




## Outline of Presentation on Vocation

### I. Gods' Invitation

 A call to share in the life of God for all people


 God is love.


 Love seeks union


 We are chosen

### II. Personal Vocations

 The Apostles

 The rich young man

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 The call of Zacchaeus

### III. A Call to perfection

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### 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 forty times. The dictionary has more than twenty-six meanings for the verb *to call*. The best definition that fits 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** and 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.<sup>1</sup> The wonder and the mystery is this: we can speak of vocation because we recognize that we are loved by God, that we can one love God in return; that we can speak to God and sense God's call in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V The Call to Holiness, number 40

*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.

*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 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 *useable* 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.”<sup>2</sup>

In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus takes his disciples up on a hill and called to himself the men he wanted. They came to him, and he chose twelve whom 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 scriptural examples from the New Testament of the way God calls people for a personal vocation.

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



### 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 Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5, 1-20, 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)

He 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 too was God's plan for Zacchaeus' personal secular vocation.

## CALLED TO PERFECTION

*"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).”<sup>3</sup>*

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

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<sup>3</sup> John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

Church; anoints us in the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> It is the grace of this anointing that helps us to reach the sanctity that God has planned for us.

Can we be perfect? The ideal of perfection is often misunderstood. Many believe perfection is just for a few very heroic people but Vatican II tells us that perfection is not reserved just for some extraordinary souls.<sup>5</sup> 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 one. (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, and 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.”<sup>6</sup>

## **CALLED TO BRING OTHERS TO GOD**

The gift of vocation is not just 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.”<sup>7</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> John Paul II *Vocation and Mission of the Laity*

<sup>5</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V, number

<sup>6</sup> Address to Youth, 1978

<sup>7</sup> *LIFE AND APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY* Emerenziana Rossato OFS CIOFS Document not dated

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.”*<sup>8</sup>

## 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 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.

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

## 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?"<sup>9</sup> People are inspired by Francis. He is called the universal saint and almost everybody's favorite.

Why not?

The Francis that 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: In 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."<sup>10</sup>*

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 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 just being attracted or inspired by Francis and the call to follow Christ in the way that Francis did. One who is thinking about a call to the Franciscan life style 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, 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? Can I see Christ with the eyes of Francis? Can I live that way too?

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<sup>9</sup> Fioretti 10

<sup>10</sup> Cantalamessa, OFM CAP April 18, 2009

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 LIFE STYLE

### DISCERNMENT

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

How then 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 life style 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 if we have an authentic Franciscan vocation:

- A very intense Eucharistic spirituality (Seeing Christ present in the Eucharist and the ideal of self giving like 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 Capuchin in his book “*The Franciscan Journey*” lists ten signs that 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 are 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 one 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 that we profess.

Those who begin to live this way of life will find their prayer life growing richer, their love for God and neighbor grow 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 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." (Isaiah 43:1)*

### 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." (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 it is I: (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).<sup>10</sup>*

### 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."<sup>11</sup>*

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<sup>10</sup> John Paul II *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

<sup>11</sup> *Legend of the Three Companions*

*“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.<sup>12</sup>

**Response:** We praise you, O Lord.

**Second Reader:** 2 Peter 1; 3-11

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<sup>12</sup> Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, & 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* (Ro 8:28–30). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

His 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.

<sup>4</sup> Through 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.

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

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

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

**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

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<sup>13</sup> Confraternity of Christian Doctrine. Board of Trustees, Catholic Church. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, & 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* (2 Pe 1:3–11). Confraternity of Christian Doctrine.

## 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?



# **Our Identity as a Secular Franciscan**

**By Anne Mulqueen, SFO**



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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 definitively 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 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup>

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 being—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

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<sup>1</sup> Article 6, OFS Rule

<sup>2</sup> Article 1, OFS Rule

<sup>3</sup> The Franciscan Charism in the Third Millennium p. 26



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.*<sup>4</sup>

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 being 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.*<sup>5</sup>

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 Franciscan, we

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<sup>4</sup> Article 15, OFS Rule

<sup>5</sup>Gen. 1:31-emphasis added

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*.<sup>6</sup> 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 masters.<sup>7</sup> 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.||<sup>8</sup> 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 say 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 is our conversations peppered with

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<sup>6</sup> Article 2, OFS

<sup>7</sup>Rule Cf.

<sup>8</sup>Ephesians 6:5-8

Psalm 24:1

statements such as, —I am the youngest of seven,<sup>9</sup> or —My family has farmed this area for a hundred years,<sup>9</sup> or —we’ve been married for 35 years.<sup>9</sup> 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 Franciscan, 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.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

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, our identity as secular people—people in the world—is indivisible from the other components of our identity and we should —wear<sup>9</sup> 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

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<sup>9</sup> Franciscan Charism for the Third Millennium, Anselm Romb p.98

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 that St. Francis joined and influenced in the early 13<sup>th</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup>

Our identity as **Franciscan** Penitents begins 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 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. <sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda 22 ff.

<sup>11</sup> The Testament, paragraph 1

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.*<sup>12</sup> St. Francis revered and respected priests profoundly because they were the ministers of divine pardon.

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<sup>12</sup> Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful, 4:22

In the *Memoriale Propositi* of 1221 we have a more juridical wording of St. Francis' exhortation to penance.<sup>13</sup> 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.

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.”<sup>14</sup>***

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 in 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

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

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

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, which 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.

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. And 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 that 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. This 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 seventeen 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 minority<sup>15</sup>

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.

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<sup>15</sup> *De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam*, The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order: Origins, Development, Interpretation, Robert M. Stewart, OFM, p. 250

## 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 Secular Franciscan Family; *it is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful.*<sup>16</sup>
- ✚ We have a responsibility to make present the charism of our common Seraphic Father St. Francis in the life and mission of the Church.
- ✚ 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,

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<sup>16</sup>Article 2, OFS Rule

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 Secular Franciscan Order, one and only, a great service in the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world of today. The Church desires that your Order should be a model of organic, structural and charismatic unity on all levels, so as to present itself to the world as a —community of love (Regola OFS 26). The Church expects from you, Secular Franciscans, a courageous and consistent testimony of Christian and Franciscan life, leaning towards the construction of a more fraternal and gospel world for the realization of the Kingdom of God.

The reflection, carried out during this Chapter, on "*The vital reciprocal communion in the Franciscan Family*" pushes you to commit yourselves evermore in the promotion of meeting and understanding especially within your Order, then before other Franciscan brothers and sisters and finally, with maximum care, as St. Francis wished, in your relations with the hierarchical authorities of the Church.

Your **renewed legislation** gives you optimal instruments for carrying out and fully expressing the unity of your Order and its communion with the Franciscan Family within precise coordinates. In it there is, above all, provision for the service of animation and guidance of the Fraternities, "co-ordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions"; such service is indispensable for communion between the Fraternities, for the coordinated collaboration between them and for the unity of the Secular Franciscan Order (cf. *General Constitutions OFS* 29.1). Also the "spiritual assistance as a fundamental element of communion", to be carried out collegially on the regional, national and international levels is important (*General Constitutions OFS* 90.3). Of decisive importance is 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 SFO—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 Pontiff, who possessed profound theological culture as well as great political power, but it was not he who renewed the Church. It was the 'small and insignificant' friar, it was Francis, called by God. Yet it is important to recall that **Francis did not renew the Church without the Pope or against the Pope, but in communion with him.** The two things went together: Peter's Successor, the bishops and the Church founded on apostolic succession, and the new charism that the Spirit had created at that moment to renew the Church.<sup>17</sup> [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".<sup>18</sup> [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.

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

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

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 way, 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** and 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.**

*Rather than repeat the information contained in the section entitled The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order contained 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).<sup>19</sup> This document is considered 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 way? 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 gave us many gifts when we embraced a penitential identity? God gave us joy, a hallmark of Franciscan spirituality. Further God gave 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

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<sup>19</sup> Also called Letter to All the Faithful, Earlier Exhortation, Primitive Rule, Volterra text.

gave up his life for his sheep (cf. Jn 10:15).<sup>¶</sup> We possess all three persons: a holy Father, an admirable spouse, the 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<sup>¶</sup> (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

### **Opening Prayer:**

**[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 Pause]**

**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]**



# The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

Adapted by Bob Fitzsimmons,  
OFS And based on a presentation at a regional  
Chapter

*This segment 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 here 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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## Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order.

To begin to understand who we are as Franciscans, let us again take a brief 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 loveable-ness of God and how we encounter God by immersing ourselves into 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 become a source of enlightenment and inspiration for the modern world.

Our task is simple: 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 is 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 preceding (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 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:

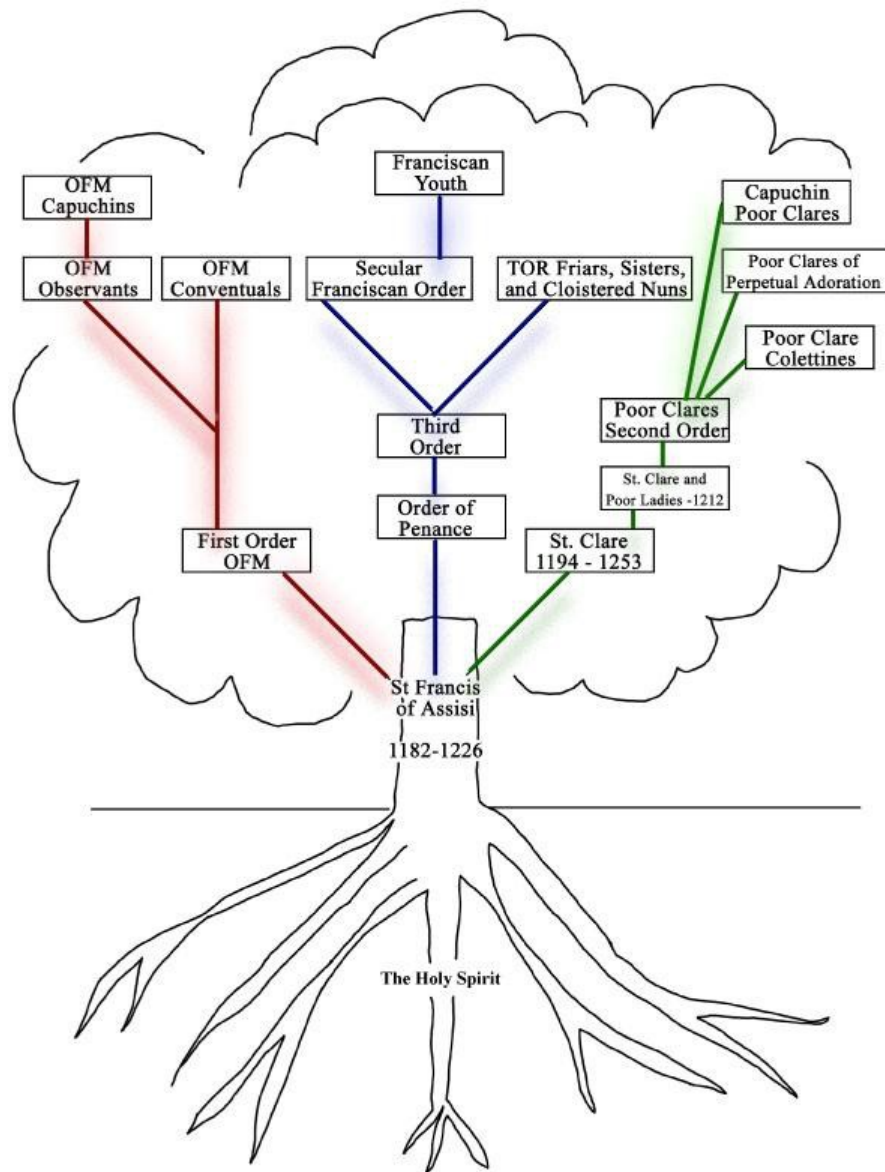
“...you are also an „Order,“ as the Pope said (Pius XII): **A Lay Order, but a Real Order;**” and after all, Benedict XV had already spoken of “Ordo veri nominis”. This ancient term – we can say medieval – “Order” means nothing more than your intimate belonging to the large Franciscan family. The word “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, Pope Martin V, Clement XII, and all Popes from Pius IX up to and including John XXIII were OFS.



## 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 Penitence of St Francis and now known as the Secular Franciscan Order) which shares, 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.

So, 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 Lord<sup>1</sup>.

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, are equal and need to 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 a person’s of the state of life.**

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<sup>1</sup> A. Boni, OFM, *Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus* (TOHO), Ed. Porziuncola, Assisi, 1999, page 27.

Since St. Francis was unable, due to the prevailing Church laws at the time, to welcome into his “apostolic religion”<sup>2</sup> (Order) either communities of consecrated women or seculars (men and women living in their own homes), Saint Francis was obliged to institute the Second Order (for consecrated women) and also a Third Order (for seculars). These orders were, by their very nature, autonomous.

Due to their common origin, shared mission and charism of the First, Second and Third Orders, the Secular Franciscan Order is not a *mere* Public Association of the Christian Faithful; anyone who enters the First or 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<sup>th</sup> August 1289)<sup>3</sup>. This rule, then 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).

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<sup>2</sup> “Religion” corresponded to “Institution of religious life”. Here, we refer to the Order of Friars Minor, approved by Innocent III and the 4th Lateran Council.

<sup>3</sup> “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. So **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<sup>th</sup> August 1289, as if 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)

We can summarize our foundational elements with three Latin phrases, used by Fr. Andrea Boni in his book “Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatur”

1. *Tres ordines hic ordinatur* (Three were the Orders he arrayed).<sup>4</sup> Common founder – Francis of Assisi
2. *Eiusdem corporis membra existentes* (Existing as members of the same body)<sup>5</sup>
  - Same charism
  - Same mission in different states of life, interdependent and complementary: all three to accomplish the *marvelous work*.
3. *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur* (A three-ply cord is not easily broken)<sup>6</sup>.
  - Independence and unity.
  - Vital interconnection [reciprocity].

### Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO)

1. The nature of the OFS is determined by 3 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 Constitution) approved by the Holy See, and accepted throughout history, as expressed by the Supreme Pontiffs & 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

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<sup>4</sup> Julian of Speyer *The Divine Office*, Antiphon for Lauds

<sup>5</sup> Urban IV, Bull *Spiritus Domini*, 1. C, 671

<sup>6</sup> Ecclesiastes 4, 12

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 & 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

### **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

So 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 for 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 that 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 for 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 Clares<sup>7</sup>.

While most public associations within the Church are erected by the Church Hierarchy (Bishops), who endow them with a juridic [legal under Canon Law] personality and assigns them a canonical mission within a specific jurisdiction (generally a diocese), the Secular Franciscan Order exists as a deliberate act of will of the whole Church, erected 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 into the life of the Secular Franciscan Order, its governance, in its electoral process or in its civil identity,

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<sup>7</sup> So that 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 1<sup>st</sup> Order to make the apostolic life flourish;

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Order to give new energy to the contemplative life achieved through prayer and sacrifice;

The 3<sup>rd</sup> 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

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 vibrantly alive the Charism of Francis, our commitment is to “Observe the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ,” to remain faithful to our Profession and our Rule of Life, and 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 respond with love for all so we can be instruments of peace.

Below is a 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 to the Franciscan First Order or to the Third Order Regular (TOR). The OFS is born 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 3-fold articulation, and participates in the spirit of the entire Family, and 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 is born autonomous and remains such, under the authority of the Holy See, who has entrusted assistance to the OFS and vigilance to the First Order & TOR
A member of a religious institute (house) may belong to the third order of another religious house, without any incompatibility	OFS General Constitutions contemplates the exact opposite i.e. exclusive 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	<p>The OFS is erected and granted its juridic person by the Supreme Pontiff and not by any religious house.</p> <p>None of the Franciscan First Orders nor the TOR hold the OFS as its own third order.</p> <p>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</p>

**Comparison 3rd Order vs. OFS**



## Structure and Governance

Today the OFS has a **centralized structure of government** [see structure of OFS – appendix 2]. 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), in order 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 and 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 in order to acquire the necessary sense of belonging to both 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. For 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 intrusions of higher levels.

The regional and national governing bodies are liaison and coordination structures designed to offer service, 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 1 – Public Associations in the Church vs SFO

**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 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 sacred 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 Church<sup>8</sup> (it is the Church, itself, that wants the OFS's existence in as much 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

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<sup>8</sup> Stated and confirmed by the Church for 8 centuries.

intervention of the Hierarchy. Removal by the hierarchy is obviously possible in extreme case.

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).
4. The functions and control of property belongs 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 § 1<sup>9</sup>) indicates that the purpose of Associations is to enable the Christian faithful *to be more or to do more*<sup>10</sup>.

A Third Order (can 303) is defined as an association whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection<sup>11</sup>, 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 Constitution of the Secular Franciscan Order (CC.GG). The entire Title II of the

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<sup>9</sup> 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.

<sup>10</sup> By this, it is meant to strive just for spiritual perfection or for more concrete apostolic work.

<sup>11</sup> A necessary aim for all the baptised regardless of whether they are a member of any group, secular or religious.

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* to be assisted pastorally and spiritually by its brothers of the First Order and the TOR rather than 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 which make up the constitutive elements of the nature of the OFS.

The OFS is and will always be “the” Third Franciscan Order; the same as always, 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 level).

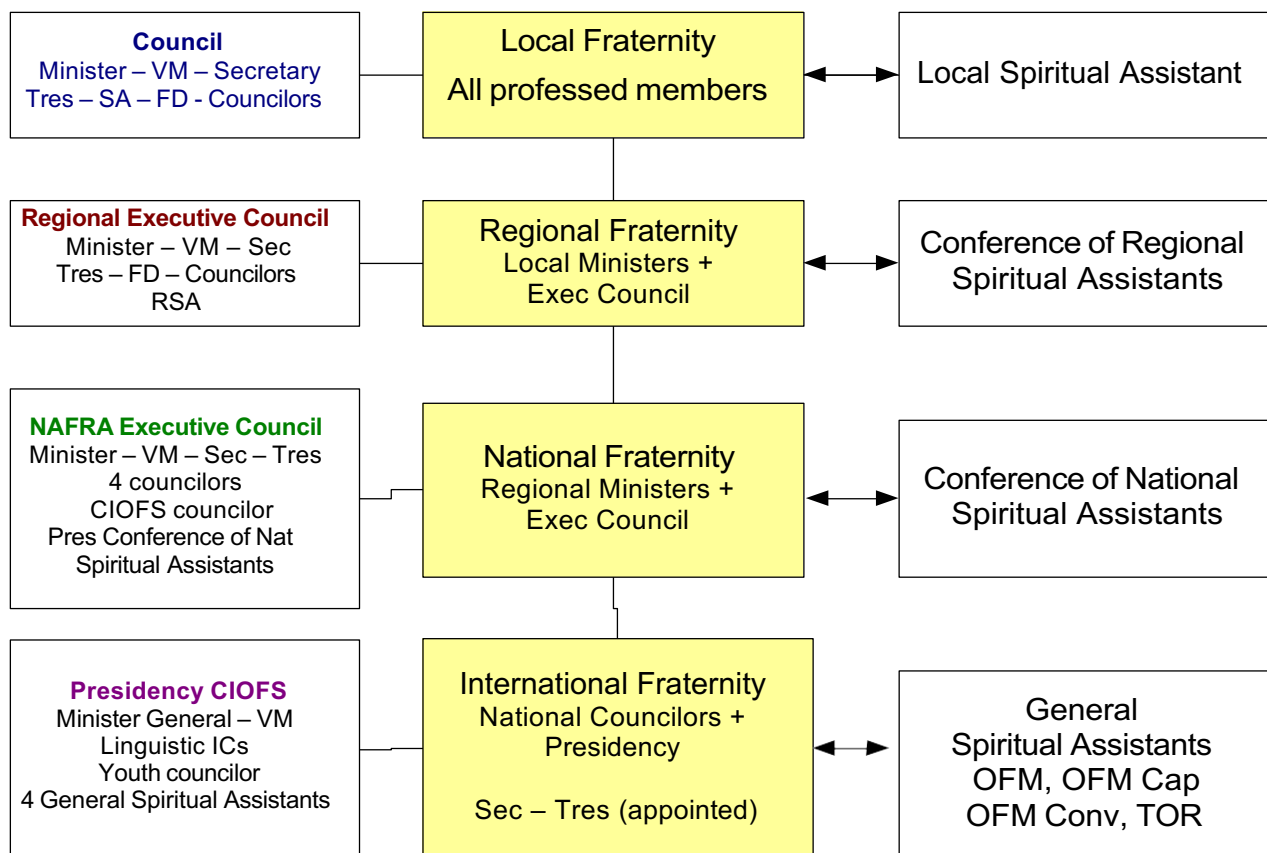
Embracing our identity as Secular Franciscans involves understanding who we are, as an association, as an Order, as an autonomous branch within the Franciscan Family, and what our role/mission is in service to the universal mission of the Church.

**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, 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

Structure of the Secular Franciscan Order



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 TO VOCATION, CHARISM AND MISSION OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS

*Too often, especially in the past, candidates were 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, until today, 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 just 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 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 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 dedicated and titled “*Vocation*,” so it will only be briefly addressed 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 creature [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,” then free will and our specific choice comes 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 it is 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, during our lifetime, is **called** by God to exercise a *fundamental option*<sup>1</sup>: 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).<sup>2</sup>

### 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 GERASENE DEMONIAK (MK 5:1-20) AND (LK 8:26-39)

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> For this section and the following on the “call to perfection” I depend on the work of Fr. Andrea Boni OFM.

“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 allow 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 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 a historical and human form.** This is why all people feel attracted by Francis.

All that Francis did and what he became, was 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 and not only for the “Franciscans”.

In order to understand if we have a genuine Franciscan Vocation, it is essential **to know Francis** and strip away feelings based upon romanticism and sentimentalism and so we are free to discern if 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 this: to verify our own availability to fully embrace this path.

This FRANCISCAN WAY requires:

- following Jesus without reservations 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.
- to discover, accept and develop within ourselves the same Charism received by Saint Francis, make it present and bring it to fruition in the world.

This spiritual “style” entails:

- a very intense *Eucharistic spirituality* (kenosis = 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 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 of all Franciscans of the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Order.

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 whole of chapter two of the Rule.
- The 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* towards 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 typical 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 that 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 and to accomplish this task**, it is essential, for us to understand: the nature of the Franciscan Charism.

The word *charism*, today is not widely used and often less understood. It remained, for a long time, a way to speak only about the exceptional gifts of the Holy Spirit which were needed to build up the early Church. The word (charism), started 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.<sup>3</sup>

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,”<sup>4</sup> so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together for the common good. (1 Cor 12:7)<sup>5</sup>

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 Elisha<sup>6</sup> and John the Baptist<sup>7</sup>, so that their followers may have a share in this spirit...<sup>8</sup>

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.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf 1Cor 13

<sup>4</sup> Lumen Gentium (LG) 12

<sup>5</sup> Christifideles Laici (CfL) 24

<sup>6</sup> 2 Kings 2, 9

<sup>7</sup> Luke 1:17

<sup>8</sup> PC 2 (Perfectae Caritatis 2 – II Vatican Council Decree on the adaptation and renewal of religious life)



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.”

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)*.

## 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.

## CHARISM OF THE INSTITUTE OR OF THE MEMBERS OF AN 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 has to remain necessarily 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 to future generations the course of history (K. 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; (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 (If you see OFS, in Latin it means - Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis, and is generally used in place of OFS outside the USA), Fr. Cristoforo Piacitelli OFM.<sup>9</sup>*

## CHARISM OF FRANCIS AND OF HIS FAMILY

The *mission* to which Francis is called has 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, 4<sup>10</sup>).

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<sup>9</sup> 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 nel mondo per il mondo*” Collana Tau, 2003.

<sup>10</sup> Major Legend by St. Bonaventure, Section XIV # 4

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 24<sup>11</sup>). 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 enables 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.

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<sup>12</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Book, VII, 107), 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 him life was Francis understanding of **God’s humility**: the Father’s total **Self-surrender or complete self-giving [kenosis]**, 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

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<sup>11</sup> Novo Millennio Ineunte, John Paul II, 2001

<sup>12</sup> Celano’s “First Life of St Francis”

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 (kenosis) 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 about 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.

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 affirmation of the Popes about 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 no one else has ever reached.

This is the gift. This is the *Charism*.

Francis accepted, without reservation, to be 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, 1<sup>st</sup> 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:

- A very *intense Eucharistic life* (contemplation of God's kénosis)
- *Poverty* (the consequence of kénosis)

- *Minority-Humility* (the consequence of kenosis)
- *Simplicity*<sup>13</sup>
- *Obedience* (to conform to the eternal project of the Father)<sup>14</sup>,
- *Chastity*<sup>15</sup>.
- *Fraternity* as the specific characterizing element, also in its universal and cosmic implications, to be lived with special intensity.
- The *Franciscan evangelical radicality*, as a specific way Saint Francis followed the *total* Christ in simplicity and *sine glossa*<sup>16</sup> (without splitting hairs on Gospel interpretation taking away, watering down or adding to it).

**All of us, the children of Francis** (1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> Order) are called to **participate** in his exceptional gift (charism) and to continue his mission. Francis shows us the way 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 started on the “*Specific Franciscan Vocation*”.

A true “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

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<sup>13</sup> 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 why 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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 to exhort his friars to be “catholic”. The Church is for Francis the infallible mediator through which he receives the confirmation of the goodness of his **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.

<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> *Sine glossa* – without gloss, e.g. interpreting Scripture to prove our preconceived idea or reinforce our own position

Francis and then to ask if I am ready to develop the same kind of “relationship” with Jesus that Francis lived.

If I am ready, then, I will discover in me the germ of the *charism*, and gradually God’s desire for me will manifest itself more and more clearly.

**If I find the humble God, the simple God, the servant God, the God who has emptied himself, and if I find him in the Son and if in finding him, I make him not only an object of intellectual reflection but I manage somehow to make Him the foundation of my life and practice, as Francis did, then, this is Franciscan vocation.**

Francis’s *charism*, then, starts working in me to transform me and enables me to undertake and continue his original mission, in a *personal* way, blending this charism into my own unique life and making it my own.

If we have made the right discernment, however, we have to make sure that 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 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** which 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 totally gives His to us.
- Profession is a *liturgical act*: it realizes, what it signifies. For this, a special gift of grace accompanies this consecration of ourselves.
- the **intercession of Saint Francis**, whose spiritual children we become.
- the **inclusion** in the ***reciprocal vital communion*** of the whole Franciscan Family of today and of all times.

This new gift which 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 that 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 he “*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.<sup>17</sup>

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, sees and „hears“ 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.

“*We want to see Jesus*” (Jn 12:21).

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<sup>17</sup> Paul VI reminds us: “*The vision of Innocent III 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*” J. 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.

This is what the man of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century asked. This is what the man of the 13<sup>th</sup> 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 son ship**. 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

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# Franciscan Movement

## Part 1 – The Journey of Francis and

## Part 2 – Your Own Journey

Jan Parker, SFO



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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" 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 explanation<sup>1</sup> or the option to create one of your own.

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<sup>1</sup> The "Lifeline of St. Francis" illustration and accompanying explanation. See FUN CD

- 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, i.e. Bible, San Damiano Cross, candle.
- The formator should have knowledge of “Mutual Invitation”<sup>2</sup> 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.
- Show the illustrated “Lifeline” of St. Francis<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>2</sup> A description of “Mutual Invitation” see *OFS Resource Manual* pp72 (also on FUN CD)

<sup>3</sup> The illustrated “Lifeline of St. Francis” and accompanying explanation is available on the FUN CD

## 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.<sup>4</sup> 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

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<sup>4</sup> 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 see how these might relate with 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 which strengthen our decisions and our walk
- ❖ Finding 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 time-line 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, i.e., 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 creatively express your thoughts and feelings 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.

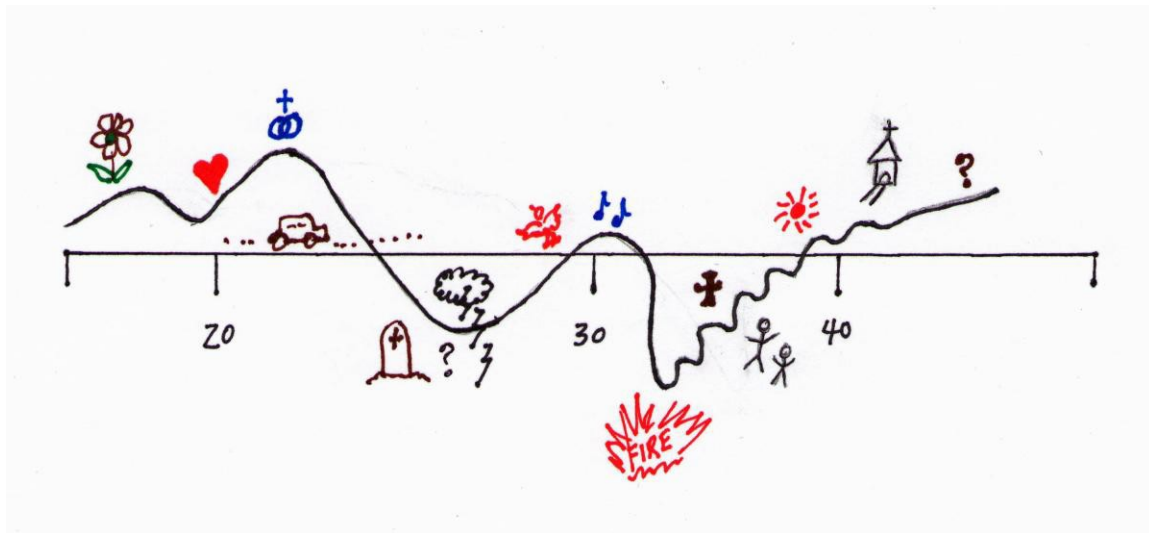


Figure 1 A sample lifeline

### Questions for Reflection, Journaling and Sharing your Lifeline

1. As you look at your life line, 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?

## 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. Francis<sup>5</sup> posted to reference as needed.

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<sup>5</sup> The "Lifeline of St. Francis" illustration and accompanying explanation can be found on the "For Up to Now" CD.

- Items needed for the closing prayer service, i.e. Psalm 139 in song or written word, and Francis' "Praises of God"<sup>6</sup>.

### **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.

### **Procedure (Lesson Plan):**

- Brief welcome and invocation of the Holy Spirit.
- The formator asks that no one interrupts during any one 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

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<sup>6</sup> Ritual, page 99

## Questions for Reflection, Journaling and Sharing your Lifeline

1. As you look at your life line, 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"<sup>7</sup>
- Leader: *Let us bless the Lord! All: And give him thanks!*
- Sign of the Cross

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<sup>7</sup> 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, SFO**



## 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).

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## A View Of The Rule Of The Secular Franciscan Order Through The Lens Of Humility

### SESSION 1 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 persons 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  
it's 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, O.S.F.

## 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 800<sup>th</sup> 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 that 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.<sup>1</sup>

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 material tells 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

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<sup>1</sup> "Renewing Religious Life," unpublished lecture, as quoted in *The First Franciscan Woman: Clare of Assisi & Her Form of Life*, Margaret Carney, O.S.F. (Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 1993), 226.

- 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
- 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 LaVerna in 1224. His response in prayer was the beautiful *Praises of God* in which he enumerated the virtues of God:

<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<sup>2</sup>.</i>
<i>You are sincerity,</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 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' *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 that 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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, O.F.M. Cap., J. A. Wayne Hellman, O.F.M. Conv., and William J. Short, O.F.M. (New York: New City Press, 1999, 2000, 2001). *Praises of God* found in FA:ED Vol 1, *The Saint*, 108.

virtue Bonaventure describes as *the root and guardian of all virtues: humility*.<sup>3</sup> 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*.<sup>4</sup>

### 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.

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 still is 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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

<sup>4</sup> For 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.

with his very own person.<sup>5</sup> In the *Tree of Life*, he dedicates a whole section to the humility of God, describing Jesus as —humble Savior,<sup>6</sup> the —humble God laying in a manger who is the humble Christ.<sup>6</sup> 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?

## 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, 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

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<sup>5</sup> 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.

<sup>6</sup> Bonaventure, *Tree of Life* VI, 130.

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**

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**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 in 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 that 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,*<sup>7</sup> *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 those components which 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 2<sup>8</sup>
- 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.

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<sup>7</sup> See Rule of 1221, Chap. 22; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 51.

<sup>8</sup> 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)<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup>

## 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.

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<sup>9</sup> FA:ED Vol 1, 254.

<sup>10</sup> See accompanying handout for explanation

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<sup>11</sup> and —witnesses and instruments.<sup>12</sup> *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 be recognized in it by their "being," from which their mission springs (GC 100.3). Their preferred apostolate is personal witness (CG 17.1).*<sup>11</sup>

## 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 numerous 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*<sup>12</sup> (GC 1.5). whose *secular state* characterizes

<sup>11</sup> 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.

<sup>12</sup> 11 See Can. 116; 301,3; 312; 313.

*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

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 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 7.6*<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Bonaventure, 111-2.

## **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:**

- 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.||<sup>14</sup>

#### 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

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<sup>14</sup>

Anthony de Mello, *One Minute Wisdom* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 43.

and desiring to find there peace of spirit. *Itin Prol 2*<sup>15</sup>

St. Bonaventure journeyed to that place of ultimate transformation for Francis, La Verna. 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 center on the opening words of the *Itinerarium*:

*Here begins the reflection of the poor man in the desert*<sup>16</sup>

- What did 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 of God). Through our own fault, we deliberately chose 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'

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<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure, 54

<sup>16</sup> Bonaventure, 53

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*.<sup>17</sup> But God wants us to be united with him again. Bonaventure goes on to tell us that

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* 4.2<sup>18</sup>

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 4,1<sup>19</sup>

And he tells us that

Divine aid is available  
to those who seek it from their hearts,  
*humbly* and devoutly . . .

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<sup>17</sup> FA: ED Vol.1, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventure, 87-8.

<sup>19</sup> Bonaventure, 55



## 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)<sup>20</sup>

➤ 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.

This humility is not a sense of *I am not worthy*. We turn to God, not out of a sense of sinfulness, but we turn to God 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *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.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Magee, O.S.F., "Reclaiming Penitential Spirituality for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *The Cord* 57, no 2 (April/June 2007): 152.

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 life style, 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)<sup>22</sup>

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).<sup>23</sup>

## **HUMILITY EMBODIED, GIVEN VOICE, AND LIVED OUT IN OFS RULE**

### **Envisioning how WE turn to GOD in the SFO Rule**

Our turning to God in the stance of humility is shown most explicitly in Articles 7, 8, 9, 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, Mary 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

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<sup>22</sup> FA: ED Vol. 1, 118.

<sup>23</sup> Clare, 37.

"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 turn toward God?
- What examples does it give us?
- What aids are provided for us?

**ALLOW TIME FOR DISCUSSION**

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**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 Secular Franciscans 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.*<sup>24</sup> *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.

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<sup>24</sup> See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff. found in FA:ED Vol. 1, 45.

The bedrock of the Secular Franciscan life is prayer, stemming from the example of 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*<sup>25</sup>.....*The brothers and sisters should try to find times of silence and recollection dedicated exclusively to prayer* (GC 14.3, 4, 5).

## 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).<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>25</sup> *Ritual OFS*, Appendix 26, 27.

<sup>26</sup> Francis of Assisi, *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* found in FA: ED Vol1. 163

- 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 only accomplished through obedience. Notice the small word contained in the middle of this larger one: obedience.<sup>27</sup> 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. 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 life.*

## 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?

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## 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

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<sup>27</sup>

Fr. Roger Hall, OFM shared during a homily

- 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<sup>28</sup>)*

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*, 39 <sup>29</sup>

## **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. What makes this mighty difference in these neighbor seas? Not the River Jordan. It empties the same good water into both. Not*

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<sup>29</sup>

Bonaventure, "Soliloquy on the Four Spiritual Exercises," in *The Works of Bonaventure*, trans. Jose` de Vinck (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1966), 69.



*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?* <sup>30</sup>

## 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' conversation, when in prayer before to 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, and the 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.

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen C. Doyle, OFM, *The Pilgrim's new Guide to the Holy Land* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press 1985), 136-7.

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?

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 that

From then on he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility, and eagerness for intimate piety. (*LM* 1.6<sup>31</sup>)

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* 8.1<sup>32</sup>)

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)

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<sup>31</sup> Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior* found in FA:ED vol. 2, 534.

<sup>32</sup> Bonaventure, *Legenda Maior* found in FA:ED vol. 2, 586.

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, then 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.

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*, 1.15 <sup>33</sup>

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 29 <sup>34</sup>)

### **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. <sup>35</sup>

- Remember how Mary is portrayed in Article 9: her complete self-giving!

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. <sup>36</sup>

Bonaventure defines compassion as —sharing the pains of the utterly blameless,  
meek, noble and loving Christ. <sup>37</sup>

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:

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<sup>34</sup> Francis of Assisi as Found in FA:ED Vol 1, 118.

<sup>35</sup> Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF, *Crucified Love: Bonaventure's Mysticism of the Crucified Christ* (Quincy IL: Franciscan Press, 1998), 107.

<sup>36</sup> Delio, 100.

<sup>37</sup> Delio, 101.

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 OFS RULE**

### **Envisioning how WE turn to OTHERS in the SFO 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.

**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.<sup>2</sup>
- 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

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**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)<sup>38</sup>. 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?

**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 welcomed 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?

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<sup>38</sup>

FA:ED Vol. 2, 286.



- 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 persons 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 recent 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 are 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 affect a change?
  - In what ways might you not be willing to affect 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 rightfully 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 the Scriptures say *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.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>

See Bonaventure quote on p.29 of this document.

## 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.

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.*<sup>40</sup>

*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.

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

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<sup>40</sup>

FA:ED Vol1, 119.

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 that 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,<sup>ll</sup> and **mothers** when we bear Christ in our hearts and give birth to him through our **humble and generous love**.<sup>41</sup>

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?

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<sup>41</sup> Magee, O.S.F., 155.



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?

## CLOSURE

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  
it's 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—

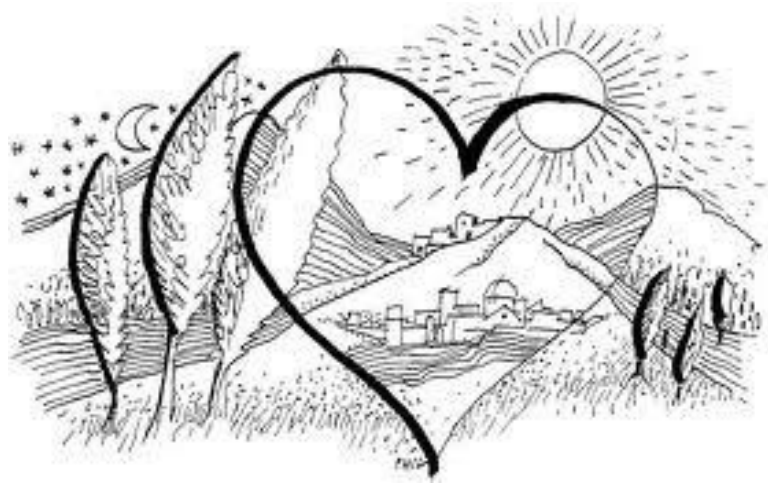
seasoned wood caught fire,  
and the fire burned,  
and the fire spread,  
  
and the fire enveloped the earth.  
Today, Francis—  
breathe your benediction  
on this crumbling clay;  
crushed, crippled, wounded,  
it desires to dance.  
  
Anoint with peace and goodness  
the fragile fragments of peace 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, O.S.F.

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, SFO



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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 & 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 the 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. At the end of the Chapter are resources to assist you. 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 SCT. 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 may be found in the papal, conciliar, and other official documents of the Church. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> 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 Progresio 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 from the above paragraphs many of the same words and phrases used in the OFS Rule and General Constitution. Beginning with our own daily conversions, the penitential life revealed in our Franciscan tradition, truly is the basis of our gospel living and evangelization of the good news. To direct the faithful further, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops has defined seven themes of social teaching. In so doing they assist us with the knowledge that every area of life is in need of God's grace and Christification.

From the seven themes certain areas are in closer focus. The three pillars (as they are known) are Human Dignity, Common Good, and Subsidiarity and Solidarity. Sometimes these are stated 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 is 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 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 life styles, 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 just 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 work place must be a place where dignity is maintained and respected. Workers rights also must be upheld.

These include (but not limited to) the right to a fair and just wage, humane conditions, 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 God's 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 United States 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 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 amidst 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](http://www.usccb.org)  
Research one of the seven themes that you know little about. How are you moved to respond?

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We also find that the CST is incorporated into the Ten Commandments. Especially found in numbers four and seven, but not exclusively, 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 every day circumstances by living holy lives make it more necessary than ever that the coming of the Kingdom mean more than personal piety. We need only 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 are two important exhortations: The Great Commandment in Mt 2: 34-40 and the Last Judgment 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 into a few quotes from the Commandments as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. \*

**“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) 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.

**“Article 7 - The Seventh Commandment You shall not steal.[185<sup>1</sup>]**

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

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<sup>1</sup> \*See Catechism of the Catholic Church for their footnote references.

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]

## **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<sup>2</sup>]

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 Constitution---defines 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

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<sup>2</sup> ibid

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 one's life;
- 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, (purposeful 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 also 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 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](http://www.usccb.org)

\* Catholic Charities [www.catholiccharitiesusa.org](http://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org)

\*FAN... Franciscan Action Network [www.franciscanaction.org](http://www.franciscanaction.org)

\*FI... Franciscan International [www.franciscaninternational.org](http://www.franciscaninternational.org)

All Secular Franciscans need to be familiar with these and other organizations —to bring about a more fraternal and evangelical world¶. (Rule, Art 14) Everything



we do is concerned about serving God. Therefore, even the small day to day volunteering, work at a local food pantry, soup kitchen, child care while mom's 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 demands 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 which 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 which 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 which would bring about a more fraternal and evangelical world. (*Build up the world fraternity*)

## Being and Doing

- Read & 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 to 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 Constitution 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

Fourth Revised and Expanded Edition Catholic Social Teaching Our Best Kept  
Secret,  
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](http://www.osjspm.org) This is an excellent —one stopl 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 SFO

Though our Rule does not give a specific and detailed plan of life, it does form a path and shapes our vision of gospel living. As you know from others 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 one's self 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 7-8 give us the necessary preconditions for Gospel living: conversion and worship.

Art 9-19 exhort us to evangelization, sharing the Good News.

We break this down further as 10-14 which gives our manner of life and 15-19 which tells 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 for 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 everyday 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 principle 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 one's self. 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 families 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 strengthens all of society.

Secular Franciscans through their own family 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, #69)

—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)**

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### **Pause for reflection:**

**\*\*Re read 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?**

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Creating worthy conditions of life and the ability to work sharing in creation, redemption and service to the human community, once again requires transformation.

Our fallen nature tends toward the self in all its negative connotations. Overcoming this (chipping away at ) this tendency through prayer, personal discipline, vigilance, frequenting the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist keep 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 & minister: animate & guide (collegial)
- ◇ Holy Spirit, the Comforter

Living justice, peace and protecting the integrity of creation is courageous Gospel living.

**Pause for reflection:**

- 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. It is nothing new using an icon or Western depiction of Jesus, Mary, saints, or an event as a focus of meditation. 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  
Mediate... thoughtfully consider  
Contemplate... oneness with, listening/openness  
Imitate... become what you contemplate

With eyes open one's 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 distraction; rather that 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 II

### Theological Reflection

There are many issues in our time that require careful examination and an authentic Catholic/Franciscan response. The US 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 frequently to incorporate this style of ongoing formation in regard to the questions of our time.

### Theological Reflection

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, i.e.: 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 —recollectl 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 also may 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, 2004

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**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 action?

# St. Francis and His Approach to Divinity

Adapted from CIOFS material By Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO

*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.*

*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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## 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/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 if 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 your prayer and discernment to see if 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 charisma 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, 1st July 1956). <sup>1</sup>

Spirituality is born and strengthened by a continuous personal relationship with God

If you look at the life of St. Francis and even read accounts of the early brothers (also includes St. Clare and her Poor Ladies), it becomes evident that they spent a good amount of time deliberately building relationship with God and one another. Contemplating the goodness of God was not relegated to a few minutes when available, or just on Sunday, but 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 also 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 it to us. No one knows the Father except the Son and he to whom He wants to reveal Him. (Lc 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

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.

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/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, that are distinguishable but never separate and to whom he turns because singularly they transform him, in order 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 by that, more frequent, of **Lord** (364 times), God is the central reality, from whom everything draws origin and toward which 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 the 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 of 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 other orders, Francis did not want to hear himself be 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 most 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 of 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: out of his 15 prayers, 11 are directed to the Father, 2 to Jesus, and 2 praise the Blessed Mother (T. Matura, op. cit).

The Father is at the center of the Trinity, source of every action and to whom everything returns: nothing summarizes this vision better than the final prayer of the Letter to the Whole 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.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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, Printed, 2008, pages 61-73.

## 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 in order 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 that he experienced, when he describes it by means of the figures of the most intimate family relationship -- 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 or 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 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 for Francis becomes 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 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 & 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 does 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 likeness<sup>3</sup> and that our fundamental nature is created to love and be loved. All are called to love everything and everyone completely, also 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 by 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.

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

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 (...) <sup>4</sup>.”

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!*

*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 2Cor 8, 9<sup>5</sup>, 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 to understand and respond

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon, celebration of penance, youth in preparation XXII GMG, Rome, on March 29 2007

<sup>5</sup> “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.”

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 any and everything that might come between himself 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 typically Franciscan characteristic 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 primer, 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 contained 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. This over the centuries became the primary theology of the Church.

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.<sup>6</sup> 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 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.

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<sup>6</sup> G. Iammarrone, Franciscan Spirituality, page 50

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 just family and friends or maybe God, we are called to be love, and to live so that love shines in the darkness.

This is the insight that 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.

The first article of our Rule<sup>7</sup> 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?

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<sup>7</sup> Rule of 1978 approved by Pope Paul VI

**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 within 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?

# Understanding Franciscan Theology Tradition and Spirituality

Robert L. Fitzsimmons, OFS



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## Part 1 – Understanding Franciscan Theology, Tradition & Spirituality

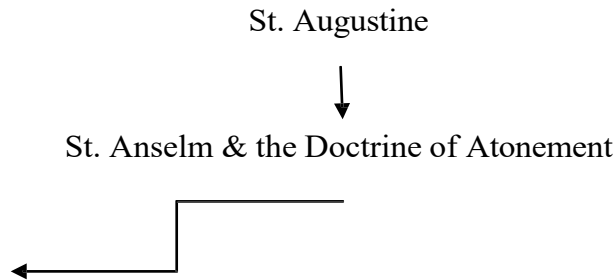
In order to better understand the different focus of the two main theologies in the Catholic Church, we need to understand or at least revisit the primary theology that is taught and is the basis for our religious education programs.

The following diagram, though much simplified, can aid in setting us on our basic path to understanding. We will look at the Two (2) 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 in the insights and writings of both St. Augustine and St. Anselm. So to help us understand the different focus that has become the foundations of the basic spiritualities accepted in the Church, we need to look at these 2 major schools of thought, The “Dominican” School and the “Franciscan” School.

Lets begin with the chart on the next page 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 & 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

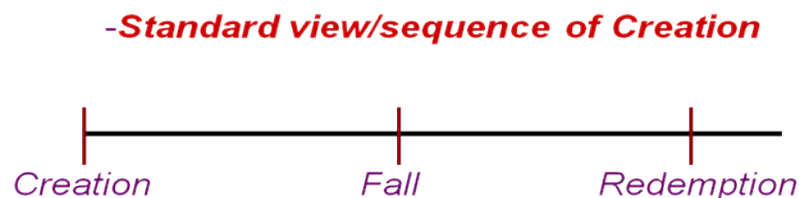
- Though much of St Augustine's writing is based on seeing God as love, he still had an emphasis on the fall of man characterized by Original Sin – this foundation places our focus on the sin of Adam and Eve (pride, disobedience, possibly trying to take by force (fruit of the forbidden tree), that which cannot be taken or earned, but which can only be given). None the less, 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, and might have a view of creation as depicted below. (Again remember this is much simplified to emphasize the basic foundational difference in approach to God. There is much in the various theologies that overlap in many areas and all are directed to the same goal of unity with God)



*-But what if Scripture describes an  
Alternative view of events*

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**Figure 1 - basic view of creation**

This brief diagram is to highlight 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, follow 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 as the diagram suggests, 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 for the Franciscan School and its understanding of God’s plan for creation.

## Comparison of Schools of Theology

<p>The Western or Latin Fathers</p> <p><i>Saint Augustine</i>  <i>Saint Anselm of Canterbury</i>  <i>“Cur Deus Homo”</i>  <i>Doctrine of Salvation</i></p> <p><b>The Dominican School</b>  <b>Thomas Aquinas</b></p> <p>Jesus comes (Incarnation) as  atonement and expiation for sin</p> <p>without sin – Incarnation was unnecessary</p> <p>redemption and salvation centered</p> <p>atoning for personal sins</p> <p>This path became the  Primary theology of the Church</p> <p>Pope Leo XIII (OFS) – <i>“Aeterni Patris”</i> 1879  More judicially based  on rules &amp; 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  The penitential movement in the Church</p> <p><b>The Franciscan School</b>  <b>Bonaventure of Bagnoriglio</b>  <b>John Duns Scotus</b></p> <p>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>redemption and salvation  are the result of God’s love</p> <p>conforming oneself to Jesus  in radical sonship</p> <p>This path toward humility &amp; poverty  remains as an alternate &amp; 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 be initiated by sin. This insight stimulates a new understanding and hopefully an appreciation of the fullness of God's love for creation.

Pseudo-Dionysius & 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 that 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 that the whole universe reflected the glory of God. It was a great educational machine, meant for the instruction of humanity.

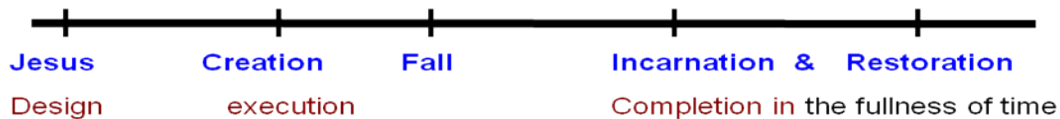
For Grosseteste, Christ's incarnation was not a last-minute rescue plan devised to rescue fallen humanity. It was part of the plan from the beginning. Christ, God incarnated in man, had always been meant to be the capstone of creation. This teaching resonated with the Franciscans at Oxford, where Robert 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 the 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 & have their goal/fullness in Him - Colossians 1:15-18**

**Figure 3 - Franciscan sequence of Creation**

Now with the possibility of a new 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 forefront 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 a pure gift and to live life reflecting that love, (yes it is a sacramental vision of life).

God desires us, to be in a deeply loving relationship with us and constantly invites us and offers us opportunities to enter into 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 pause and review the foundations of Franciscan life and spirituality.

## Two Key beliefs as foundation of Franciscan Life & 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 & humility is 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 2 statements say to you about the nature of our God, and what challenges do they ask of you?

## St. Bonaventure

**Bonaventure** ([Italian](#): *San Bonaventura*; 1221<sup>[1]</sup> – 15 July 1274), born **John of Fidenza** ([Italian](#): *Giovanni di Fidenza*), 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.

These are some of the key highpoints from the works of Bonaventure to reflect on:

- **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 (kenosis), self-emptying is an essential aspect 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 (e.g. 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 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.

Bonaventure in his writings 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 parts of 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 the 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.
- Lastly, **similitude** is the goal of Franciscan spirituality (St. Clare's gift), where we are, like Francis, not to just 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 the 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, O.F.M.** (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.

In John’s writing, though not as well organized as the “Summa” of Thomas Aquinas, the Franciscan School moved 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 the desire of God 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 his 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 we still do today, (we Franciscans so often start here too), but at a beginning based on a total and completely free expression of God's love and otherness. Sure 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 for 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 in order 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 after thought or reaction to any event, but the cornerstone of the whole plan of creation
- Everything that was, is & ever will be is based in Christ
- The relationship between divinity & humanity  
God & humanity are intrinsically united and all creation is centered in Jesus
- **Creation is based on God's absolute freedom and love, e.g God's very nature, and not 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 because we simply "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 & 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, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, and 3<sup>rd</sup> 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 instead of 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 “creature-li-ness” 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.

## Summary & Conclusions: Franciscan Spirituality in 7 Steps

The summary, compliments of Friar Joe Schwab OFM: director of the  
Franciscan Renewal Center “The Casa” in Scottsdale, AZ

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. The 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 of St. Francis first, 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 has freely chosen 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 unbelievable 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 choose 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)

Clare in her instructions to her sisters, 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 that God could not be found apart from world.

In fact God was connected to and his presence permeated all of creation, hence true spirituality required an immersion into and embracing of nature. God himself became human, took on a human body with all its trappings and because of 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 the other 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 up to us the doors to transformation.

- Jesus reveals the totality/completeness of God's Love and the heights we are called to aspire to.
- 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 the armed with that knowledge and understanding to embrace poverty and humility.



## Poverty & 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 with us and 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) in order 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 where it is 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 will we allow ourselves to be the beloved?
- Humility is our ability to allow ourselves to be vulnerable in order 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 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 that 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.

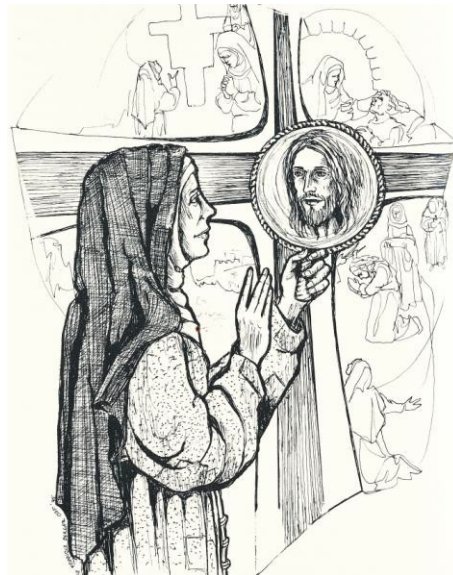
She emphasizes our uniqueness and lovability, pointing out there is nothing in our power that can put us beyond God's love and hopes for us. Our dignity (John Scotus would later define this as our "thisness") comes from just being. We are individually unique and chosen by God as His beloved.

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 mirror, because for Clare the tool to transformation is called the mirror of Eternity – it is the cross of Christ. Now put morbid aside and repeat the same exercise about 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 you could begin to see your own face there. Then you 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 is 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 for 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>Lectio Divina Components of this monastic prayer Reading Sacred Scripture</p>	<p>Clare's Mirror of Perfection Franciscan form of Lectio Divina</p>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Read (lectio) a Scripture passage – read silently &amp; out loud, - savor the words, take your time it's not speed reading, linger on the text, taste and see</li> <li>2. Meditate (meditation) on the text – place yourself into the story, become one of the participants, enter into the experience.</li> <li>3. Pray (oratio) – allow the text/story move you into prayer, praise, thanksgiving, supplication.</li> <li>4. Contemplate (contemplatio) – 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 <b>escape from the world.</b></li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gaze upon Him -- gaze at the cross of Christ and visually embrace the love you see there.</li> <li>2. Consider Him – think of all the things Jesus has done for me. How do I participate in His life, loving, forgiving, healing others?</li> <li>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 I can be emptied of self and filled with God.</li> <li>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 into the world because God is there, and all creation is good.</li> </ol> <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 <b>“of the heart”</b> 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 emptied 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 none the less. This is the foundation of Francis' desire to also 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 three photos in the visual meditation were  
taken by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS at  
Our Lady of Peace Retreat Center in Beaverton, OR  
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 & 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 & action.**

**Leads us to see God in all creation & invites our participation**



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# PROFESSION and the Secular Franciscan

*Theological and Liturgical Foundations*

Fr. Richard Trezza, O.F.M.

*Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life  
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,  
which is 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, the 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 personally was 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 of the fact 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 just doesn't happen. It is prepared for and is joyfully anticipated. It is specific so that 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 that 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 that 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 Mc Brien would say that grace “is essentially God’s self-communication to us and, secondarily, the effect(s) of that self-communication.”<sup>1</sup> The Church officially teaches that grace is the “... free and underserved gift that 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.”<sup>2</sup>

God does not allow us to make promises that 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 which 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 can not do this by our own strength. It cannot happen without God’s grace.

At Profession, one is 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 that they be transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> McBrien, Richard; *Catholicism*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1994, page 180

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Catholic Conference, 1997, sections 1996 and 2000; cf. 654



## 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.

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 like to 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. Well, Profession is an event which takes place in *kairos* time. Although it takes place at a specific *time* (Saturday at 10AM, for example) it is an event which takes place in the *history-time* of the Church as part of God’s saving plan *in time* for us.

When 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 which 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 very 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 which 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 already states that this fraternity is a “privileged place.”<sup>4</sup> It is the whole fraternity assembled and in union with the Spirit celebrating the mystery of salvation revealed and communicated to us in Christ. (Cangelosi) In addition to its 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.*”<sup>5</sup> 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 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 now may 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

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<sup>3</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 5; 3:31

<sup>4</sup> Rule of the OFS; Chapter III #22

<sup>5</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 24.

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 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 to 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) <sup>6</sup> The Ritual also mentions “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.” <sup>7</sup>

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 the Rite will take place within a Mass. My contention being 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 2 weeks before the ceremony, but perhaps 2 months! So what is the priest called to be and to do during the rite of Profession?

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<sup>6</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet, The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 6; 3:35

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*; page 5; 3:31

a) 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 are 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 insure the beginning of the process of sanctification now that a permanent commitment has been made.

b) 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.

c) 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 conforms 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 made mention of 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 that they may be 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 *epicletic* 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 think that 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 why 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 me 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 to 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 better understand this status. 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, but 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 as saying, “*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)

In an earlier place, I mentioned that there questions asked of the candidates so that the Church was assured that the candidates knew what they were 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?*”<sup>8</sup>

## 9) Witnesses and Instruments of the Church's Mission

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 that 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 Church ... the “house” of the Church – not the structure, but the heart – the relationships which make up the fabric of the Church. Profession gives 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 astounding 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 2 choices. Seek and cooperate with those graces, or continue living your life for yourself and squander those graces.

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<sup>8</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet, The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 22

These are the things that should make a Secular Franciscans think twice before absenting themselves from Fraternity gatherings, Regional events, not accepting nominations for various offices, etc. Lest we think that 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 that 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 lead wherever the Lord wishes to take us for whatever reasons He may have. The Professed person becomes God's own property so that s/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 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 the congregation at the Profession rite witness. As we have seen previously, Profession also contains **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 you 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 which Profession demands and make sure that those in formation receive the where-with-all 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 mean actually?



Do we constantly have to go through life asking ourselves the question, “What would Francis do?” Do we need to approximate 13<sup>th</sup> 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 Francis’s, 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 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’s 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 which 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 it to affect our sisters and brothers?

Francis’s 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 speaks in these terms also. 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 Franciscan 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 that Francis desired to go about his relationship to God, then anyone professing the Franciscan life hold the same sentiment. In another section, the Rule also reinforces the fact that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Light – 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, s/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 prerequisites 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 that 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 which 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 everyday changing of habits and attitudes which 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, (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 which 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” to that secularity. Cangelosi make 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 to Reflect upon

- 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 insure that all of 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 insure that everyone appreciated and knew 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 that 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* which 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 you will attend as a professed Franciscan?

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 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 still 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 way? (radical = from the roots)

16) Secularity

- How do you theologize about the world?
- How does one come to salvation through the world?

# Penitence and Conversion

# Spirituality of Conversion

## Ron Pihokker, SFO



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## **Penitence – Conversion**

### **Spirituality of Conversion**

Conversion is the particular character of Secular Franciscan spirituality—it is the signature concept which 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 of conversion, 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 Christian spirituality is the understanding of 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 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 to grasp his conversion story concretely. The biography helps to 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 the understanding of 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 for not only a personal but also 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 which provides a useful pattern for understanding conversion and supporting the experience, and it also reflects the formation process we employ to prepare candidates for entry into the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS).

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 the hearing of 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 Fraternity 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 forty-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 forty 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 scrutiny rites 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 a new appreciation as a season of ongoing conversion for the entire Christian community.

At the conclusion of the forty 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 fifty 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 understandings 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 conversions. 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 to acquire the intellectual, moral and religious values which 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 shrouded 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 in 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 only celebrated 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 that 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. These 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 the carrying of 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 upon 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 one of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly grace, watered with showers of gifts and he 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 which 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 which 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 then 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 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).

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