

*Keeping Our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi:
An Ongoing Formation Resource
for Secular Franciscans*

by Father John C. Sullivan, O.F.M., 2022 revision

Revised and Edited by Thérèse and Deacon Dave Ream, O.F.S.



Laudato Si' – “Be Praised, My Lord!”
a wood burning created by Fr. John Sullivan, O.F.M., 2015

About the Author, Father John C. Sullivan, O.F.M.



Fr. John Sullivan, O.F.M., described as a “gentle, joyful, humble man, filled with love and wisdom” by Jan Parker, O.F.S., then National Minister of the Secular Franciscans, died on November 7, 2016. What follows is a tribute to Father John as adapted from the November 15, 2016 issue of Sacred Heart OFM Province’s weekly newsletter *Around the Province* (used with permission of the editor).

John Charles Sullivan was born on the Feast of St. Louis – August 25, 1932. As the third child in a family of four siblings, he grew up in a loving, caring and sacrificing Catholic family in south Saint Louis.

While in 8th grade at St. Anthony’s, the mystery of grace of his religious and priestly vocation began that led to his attending St. Joseph Seminary in Westmont, IL. John entered novitiate in Teutopolis, IL, on July 4, 1952, receiving the name Liborius. He professed Solemn Vows in 1956 and was ordained a friar-priest in 1959.

Over the years, Fr. John taught at Padua Franciscan High School in Cleveland, OH. He served as a pastor and spiritual formation leader in Missouri, Indiana and Illinois. He was director of spiritual formation at Our Lady of Angels Seminary in Quincy, IL from 1976-1979. Fr. John was elected to the Provincial Council of the Sacred Heart Province in 1984 and served in that capacity for three years. In 1987, he was elected Vicar Provincial for six years. Fr. John served as the Provincial Spiritual Assistant for the Secular Franciscan Order (O.F.S.) for over fifteen years. At the time of his death, he was also serving as Regional Spiritual Assistant to Franciscans of the Prairie Regional Secular Franciscan Fraternity and as a local Spiritual Assistant.

Friars, Sisters, Secular Franciscans and friends gathered with Father John’s family at St. Anthony of Padua Parish in St. Louis, MO, on Friday, November 11, to celebrate his long life of love and service to the Lord. Provincial Minister, Father Bill Spencer, O.F.M. presided at the liturgy and Father Robert Karris, O.F.M. preached the homily. Fr. John was laid to rest alongside his Franciscan brothers at Ss. Peter and Paul Cemetery in Saint Louis. In the words of Father Robert, “Praise be to our God who in Christ Jesus has conquered sin and death, especially today for Fr. John Sullivan, O.F.M., our brother. Amen. Alleluia!”

**“Well done, my good and faithful servant...
Come, share your master’s joy.”**

(Matthew 25:23)

EDITORS' PREFACE TO Father John Sullivan, O.F.M.'s SERIES of Formation Topics:

Keeping our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi

May the Lord give you peace!

Like many Secular Franciscans, we consider ourselves to be extraordinarily blessed to have known and worked with Father John Sullivan, O.F.M. over the course of many years. Whether he was directing a retreat or day of reflection, teaching a formation session, conducting the Pastoral Visitation of a fraternity, serving as the Ecclesial Witness at an election, participating in a Fraternity Council meeting, celebrating Holy Mass or administering the Sacrament of Reconciliation, Father John was perceived as a consummate servant of the Gospel, a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ after the manner of Saint Francis of Assisi. To know John was also to know Jesus and Francis.

Fr. John was extremely knowledgeable of the formation process as exemplified by the numerous formation materials which he authored. His teachings went way beyond the printed or spoken word because he taught the true meaning of a Franciscan life by his quiet and gentle way of being a joyful Franciscan priest and formation guide. He was aptly and affectionately described as “a national treasure” by the late Deacon Tom Bello, O.F.S., former National Minister of the O.F.S. in the U.S.A.

We entered into dialogue with Father Ed McKenzie, O.F.M., Father John's immediate successor as Provincial Spiritual Assistant for Sacred Heart OFM Province, in September 2017. We inquired about revising Father John's *Sharing the Good News: Keeping Our Focus on Francis* course first published in 2002. In May 2019 we started working on the paper copy of Father John's course. Then in August 2019 Father Ed graciously shared Father John's formation-related files with us in electronic format.

The extensive editing and revision process which began in May 2019 saw a happy completion in December 2021. We have attempted to preserve as faithfully as possible the spirit and tone of the author while providing what we felt were appropriate updates and revisions to the original text. As detailed in the **Documentation** section of this Preface, we made certain that the necessary copyright permissions were obtained and we made a deliberate choice to feature paintings and images throughout the text that are not usually portrayed in Franciscan formation materials.

We gratefully acknowledge our Franciscan sister Lynn B. Carter, O.F.S. for her careful and thorough proofreading which included many helpful observations and suggestions for refinement of the revised text.

It is to Father John that we lovingly and respectfully dedicate this revision of his *Sharing the Good News: Keeping Our Focus on Francis* now titled *Keeping Our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi*. Our intention is to help preserve his formation legacy and make his insights and teaching readily available to his brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Thérèse A. Ream, O.F.S. Deacon David D. Ream, O.F.S.

Thérèse and Deacon Dave Ream, O.F.S.

December 25, 2021 – the 798th anniversary of the Christmas at Greccio when in 1223, as an expression of his devotion to the Incarnation and Nativity of the Word-Made-Flesh in Christ Jesus, St. Francis of Assisi gave the world the gift of the Christmas crèche

AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THIS SERIES of Formation Topics:

Keeping our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi

by Fr. John C. Sullivan, O.F.M.

The reasons for this series of review topics for O.F.S. ongoing formation stem from the fact that we as Franciscans profess to follow and try to absorb the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi. How can we do this if we do not have frequent reminders of what St. Francis stood for and what he did?

In his first biography of St. Francis, Friar Thomas of Celano writes: “. . . overflowing with burning charity, he [Francis] set out on the way of full perfection, reached out for the peak of perfect holiness, and saw the goal of all perfection. That is why every order, sex, and age finds in him a clear pattern of the teaching of salvation and an outstanding example of holy deeds.”¹

Article #12 of the *O.F.S. General Constitutions* states: “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.”


And even more pointedly do we find the reminder in Article #40.2: “The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions.” The same is true for the Professed.

It is my hope that those who study these topics will find “inspiration from the example and writings of St. Francis” and a deeper knowledge of Franciscan spirituality.

In the monthly Fraternity gathering/meeting, we are called to have ongoing formation (see Article #44 of the *General Constitutions*). This present material has been developed as one way to answer this need. Our formation needs to reflect both on our O.F.S. *Rule* with our *General Constitutions*, and on aspects of St. Francis that can encourage us in our developing spiritualities. Hopefully, we can review events in Francis’ life and find them not only inspiring and worthy of our admiration, but will then lead to imitation in some way in our own personal lives. Francis’ life is always an encouragement, filled with amazement, of what can be done by cooperating with the grace of God as St. Francis did.

These topics are designed primarily to be used in small group fraternity sharing sessions; however, they could also be used profitably by those who are homebound or otherwise unable to gather to share their Franciscan faith and vision with others. And not all questions need to be addressed, depending on time available.

Peace and all that is Good,


Fr. John Sullivan, OFM Provincial Spiritual Assistant
Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart, St. Louis, MO

August 2, 2002 – Feast of Our Lady of the Angels
of the Portiuncula

¹ Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, *The Life of Saint Francis, The Second Book*, 1228-1229, Vol. 1, p. 260, Chapter 1, v. 90

Topics for *Keeping our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi* by Fr. John Sullivan, O.F.M.

Topic 1 – ST. FRANCIS’ THREE LOVES – THE CRIB

Topic 2 – ST. FRANCIS’ THREE LOVES – THE CROSS

Topic 3 – ST. FRANCIS’ THREE LOVES – THE EUCHARIST

Topic 4 – FRANCISCAN SPIRITUALITY

Topic 5 – GOD IS EVERYTHING – “MY GOD AND MY ALL”

Topic 6 – ALL CREATION IN CHRIST

Topic 7 – ST. FRANCIS AND SACRED SCRIPTURE

Topic 8 – PRAYER LIFE WITH ST. FRANCIS

Topic 9 – MARY – OUR MOTHER

Topic 10 – DAILY CONVERSION TO CHRIST

Topic 11 – THE VIRTUES – THE WAY OF HOLINESS

Topic 12 – PERFECT JOY

Topic 13 – SISTER HUMILITY OF CHRIST

Topic 14 – REVERENCE FOR THE CHURCH

Topic 15 – THE TAU

Topic 16 – PEACE IN CHRIST

Topic 17 – ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

Topic 18 – THE SERAPHIC VISION ON LA VERNA

Topic 19 – THE STIGMATA

Topic 20 – SISTER SICKNESS AND DEATH

Topic 21 – OUR O.F.S. ROOTS

Topic 22 – FRATERNITY FOR FRANCISCANS

Topic 23 – SECULAR FRANCISCAN POVERTY

Topic 24 – EVANGELIZERS IN CHRIST

Note: There is no particular sequence arrangement that needs to be followed when covering these topics. Each topic is a stand-alone resource.

RECOMMENDED PROCEDURE FOR USING:

Keeping our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi

A month before a particular topic sheet is to be used in an ongoing formation session of the fraternity, enough copies are printed or distributed electronically so that each person receives one. Then at the meeting/gathering the month before its intended use, the topic sheet is made available. Remember that the topics may be addressed in any order and need not be used sequentially.

The O.F.S. members are then asked to prepare for next month's ongoing formation session by reading through this new material and prayerfully reflecting on the topic and questions during the coming month, and to bring the topic paper with them to the next meeting/gathering.

In this way, the O.F.S. members will be prepared for the coming month's sharing time at the meeting/gathering, as well as benefit from thinking about this aspect of their Franciscan calling at different times during the month.

- Fr. John Sullivan, O.F.M.

Notes: The article references for the *Rule* as a number and then a letter, e.g., Article #4a, means the first paragraph of Article #4 since there are 3 paragraphs for this particular article.

When references are made to St. Bonaventure throughout the topics, this is Bonaventure of Bagnoregio.

Throughout the topics, when material is included in [brackets and reduced font size], the author (or the editors) have added clarifying information to the text.

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Documentation for *Keeping our Focus on St. Francis of Assisi*

Abbreviations and Websites:

Bible – *New American Bible, revised edition*

Catechism – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

(Both of these resources can be accessed at <https://www.usccb.org>)

General Constitutions – *General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order*

National Statutes – *National Statutes of the Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S.A.*

Ritual – *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*

O.F.S. Rule – *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*

(These four resources can be found at <https://secularfranciscansusa.org>)

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