – 1942, Barbo-Carlson Enterprises, Lindsborg, KS, 2007, 29

each of the three branches of the First Order, together with the representative of the Third Order Regular; one of these to be appointed chairman, another vice-chairman and a third, secretary, these appointments to be made by the National Directive Board. Three consultants were likewise to be members of the National Executive Board, one a Tertiary priest and two Tertiary laymen.”⁶⁷

It was written into the national constitutions that a national congress be held every five years—hence the title, Quinquennial Congress. By the time of the fifth Quinquennial Congress, held in Pittsburgh, Penn., 24 provinces comprised a North American Federation—a positive indication of the success in forming a national organization. It should be noted that the North American Federation included Third Order Provinces in Canada. It should also be noted that the early congresses were the venue for conducting the business of the national organization. Although some business continued at future Congresses, these events took on a thematic emphasis.

The early Congresses were the place where the official business of the national fraternity took place. The most recent Quinquennial Congresses have been organized around a theme.

It should be noted that a Central Office operated by the Executive Secretary had a major role in the successful operation of the national fraternity, especially in the early days. It was a publishing house, a clearing house, and a major player in the setting the direction for the national fraternity. That position was in place from 1928 to 1977.

Commissaries were delegated by the Ministers Provincial. They represented the various Third Order Provinces at the combined Executive Board and Commissary meetings. The Commissaries were initially a consulting entity at the annual meetings, but eventually were given a vote.

Emergence of Lay Leadership

Lay leadership was officially directed by the 1957 International Constitutions, which defined the external and internal governance of the Third Order. The external governance was the domain of the Church, the hierarchy, whereas the internal was the domain of the Tertiaries. The internal governance paragraph authorized lay Tertiaries to serve in the principle positions of fraternity leadership.

This structural shift was evident at the 1967 Quinquennial Congress held in Philadelphia. Provincial Ministers represented their Third Order provinces along with the friar Commissaries. Lay Tertiaries held principal leadership positions in the Executive Council at all organizational levels of fraternity.

⁶⁷ Poppy, and Martin, Survey..., 12

The documents of the Second Vatican Council advanced lay leadership in the Church in general and catalyzed the move toward lay leadership in the Third Order.

In the late 1980s, the Commissaries, at that time called Spiritual Assistants, opted not to vote in the Third Order national elections. Restructuring called for a representative of each branch of the First Order and of the Third Order Regular (four in all) to serve with the Third Order Ministers Provincial as members of the National Council; the Executive Council included one friar representative—a president in turn, of the four members of Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA)

It should be noted that the International Constitutions were revised in 2000 to abolish the voting privilege of the friars at elections (Article 90.2).

With lay members in leadership positions, Regionalization was the next step towards embracing Third Order autonomy.

Regionalization

The process of Regionalization, first called for by the 1957 General Constitutions and then by the new Rule, began in the United States in 1987 and was completed in 1997; the process divided the country into 31 geographic regions, thus doing away with the Provincial jurisdictional structure. This geographic restructuring helped bring to fruition the aspiration of Third Order autonomy. The argument was that the Secular Franciscans are one Order, not made up as four branches, as are the friars, which was virtually the case for the Third Order when it was organized under a specific provincial umbrella.

This restructuring was not a complete separation from the friars, nor was it intended to be. Canon 303 ordained a connection to the Friar Provinces via *Altius Moderamen*, a Latin term used in Canon 303 to mean that the friars of the First Order and Third Order Regular are to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan Charism, communion with the Church, and union with the Franciscan Family.

The changing of the structure of the organization from provincial attachment to geographic had this effect: lay leaders were elected to regional and national positions irrespective of their affiliation with a specific friar province.

Publications and Programs Promoted By Secular Franciscans

- *Franciscan Herald* (1913-1987)
- National Newsletter (1935-1973) (1992-Present)
- Catholic Action (1940s and 1950s)
- Youth (1921-Present)

⁶⁷ Poppy, and Martin, Survey, 12

- Three-Point Economic Program (1934-1941)
- Modesty Campaign and Sanctification of Sunday (1953-1955)
- Hour of St. Francis (1946-1970)
- Peace Award and Achievement Award (1950-Present)
- Retirement Homes and Shelters (1934-Present)
- Action for Racial Understanding (1961-1968)
- Ecumenism (1946-Present)
- Apostolic Commissions
- Multicultural Sensitivity
- Franciscan Action Network (FAN)
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)

The *Franciscan Herald*, a monthly publication inaugurated in 1913, became an information forum and a formation device for the members of the national fraternity. It was the official organ of the national fraternity. It ceased publication in 1987.

National Newsletter—The First National Newsletter was published out of the Central Office in 1935. The Central Office discontinued publication in 1973. During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, much of the national news was included in the *Franciscan Herald*. A national newsletter was resurrected in 1992 and continues to be published today as a quarterly newsletter. It is presently named *TAU-USA*.

Catholic Action—Catholic Action was a program promoted by Pope Pius XI. It was defined as the *participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy*. The Third Order became, for a while beginning in 1942, an auxiliary to Catholic Action. A function of the Third Order, according to the National Catholic Welfare Conference, NCWC⁶⁸, was to provide a spiritual base, especially in parishes, for the parishioners and others to become active in Catholic Action. A field agent was appointed to work out of the Central Office to travel to various Catholic Institutions and in parishes to educate people about Catholic Action and to provide a Franciscan spiritual base to the activities. The patron saint of Catholic Action was St. Francis of Assisi.

Youth—Youth fraternities have been a priority for the Third Order from the very beginning of the National Organization. Some youth fraternities were attached to existing adult fraternities; some were attached to Franciscan Institutions. Cordeliers was a group of youth, mostly of grade-school age, formed in parishes or attached to friar provinces, with particular oversight by the Conventual friars. They were children's groups that were formed in the ideals of Franciscanism.

⁶⁸ The National Catholic Welfare Conference was equivalent to today's United States Council of Catholic Bishops

It should be noted that the National Statutes of July 1995 changed the age of profession from 14 to 21, thus changing the dynamic of the measure of a professed Third Order member. This preempted an avenue to profession for many youths.

The high point of the youth movement in the United States took place in the 1950s and the 1960s. Youth Congresses were held annually. Participating institutions were Notre Dame University; St. Francis College, Loretto, Pennsylvania; St. Bonaventure University, New York; and Quincy University, Illinois. As many as one thousand youths attended these Congresses, most from Franciscan Institutes.

During the late 1970s, the number of youth groups declined. To resurrect Franciscan youth involvement, a Youth Commission was formed in October 1995.

Three-Point Economic Program—The Three-Point Economic Program began in the mid 1930s, in coincidence with the Great Depression. The three points called Tertiaries to: 1) commit no sin in heart or hand for the sake of goods of fortune; 2) observe moderation in acquiring and enjoying goods of fortune; and 3) share their goods of fortune with God and neighbor.

Modesty Campaign and the Sanctification of the Sunday—These “self-descriptive” programs were campaigns promoted by the Third Order in the fifties and sixties. They were effective, mainly in the Midwest, for about ten years.

Hour of St. Francis—The Hour of St. Francis was spearheaded in its popular form, by Fr. Hugh Noonan, OFM, at St. Joseph Church in Los Angeles, with the help of The Heralds, a Franciscan youth group. The Hour was a radio program that presented Franciscan ideals in parable form—story telling. It was adopted as a National Fraternity apostolate in October 1946. The Third Order financed this endeavor. Movie stars volunteered participation in the programs. In 1951, The Hour had the largest audience of any of the Catholic radio program in the country. The Hour of St. Francis transitioned to television in 1960 and continued to be supported financially by the Third Order. Hollywood actors and actresses participated, and it was a grand success. In 1964, a new TV studio was completed and dedicated by Cardinal McIntyre, Archbishop of the Los Angeles Archdiocese. Television productions, including spiritually oriented commercials, were presented until the early 1970s.

Peace Awards and Achievement Awards—The Peace Award was first discussed at a meeting of the Executive Board in 1949, and in 1950, the first award was presented. The nominees were men and women who made a significant contribution towards peace in the world. This award had been in the past given to national and international dignitaries who were, for the most part, not Franciscan. More recently, the award has been presented to Franciscans, Seculars and friars.

Achievement Awards were presented during the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s to those, either friars or Tertiaries, who were outstanding contributors to the good of the Order.

Retirement Homes and Shelters—The Third Order, with the leadership of the Friar Provinces, helped sponsor the building of retirement homes for Tertiaries. The most prominent ones are: The Third Order Villa in Garrison, New York (no longer in existence), Mayslake Village in Oak Brook, Illinois, and St. Francis Village in Crowley, Texas. The Third Order also supported, and “manned” bread lines and shelters. Some of the more prominent of these are: The Food Kitchen and the St. Francis House of Hospitality of Detroit, St. Anthony Dining Room in San Francisco, the St. Francis Center of Los Angeles and the St. Anthony Inn of Chicago, Illinois.

Action for Interracial Understanding—Action for Interracial Understanding (AIU) was born in 1961, a response to the need for the Third Order to address the civil rights of African Americans who were, at the time, in a struggle for equality. This concerted action was taken on by the Third Order to help alleviate the injustices of racial discrimination that were prevalent during those days of racial unrest in the 1960s.

Ecumenism—Ecumenism had been a part of the Franciscan mentality in the United States since the 1940s, although it was somewhere on the back burner until the time of the Second Vatican Council. Following that Council, Tertiary education and a Unity Movement were placed on the front burner. A Prayer for Christian Unity, promoted by the Friars of the Atonement of Graymoor, N.Y., was encouraged.

A Third Order Ecumenical Committee was formed following an invitation to join a gathering of the Third Order Society of St. Francis (Anglican Third Order) at their Quinquennial Congress in 1997.

Today (2011), an Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee addresses Secular Franciscan relations with people of all faiths.

Apostolic Commissions—The Apostolic Commissions, Peace and Justice, Work, Family, and Ecology, were established at the national level in October 1984 and were dissolved in October 2007. They were created to aid in the observance of paragraphs 15 through 18 of the Rule of 1978. The Commissions successfully helped members to transition from the “devotionally” oriented Rule of Leo XIII to the more “apostolically” oriented Rule of 1978. Commissions were established at all levels of fraternity.

Multicultural Sensitivity—A Multicultural Committee was established in 1995 with a mission of coordinating an effort directed to the understanding and embracing the various ethnic cultures within the national fraternity and in the world, especially considering the cultures of

the “language” fraternities existing and growing within the national organization. Multicultural sensitivity was the theme of the 2007 Quinquennial Congress held in Pittsburgh.

Quinquennial Congresses—Quinquennial Congresses are a national gathering of Secular Franciscans held every five years. Initially they were the venue for the conduct of the business of the national organization. Gradually, they became a teaching gathering with a theme and a social event.

Franciscan Action Network (FAN)—The National Fraternity voted to join the Franciscan Action Network in October 2007. “The Franciscan Action Network is designed to bring a coordinated and effective voice to matters of Justice, Peace and Care for Creation in our world. The particular focus of the Franciscan Action Network’s advocacy is the U.S. government and related Washington, D.C.-based institutions (e.g., World Bank, International Monetary Fund, Organization of American States)... The backbone of the Network is the friars, sisters, Secular Franciscans, Ecumenical Franciscans and the men and women with whom they minister.”⁶⁹

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)—The Justice, Peace and Integration of Creation Committee was established by a motion at the October 2007 National Fraternity Council meeting. The motion was: “to accept the recommendations of the ad hoc Committee on the Commissions to restructure the Apostolic Commissions to one Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Committee.”⁷⁰ JPIC encourages living of the Rule as related to the apostolic activities from the point of view of who we are; it is a departure from the structure of the Apostolic Commissions.

Epilogue

To this date, the “experiment” of lay leadership of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, as directed by the 1957 International Constitutions, has been a grand success, thanks to the continued improvement in the quality and commitment of lay leadership over the years, and the friars’ total support and assistance. Also a success, and certainly a blessing, has been the embracing by today’s Secular Franciscans, of the Rule of 1978—a gift of the Holy Spirit.

Lastly, much gratitude is expressed to those Friars, and Tertiaries too, who built, with energy and dedication, a national organization, and kept it very much alive.

*Those now engaged in Third Order work in this country are pioneers
Those who will continue it have not been born,
But the spirit of St. Francis is a spirit of optimism and of faith
Maximus Poppy, OFM (1888-1972)*⁷¹

⁶⁹ TAU-USA, Winter 2007 issue, Frances Wicks, OFS Editor, 13

⁷⁰ Ibid, 10

⁷¹ Wicks, William, OFS, A History

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