

Lady Poverty Region Ongoing Formation

Live the Treasure! Celebrating 40 Years of Our Rule!

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 Saint 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.

*..., (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" January 6, 1921

The Third Order was born in the mind of your Seraphic Father the day that a group of souls, moved and urged on by his words, asked him to be allowed to accompany him on the path he was traveling, following in the footsteps of Christ, in Whose name he was constantly repeating the words "Be ye perfect " (Matt. 5, 48). But since it was not possible for everyone to follow the Gospel counsels, Francis remembered that all, as long as they wished it, could tend to the perfection of their own state of life and reach it without embracing the state of perfection. By denying themselves, all could be docile instruments in the hands of Christ: prompt to answer His every desire, His every suggestion. And that complete and continual clinging to the will of God, that affectionate yet strong dedication to Him and to His wishes, that fullness and perfection of life in the light of the Gospel, can belong to all Christians, and in fact has been the treasure of so many in every age. The Third Order of St. Francis was born to satisfy this thirst for heroism among those who though having to remain in the world did not wish to be of the world. The Third Order, then, seeks souls who long for Perfection in their own state.

~ Pius XII, Allocution to Tertiaries July 1, 1956

Our Franciscanism is not just a private affair nor merely a personal road to sanctity. It is more than one's belonging to an organization that assures spiritual benefits in an easily obtainable way. Rather, our Franciscan way of life is a precious gift and an involving mission. By committing ourselves to the gospel of Jesus through observing the OFS rule of life, we become a living sacrifice of praise and thanks, and a vibrant witness of the Good News for all to see and hear.

~ Benet A. Fonk, OFM, *Called to Proclaim Christ: Short Reflections on the SFO Rule*

Questions for meditation and discussion

- In what ways is your local fraternity a "spiritual family"?
- As a member of the Secular Franciscan Order, what are some of the blessings you experience by belonging to a fraternity?
- The Secular Franciscan order is "one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church." What are some of the things that differentiates us from the other spiritual families?
- What are some ways "to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi"?

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Article 2

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 Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.

Article 3

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.

The Secular Franciscan Order is truly secular, for it has a specialized style of evangelization: to transform the world from within with the life and teachings of Jesus, and to do so by means of change of heart, worship, simple things, community, service, justice, peace, ecology, and Christian attitudes toward work. For Secular Franciscans the workaday world is the arena of salvation and the altar for the consecration of creation. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Called to Proclaim Christ

But by reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the Kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will. They live in the world, that is, they are engaged in each and every work and business of the earth and in the ordinary circumstances of social and family life which, as it were, constitute their very existence. There they are called by God that, being led by the spirit to the Gospel, they may contribute to the sanctification of the world, as from within like leaven, by fulfilling their own particular duties. Thus, especially by the witness of their life, resplendent in faith, hope and charity they must manifest Christ to others. ~ Lumen Gentium, 31

Questions for meditation and discussion

- Article 2 states: "In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state." What does "strive for perfect charity" mean to you personally?
- What are some ways our fraternity and our order as a whole help us to strive for perfect charity?
- What does it mean "From Gospel to life and Life to the Gospel"?

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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.

Every Secular Franciscan should become "Francis all over again" in this respect, contemplating and living the humanness of Christ, the man, and his words. This lived experience of Christ within us is shown in what we do, what we say, what we are, and, therefore, in what we believe. In a word, it is that full-circle cycle from "reading" the gospel with all our being, to living it with all our potential, for Jesus, our "Way" is vividly portrayed on every page of the gospel. If in the ordinary things of life we are motivated to purposeful action by visualizing our goals, by developing a burning desire to attain them and having confidence that we will, then encountering Jesus in the gospel as our model, as our source of energy and as the pledge of our hope, makes a truly gospel-oriented life possible. We live as he did, we take on his mission. We share his Good News with others. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Called to Follow Christ

Francis' highest intention, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe the holy 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." He would recall Christ's words through persistent meditation and bring to mind His deeds through the most penetrating consideration. The humility of the Incarnation and the charity of the Passion occupied his memory particularly, to the extent that he wanted to think of hardly anything else. ~ Thomas of Celano, First Life of St. Francis

Questions for meditation and discussion

- Can you give an example from your life of going from gospel to life and from life to gospel? How can we help our brothers and sisters in this effort?
- The world we live in is very different than the world Francis lived in. It can be a real challenge for us to "recall Christ's words through persistent meditation," given everything that is happening around us all of the time. What ways have you found to make this practice possible?
- Do you think it's correct to say that the first paragraph of this article contains a complete summary of the entire rule? Why or why not?

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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.

Let us not lose sight of Jesus, who leads us in our faith and brings it to perfection: for the sake of the joy which was still in the future he endured the cross, disregarding the shameful of it, and from now on has taken his place at the right of Gods throne. Think of the way he stood such opposition from sinners and then you will not give up for want of courage. ~ Hebrews 12:2-3

The Lord gives us the grace to fulfill any task he puts before us. If he has called us to be Franciscans for the Church and the world by observing the gospel, we are certain that he provides the means to accomplish this vocation. One of the primary ways that his grace is manifested to us is through his own presence which is always present in various forms for us to encounter and respond to. Through such interaction with the living and active person of Christ, our relationship with him becomes more intense, our commitment to the gospel is deepened, and our three-fold task of change of heart, community-building, and evangelization become more firmly our way of life.~ Benet A. Fonck OFM, Called to Proclaim Christ

In the Secular Franciscan quest nothing is more important than to seek out the presence of our Lord Jesus. This presence is very real; it guides and sustains us on our journey to the Kingdom. More than that, it can make us know that the Kingdom is here and now; that, since we entered upon eternal life at the moment of our conception, nothing can destroy that life and our full participation in the Kingdom is veiled only by the facts and circumstances of the daily lives We lead in our secular milieu.

It is indeed in this world about us that we must, then, seek his presence – it is simply the environment, the setting, where we meet with our brothers and sisters, where we seek to live the Gospel life, where we join together to make his Church, where we gather for liturgical activity and its culmination in the Eucharist.

Enthusiasm for these encounters is engendered by the sense of the living Christ among us. Can we fully explain this sense of presence of the Lord? No, not more than could the Fathers of the Church who declared it a holy mystery. But we can live it and be nurtured by it and that is why our Franciscan Rule calls us to seek out Christ's presence – and to seek it wherever we live. We are most fortunate in having the whole world before us and for us. "Secular Franciscans" is a good and honorable name for us. ~ Adelaide N. Sabath, OFS, "To Encounter Christ", Called to Make Present the Charism

Questions for meditation and discussion

1. Article 5 outlines five places where Franciscans are to encounter Christ on an ongoing basis. Is there one that you feel particularly drawn to? Is there one that you find difficult? Why?
2. How does your Franciscan calling help you to encounter Christ? How does your fraternity help?
3. Consider a time when the living and active person of Christ was especially present to you in:
 - Your brothers and sisters
 - Sacred Scripture
 - The Church
 - Liturgical activity
 - The Eucharistic

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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.

Food for thought

Francis thought that the faith of the holy Roman Church was by all means to be preserved, honored and imitated, that faith in which alone is found the salvation of all who are to be saved. He revered priests and he had a great affection for every ecclesiastical order. ~ Thomas of Celano, The First Life of St. Francis, 62

There is no authentic Secular Franciscan ministry without union with the Church in obedience and cooperation. To live the gospel means to know the Lord, seek out his presence, and share his life and mission. To fulfill this three-fold goal, the Church is essential, for she reveals the person of Christ, his presence, and his plan of redemption. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Called to Proclaim Christ

One's profession in the Secular Franciscan Order is a special way of intensifying the effect of baptism. Entering a secular or religious order is not another sacrament, like ordination or marriage, precisely because its intent and result is identical to baptism, but on a deeper level. For example, a person may play a simple melody on the piano all by itself; that same melody is played again with harmonics and chords to give it an even greater richness, depth, and fulfillment. So, profession directs, intensifies, and deepens the "melody" of Christian life first played at baptism.

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Motivated by the power of the gospel, Secular Franciscans are called to unfold the living Christ and bring his message to all people regardless of age, race, creed, economic status, or the like. Especially worthy of consideration are the displaced persons and the unchurched and others in situations which make it difficult for them to appreciate what the Church is trying to do to reveal the presence of Christ and safeguard their God-given rights and dignity. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Editor, Called to Follow Christ

Questions for meditation and discussion

- How does living your life as a Secular Franciscan help you to bear witness to others?
- When you hear or read that Secular Franciscans are expected to share Christ's mission in the Church, what is your response?
- From the crucifix in the poor church of San Damiano, Francis heard the words of Christ: "Rebuild my Church." In what ways might you, as a follower of Francis, be called to rebuild the Church today?

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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.

Food for thought

Often, without moving his lips, St. Francis would meditate for a long time and, concentrating, centering his external powers, he would rise in spirit to heaven. Thus, he directed his whole mind and affections to the one thing he was asking of God. He was not then so much a man who prayed, as a man who had become a living prayer. ~ Celano, Second Life, 95

St. Francis set his eyes on the example of Christ in his practice of prayer, and he urged his followers to do the same. From the time St. Francis discovered God as his Father, he developed a heart-to-heart contract with God whom he came to know in prayer. His constant life of prayer is the best explanation of the spiritual success of his life. ~ Philip Marquard OFM, Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel

Prayer was so keenly important because it was for Francis the most basic experience and expression of faith. In like manner, prayer as an essential element of our Franciscan way of life puts us in intimate communication with God, puts us in touch with our own identity, and gives us the energy, strength, and determination to live the gospel life more effectively.

Article Eight of the rule directs all Secular Franciscans to stress the primacy of worship in their lives – the interior prayer of contemplation as well as the exterior liturgical prayer of the Church. The article also urges Secular Franciscans to have an active participation in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist, and in the Liturgy of the Hours. When this article is lived fully, each Secular Franciscan will be a true worshipper, always involved with Christ and conscious of his presence in oneself and in others.

~ Adelaide N. Sabath OFS, Called to Follow Christ

Questions for meditation and discussion

- How has being a Secular Franciscan changed your prayer life?
- What can we do to infuse every aspect of our lives, our work, our recreation, our in-between times, with prayer (to “become a living prayer”)?

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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.

Food for thought

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. The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most holy virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community. Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.

~ General Constitution of the Secular Franciscan Order, Article 16.1,2

His assiduous meditation urged him to give her an astonishing title; he would recall how Mary lived on alms for many periods of her life, so he named her the "little poor one," the "Poverella." If we remember the real conditions of her life, her frequent traveling and moving, we will realize to what extent her life was poor, itinerant, suffering. Though queen in the eyes of God, she was the Wife of a humble carpenter and lived in a remote and despised village. By this example she teaches us to put our values not in a place or in a function, but in inner dispositions. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Called to Follow Christ

Toward the Mother of Jesus he was filled with an inexpressible love, because it was she who made the Lord of majesty our brother. He sang special Praises to her, poured out prayers to her, offered her his affections, so many and so great that the tongue of man cannot recount them. But what delights us most, he made her the advocate of the order and placed under her wings the sons he was about to leave that she might cherish them and protect them to the end. Hail, advocate of the poor! Fulfill toward us your office of protectress until the time set by the Father. ~ The Second Life of St. Francis by Bl. Thomas of Celano, 198

The rule asks Secular Franciscans to express ardent love for Mary by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently. Self-giving is a real characteristic of Christ, and Mary learned it well. It is a difficult task for anyone of us to achieve, but is something we must daily strive to acquire. This article of the rule indicates how Mary became a self-giving person. "She was the humble servant of the Lord open to his every Word and call." With this openness to grace, we, too, can find it possible to imitate her as the rule requires.

~ Philip Marquard OFM, Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel: Commentary on the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order

Questions for meditation and discussion

- What qualities or attributes of Mary most stir you? How do you imitate those qualities/attributes in your daily routines?
- How do you, such as Mary, welcome the Spirit to create a community of love?
What steps would you need to work on more diligently to help your fraternity be a better community of love?
- How do you nourish your spirit in order to serve others more humbly and express your service more deeply?

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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.

Food for thought

"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. They discover in Him the value of contradictions for the sake of justice and the meaning of the difficulties and the crosses of daily life. With Him they can accept the will of the Father even under the most difficult circumstances and live the Franciscan spirit of peace, rejecting every doctrine contrary to human dignity.

~ General Constitution of the Secular Franciscan Order, Article 10

With Jesus, obedient even to death, they should seek to know and do the will of the Father. They should give thanks to God for the gift of freedom and for the revelation of the law of love. In order to carry out the will of the Father, they should accept the help which is offered to them through the mediation of the Church by those who are constituted as authority in her and by their confreres. They should take on the risk of courageous choices in their life in society with decisiveness and serenity.

~ General Constitution of the Secular Franciscan Order, Article 12

The true evangelical life is countercultural, because we have the power to break through and rise above negative social values to give them a positive meaning and effect. We know too well that the cross, or our sharing in Christ's passion, comes to us every day: personal trials, the load and monotony of daily work, the difficulties of life, the annoyance of certain persons, accidents, sickness, death, sorrow, even misunderstanding, opposition, oppression, loneliness. Hence, part of obedience is to work through these crosses to discover their redemptive quality: the will of God to purify and sanctify us and others, so that the trial of the cross becomes the triumph of the passion, leading toward unity with God and building the kingdom. ~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, Called to Follow Christ

As Franciscans, it is not so important what we offer, but rather the willingness to offer whatever opportunity to serve that God chooses to give us. We are all given a particular station in life which best enables us to fulfill God's will. It is within this context of our individual circumstances that we are asked to faithfully execute our duties. The method by which we are to serve is given to us quite simply in the gospel. If we are to progress "from Gospel to Life," we must heed these Words: "Love one another as I have loved you," (Jn 13:14) Everything we do in the Church, our homes, the market place, the fields and in our communities must exemplify his love.

~ Karol Morton, OFS, Called to Make Present the Charism

Questions for meditation and discussion

- As a fraternity/family, how can we help each other to faithfully fulfill the duties proper to our various circumstances of life?
- In what ways has your Franciscan calling made you "counter-cultural"?