

# What it takes

*to be an OFS Franciscan*



*The time after profession*

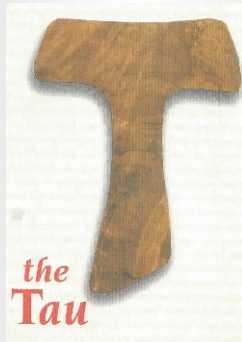
*Lester Bach OFM Cap.  
2013*



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**to be**  
***an OFS Franciscan***

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*Lester Bach OFM Cap*

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2013

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**OFS = Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis**



*i*  
***Preface***

The OFS Constitutions give local councils the duty to give *special attention* to the newly professed.

*2. The fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.*

OFS Constitutions - Article 44.2

*What it Takes* offers ongoing formation for this *special attention*. It provides possible ways to achieve that goal. It assists fraternities both to fulfill Article 44.2 and to offer material for "*special attention*." The text can initiate ongoing formation/education for the newly professed.

"*Special attention*" uses dialogue as a major part of these sessions. All newly professed members need to grow in their awareness of their commitment. Spiritual growth and integration of the OFS Rule in daily life is a necessity.

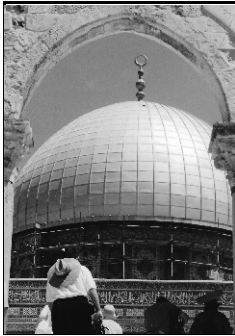
All fraternity members ought to be aware of the need for *ongoing formation* at the regular gatherings. Personal *conversion* is a common denominator in our Franciscan lives. Some of our older ideas and attitudes no longer serve us well in a changing world filled with new ideas and technology. Learning to deal with changing social and religious issues is vital. There is a need for a fresh understanding of Scripture and faith. Personal *conversion* is a common practice for Franciscans.

Profession is NOT the end of formation. It is simply another step in our development as Franciscans. *Initial Formation* is a good start. But things have changed while you were involved in *initial formation*. *Special attention* is needed to encourage continued learning and practicing of the OFS Rule. Dialogue will open the door to a variety of ways to view issues. It opens the door to growth in Franciscan life and our ability to develop into a *community of love*.

*Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the Kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. ...*

OFS Rule #14

*The Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes) offers encouraging words for ongoing formation and action in the world and the Church.*



*We should also have respect and love for those who think differently than we do in social, political, or even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we understand others, the more we can dialogue with them, **seeking understanding**. This is not to say we should accept untruth as truth, or meanness as goodness. But the people whom we believe to be in untruth are dignified nonetheless, and we teach that only God can make judgment in the end. God alone is the searcher of the human heart, and we should not make judgments about the internal guilt of anyone. To the contrary, we are taught by Jesus to love even those we consider our enemies.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraph 28*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 146

These words are easy to read but difficult to follow. They apply to groups of people we may not like. We may disagree with some of their practices and ideas. But Franciscans make serious efforts to maintain a relationship with them. That allows us to dialogue with them and come to a better *understanding* of each other.

E.g. We face issues about immigration. The rule of law does not override the need to welcome the stranger as the Gospel requires. We may find ourselves in disagreement with legal maneuvering that refuses to treat immigrants in a human and humane manner. We respectfully make our disagreement known. We do not 'beat up' on those who think differently. We are respectful even when we disagree.

### iii

Again, this is our Franciscan and Christian response based on the Gospel.

The previous example indicates the response we give to those with whom we may disagree. We listen attentively and respectfully to their explanations of why they support issues we disagree with. Explaining the reasons for our beliefs and listening to their explanations can have an impact on both of us. We do what we can to continue a dialogue that allows relationships to persist.

Whatever happens, we seek relationships that allows dialogue to continue and change to happen. *And when faithful people disagree, and that will certainly be the case, do not presume to speak for God or the Church but try to enlighten one another through honest discussion and charity, always earnest in your search for truth.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraph 43  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 158

*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 divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.*

OFS Rule - Article #19

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*"Francis, don't you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, then, and rebuild it for me."  
Stunned and trembling, he said: "I will do so gladly, Lord."*

*The Legend of the Three Companions*  
Francis of Assisi - The Founder  
Vol 2 -Page 76



*The Christian vision is that the world  
 was created and is sustained by God.  
 It was freed from the slavery of sin by Christ.  
 It is now being re-created and brought to its destiny  
 under the Holy Spirit.  
 We now offer to the world the honest assistance  
 of the Church in fostering human harmony  
 which is our destiny. In this, we follow  
 our teacher, Christ, who came  
 to give witness to truth  
 and to serve and not be served.  
 People today are troubled and perplexed  
 by questions  
 about their lives in the world,  
 about their place in the universe,  
 about the meaning of individual and collective work,  
 and about the purpose and nature of being human.  
 We now wish to enter into dialogue  
 with the whole human family about all this.  
 We will clarify these questions  
 in the light of the Gospel  
 and offer the human race  
 the saving resources of the Church.  
 Our entire subject is humankind,  
 men and women ...*

## Chapter one

**RELATIONSHIP***The heart of the Franciscan spirit*

*Never has the human race enjoyed more wealth, yet a huge number of people are tormented by poverty, illiteracy, and want. Never has there been such human freedom in the world, yet new forms of social and psychological slavery also make their appearance alongside it. Never has the world been so close to the brink of unity and interdependence, yet new and opposing camps threaten this possibility. ... We humans must respond to all of this, indeed we cannot escape doing so.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraph 4*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 128-129

*Thus, the laity are entrusted with the important job of ordering the world's goods so that all people are cared for and no one is overlooked. There is in Christ complete equality regardless of race, nationality, social condition, and gender. It is up to the laypeople to oversee the customs and conditions of the world. Let them order these according to the norms of justice, peace, and the dignity of all!*

*Lumen Gentium - Paragraph 36*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 47

***Rights and Responsibilities***

*The Catholic tradition teaches that human dignity can be protected and a healthy community can be achieved only if human rights are protected and responsibilities are met. Therefore, every person has a fundamental right to life and a right to those things required for human decency. Corresponding to these rights are duties and responsibilities - to one another, to our families, and to the larger society.*

***The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers***

*The economy must serve people, not the other way around. Work is more than a way of making a living; it is a form of continuing participation in God's creation. If the dignity of work is to be protected, then the basic rights of workers must be respected - the right to productive work, to decent and fair wages, to organize and join unions, to private property, and to economic initiative.*

### *Solidarity*

*We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world.*

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 423-424

*If you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first to be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison. Truly, I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.*

Matthew 5:23-26

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

John 15:9-11

We profess to live according to the Gospel and the Church-approved OFS Rule. A tepid response to the OFS Rule gives little vibrancy to fraternal life. Unless we understand the Rule and give an example by the way we live, we fail to embrace our Franciscan profession.

Passionate living of the OFS Rule offers an example of gospel life. We literally go from *life to the Gospel and from the Gospel to life*. This rhythm becomes natural to us. *Conversion* knocks on the door of life each day. Our lives model our understanding of the Rule and gives a visible example to others.

This is a good time to reflect on the OFS Rule and see how it addresses issues that surface in these chapters. What attitudes does the OFS Rule expect us to acquire? After giving an honest answer continue your reflection. Give a response to illustrate how you give life to the Rule's words.



What is your greatest need in order to be faithful to the OFS Rule? What changes are required in your daily life?



*You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one lighting a lamp puts it under a bushel basket, but on the lampstand and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.*

Matthew 5:14-16

It's pretty easy to fail! Political persuasions may stand in the way of our Franciscan goal of maintaining relationships. We can destroy reputations with half-truths or anger, with lying or violence, with rigid opinions or poorly researched data. We may listen only to people who agree with us. No attention is given to daily *conversion*. The OFS Rule is ignored. We resist change and may even claim that stubborn rigidity or shallow thinking is the truth.

Some Franciscans feel that expecting us to experience *conversion* every day is nonsense! We already know all there is to know about religion or politics or social issues or laws or faith or liturgy or whatever! Vatican II is 50 years out-of-date! We pity people who see things differently than we do. For us they are socialists or communists or just plain dumb. Attitudes such as these fail to bring people together in relationships - and we fail in our Franciscan vocation.

According to the Church, the role of Franciscan life is to develop, among the *People of God*, individuals who trust God and not Dow-Jones. People who listen to the Gospel and not just liberal or conservative ideas. We are called by the Holy Spirit to profess this Franciscan way of life. We model Franciscan life by implementing the OFS Rule given us by the Church. Our OFS Rule points out what is expected of us. It is not a call to be liberal or conservative, but to be Franciscan! Our failure to be faithful means we neglect to live the OFS way of life given us by the Church.

Anyone who reads the following quotations from the OFS Rule understands that the Church guides our lives through her approval of the Rule. It is clear: ***Keep relationships alive / Be a community of love!***



*... They have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words (OFS Rule #6) /... 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 (OFS Rule #7). /... so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. (OFS Rule #8). /... they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power (OFS Rule #11). /... Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ (OFS Rule #13).*

Considering ourselves to be right at all times will not get us through life nor give us strength to handle difficulties. Cancer does not succumb to rigid stubbornness. Wars do not end simply because someone lacks a nuclear weapon. Groups find ways to kill without the dragon of nuclear bombs. Power of itself cannot bring real peace because someone is always able to find ways to circumvent another's power. Power did not keep 9/11 from happening.

Neither liberal nor conservative ideas are perfect for creating a world where human dignity is respected by all. Each group contributes "something," but it will take collaboration and dialogue to discover favorable "somethings" that bring people together. If the power of a dictator is greater than those working to remove the dictator, a lot of death happens before things change. Children do not mature simply by growing older. If no one in their circle of life is mature, it is difficult to achieve maturity.

Through its approval of the OFS Rule of life, the Church points out its expectations of the OFS to contribute to the life of the world and the Church. It is foolish to profess this way of life and fail to invest energy to give visible witness to the OFS Rule. E.g. *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 (OFS Rule #19).*

You have made profession to live the OFS Rule. You did not (I hope) put conditions on what you professed. Therefore, the OFS has a legitimate right to invite you to live the entire OFS Rule 24/7 until you meet Sister Death. The Holy Spirit will support and guide you. The Spirit awaits your positive response through a dedicated Franciscan life.

The period of *initial formation* is simply the beginning of a lifetime of learning. Profession does not mean you know everything about Franciscan life. It means you know enough to discern that this is the way of life the Holy Spirit has called you to follow. Everyday living of a Franciscan life will continue to change you. Your patterns of action and re-action will change. Anger and hatred will be dealt with realistically. Understanding and love will find more space in your life. You may still get angry or frustrated; you may still have an inner feeling that you know-it-all. But that will change as your Franciscan life grows and the Holy Spirit continues to transform you. If this is not happening something is missing from your *faithfulness* to profession.

If you are someone who simply believes anything that supports what you already believe, with no personal reflection, then you may be easily sucked into situations that are unbecoming to a Franciscan. E.g. To show intolerance for people with different ideas; to refuse to understand people of other cultures; to use gossip to hurt people's reputations; to accept only one legitimate ministry as good and denigrate all others. If this is your manner of living, you are probably unfaithful to your profession

as a Secular Franciscan.

In short, if there is no change, no *conversion*, no growth in the way you practice love of God, self, and neighbor, something is out of balance in your OFS profession. If you find plenty of ways to criticize but do little to build a better fraternity or family or parish or neighborhood or country, why did you make a profession that *requires personal conversion*? If you are the cause of dissension in a fraternity; if you never listen to opinions other than your own or those who agree with you, how can you hope to grow in understanding other people? If you discard troubled people from your list of friends, how are you different from a religious fundamentalist who castigates those who think or act differently? Being a Franciscan is no little committment! The requirements of profession touch every day of life and each relationship that grows or dies there.

*There is a growing interdependence among people today which is based on the many technological advances that are obvious to everyone. But this interdependence reaches its perfection only in growing human relationships, not merely scientific ones. For God, we believe, desires that all people become one family with love for God and neighbor as the basis. We cannot separate these two; whoever loves God must love neighbor or the love is false. Jesus said as much himself. It is obvious how important this is as we come to rely on each other and grow in unity. ... So we humans, in order to fully discover ourselves, must donate ourselves to one another in love.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraphs 23-24-25  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 141

Maybe we need to repeat our profession each day or week to remind us of what the OFS expects of us.

### ***The Words of Profession***

***I, N.N., by the grace of God, renew my baptismal promises and consecrate myself to the service of his Kingdom. Therefore, in my secular state I promise to live all the days of my life the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the***

***Secular Franciscan Order by observing the rule of life. May the grace of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and our holy father, St. Francis, and the fraternal bonds of community always be my help so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.***

Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order - Pages 23-24

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### ***A few things to discuss***

1. As you read this chapter, what things did you find challenging? What things did you initially reject from your understanding of the Franciscan spirit? Why do you think you are correct and the text is wrong; or vice versa?
2. How would you describe the purpose of dialogue? What is most important about the consequences of good dialogue? What qualities are necessary for dialogue to be effective?
3. How do the issues discussed in this chapter have anything to do with personal relationships? Why is relationship important in our Franciscan life?



4. What impressed you most about the texts of Vatican II and other texts that were quoted in this chapter? Explain.

5. If there is one thing you learned from this chapter, what is it? If more, please share them!

*And who has the right response?*

## Chapter two

**RELATIONSHIPS**  
and Unity

*All these modern developments, coming so rapidly and disorderly, intensify imbalances within the human person. One's intellect, for example, may be thoroughly modern, while one's theory of meaning is more traditional, and no joining of the two seems possible. Or one's concern for practicality and efficiency is in tension with one's moral conscience. Or the demands of collective existence conflict with one's need for personal thought, or even contemplation. Furthermore, the family is in tension with pressure on it from many sides: population control, economic realities, or social demands. Likewise, tensions emerge between nations when some are so wealthy and others so poor. All of this leads to mistrust, division, and hardship, and humans are at once the cause and the victims of it all.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraph 8*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Page 131

*"Love God with all your heart," the Scriptures tell us, "with all your soul, with all your understanding, with all your strength. Love one another as Christ loves you." These commands in Scripture are really an invitation to be holy. By our holy love, we nurture in the world a way of life that is more gentle, more beautiful, more human. Over and over again the Scriptures describe for us what this holiness will resemble - a heart of mercy, humility, meekness, patience, awareness of God's mercy when we have sinned, and a spirit of forgiveness towards others.*

*Lumen Gentium - Paragraph 40*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Page 51-52

*A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.*

OFS Rule - #13

*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 by Christ.*

OFS Rule #17

*Wherever the brothers may be and in whatever place they meet, they should respect spiritually and attentively one another, and honor one another without complaining. Let them be careful not to appear outwardly as sad and gloomy hypocrites but show themselves joyful, cheerful and consistently gracious in the Lord.*

*The Earlier Rule - Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol 1 - Page 69*

*This is the Church's invitation to seekers who want to discover a satisfying answer to their spiritual hungers. Her invitation is rich: to seekers, old and new, and to those who might label themselves as alienated or indifferent, the Church offers Jesus Christ and his love, the fulfillment of hope. The Church offers a way of belonging that teaches truths that free one from sin and its power. The Church initiates members into an intimate relationship with God - indeed, into a participation in the divine life - where one will find genuine joy and fulfillment. This is all possible because of Jesus Christ and his love.*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 7

*By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.*

Galatians 5: 22-26

In the midst of these quotations there is a sense of what it takes to have *unity* within the community. We are guided by the Spirit - which means we spend time getting to know the Holy Spirit and the work of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the OFS Rule wisely invites us to ... *let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do* (OFS Rule #8). We recognize responsibility for the obstacles we face - *humans are at once the cause and the victims of it all.* (cf Page 8 of this book - quote from Gaudium et Spes)

If we are the cause, than our *conversion* can make a difference in the spirit of the world and the Church as our

lives change. It is wise for the OFS Rule to require daily conversion since *human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily!* (OFS Rule #7). Above all, we explore those personal qualities and actions that keep us from unity or separate us from one another. Angry words; aggressive attitudes; rash opinions; stubborn and rigid dogmatism; accusations; refusal to forgive; poor listening; unwillingness to take time to understand the "other;" our need always to be right; seeking security by dominating others with our opinions; ... and many other things hinder the unity the Holy Spirit seeks to implant in our lives. *They should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue ...* (OFS Rule #19)

I firmly believe that if Seculars implement the OFS Rule, if we do not let ourselves be diverted from it by self-styled "experts," and if we embrace the "spirit" (charism) of St. Francis of Assisi, the OFS will gift the Church and the world with qualities the Church requires of us. We may not accomplish everything the Church is commissioned to do. But we will accomplish that dimension of Christian life required by the OFS Rule. For Franciscans that means a lifetime of dedication and love. To do less can only create confusion and would require merely a meager dedication to the call of the Spirit and the Church through the OFS Rule.

*... for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. **I can do all things through him who strengthens me.***

Philippians 4:11-13

Something that will help us in daily life is to evaluate how our words, actions, and attitudes reveal a longing to bring people together in **unity**. The dictionary defines *unity* as: *a condition of harmony; ... the quality or state of being made one.* (Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary).

Even a shallow reflection reveals, for example, that



Democrats, Republicans and Independents have different ideas and issues. It tells us that Muslims (and other faith traditions) do not always see eye to eye with Catholics. We realize that the hierarchy of the Church has authority to protect the faith, sometimes through excommunication or punishment of some sort. The people involved often separate from one another and/or the Church. Unity suffers.

This is the area where Franciscans work to keep people together through understanding, dialogue, compassion, forgiveness or other qualities that are part of Church life. The OFS Rule and Francis' example expect us to work for unity even when people have offered false guidance or heretical ideas about the faith. Our ecumenical attempts at unity does not mean we approve false ideas. It does mean that we want the people who believe such things to remain brother and sister to us.

*While we correctly celebrate the rich variety of cultures, we also are reminded that unity and harmony in Christ constitute the greatest value and hope for the human community. There should be no clash of cultures or civilizations, but rather the growth of universal respect for everyone's human dignity. We search for unity as we honor ethnic and cultural diversity. This is a unity that reflects the unity of the Holy Trinity itself. The mission of the Catholic Church is the Lord's plan to unite all people in the love of Jesus Christ, the Savior of all. This unity can never detract from the uniqueness of cultures that pluralism recognizes and respects.*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 84-85

*"Full unity will come about when all share in the means of salvation entrusted by Christ to his Church." (Pope John Paul II: 'On Commitment to Ecumenism' [Ut Unum Sint - UUS], no. 86)*  
*"Communion of the particular Churches with the Church of Rome, and of their Bishops with the Bishop of Rome, is - in God's plan - an essential requisite of full and visible communion" (UUS, No 97). Ecumenism includes efforts to pray together; joint study of the Scripture and of one another's traditions, common action for social justice, and dialogue in which the leaders and theologians of different churches and communities discuss in depth their doctrinal and theological*

*positions for greater mutual understanding, and "to work for unity in truth:" (UUS no 18, 29) In dialogue the obligation to respect the truth is absolute. The unity willed by God can be attained only by the adherence of all to the content of revealed faith in its entirety." (UUS, no. 18) On the worldwide level, these dialogues are sponsored on the Catholic side by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of Christian Unity, a Vatican office directly accountable to the Pope.*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 128

Having a complete understanding of these ideas will take time and further research to achieve. Franciscans seek unity and respect the search for the truth. As the OFS Rule #19 puts it: ... *they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue ...* This may seem clear. But the implementation takes patience, respect, and attentive listening to one another. We seek an honest dialogical search for the truth revealed by the Trinity through Jesus and the Holy Spirit, in collaboration with the Father.

The decree on Ecumenism of Vatican II (*Unitas Redintegratio*) also spells out issues to which we need to pay attention.

*The efforts that individuals and groups are taking include five important elements. First, people are nurturing a sense of truth about various denominations rather than proceeding with past prejudices and false perceptions. Second, they are joining together in dialogue in order to gain a greater appreciation of the richness of each denomination. Third, they are co-operating with one another to address the pressing needs of society around them. Fourth, they are joining together in prayer. And fifth, they are humbly examining their own religion to determine if it is in line with the will of Christ. If it is not they are then making efforts for reform when necessary. These and other actions, when carried out under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the leadership of the Church, promote justice and truth. Little by little, this will lead to full Christian unity.*

Unitatis Redintegratio - Vatican II - Paragraph 4  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 51

Franciscans use these same ideas to enrich relationships with groups and individuals within the Church. If people

hold extreme ideas or proclaim issues as true which are not totally true, we approach them with respect. We seek dialogue with them so that our conversations lead to unity and not to separation. We expect from them the same respect and willingness to listen that they expect of us. The OFS Rule requires us to function this way so our actions lead to unity of spirit even when we still have some disagreements about certain issues. Continued relationship, and willingness to engage in dialogue, offer the opportunity for further conversations. These can lead to a possibility of unity, and to a better understanding of our faith.

*I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Ephesians 4:1-6

### **A few things to discuss**

1. In your personal life, how do you deal with arguments about political issues? What is your goal in such arguments? Does the outcome build relationships or separation? Can Franciscans live with the results? If not, what should Franciscans do in such situations?

2. Take time for the same reflection about religious topics. How do you deal with people who act as *thee* orthodox person who is always "right?" (Are you that way?). What attitude do you have in such conversations? What part of your Franciscan spirit enters these discussions? How do you show respect in such conversations? What will you do to make certain the conversation doesn't lead to separation rather than unity?

3. Explain to others how Vatican II documents are meant

to be implemented by Franciscans? What numbers of the OFS Rule are especially demanding in requiring that we build unity by the way of dialogue? Describe the attitudes that we need to model in order to achieve unity!

4. Do your fraternity gatherings offer solid *ongoing formation* about achieving unity with people in your daily life? How would you design a program if you had to prepare *ongoing formation* sessions on *unity* for your fraternity? Describe why developing and maintaining relationships is important in seeking unity.

\*\*\*

*Let us refer all good  
to the Lord God Almighty and Most High  
and thank Him  
from Whom all good comes.  
May He,  
the Almighty and Most High,  
the only true God  
have, be given, and receive  
all honor and respect,  
all praise and blessing,  
all thanks and glory,  
to Whom all good belongs,  
He Who alone is good.  
When we see or hear evil spoken or done  
or God blasphemed,  
let us speak well and do well  
and praise God  
Who is blessed forever.*

*The Earlier Rule  
Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol 1 - Page 26*





## Chapter three

**Why Dialogue?**

We've mentioned "dialogue" rather frequently during the last few sessions. Now we want to look at it in greater depth and discover attitudes that support the role of dialogue in understanding one another.

A number of qualities set the stage for good dialogue. Without them any of us can respond with the normal human response when faced with serious conflict or simple disagreement. We can become demanding, make accusations, consider the intellect of the "other" as lacking wisdom, deny the truth of statements, work hard to make certain the "other" is seen as mistaken or lying or without proper evidence. We may or may not have evidence for these reactions. But it won't matter so long as we win the argument in which we are engaged.

The usual result of these actions is that the groups or individuals separate from one another. They search for evidence to prove the "other" wrong. It becomes a win/lose or right/wrong debate where someone wins and someone loses - and nary the twain shall meet! Relationship loses.

*Laypeople exercise an important ministry in their families, in their parishes, in their dioceses, and in other voluntary groups they join. Such group ministry sustains the members and serves the Gospel extremely well. We want to see lay ministry strengthened today so that by staying close to one another the faithful might remain strong.*

*Among the many organized apostolates today the most effective are those that harmonize everyday life and everyday faith. The point here is that organizing as such is not our goal. Infusing*

*goal and we organize to get that done.*

*... any organized effort must have that mission in mind or it is not valid. We would also like to see greater effort to organize Catholic ministry on a group basis in the international sphere.*

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity - (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*)  
Paragraph 18-19 / Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 3 - Page 31

*Preparation for lay ministry emerges and is formed by the distinctive quality of being a layperson and having a lay spirituality. This means a layperson should take up work reflecting his or her natural talents. Above all, a lay minister advances the Gospel by living our belief in the divine mysteries, by sensing the movement of the Holy Spirit, and by moving ever closer to God. Beyond this spiritual reality, lay ministers also need training in theology, ethics, philosophy, technical skills, human relations, and cultural realities*

*Apostolicam Actuositatem* - Paragraph 29  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 3 - Page 35

*We should also have respect and love for those who think differently than we do in social, political or even religious matters. In fact, the more deeply we understand others, the more we can dialogue with them, seeking understanding.*

Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - *Gaudium et Spes*  
Paragraph 28 / Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 146

Below is a scripture story about Peter and Jesus that has elements of dialogue. Peter asks a question of Jesus and Jesus gives an answer that Peter only understood later. Listen to the Scriptural story and reflect on when Peter finally understood his dialogue with Jesus. The word is given now and understood later. It is important to recognize that in dialogue we may need patience to come to an understanding both for ourselves or for the "other."

*Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going you cannot follow me now, but you will follow afterward." Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now! I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times."*

John 13: 36-38

*Called like St. 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 dialogue** of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.*

OFS Rule #6

Good dialogue recognizes that the goal of dialogue is NOT "winning" but "*understanding*." If we win that is a secondary consideration. We want a relationship that allows us to continue the dialogue. We need not finish in one session. We must act wisely so that another session is possible. That means keeping a relationship alive. As *Gaudium et Spes* (Paragraph 28) puts it: ... *the more deeply we understand others, the more we can dialogue with them, seeking understanding.* (Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 146)

Our goal is to *understand* the "other." That requires attentive listening during the conversation. We want to understand how the "other" came to believe what they share with us. We may not agree, but we will do our best to understand. We may ask pertinent questions or repeat ideas to make certain we heard things correctly. In short, dialogue leads both sides to come to an understanding of the "other." Whether we agree with one another is secondary since the "other" may have good reasons for their opinions. It may take more than one session, but our primary goal is to understand. With understanding we keep a relationship alive, even if we still disagree. Franciscans make these choices because of their OFS profession to seek unity.

This is not a matter of denying our beliefs but accepting another way to understand the situation, text, or opinion. For example, if the hierarchy calls someone to accountability because of inaccurate doctrinal ideas, we accept that. However, the Church also wishes to show people the compassion of Jesus. Franciscans connect with these individuals to let them know that we care about them even if we do not agree with their ideas. We make present the love of Christ for all people. That is part of our Franciscan

charism which the Church requires of us.

The Church expects this since she approved the OFS Rule which we profess. Influential ideas abroad in our world are not always helpful to Christians or Seculars. But in order to have meaningful conversations, we must relate to one another and not do or say things that isolate us from one another. We can easily refuse to understand. We can stay with a group that supports us and condemns "others." Change is not likely to occur if we fall into that trap.

*There is also a movement for a universal community in which persons can live a full and free life. In all of this, the modern world is both powerful and weak, capable of noble deeds or foul ones, in the path of freedom or that of slavery. Modern people seek new levels of meaning today precisely because of the unleashed power of modern life, which can either serve us or destroy us.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraph 9  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 132

When a group dialogues it helps to sit in a circle or a similar shape. Spend a few minutes discussing the process of dialogue. It allows everyone to accept the listening and responding process and avoids antagonism, anger, impatience or any form of verbal violence. Allow each person to speak, long (perhaps with limits) or short. Involvement is important since everyone has ideas and opinions. We listen respectfully to each person in order to understand them.

Questions that clarify what was said can assist understanding. If people find it helpful, the ideas can be put on a page of newsprint or whiteboard or a computer generated listing. At the conclusion it is good to repeat what has been learned from the dialogue. Further conversation follows a similar respectful process. We avoid animosity and seek a better understanding. When dialogue is well done the participants can actually enjoy time together. A well established relationship will allow for continued dialogue.

It is helpful to spell out implications of shared information,



or discover viewpoints and perspectives that are the basis for opinions. We also do a check on background information that supports an opinion. We need to recognize things that reveal prejudice or rigid dogmatism that diminishes dialogue or creates new problems by evading the main issue(s). Basic to dialogue is the willingness to listen to each other and accept explanations (asking questions for clarification, if needed). We acknowledge the value of explanations that we may never have considered.

Clarity is important but patience is also important. It takes time to bring clarity to the information that is shared. It will require everyone involved to check prejudiced judgments, personal agendas or anything that reveals a "I know best" approach. That is part of the cost of dialogue.

If we really want to *understand* we can't keep throwing roadblocks in the way. Dialogue attempts to build common ground among the participants. This allows people to make decisions that can deal with issues in a collaborative way. Dialogue creates a safe environment for people to share ideas, feelings, attitudes without fear of reprisal. Rushing through dialogue will often diminishes any hope of success. If more than one session is required, the group will agree to take the time. Refusal to continue can show a lack of commitment to the process.

We need to keep a focus on individual issues. That is part of a good attitude in situations of dialogue. Everyone needs to focus on the topic under discussion. Having a grab-bag of things to talk about usually muddles the dialogue. Focus on the issue you want to address. A facilitator can explain the topic under discussion and remind people how important it is to *listen to one another*. Without good listening we will never understand the position of the other person or group. The conversation in dialogue is never totally one-sided. Each person needs time to explain themselves and why they hold the ideas that are part of the dialogue.

As we listen, try to identify with the ideas being expressed. However, don't get caught in the emotions connected to the ideas/opinions that are shared. When you listen with an open mind it is likely that you will understand the "other." Your empathy is not the same as agreement, but is respectful of the feelings of the other person or group. If you need clarification do it honestly in order to understand the meaning(s) being shared. Unlike a debate, information is not used to win an argument but to help people understand!

When everyone had an opportunity to share, the conversation needs to conclude the issue(s) being addressed. Again, blaming and accusing stops good dialogue in the middle of a sentence. Anger, cynicism, or violent words will stymie the possibility of finding a common conclusion. Indeed, the conversation may need another dialogue session.

Franciscans remember that serious, respectful and honest dialogue allows our relationships to continue no matter what conclusion we embrace. If it were a debate somebody would have to win and somebody lose. In dialogue our ability to *understand each other* will be the special gift we achieve. Such a result also supports the ability to maintain unity because of the respect we show one another.

*Do not find fault before examining the evidence; think first, and criticize afterwards. Do not answer without first listening, and do not interrupt while another is speaking.*

Sirach 11:7-8 (REB)



Massimo Cruciani

*"Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed"*

Legenda Major - Bonaventure  
Francis of Assisi - The Founder  
Vol II - Page 536

## **A few things to discuss**

1. If you were facilitating a dialogue between catholic groups with differing opinions about the faith, what would you include in your talk? What kind of atmosphere would you create? What would you say about listening and why it is important? In short, how would you set the stage for everyone to engage in dialogue?
  
2. What is the goal of dialogue? Why is it important for Franciscans? What does the OFS Rule say about building relationships? Why is building relationships important for Franciscans? Do any personal issues keep you from participating in dialogue? Explain what they are and what you will do about them?
  
3. How does respect and understanding illustrate a quality that the Catholic Church should show to the world? How is our American culture a help or hindrance to relationships between people who see things differently? How can Franciscans deal with negative cultural words and actions that touch the quality of relationships?

*While it is important for Catholics to be concerned about their sisters and brothers in other Churches and to invite them to know the Catholic Church, our primary responsibility is to make sure that our own household is in order. Only when we confront our own shortcomings and make the necessary reforms will we truly be able to discern the will of Christ and bear witness to Christ's teaching. Yes, through the grace of God, the Catholic Church has maintained the truth that was first given to us. But through shortcomings, stubbornness, and sin, the Catholic Church as a whole and the individual members within it have often failed to understand this truth and to live by it.*



Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) - Paragraph 4  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 3 - Page 51-52

*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 St. Francis by means of this Rule approved by the Church.

OFS Rule #2

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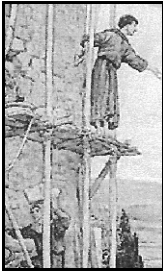
### ***We are God's Children***

The Lord speaks, the Word is clear,  
I am God and there is no other.  
Dear God, Your Word is life.  
It is both a way of joy and  
the way to joy.

My work, my writings, my words,  
whatever I may do,  
is your gift to me, Holy Spirit.  
It is given to be used.  
It is meant to bring glory,  
and honor to Jesus and the Father.  
Help me to use gifts well,  
but most especially help me  
never to be afraid to use them.

How precious is your goodness to me.  
The luxury of days in your presence,  
in retreats without interruption,  
how good they are for all of us.

Be praised, my Lord,  
for the snow-capped mountain peaks,  
for the deepest valleys,  
and the grassiest plains and sparkling rivers.  
All of them are yours.  
You share them with all of us.  
Be praised for your love - always.  
Help me to imitate your generosity. Amen



## Chapter four

**OFS & the Church**

*"Repair my house ..."*

*We begin our inquiry with the People of God, which believes it is led by the Holy Spirit. This People of God, this human family of which we are a part, makes careful inquiry into the events, needs, and desires of this age to find authentic signs of God's presence here: Who are we humans, anyway?*

*What does society need today to be better? What do human actions throughout the world mean? People are waiting for answers to these questions, and by this inquiry, it will become clear that the Church and the world render service to each other, for the mission of the Church is religious but is also supremely human!*

*... We take a positive view of the human person, based on the words of our Scriptures, expressed in the Book of Genesis, that God created us in the divine likeness and was pleased with the outcome. We understand ourselves, furthermore, to be essentially social creatures, created from the beginning to have companions.*

*... For the human person, although composed of both body and soul, is a unified, whole person, not divided. We are obliged to love our bodies and, indeed, the whole material world, for it is created by God too. Nevertheless, it is often there, in the material, physical realm, that we find inclinations toward darkness. So we must probe our human nature to its depth to find our souls, and when we do, we will not be mocked, for there in the depth of our hearts, we also find God.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraphs 11, 13, 14  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 133-135*

*For us Christians, the truth and meaning of our lives is wrapped up in the mystery of Christ, the Incarnate Word of God. In Christ, the riddles of sorrow and death take on meaning, the divine presence is made profoundly clear, and we find the energy and power to live fully. In Christ, we become capable of being fully*

*human, sharing in the full divinity, divinity made flesh, working with human hands, thinking with a human mind, acting by human choice, and, above all, loving with a human heart. What greater love do we need? What greater truth? The mystery of the human person is centered in this divine core, revealed through Christ, and stirring us to full humanity.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraph 22  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 140

*He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for in him all things in heaven and earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or rulers or powers - all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.*

Colossians - 1:15-20

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen*

Ephesians 3:14-21

*When it comes to the Church, some claim that its institutional needs take a toll on the values of community and relationships. Institutions require time, money, and effort for their maintenance. Since the Second Vatican Council highlighted the Church as the People of God, does this not mean that our energies should be focused on people, not buildings, committees,*

laws, and rules? Should we not recapture the simplicity of Christ's relationship with his disciples and the intimacy of the early Church as described in the Acts of the Apostles?

In response, we would say that this is not an "either/or" situation. There is no doubt that the Church is called to be a community of love in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The risen Jesus himself presented a model of Church leadership based in love when he solicited three attributions of love from Peter (cf. Jn 21:15-17). At the same time, though, the Church has many structures that are needed to build up the bond of love.

Jesus himself established one of those structures of the Church when he named Peter as the rock of the Church, the head of the Apostles (Mt 16:18). While St. Paul taught us that love is the greatest gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:28), he also listed administration as a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:28)

The Church needs an institutional framework for its stability, community, and mission for serving the cause of the Gospel and opening people to God's call to holiness. Problems with the institution are not arguments for its removal, but for its renewal. Just as the Son of God took on our human flesh and just as a soul needs a body, so a community needs to be organized to serve and be served. The Church is a community that is served by a multiplicity of structures.

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 120-121

\* The word Church is based on both the Greek word ekklesia and the Hebrew word qahal, which means the gathering of the community. It was first applied to the people of Israel, whom God called into existence. The Church was planned and formed by God, who called together into one those who accepted the Gospel. ...

\* The Church is a visible society and a spiritual community; she is a hierarchical institution and the Body of Christ; she is an earthly Church and one filled with heavenly treasures. Hence the Church is a complex reality that has human and divine elements. ...

\* The Church is a communion. The starting point of this communion is our union with Jesus Christ. This gives us a share in the communion of the Persons of the Trinity and also leads to a communion among men & women (cf. CCC, nos. 813,948, 959).

\* *These truths about unity and communion in the Church call us to become a source of unity for all peoples.*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Pages 122-123



*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.*

OFS Rule #1

*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.*

OFS Rule #4

A serious examination of these texts offers a picture of the Church in many of its aspects. Franciscans recognize the human as well as the divine elements in the Church. The Church, in her human elements, is often in need of renewal. Francis was told: "... to repair my house! ..."

One effective tool is the tool of dialogue. It allows love to find expression by the way we converse about issues that could separate us. Dialogue offers a way to maintain unity while building a better understanding among us. Franciscans create a Franciscan model of what the *People of God* look like. We are very human and often discover areas of our lives that stand in need of *conversion*.

Our task as Franciscans is not only to build fraternities that are *communities of love*, but through them to model what the Church offers the world. We do this by way of love, compassion, peace-making, forgiveness, conversion, and understanding (among other virtues), while seeking to enrich our relationship and unity with all people. The Holy Spirit guides the *community of love*. The community of the Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the model for



building a *community of love*.

A brief examination of the OFS Rule makes it clear that we are called to exhibit the virtues described there. Consider these words drawn from the OFS Rule: ... *observe the Gospel* ... (4) / *...go forth as witnesses* ... (6) / *...conform their thoughts & deeds to those of Christ* ... (7) / *... let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are & do*. (8) / *The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her (Mary) by imitating her complete self-giving* ... (9) / *let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life*. ... (10) / *... as pilgrims & strangers on their way to the home of the Father; they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency & yearning for possession and power*. (11) / *... with a gentle & courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord & an image of Christ*. (13) / *... be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives* ... (15) / *... they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate* ... (18) / *...they should seek out ways of unity & fraternal harmony through dialogue* (19) / *They have been made living members of the Church by being buried & raised with Christ in baptism* (6).

A brief reflection makes it clear that profession as Franciscans requires a continuous process of *conversion*. Individual Franciscans are not merely members of a local fraternity. They belong to an Order spread throughout the world. Each fraternity is a small part of the larger international body. We belong to each other and live the same way of life whether in China, South America, Europe, Russia, Japan, the Philippines, Asia, the United States or wherever there are Secular Franciscans. An individual fraternity's OFS identity is real only when their members recognize their connection to OFS fraternities around the world.

Our administrative structures reflect this worldwide connection. Fraternities around the world proclaim our communion with each other at the local, regional, national, and international levels. OFS International General Constitutions and National Statutes (perhaps even Regional guidelines) support one another in guiding fraternal life. We are one Order connected to hundreds of fraternities

both spiritually and administratively. *We are the OFS - Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis!*

I find it reassuring to read newsletters from various fraternities. They offer wise reflections from all corners of the globe. They teach us about cultural differences, about poverty and wealth, about Sister Death or a new birth, of older fraternities renewing their life and new fraternities learning how to be a loving community, of countries where freedom is rich and places where it comes at a great price. Franciscans seek ways to bring people together; to show compassion for the needy; to learn the way of contemplation; and to show a readiness to thank and praise our loving Trinity for the gift of our Franciscan vocation.

What is common among all Seculars and their fraternities is our dedication to the *People of God*. We fulfill our profession within the Church. We know our need for the help of the Spirit. The Spirit works through our Franciscan brothers and sisters, and through people who may not even know about Francis or Clare or the OFS. Unity happens because love happens. Love is possible because the Trinity dwells within us and *God is love!*

*3. Rule 2 From the beginning the Secular Franciscan Order has had its own proper place in the Franciscan family. It is formed by the 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.*

*4. The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care & spiritual assistance of the Secular Franciscan Order because it belongs to the same spiritual family, to the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular (TOR). These are the "institutes" who are responsible for the 'altius moderamen' referred to by canon 303 of the Code of Canon Law.*

OFS General Constitutions -- Article 1.3, .4

*1. The OFS is governed by the universal law of the Church, and by its own: the Rule, the Constitutions, the Ritual, and the*

*particular statutes.*

2. *The Rule establishes the nature, purpose, and spirit of the OFS.*

3. *Rule 3 The Constitutions have as their purpose:*

*\* to apply the Rule;*

*\* to indicate concretely the conditions for belonging to OFS, its government, the organization of life in the fraternity, and its seat (locale).*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 4.1, .2, .3

The Church's concern is evident in the care the Church takes to help the OFS live up to its calling. According to the OFS General Constitutions, *the OFS is a public association in the Church and is divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national and international* (cf. GC Article 1.5). The Rule of 1978 spells out the way of life that Secular Franciscans are expected to live. That is why the OFS Rule and Constitutions are so important. By her approval the Church supports the guidance given us in the OFS Rule and Constitutions.

## **A few things to discuss**

1. What does the Church expect of the OFS? Where would a Secular Franciscan find this information? Take some time now for personal honesty: How often have you sought answers by looking: in the *Constitutions* or *National Statutes*? /.. in the *SA Statutes* / in the *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance* (2012)? Why are they important? What personal changes will you make in regard to this issue? Why is it important to be knowledgeable about these resources?

2. List qualities the OFS Rule spells out for OFS members. Why are they important? How do they help OFS members model the charism of Francis? Evaluate how well you personally model them! What help do you get from fraternity gatherings? How could fraternity gatherings be improved? Will you engage in dialogue with the local

council to improve the fraternity gatherings? Will you take time to dialogue with fraternity members? And do what?

3. What fresh ideas about the Church have you learned through this chapter? List them and share them. Indicate why they are helpful both to your Franciscan and Church life.

4. Franciscans involved in these sessions need to share ideas on *how they have been enriched by them*. These sessions remind us of *the way we are called to live* the OFS Rule. We need to both help each other and to develop a prayerful life of intimacy with the Trinity. The power of the Trinity's love and the support of the fraternity's love makes it possible for us to be faithful to the OFS Rule.

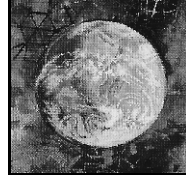
Stop to consider, for example, how you help *to build a more fraternal and evangelical world* (#14), / or how you develop *a sense of community* that will make you *joyful and ready to place yourselves on an equal basis with all people, especially the lowly ...* (#13)? / Or consider that your profession brings a responsibility to serve the fraternity. You may serve the OFS as a member of a council at various levels / you might use your gifts to provide leadership in social action; / or learn and share new ways of prayer / or develop a care group for members who are homebound / or care for caregivers / and many other needs. Franciscans share themselves with the community both in the Church and the world. Our personal gifts need practice to keep them from atrophying.

In Admonition XIX St. Francis says to us:

*Blessed is the servant who does not consider himself any better when he is praised and exalted by people than when he is considered worthless, simple, and looked down upon, **for what a person is before God, that he is and no more.** ...*

*The Undated Writings - Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol 1 - Page 135*

## Chapter five

**OFS & The World**

Secular Franciscans live in the world. It would be hard not to live here. It is the abode for all humans except for the few who live on the space platform. So at present it is safe to say that we live in this world. The Church also lives in the world. But faith embraces a different perspective about people and the world than the perspectives of some other people or groups in the world.

Franciscans have a particular tradition about this world that comes from Francis of Assisi. Despite all the evil, violence, cynicism, lying, aggressive behavior, addictions, apathy and enmity that exists in the world, we believe that our loving God created a place that could bring a good life to humans. Animals, mountains, streams, oceans, beaches, trees, flowers, snakes and reptiles as well as domesticated cats and dogs and cows and even pigs are created for the good of human beings. Minerals and oil and natural gas as well as gold and diamonds, water and other precious items serve the human race. And *God saw everything he had made, and indeed, it was very good.* (Genesis 1:31).

So we had a good beginning. But things did not go well with the human race. It didn't take long before pride and power, mixed with a bit of selfishness, anger, and jealousy started making themselves felt. The Bible honestly faces this misplaced energy that humans used in their relationships with one another and with God.

The Bible offers pictures of loyalty, dedicated love, forgiveness, compassion and a God who remains committed to the fine and foolish people he created. God loves the people he made. God cannot let go. Love cannot be locked up in this God. The door of love remains open and

prophets were sent by God to help people respond to God's commands. There was always hope that someone would listen. The parable of the vinegrower in Matthew 21:33-42 reflects attempts by God to reach out to his human creation. Some people listened and followed God's word. Some of God's people ignored God's message with tragic results.

*The story of God's interaction with humankind is an age-old mystery. How does God speak to humanity? How do we know that it is actually God whom we hear? Is God really here, or is God's existence "wishful thinking" on our part? Are the words of Scripture really God's words?*

*This Council (Vatican II) now wishes to address the matter of how God reveals Godself to humankind, and how humans respond to the voice of God. This we do in order to strengthen the faith of all people. It is our hope that by hearing the message of Christ, all the world might believe, and, believing, might hope and, hoping, might love more profoundly. In this we take as our lead the words of St. John expressed in the first letter, "What we have seen and heard we announce to you so that you may have community with us and together our community may be with God and God's Son, Jesus Christ."*

*Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum) - Paragraph 1*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 73

*In revealing God's inner self, God does not merely reveal information about the divine life, but invites us into close companionship. God actually shares with us the divine nature so that we are no longer strangers to God or to one another. God shows us what God is really like, and in this process, we come to know God's heart as God knows ours.*

*... From the beginning, God has been with us, conscious of our human nature. God continually promised us healing, by caring for us ceaselessly. God was first manifest in creation, being known in wonder, power, majesty, and goodness through the created world. Thus all people have access to God, and all people can, on some level, come to know of God's existence and inner self. Over the course of history, though, it has become more and more clear to us that God wishes to speak to us as friends, to live among us, and to invite us to close union.*

*Dei Verbum - Paragraph 2 & 3*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Pages 74-75

*God sent Jesus Christ to dwell with us and to tell us about the inner life of God. Jesus proclaimed through his life and death, through his rising and remaining among us, that God is indeed with us, to free us from the darkness of sin and to raise us up to life eternal. Everything that God wanted to say to us for all eternity was made known in Jesus Christ. This was the perfect moment of divine revelation, and we await nothing further: no hidden secrets, no sleight of hand, no fine print. Jesus Christ: today and for all eternity. Nothing more, nothing less.*

*Nor are we left here all alone. The Holy Spirit brings all this to completion in us by deepening our interior lives so that this revelation might take root there. Thus we are able to give free assent to these truths, our hearts moved and turned toward God, the eyes of our minds opened by the Spirit. Hence we can come to understand more fully those divine matters and persons which it is otherwise beyond us to grasp.*

*Dei Verbum* - Paragraph 4, 5, 6  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 76

These texts about Scripture give us an idea of God's viewpoint of the world and the people who live there. God is not ignorant of what we do or why we do it. He is pleased with faithfulness and saddened by our failure to listen to his Son. But above all, *God is love*, and no one can dictate to God when or if love should be withheld from someone in his human family. God remains a *God who is love* (cf. 1 John 4:8), a love that is unconditional and constant.

Our behavior cannot change that. God allows our poor decisions to bring their results to our lives. God does not magically change everything so it all works out "nice" for us. We damage a reputation and we get anger in return. We carelessly run a stop light and the consequences happen. We plot ways to destroy others and somehow the results come to haunt us. Yet, through all of this, God loves us. That is the way the Trinity functions in its relationship with us. These experiences can also make us aware where our personal *conversion* is needed.

The Trinity prompts our *conversion* when we make poor decisions. *Conversion* brings a new way to see things, a

better way of behavior, a different viewpoint of the behavior of others and the consequences. Franciscans who go from *Gospel to life and life to Gospel* have professed to engage in *conversion* as they discover the need for it. They do this in the world and not in some hidden corner. They give an example of *faithfulness* to Jesus' words. Most frequently this happens in their life in the world - at home, working, recreating, or reflecting. Their *conversion* becomes obvious to others. Franciscans can also share their reasons and offer an explanation for their way of following the Gospel.

For most of us *conversion* is not something sudden. It usually takes time, guidance, effort, and prayer. The OFS Rule helps us realize that *human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily* (OFS Rule #7). *Conversion* takes place wherever we happen to be. It offers the possibility that new choices are possible for ordinary people. *Faithfulness* to the OFS Rule makes the Franciscan charism present in the world and the Church.

One thing that is needed in our world is peace. It seems difficult for peace to blossom in families, communities, parishes, fraternities, countries, between nations, among people and tribes, between natives and immigrants, between criminals and victims, even within ourselves. It is eagerly sought but not easily achieved. Vatican II gives us a fine sense of direction. We are called to be *bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly* (OFS Rule #19).

*Peace is a harmony built into human society by God, the divine Founder of all life, and it is a direct outcome of justice. Such a peace is not attained once and for all but is constantly built up as people control their passions and governments remain vigilant. But even this is not enough. For peace is the fruit of love as well. It cannot be obtained and safeguarded unless men and women freely and trustingly share with one another their inner spirits and talents. It is based on a firm determination to respect others, and to live lives of sisterhood and brotherhood. Without such love, peace absolutely cannot prevail in our time. For all of this flows from the peace of Christ, who first loved us and dedicated himself for us. We urge Christians therefore to*



*join with all peacemakers in the world to plead for peace and bring it about. We praise those who renounce violence and find other ways to settle disputes where fairness for all is assured. We dream of the day when we will say with Isaiah (2:4): "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again!"*

*Despite this great dream of all people, savage warfare goes on all over the world, in fact, more savage than ever before. Having considered all this, we in this Council remind everyone first and foremost about the permanent binding force of natural law, which is the law written in our very hearts. Any action that deliberately conflicts with this law or any command ordering someone else to do so is criminal. Blind obedience will excuse no one from this.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraphs 78, 79  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 183-184*

*... Therefore, we hereby condemn total war completely, and following the teachings of Pope John XXIII in 'Pacem in Terris' and Pope Paul VI at the United Nations, we issue this declaration: Any act of war aimed indiscriminately at the destruction of entire cities, or of extensive areas along with their populations, is a crime against God and humanity itself and merits absolute and unhesitating condemnation.*

*Gaudium et Spes - Paragraph 80  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 185*

*It is time to put aside purely national interests so that the whole community of humankind can find peace together. The basis for this is in each person's change of heart as we regard the entire world and those tasks that we can perform in unison for the betterment of all people. Peace will not come until hatreds end; until contempt for others ends; until distrust, unbending ideologies, and divisions cease. The Church now takes its stand in the midst of these anxieties, which are felt in every nation of the world. We intend to continually say to all: "Now is the proper time for change!"*

*If peace is indeed to succeed, the causes of discord must be reduced, especially injustice that results from economic inequities, from a quest for power, or from contempt for*

*personal rights.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraphs 82, 83  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 187

Violence begins in the human heart. Franciscans know this and work at converting their hearts to the ways of peace. We cannot gift the world with peace without a passionate desire to rid ourselves and the world of violence. We join this desire to a strong commitment to the ways of peace found in the Gospel. Committed to this process we seek peaceful solutions for human problems. Franciscans are not free to ignore the work for peace. The OFS Rule expects us to build up peace *unceasingly!* (cf. OFS Rule #19).

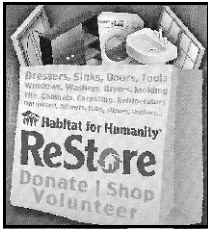
For Franciscans who live in the world, this is only one directive of the OFS Rule. Read articles #11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 in the OFS Rule. You will find social issues to fit your skills and your personality. You may discover suitable ways to fulfill one or the other article of the Rule *in your life in the world*. It is a matter of *faithfulness*. But it is more. Our presence should help to transform our world into a place where all people receive justice / all people can live in a peaceful atmosphere / where troubled persons have people who love them enough to walk with them through addictions and apathy to freedom and enthusiasm. Our source of strength is linked to the contemplative side of our lives. Contemplation brings us to intimacy with the Trinity. The Trinity (Holy Spirit) empowers us to show love wherever we may be.



The world will most probably not be totally changed during our lifetime. But Franciscan fraternities and individuals should create the dream as we "repair" both the church and our world. That is part of the reason why the Holy Spirit calls us to be Franciscans.

## ***A few things to discuss***

1. We've written about the work for peace in the world. Ministry, whether for peace or other things, often begins in family life. It spreads to community/fraternal life and moves beyond them to the wider horizons of the world. Where is the place where you will work for peace? What support can the fraternity give? How will dialogue help in beginning the ministry? Are you tempted to "force" "your" ministry on the fraternity? If so, why would this be counter-productive?



2. Many ministries flow from the OFS Rule. Read the Rule. Engage in ministry. Share your ideas **respectfully** with the other people involved. Franciscans engage in many ministries. Do not presume that your ministry is our only ministry - it's not! When we force ministry on fraternity members as *the only real ministry*, we lose something of our

Franciscan spirit. Support other groups doing good ministries. Share your gifts with them. The point is: the OFS Rule requires us to be attentive not only to our own desires and ideas but also to the desires and ideas of others - especially in serving the "lowly!" (cf. OFS Rule #13). {E.g. Pro-life ministries deal with abortion but also develop ministries connected with all of life!} People have life-needs throughout their time on earth! Franciscans choose from a variety of ministries to serve people! + What virtues are common for our ministries? Explain what they are and why they are important. + What are some guidelines you would develop in creating a fraternity ministry? + How does "love" fit into the work of your chosen ministry?

3. How does this Bible text influence your approach to ministry? *Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because **apart from me you can do nothing!*** (John 15:4-5). What does this text ask of Jesus' followers?



## Chapter six

***OFS & the Holy Spirit***

*And now in our own age, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us. This Spirit is a fountain of living water springing up to life eternal! The Spirit guides the Church in truth and continually makes the Church more holy. Working through the ordinary lives of us all, the Spirit gives the Church everything it needs both for leadership and service and thus allows the Church to keep its youthful energy. Praying through the hearts of the faithful and dwelling in us as in a temple, the Spirit unifies us all in love. And therefore, we can say that we, the Church, are a people united by our common heritage; created in love by God, assembled in the name of Jesus, and **bound together in the Holy Spirit**. The same power that mysteriously unites this threefold presence also binds us together in love.*

*Lumen Gentium* - Paragraph 4  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 24

*Christ has shown that the hope of a world based on love is not a foolish hope. This hope must be pursued in common, everyday life as we "lay down our lives" for one another, having learned to do this from Christ and believing that doing so will lead all to a glorious shared life. Christ is present in the midst of this, providing the energy we need, arousing the desire for good in us, animating our hearts, and purifying our noble longings for human solidarity. This work is done by Christ in the hearts of people by the power of the Holy Spirit. This Spirit first arouses in us the desire for a better world but also encourages the best and most noble of our sentiments so they will be used toward this end to make Christ present.*

*Gaudium et Spes* - Paragraph 38  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 153

*Even though the Holy Spirit is the last person of the Trinity to be revealed, we must understand that, from the beginning, he is a part of the loving plan of our salvation from sin and of the offer of divine life. He has the same mission as the Son in the cause of our salvation from sin and of the offer of divine life. When the Father sends his Son, he also sends the Holy Spirit:*

*When the Father sends his Word, he always sends his Breath. In their joint mission, the Son and the Holy Spirit are distinct but inseparable. (CCC, no. 689).*

*The Holy Spirit continues to give us knowledge of God, living and active in the Church. The Catechism sets out eight ways in which the Holy Spirit provides us with an experience of God's presence (cf. CCC, no. 688):*

*\* When we pray and study the Scripture which the Holy Spirit inspired, we can sense his presence in the biblical words.*

*\* When we read the lives of the saints, their teachings and witness, we can be motivated to holiness by their example which was shaped by the Holy Spirit.*

*\* When we assent with obedience to the teachings of the Magisterium, we are guided by the Holy Spirit. His presence is uniquely experienced at Ecumenical Councils.*

*\* When we actively participate in the liturgies and Sacraments of the Church, we enter into a sacred moment when the Holy Spirit opens us to experience God, especially in the Eucharist.*

*\* When we give ourselves to prayer, whether that be the Rosary or the Liturgy of the Hours or meditations or other prayers, the Holy Spirit prays within us and intercedes for us.*

*\* When we offer ourselves to the various missionary or apostolic efforts of the Church or see signs of those efforts, we can sense the Holy Spirit at work in the world.*

*\* When we recognize the charisms and ministries which help build the Church, we also understand that it is the Holy Spirit providing us with the leadership we need.*

*\* When we dwell on the great Tradition of the Church, its marvelous history and its host of saintly witnesses, we sense the Holy Spirit's sustaining power through it all.*

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 105-106

*\* The Holy Spirit builds up, animates, and sanctifies the Church. He prepares us to go out and bring others to Christ. He opens our minds to understand Christ's death and Resurrection. He*

*makes present for us the mystery of Christ, especially in the Eucharist, and brings us to communion with God that we may bear much fruit* (cf. CCC. no. 737).

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 109

These quotations give us the wide expanse of the work of the Holy Spirit both in the Church/world community and in our personal lives. It reminds us that though some responsibilities of believers are difficult, we are always assisted by the Holy Spirit. This is God's work. We cannot excuse ourselves under the guise of a presumed lack of skills. At the same time the wisdom of the Holy Spirit helps us understand both our limits and the extent of our personal gifts. If we lack a needed gift it is usually present in someone else in the *community of love*. Perhaps that is why community ministries are often more effective and long-lasting than individual ones. Both individual and community ministries are part of our Franciscan charism to proclaim Christ and his message. Good discernment helps us to be certain that our ministries are inspired by the Holy Spirit and not our own or some another spirit.

At your Profession you said:

***May the grace of the Holy Spirit ... always be my help, so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love!*** (cf. Page 6-7 in *What It Takes* ...)

Ritual of the OFS - Page 24

In order to achieve *perfect Christian love*, we realize the importance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit brings us to Christ. The Holy Spirit shares gifts with us - both for ourselves and for others in our lives. The gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit make their importance clear. They assist us in modeling a loving Franciscan community.

**Gifts of the Holy Spirit** - Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel (right judgment), Fortitude (Courage), Knowledge, Piety (Reverence), and Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe in God's Presence) [cf. Isaiah, 11, 1-3]

**Fruits of the Holy Spirit** - Charity, Joy, Peace, Patience,

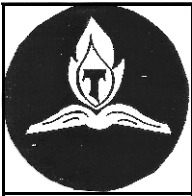
Kindness, Goodness, Generosity, Gentleness, Faithfulness, Modesty, Self-control, Chastity (cf Galatians 5:22-23)

cf. U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 108

The Holy Spirit empowers us to follow the OFS Rule and Constitutions in daily life. Francis recognized his need and depended on the Holy Spirit in his life.

Perpetually professed members need the fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit. As these gifts blossom in us, we realize our need to walk with other newly-professed to help their Franciscan growth. It doesn't happen automatically. Experience tells us that growth requires community support and concern. If support and concern are absent you feel "left out," wondering why you became a Franciscan.

On the other hand, we hope these last few months have helped you feel a part of fraternity life. Regular contact is important. E.g. to be invited to share a ministry or have lunch together or attend programs together, or just get together for dialogue or quiet prayerfulness. When we show concern for one another we also show the importance of experiencing love within community life.



*2. The fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporary professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 44.2

*Opportunities for fraternities to meet together for the purposes of common ongoing and initial formation **shall occur whenever possible at all levels of fraternity.*** [cf. General Constitutions Article 40.1]

Statutes of the National Fraternity of the OFS in the United States of America - Article 19.5c

*The brothers and sisters are co-reponsible for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 30.1

### ***A few things to discuss***

1. Describe your understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in Franciscan life. How have you experienced the Holy Spirit? How did it influence your Franciscan life? How were you certain it was the Holy Spirit?

2. The fruits and gifts of the Holy Spirit are listed on pages 40-41 in this book. What gifts or fruits of the Spirit are already part of your life? How does it (they) show itself? Which gifts or fruits of the Spirit do you need the most? Why? How will the Spirit's gift or fruit change your life?

3. On page 39-40 in this book we shared a list of ways the Holy Spirit touches our lives. A) Which of these have you actually experienced? B) What action(s) will you take to respond to the Holy Spirit in your life?

4. Have the sessions of these last months helped to make you feel a part of fraternity life? Explain. What other things could be done to enhance your feelings of "*belonging*" to the fraternity? What action(s) do you take to make other newly-professed people feel "at home" with us? What kind of hospitality do you show newcomers when they first come to the gatherings? Could that be improved? How?

5. How does "love" support hospitality and compassion? / in your welcoming of new people? / in your concern for homebound seculars? / in the way you treat hard-to-like people? / in your way with people who recently lost a loved one? / in political activity? / in family life? / other?

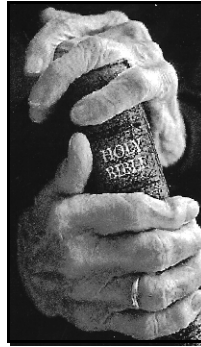
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*The vocation to the OFS is a vocation  
to live the Gospel in fraternal communion.  
For this purpose the members  
of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities  
which are called fraternities.*



## Chapter seven

***Being Faithful***

*For Christ did not pour out his life for us just to leave us abandoned. Instead Christ sent the Holy Spirit to fill the lives of the first Apostles and disciples and to stir up in them the desire to live fully at the table of God's gracious love. Thus the first followers of Jesus were empowered to preach the Good News. And God also gave to those first disciples everything that they needed to remain fully attentive to the mystery that they had experienced during Christ's life on earth. Thus did they baptize those who came to believe in Christ and in the saving power of his life and death. Thus, too, did they share together the Eucharist, the full celebration of the presence of Christ. It was both in their loving actions and in their worship that the first disciples came to know their profound call to "be Church." From that very day until now, we have never stopped announcing the Word, baptizing those who believe, and celebrating the Eucharist as God's priestly people.*

*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium)  
Paragraph 6 / Vatican II in Plain English - Page 97-98*

*In the Mass Christ is really present in the minister, in the eucharistic bread and wine, in the proclaimed Word of God, and in the whole community gathered to worship and pray. Christ is also present in a special way in all the other sacraments. Because of Christ's assured presence, the Liturgy gives us the unique opportunity to enter fully and honestly into our most right and authentic relationship with God.*

*Sacrosanctum Concilium - Paragraph 7  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 99*

It seems to me that one of the signs of Christ's *faithfulness* to us is his presence. The liturgy expresses this presence in a special way. But the Trinity is also present through their indwelling in us. God's way of *faithfulness* is through the Trinitarian presence that is constant no matter how we respond to the message of Jesus. When we take our detours,

we may feel that the Trinity has disappeared from our lives. The feeling is an honest one but it does not control the Trinity's actual indwelling presence. Sin and foolishness do not have the power to drive God out of our lives. It does seem to have the power to make us think that way. Hence, when we discover our failures, it is good to seek a path of *conversion* and open our hearts again to the presence of the Trinity within us. We might say that when we close the door of our heart on the Trinity, our *conversion* opens that door. Once again we respond to the Trinity's loving presence. As the OFS Rule puts it: *On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace* (cf. OFS Rule #7).

Artists frequently paint the picture of the father embracing his prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24). The son had never been out of his father's awareness. The father of the prodigal son kept the image of his wayward son alive in his heart. God does the same for us. In this sense the sacrament of reconciliation is a celebration of the love of God who forgives rather than a focus on the sin that needs forgiveness. Each sacrament repeats for us the presence of God's love in a variety of situations of life from birth (baptism) to the coming of illness or Sister Death (Anointing of the sick).

For us, being *faithful* will have something to do with our presence to each other. God's love finds its expression through ordinary people bringing the love of God to others in a variety of ways. They visit the sick and homebound; they are concerned for people in prison or caught in addictions or loneliness; they care for people suffering from handicaps; or who are refugees of war; they show love for "outsiders" and welcome them; they enjoy good friendships. God's presence happens through all these people who reach out and share time, talent, and treasure as needed. As the OFS Rule puts it: *... 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* (OFS Rule #11). *Sharing* becomes a way of presence to people

in need of loving care. Thus God's love finds expression through us.

When we are generous to others in our love for them, we recognize in our hearts ... *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 (OFS Rule #11).* When we are *faithful* to the OFS Rule it becomes a way to be present to others whom we love or learn to love. The Trinity shows love through their indwelling in us. Through us they show their love to others in various circumstances. This is what love does. We follow a *seraphic lover* - St. Francis of Assisi, and his loving partner, St. Clare of Assisi.

Another article of the OFS Rule invites us to be present by: *Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged 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 (OFS Rule #12).* God is present in the various situations and circumstances of our lives. We discover that *faithfulness* to the OFS Rule finds expression in our love for others. Jesus gives a vibrant model of presence through his words and actions in the Gospel we profess to follow.

The OFS Rule gives another indication of our need to be present to all people. The OFS Rule invites spouses and parents to make present the love of the Trinity: *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 journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child (OFS Rule #17).*

We are frequently called to make a difference in the lives of people through personal presence which is molded by our Franciscan vocation. It is something we have professed to be and do.

*Faithfulness* to article #17 of the OFS Rule requires that we make our love present in married life and with our children and, I presume, with grandchildren, or pupils in school, or young people outside the parameters of a school.



*Faithfulness* requires that we evaluate our behavior to be assured that our presence is love-giving and life-giving. We imitate the great lovers - Jesus, Francis, and Clare of Assisi. Our vocation is a call to learn many ways to love one another without becoming enablers of addictions or so domineering that people run away when we are present. We may recognize in ourselves patterns of failure that we see in others. We need *conversion* regularly! We learn that *conversion* comes not only from our successes, but often from insights offered by our failures.



Presence at the regular gatherings of the fraternity is required as a *faithful* way to build Franciscan life. *The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer, and active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 30.2

It is also part of supportive presence that OFS members do their "fair share" to provide for financial needs of the OFS at the various levels.

3. Rule 25 ***In a family spirit***, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. *The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 30.3

Over and above support for the local fraternity is our support for the *higher fraternities* and their councils. The Regional Fraternity determines the amount needed from each fraternity in their region as the "fair share" for higher fraternity needs. That can be changed by the Regional fraternity, or upgraded as needs escalate. We are aware that our Franciscan family does not exist in a spiritual vacuum but needs financial support for fraternity development. The financial gift of individuals within the fraternity depends on their ability to pay. Sharing financial support is expected unless members are unable to share. But if a member *unreasonably* refuses to share, it calls for dialogue between the council and the individual. Unwillingness to participate in fraternity life, when the member is able to do so, requires a time for dialogue. We help one another to be *faithful* to our OFS profession.

Having shared these ideas, we proclaim that our Franciscan way of life includes both spiritual and material actions. Franciscans have both physical and spiritual needs in the pursuit of *faithfulness* to their way of life.

*1. The brothers and sisters are co-responsible to the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 30.1

The OFS is not just another society or parish group. It is a vocation for life to follow the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi in everyday life. It is expected to have a place of primacy when there are scheduling conflicts. Absence from the community gatherings should happen only for serious reasons. *Faithfulness* requires our presence at the community gatherings. It is part of the gift we give each other in fraternity life. With the gift comes the responsibility to create gatherings that are worth attending and to give generous personal and financial support for OFS life.

Around 2005 I wrote the following poetry about God's way of loving us that I want to share with you.

***Our Trinitarian God - who can only love ...***

*The Lord calls in silence  
to a world seeking peace. God's word comes  
like the descent of a quiet, velvet night.  
There is no particular way that God speaks,  
no one particular way that says everything.*

*What a marvelous experience,  
to be in the presence of God,  
and silence is an adequate response.  
God reads the heart  
and proclaims hope to people who love God,  
even people who may not know God.  
God speaks of His care for us,  
how God holds us in a warm embrace.  
God etches our names  
on the palm of His hand.  
God sees them as He raises  
those hands before His eyes.*

*If the world were to stop tomorrow,  
God would still be present to me.  
Should I no longer be able  
to speak, or see, or walk, or think,  
God would still exist and love me.*

*If all the things I have done,  
all the people I have met,  
all the wood I have formed into  
cabinets, or the words  
I have written,  
or the sermons I have given -  
if they would all disappear,  
God would still be present  
and God would still love me,  
for our God is a faithful God.*

*It is difficult for a person  
who is full of "self"  
to acknowledge such a loving God.  
It means acknowledging that there is  
Someone I cannot control.*

*Someone I cannot teach.  
Someone I cannot stop  
from loving me,  
and calling me to new life.*

*Despite what I may do,  
God continues to be God,  
continues to love me,  
continues to call me to love -  
so that God's will may be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.*

*A falsely proud person is blind.  
The blindness comes from  
the brilliant shine of his/her own sun.  
It is too bright and blinds eyes  
to the Light of the World.  
How strange to realize  
that two lights  
have such different effects.  
One leads to blindness,  
the other to light and vision.*

*Lord, heal the blindness caused by my own sun.  
Open me to the light of your Son.  
Make me a Eucharist,  
someone who is always thanking you  
for the wonder of your Light and love,  
especially for your Word-made-flesh, Jesus. Amen*

\*\*\*

The Trinity is a mystery of our loving God - faithful, light-filled and prompted by unconditional love. We Franciscans are ordinary people remembering that we are like the moon reflecting the light of the sun. *We never forget that the Son is the source of the Light in our lives!*



*Christ instituted the eucharistic celebration at his last supper with his friends. His purpose was to provide the Church with a memorial of his loving death and resurrection: a sacrament of love, a*

*sign of unbreakable unity, a bond of charity and justice, all filling us with grace.*

*Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) - Paragraph 47*  
Vatican II in Plain English - Vol 2 - Page 108

### ***A few things to discuss***

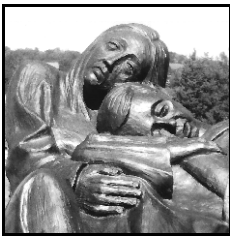
1. Describe/define being *faithful* as a way of fulfilling the responsibilities of your profession as a Franciscan. Evaluate the difference of this definition with other ways you may have understood *faithfulness*.

2. Having this fresh sense of *faithfulness*, which articles of the OFS Rule are most difficult for you to practice being *faithful*? What does the story of the prodigal in Luke 15:11-24 teach you about the quality of God's *faithfulness* as revealed by the father in the story?

3. How does *faithfulness* fit into the call of Francis (and our call) to "... *repair my house*?" What are some personal qualities of *faithfulness* that help you repair: a) the Church? b) your fraternity? c) your home or neighborhood or country? d) your personal life? e) the world? How would you initiate action to make such "repairs?"

4. How do you *faithfully* fulfill OFS Rule #19 where it says: *Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others*? Explain.

\*\*\*



'Sr. Death' - Statue by  
Michael Gaffney OFM Cap

*.. but we can also boast  
 in our sufferings,  
 knowing that suffering produces  
 endurance, and endurance produces  
 character, and character produces hope,  
 and hope does not disappoint us,  
 because God's love has been poured  
 into our hearts through the Holy Spirit  
 that has been given to us.*

Romans 5:3-5





*Tradition is the living transmission of the message of the Gospel in the Church. The oral preaching of the Apostles and the written message of salvation under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Bible) are conserved and handed on as the Deposit of Faith through the Apostolic Succession in the Church. Both the living Tradition and the written Scriptures have their common source in the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.*

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 25

### **OFS Quotes**

*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. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.*

OFS Rule #24

*Rule 7 Secular Franciscans ... propose to live the spirit of continued 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 director; 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.*

OFS Constitutions - Article 13.1



*... This (initial) formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, **in common with the candidates of other fraternities.***

OFS Constitutions - Article 40.1

## RE: Eucharist and Gatherings

It is true that Article 14.3 of the OFS General Constitutions (GC) states: *The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church. Christ unites us to himself and to one another as a single body in it. Therefore, the Eucharist should be the center of the life of the fraternity. The brothers and sisters should participate in the Eucharist as frequently as possible.*

It is also true that Article 53.2 states: *They should come together **periodically** (emphasis is mine) as an ecclesial community to celebrate the Eucharist in a climate which strengthens the fraternal bond and characterizes the identity of the Franciscan Family.*

And the footnote to article 42.3 indicates that profession ought to take place during the Eucharist.

Yet, Article 24 of the OFS Rule points out: *To foster communion among the members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community ... (and) should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life in fraternity.*

So, Article 53.1 builds on this idea by stating: *The fraternity must offer its members opportunities for coming together and collaborating through meetings to be held with as great a frequency as allowed by the situation and with the involvement of all its members. The GC picks up on this idea of ongoing formation in Article 44.2. The fraternity has the duty to help its own members with programs of continuing formation; a) to listen and meditate on the Word of God, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel. b) to reflect on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions; c) to realize and deepen the Franciscan vocation.*

*What does all of this say? Though the Eucharist is central in the life-style and mind-set of the Secular Franciscans and ought to be a part of the fraternity's gathering on a periodic or occasional basis, like at professions or special events, it is not meant to be a part of the regular and frequent meetings of the fraternity because that has a different objective all together. The objective - according to both the Rule and the General Constitutions - is what the French call a 'review of life' or a 'faith-sharing' based on the Word (not Eucharist) to nourish and strengthen the apostolic, ecclesial, and Franciscan dimensions of the OFS life.*

*Benet Fonck OFM - November 7, 2001*

## Suggested Written Texts

Secular Franciscans access documents that relate to Franciscan life and its functions. Seculars holding an office in the OFS need documents to be available for their use. The documents answer a variety of questions that can arise. The name, address, and costs of *some* texts are found on the inside of the back cover of **TAU-USA**.

- ✦ *The Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order* (Constitutions, National and SA Statutes, Rule, Ritual etc.)
- ✦ *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order* (Revised 2012 - Information on SA ministry and related topics)
- ✦ *Rule book* - (Little Red Book with OFS Rule - a handy copy)
- ✦ *Franciscan Family Connections* (Revised 2011) - (Training manual for Regional and Local Spiritual Assistants- 19 chapters)
- ✦ *The Franciscan Journey* (2012) - Lester Bach OFM Cap - (Orientation and *Initial formation* text - 33 chapters)
- ✦ *To Set Themselves Free* - Teresa Baker OFS - (Guide to the life and Rule of the OFS)
- ✦ *Fully Mature with the Fullness of Christ* - Benet Fonck OFM - (An initial formation program - 3rd Edition)

Other books are available from various publishers.

- ✦ *Francis of Assisi - early documents* - 3 Volumes - New City Press 202 Cardinal Rd - Hyde Park, NY 12538. - (Texts of Francis' writings and other Franciscan resources)
- ✦ Helpful titles on apostolic ministries or formation (The *For up to Now* formator's manual) can be obtained from the leaders of NAFRA national committees and commissions.
- ✦ A variety of biographies of Francis and Clare are available. (Plus books by Franciscan theologians and leaders)

+++

*Initial and Ongoing Formation materials* are a priority. Councils should have up-to-date copies of formation publications. Franciscan writers on Franciscan spirituality and texts on social ministries and prayer should be available to formators, councilors, and newcomers in the fraternity.



NAFRA publishes texts (brochures) on various issues of Franciscan life: (E.g. Visitations / Elections / Vocational materials / Council duties etc). *Contact* the secretary of the NEC for information.

## **Important SA info**

*SA's at all levels have a term limit of 12 consecutive years. At some point local and regional councils (fraternities) will need a new Spiritual Assistant. Here are some guidelines concerning SA's.*

1. **Only the major superior** (Provincial or his delegate - the Provincial Spiritual Assistant) of the 1st Order/TOR Province, to which a local fraternity is bonded, *can appoint a spiritual assistant to that fraternity*. Local or regional councils **DO NOT** have that authority nor does anyone else in the OFS.

2. Local or regional councils can *recommend* qualified persons to the Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA) of the province to which the involved fraternity is bonded. Any OFS member who is recommended should be perpetually professed for at least five years. (cf. GC - Article 89.3, 89.4)

3. When the PSA has chosen an appointee, he *consults* the appropriate council for their input. The PSA mentors the training of an appointee by using the book: *Franciscan Family Connections* (2012) [19 chapters] as a basic text. Other materials can be added by the REC. The PSA can delegate a qualified person to mentor the individual.

4. The initial pages of *Franciscan Family Connections* give directions on establishing the training program. Please read these pages if you are involved. The book has separate questions for local and regional SA nominees.

5. **CNSA:** The four friar members of the *Conference of National Spiritual Assistants* (CNSA) are appointed by the Provincial or Provincial Conferences of the 1st Order/TOR in the USA (1st Order = three / TOR = one). They *consult* NEC about the appointment. CNSA serves the National Executive Council (NEC) and the National Fraternity (NAFRA). The four CNSA friars rotate as CNSA president-in-turn (a 2 year term). The president-in-turn attends all meetings of NEC. All four friars attend the regular NAFRA meetings. CNSA friars meet together several times a year.



**Establishing a new fraternity** requires about six years. This book, *What it Takes* (2013), summarizes material for *establishing* a new fraternity or *re-activating* one that was de-activated.

\*\* Detailed guidance can be found in the *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order* (Revised - 2012) Page 38-41) \*\*

The Regional Executive Council (REC) **is involved from the beginning** of the process. The REC approves the request for establishing a new (or re-activated) fraternity in their region. The Regional Executive Council (REC) is kept informed of the progress of the entire program.

Upon receiving the request and approving it, the REC may serve as the sponsoring fraternity or appoint an established local fraternity council to be the *sponsoring fraternity council* (SFC). The REC can appoint someone from the *newly-forming group* as a non-voting liaison to the SFC. At the end of three years of initial formation, **at least five** (or more) **perpetually professed people are required** (some or all may be newly-professed). Five perpetually professed members are needed to form a council. They serve as the temporary council during the last three years of the 6-year process leading to canonical establishment.

*For the valid establishment of a local fraternity, at least five perpetually professed members are required. The admission and profession of these first brothers and sisters will be received by the council of another local fraternity or by the council of a higher level which will have provided for their formation in appropriate ways. The acts of admission and profession and the decree of establishment are preserved in the records of the fraternity. Copies are sent to the council of the higher level.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 46.2

1. The SFC's formation team interviews the new members at the beginning of the formation program. This formation team guides the *orientation and initial formation* program for the new group (about a 3 year program). The recommended book for orientation and initial formation is *The Franciscan Journey* (33 chapters). The steps of formation are as follows:

(cf. Statutes of the National Fraternity of the OFS in the USA - Article 19): *Orientation* (3 months) / *Inquiry* (6 months) / *Candidacy* (18 to 35 months). *The Franciscan Journey* has 26 chapters for *Candidacy*. The formation team *uses the same materials and techniques that are used in already established fraternities*.

- ✦ The *sponsoring fraternity council* (SFC) approves the newcomers when they move from *orientation* to *inquiry* and from *inquiry* to *candidacy*. Near the end of *candidacy*, the council of the SFC discerns the *candidates'* readiness for profession. (During candidacy the REC makes a fraternal & pastoral visitation of the newly-forming group). When approval for profession is given, preparations are made for a spiritual preparation for profession and for the program of profession itself.

- ✦ Profession is made to the minister of the sponsoring fraternity. The professions are recorded in the register of the *newly-forming group*.

- ✦ At the conclusion of this 3-year *initial formation* period, a 1st Order/TOR province must be contacted to assume the *altius moderamen* for the *newly-forming group* (if it hasn't already been done). When a 1st Order/TOR Province accepts the *altius moderamen* for the newly-forming group, the PSA of that Province appoints a spiritual assistant for the group. Until this connection is made, the emerging-group **cannot** be canonically established.

*The provisions of articles #46 and #47 of the General Constitutions, shall govern the canonical establishment of new fraternities and determine the Franciscan friar province which assumes pastoral care* (cf. Statutes for Spiritual Assistance - articles #6.1 and #11.2).

National Statutes of the OFS in the USA - Article 18.2

2. The newly-forming group *now* becomes an *emerging-group*, with a council appointed by the REC. **How is the council appointed?** The SFC *consults* the members of the emerging-group to nominate five *perpetually professed* people for council positions. If the SFC approves, it recommends these nominees to the REC. When the REC approves, this *appointed council* begins their three-year internship as the emerging-group's council.

3. *After approval and appointment by the REC*, The council of the emerging-group, **appointed by REC**,

functions *as though* they were a fraternity council. The SFC **mentors and assists** the new council and members of the *emerging-group* in implementing the skills required by the OFS. (cf. The revised Handbook for Spiritual Assistance (2012) - **Page 40**) The council deals with all the issues listed in the General Constitutions, article 50. Here are a few particulars:

Submit annual report to the REC / conduct regular gatherings / meet regularly as a council / appoint formation personnel / request & prepare for pastoral and fraternal visitations / pay the "fair share" / approve people for the next step in formation / keep accurate and transparent financial & council meeting records / assure ongoing formation / collaborate with regional and national programs / attend meetings called by REC / minister must attend the regional chapter / keep a relationship with the province to which they are bonded / inform the national data-base of membership addresses ...

4. During these final 3 years the *REC makes a pastoral and fraternal visitation* to assess the functioning of the *emerging-group*. The REC needs assurance that the *emerging-group* is developing into a well-prepared and vibrant OFS fraternity. If visitation results (during the last five or six months of the 3-year internship) are positive, and **with REC approval**, preparations for canonical establishment (or re-activation) can proceed. If the REC does not approve, continued formation may be required. It is important to read **page 41** in the revised Handbook (2012) for further direction in dealing with the local bishop, the 1st Order/TOR major superior, the National Executive council, CNSA, and the region. The directions in the Handbook are needed and helpful.

5. **After canonical establishment** (or re-activation) the fraternity initiates the process for the *election* of its fraternity council. It recommends several possible dates to the REC. Agreeing on a specific date, *the council* of the emerging-group asks the REC *for a presider and witness* for the elections. The SFC can help the fraternity to prepare for the elections. Fraternity collaboration with regional and national programs is a normal expectation. When the fraternity is finally established, the new (or re-activated) fraternity functions on its own.

*They should be ready to promote common initiatives or participate in them and ... to work together to spread the Gospel, remove the causes of marginalization, and serve the cause of peace.*

## What about devotions?

OFS Rule #9 gives us some direction on the role of devotions in our Franciscan life. Referring to Mary, the Rule does not approve nor disapprove any devotion. It shares the consequences of a good devotion as a guide for our Franciscan devotional life:

*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.***

OFS Rule - #9

Among the ideas and qualities mentioned in this OFS Rule are these:

- + Mary is deeply loved by Francis;
- + Mary is open to every word and call of the Lord;
- + Mary is a humble servant;
- + Mary is a person whose complete self-giving is a model;
- + Mary's confident and earnest prayerfulness is a model.

No particular devotion is called for. Since most devotions come from private revelations, guidance is given in the *Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith's* booklet entitled: *The Message of Fatima, 121.* (cf. CCC, no 67). This text is quoted in: *Popular Devotional Practices* - USCCB - 2003 - Page 15.

*The criterion for the truth and value of a private revelation is therefore its orientation to Christ himself. When it leads us away from him or, when it becomes independent of him or even presents itself as another and better plan of salvation, more important than the Gospel, then it certainly does not come from the Holy Spirit, who guides us more deeply into the Gospel and not away from it.*

Popular Devotional Practices - USCCB - Page 15

Devotions approved by the Church obviously meet this criterion. However, people can easily make private devotions bigger than the Gospel or Jesus. This should **not** happen. Franciscans must never practice devotions that become more important than Christ or the Gospel.



## The spirit of OFS Ministries

Franciscans follow a Trinitarian spirituality. It is found in the Gospel and focuses on the intimate love between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Our spirituality proclaims God's nature and teaches us to imitate God i.e. *to love*. Made in God's image, those who believe the words and actions of Jesus realize that all people, even enemies, are to be loved.

In our world (And even in our Church) we see violence, hatred, antagonism, rage, anger, greediness, longing for personal power, neglecting the *common good*, and many other destructive qualities. As Jesus' *community of love* and *People of God*, we face these human issues. St. John gives an answer which is sufficient but difficult. He speaks to the issue after talking about people who do not love.

*Beloved, let us love one another because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way; God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him, In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.*

1 John 4: 7-12



Franciscans know that our call to be Franciscans points out the way to respond to John's words. We learn how to express God-love whenever love is required of us. It is not simplistic but it is true. We are weak and need the Spirit to be competent to love.

Jesus sent the Holy Spirit to teach us the ways of love and to find loving ways to express ourselves, little by little, *conversion by conversion*, as the OFS Rule requires. We have consecrated ourselves to this path.

## Duns Scotus Formation Trust Fund



... was established by the OFM Province of St. John the Baptist when they sold their Duns Scotus seminary in Detroit, MI. Money was set aside to create the *Duns Scotus Formation Trust Fund*.

**The goal:** To offer financial support for programs of formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the USA. Support is given to programs sponsored by local, regional, or national councils, or requested for formation reasons by individual OFS members. These programs may be formation workshops for *initial or ongoing formation*. They may be programs for reflecting on Franciscan spirituality. A program might help to initiate ministries that seek a deeper knowledge of our Franciscan charism. **The Duns Scotus Board of Trustees and NEC's Formation director** make the final decision.

### Process:

- ✦ Fraternities or individuals submit a request, with an explanation of their program - ***to their Regional Executive Council***. The entire cost of the program should be listed. The financial report should include the costs being covered by those requesting the program and what amount they seek from the **Duns Scotus Formation Trust Fund**.
- ✦ A statement of the anticipated results and/or benefits of the program should be listed. List the date by which funding is needed and the name, address, phone & e-mail address of:
  - .. the fraternity or individual making the request;
  - .. the local fraternity minister or formation director;
  - .. the contact person for the proposal, including the home address, phone, and e-mail address.
- ✦ *If the REC approves*, the petitioners send the request to:
  - a) **The Director of the National Formation Commission**
  - b) **Duns Scotus Formation Trust Fund Board of Trustees**

To send the request to the **Board of Trustees**  
*send it to:*

**OFS National Minister in the USA**  
 who is a member of the  
 Duns Scotus Board of Trustees.

## **Franciscan Society of the Queenship of Mary**

(cf. General Constitutions - Article 36)



Members of the OFS make profession to follow the OFS Rule for their whole life. Profession is not a vow but a consecration (promise) to follow the OFS Rule in daily life. The Society of the Queenship of Mary adds another dimension to the Franciscan commitment. In the statutes of the Queenship of Mary we read:

*4. The first unique characteristic is that all the members of the Queenship of Mary - besides the public promises made at the OFS profession - take four personal or private vows of obedience, poverty, chastity (either as celibates or in marriage), and apostolic engagement;*

*4.1 A private vow in the Catholic Church is "a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning a possible and better good which must be fulfilled by reason of the virtue of religion." (cf. CCC #2101-03).*

*4.2 A vow differs from the OFS public promises of profession in that one voluntarily binds himself/herself under the further bond of sin, an offense against God, for failure to keep the vow.*

The mission statement of the Queenship of Mary offers a further view:

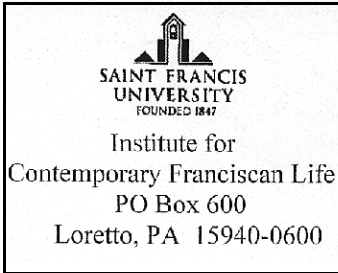
*The mission of the brothers and sisters of the Franciscan Society of the Queenship of Mary is:*

- \* to strive for holiness as members of the OFS and as persons making private vows of poverty, chastity, obedience to God and his Church, and the apostolate;*
- \* to rebuild the Church by realizing their freely chosen, intentional, and actual community living over the distance of miles;*
- \* to create a more loving and evangelical world by being advocates for the poor, the marginalized, and the abused through their community service, communication, and political action;*
- \* to bring the love of Christ incarnate to one's own faith and secular communities; and:*
- \* to accomplish all this with the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of all Creation, as our model and guide and with St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi as our exemplars and patrons.*

**Contact** (As of Jan 1, 2013)

Sally Daley OFS-QM  
 1-847-491-0126  
 sdaley7411@comcast.net  
 www.queenshipofmary.info

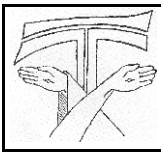
## **Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life ICFL**



*ICFL is based at St. Francis University in Loretto, PA. It offers a program of independent adult learning through correspondence study and distance education. The certificate program is designed for persons seeking knowledge in the areas of spirituality, history and the Franciscan way of life. Courses are presently non-credit and self-paced. Open to anyone interested in learning more about Catholic Franciscan values in contemporary society, these courses are designed for personal enrichment, ministerial enhancement, and for Secular Franciscans pursuing their on-going formation.*

*Enrollment is on-going, and a full year is given to complete each course. Courses earn Institute Units (IUs) toward a post-baccalaureate Certificate in Contemporary Franciscan Life. The Certificate is awarded after 15 units of study. Courses may be taken for general interest, without regard to the Certificate. A member of our faculty will work with you to guide your studies. A Completion Certificate is awarded at the end of each course to document your on-going learning.*

✦ Course listings and registration forms, as well as tuition costs and limited scholarship funding for those taking the various courses, may be obtained at the address at the head of this page (The e-mail address is - [ICFL@francis.edu](mailto:ICFL@francis.edu)). Using ICFL courses is one way to continue your individual Franciscan on-going formation.



*Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid to the conversion of each and everyone and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.*

## The "New Evangelization"



Evangelization was addressed in the 1960's by Vatican II, and in 1975 by Pope Paul VI in *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (On Evangelization in the Modern World). The Church has continued sharing ideas on evangelization in the 21st century.

1. In *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paragraph #41) Paul VI wrote that Catholics are to be *authentic* in living their faith. Being faithful to the faith and the OFS Rule are primary tools of evangelization for OFS members. People listen more readily to witnesses than to teachers. Stories about people of faith are effective ways of evangelization. People identify with individuals in the stories and imitate them. We readily see God at work in their lives.

2. People must come to know Jesus and his Gospel. The life and conduct of the *People of God* serves as a tool of evangelization. Being faithful to the OFS Rule gives us the opportunity to let people see the effects of faith in our lives. If, on the other hand, our lives do NOT reflect Jesus and the Gospel or the OFS Rule, we are not likely to influence people to accept our beliefs.

3. Franciscans not only speak about their faith but also give the reasons for their belief. We share the power of God's love that enables us to imitate Jesus and follow his words and actions. People need to hear our stories and struggles in living our faith life (cf. EN - Paragraph #42). There are many ways to share our faith and help other people to understand it.

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*Evangelii Nuntiandi* (EN), the documents of Vatican II, and recent texts and talks share qualities needed by evangelists. Keep in touch with such publications. They help us evangelize with greater confidence and competence. Moreover, we also recognize that we need to be personally evangelized. We need to live our faith with obvious integrity.

A) We embrace the gospel with the same passion of the early Christians. Their faith gave them strength to witness to the Gospel even when threatened by imprisonment or death.

B) Evangelizers show their faith in the Trinity in situations and issues of everyday life. The indwelling presence of the Trinity is the source of our faithfulness. We are respectful and honest with people when we share our faith. The Holy Spirit calls people to *faith* and *conversion*. Develop a trust in the Holy Spirit as you prepare to evangelize.

C) When we: - work for peace and justice, / show loving interaction with people, / seek the common good, / show a readiness to forgive and show compassion, / do our best to love our enemies, - these qualities can enable us to be competent evangelists! Personal renewal is part of evangelization. The OFS International Chapter in Brazil, October, 2011, put it this way:

*An enthusiastic work of pastoral remodeling is waiting for us. It is a work where we are all involved. The Holy Spirit in person - who made Francis' heart to be illuminated by His flame, who also identified him with the mystery of Jesus, poor and crucified, in fraternal communion with all creatures, and who entrusted to him the greatest mission of repairing the Church - has called the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth. The Spirit has taken us to His own at the moment of our OFS profession or our commitment to Franciscan Youth, and has sent us to the entire world in the name of the Church. "I have done my part, let Christ show you yours!" (Legenda Minor - 14.3.)*

Evangelized to Evangelize - OFS International Chapter - 2011 - Page 1-2

*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.*

OFS Rule #6

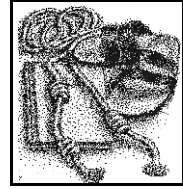
*The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. Jn 13:1-13) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. Jn 13:1: 15:13).*

*The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son.*

God is Love - Benedict XVI - Paragraph 19

### ***Altius moderamen***

Through the *altius moderamen* ("higher direction") of canon 303, the Holy See gives a canonical responsibility for the Franciscan family to the 1st Order/TOR. The action gives ecclesiastical legitimacy and affirmation to the 1st Order/TOR to interact with the OFS to guarantee the evangelical charism given to Francis - "*Go, rebuild my house* (church)." This legacy is shared by the entire Franciscan family who are equal, authentic and complementary participants in the Franciscan charism.



Though some form of jurisdiction is usually implied in such canonical actions, the intent of *altius moderamen* is more like a fraternal obligation to be a brother to the OFS brothers and sisters. Through this fraternal solicitude, the friars seek to create faithfulness within the OFS members of the Franciscan family. The friars are called to tend to the spiritual needs of the OFS.

The *altius moderamen*, in the history of the *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis* (OFS), has three objectives:

1. Promote fidelity to the Franciscan charism in its secular expression;
2. Assure the observance of the OFS Rule and Constitutions;
3. Provide support and accountability for the OFS life in fraternity (cf. OFS Rule, article 26)

The person responsible for realizing these objectives is the "major superior" of the 1st Order/TOR. The "major superior," on the international level is the 1st Order and TOR **General ministers**. Within the provinces of the 1st Order/TOR, the "major superior" is the **Provincial minister**. These major superiors generally appoint an "habitual delegate" to carry out these responsibilities. These delegates are called a **General spiritual assistant** or a **Provincial**

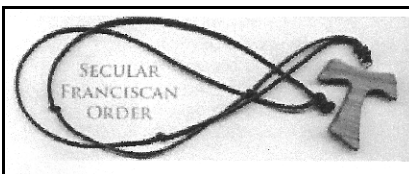
### spiritual assistant (PSA).

The way to fulfill this responsibility is achieved through three particular actions by the major superior or his delegate:

1. to establish fraternities of the OFS;
2. to appoint spiritual assistants on the various levels;
3. to conduct the pastoral visitations of the fraternities on the various levels.

These actions are like familial interactions rather than legal responsibilities. *As one family we work together to express and build up the Franciscan charism.*

Without prejudicing the duty of the provincial minister or his delegate (PSA) to visit the fraternities bonded to his province, ***the duty of a visitation of local fraternities is usually fulfilled by the regional spiritual assistant*** who acts in the name of the appropriate friar province. The regional SA also reports on the visitation to the respective provincial minister or his delegate of the province to which a fraternity is bonded.



In short, the tradition of fraternal interaction between the friars and the OFS is *given by the Church through an apostolic mandate*. This has become codified (canon 303)

in what we now call: *altius moderamen*. *It is a canonical responsibility to guarantee faithfulness to the Franciscan charism, the OFS Rule and Constitutions, and to live as brothers and sisters in the Franciscan family*. The friars accomplish this through establishing new fraternities, appointing spiritual assistants to fraternities bonded to their province, and by regular pastoral visitations.

Summarized from a text by Benet Fonck OFM



## A few reflections

A variety of views:

- ✦ *OFS is just another organization that spells out a way of life. One group looks just like another.*
- ✦ *OFS is a special brand of being a Christian.*
- ✦ *Since our numbers are diminishing, perhaps the OFS is being called to some form of renewal in order to continue a faithful presence in the Church and the world.*



Different folks give voice to different ideas about the OFS. That is not uncommon. However, talking about rules and regulations by itself will not convince people to respond to a vocation to the OFS.

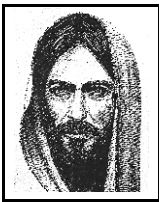
Living our lives in ways that are transparent and show a dedication to the Gospel / growing intimate with Jesus / acknowledging the power of love given by the Holy Spirit / accepting *conversion* as a part of life and offering less and less resistance / acting in unselfish ways when dealing with one another / avoiding violence in words, actions or attitudes / seeking ways to respectfully converse with one another - these actions are what Franciscans do. Creating committees, commissions, or other structures cannot, by themselves, change us.

Is our Franciscan vision helped by structures? Of course! Do *structures* have the power to sanctify? Probably not. Does the *vision* help us to sanctify our lives?

*Depende!* The Trinity calls us to put into practice all the elements of the OFS Rule. In a Church and world full of division, including violent words and actions, Franciscans may be partly responsible. We may be divided by know-it-all attitudes or by our condemnations and judgments of others. We may totally neglect *rebuilding/reforming* either the church, the world or ... ourselves! If so, we are part of the problem rather than part of the solution.

Like other folks, we may separate people into gay or straight; conservative or liberal; racially prejudiced or racially accepting; anti-immigrant or welcoming the immigrant; concerned with bank accounts rather than love accounts; ready for revenge rather than forgiveness; ignoring unloving actions in the Church and the world that add to the problem rather than seeking compassion and understanding to help solve problems; we may negatively judge folks who are "different," presuming that somehow they are "less," rather than getting acquainted and learning to understand them. In short, we are as human as other people. We can make poor choices or gospel choices! We can presume we are right and that "others" are wrong. We "know" they are wrong, sometimes with weak or minimal reasons for our opinions.

Franciscans listen to and imitate Jesus. Jesus, in turn, helps us to be pastoral rather than proclaiming how "right" we are. Negative attitudes about the quality of "other's" faith sometimes builds on ignorance, stubbornness, insecurity, or fear. Ongoing understanding of the faith and *conversion* are normal gifts in facing these issues. Franciscans are not required to be *thee* apologists of the faith. Other people in the Church can fulfill that role. The Catholic faith has survived 2000 years of trials and troubles. The Holy Spirit never abandoned us even when we mistakenly thought so.



Our *love for and relationship with the Trinity, neighbor, and self* does not allow for exceptions. Relationship is a vital ingredient of Franciscan life. If negative words, opinions, and actions dominate our lives, our Franciscan vision gets blurred. Change is needed in that "other" person but also in us - in myself! The OFS Rule and Constitutions give guidance for living a Franciscan life. It is easy to memorize the Rule. But to give it flesh in the ordinary circumstances of everyday life is the demanding but satisfying alternative - and *it brings joy in its wake.*

## **Names of the 30 OFS Regions in the USA**

Troubadours of Peace  
 Bl. Junipero Serra  
 St. Francis  
 Our Lady of the Rockies  
 Santa Maria de las Montanas  
 Our Lady of Guadalupe  
 St. Thomas More  
 Queen of Peace  
 Juan de Padilla  
 Los Tres Companeros  
 Ohana O Ke Anuenu  
 La Verna  
 Mother Cabrini  
 Franciscans of the Prairie  
 St. Clare  
 St. Joan of Arc  
 Divine Mercy  
 Our Lady of Indiana  
 St. Maximilian Kolbe  
 Holy Trinity  
 Brothers & Sisters of St. Francis  
 Five Franciscan Martyrs  
 St. Margaret of Cortona  
 St. Katherine Drexel  
 Our Lady of the Angels  
 The Tau Cross  
 St. Kateri Tekawitha  
 Solanus Casey  
 St. Elizabeth of Hungary  
 Lady Poverty

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*The regional fraternity is the organic union of all the local fraternities existing in a territory or which can be integrated into a natural unity, either by geographic proximity, or by common problems and pastoral circumstances. It assures the link between the local fraternities and the national fraternity in respect to the unity of the OFS and in accord with the cooperative efforts of the Franciscan religious Orders to provide spiritual assistance within the area.*

## What about "Magisterium?"

Some Catholics believe that anything from Rome is the highest form of magisterial teaching. Some things are and some are not.

1. Many ideas and directions from Rome deal with world or church issues. They alert us to difficulties or ambiguity and offer direction. This teaching is often a form of guidance rather than magisterial teaching. It deserves respect but may also change as fresh insights arise within the Church (among hierarchy, theologians, clergy, and laity). Issues of faith and morality are clarified through respectful dialogue.

2. \*The teaching office of the college of bishops is called *Magisterium*. Bishops usually make this clear when they share their insights and teachings. (cf. U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - Page 134)

*\*The Pope and bishops also together teach truths that flow from Divine Revelation or that are closely related to it. Sometimes they teach these truths as being definitive, which means they must be firmly accepted and held. Sometimes they teach in a less than definitive way, which requires a religious submission of will and mind.*

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - Page 134

*\* **MAGISTERIUM** - The teaching office of the pope, and bishops in communion with him, guided by the Holy Spirit. The pope and bishops are the authoritative teachers in the Church.*

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - Page 519

3. Some talks, homilies, or instructions of the Pope or bishops deserve respect as good theology, but may not be magisterial teaching unless it is made clear that it is such. Many public sharings are written by the Pope or a bishop in collaboration with theologians. That is true of the weekly talks by the Pope at public audiences. He offers an opportunity for dialogue in order to gain further clarity of the topic under discussion. It is not automatically a magisterial teaching. It is good theology that can open the

way to greater clarity.

Benedict XVI, in one of his books, written before he became Pope, gives this gentle reflection on magisterium:

*It goes without saying that this book is in no way an exercise of the magisterium, but it is solely an expression of my personal search "for the face of the Lord." (cf. Ps 27.8). Everyone is free, then, to contradict me. I would only ask my readers for that initial good will without which there can be no understanding.*

Jesus of Nazareth (Vol 1) - Benedict XVI - Foreword - Pages xxiii-xxiv

This gentle understanding of magisterium opens the door to respectful dialogue. Dialogue with others about ideas that may not be magisterial teachings can enrich our understanding of the faith. (cf. For further insights, read pages 25-26 in The U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults -or- check the index of: The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) for the terms "Magisterium" or "Infallibility".

**INFALLIBILITY:** *This is the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church whereby the pastors of the Church - the pope, and bishops in communion with him - can definitively proclaim a doctrine of faith and morals, which is divinely revealed for the belief of the faithful. The gift flows from the grace of the whole body of the faithful not to err in matters of faith and morals. The pope teaches infallibly when he declares that his teaching is "ex cathedra" (literally - "from the throne"); that is, he teaches as supreme pastor of the Church.*

U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Page 516

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*... I wish to know in this way, if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours, that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after he looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him is he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord, and always be merciful with brothers such as these.*



A Letter to a Minister - Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol I - Page 97-98

## **Administrative Servant-Leaders**

### **INTERNATIONAL**

GC - Articles 69-75

Read articles 69 to 75 of the OFS General Constitutions (GC) for information on the International fraternity and Presidency. The Presidency is similar to national or regional executive councils.

### **NATIONAL**

GC - Articles 65-68 / National Statutes - Articles 3-6

**NB:** People **elected** to an office may vote at chapter meetings.  
People **appointed** to an office do not vote but can engage in the dialogue at chapter and council meetings

OFS legislative authority in the USA is held by the **National Fraternity** (NAFRA). NAFRA is composed of: **a) all the USA presently elected regional ministers or their delegate; b) the presently elected members of the National Executive Council (NEC); c) Presently appointed or elected formation and committee leaders; d) the present four members of CNSA.** NAFRA meets once a year, hosted by one of the OFS regions.

- ✦ NEC meets several times a year and deals with issues assigned by NAFRA or issues that arise during the period between NAFRA meetings.
- ✦ NEC prepares for the annual NAFRA "chapter" by: Listing the issues to be dealt with / Ongoing formation for the entire NAFRA group / Reports / New business / Guest speakers / Other necessary business.

The following OFS members are required to attend NAFRA meetings and have the *right to vote*:

- ✦ The presently elected regional ministers or their delegate.
- ✦ The four present CNSA members. (*They do not vote in elections or on financial matters*)
- ✦ The presently elected members of the National Executive Council

These OFS members can be present at the NAFRA meeting but *have no vote*. They can contribute to the dialogue at the meeting.

- ✦ OFS members presently appointed as chair of committees or commissions / the chair of study groups / invited experts.

Other people may be *non-voting attendees* at a NAFRA chapter with limited participation, observing the work of the chapter.

- ✦ Associated Franciscan groups - Anglican TOSSF / Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF) / Other groups who are invited to attend.
- ✦ Speakers and other people invited to the NAFRA chapter.

- ✦ *Observers*; OFS members or others who choose to attend and register for this chapter meeting.
- ✦ The ***National Executive Council*** (NEC) implements the issues and goals developed by NAFRA. The NEC members are elected, every three years, by the present voting members of NAFRA.
- ✦ The President-in-turn of CNSA (a two year term) is an *ex officio* member of NEC. The *President-in-turn* of CNSA is chosen on a rotating basis among the four members of CNSA.

### **REGIONAL**

GC - Articles 61-64 / National Statutes - Articles 21-26

- ✦ The *Regional Fraternity* is composed of all the present local ministers of a region / the present Regional Executive Council (REC) / and the present members of the Regional Spiritual Assistants. These groups function in the region in the same manner as NAFRA and NEC groups do at the national level.  
*The Regional Fraternity has legislative authority for the region.*

<p><b>NB:</b> A region's area can be changed by the National Fraternity (NAFRA) which is the legislative body for the OFS in the USA.</p>
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- ✦ Those required to attend the annual chapter of the region are: *The present local ministers / the presently elected members of the REC / the present Regional spiritual assistants.* They all have a vote at the Regional chapter. (Regional Spiritual assistants do not vote in regional elections nor on financial matters).
- ✦ Local ministers & elected members of REC vote in elections and on issues brought before the Regional Fraternity. Appointed regional directors of formation / appointed committee & commission chairs are to be *present* at the annual chapter of the region & serve in a consultative capacity but may not vote. (Observers are welcome).

### **LOCAL**

GC - Articles 49-52 / National Statutes - Article 18

- ✦ On the local level, every three years, perpetually professed members of the fraternity elect a council to serve the fraternity.
- ✦ Competent & perpetually professed fraternity members are expected to be willing to serve as servant-leaders in the fraternity. This is part of their OFS commitment.

*In the local fraternity, the perpetually professed of the same*

*fraternity have active voice, i.e. can elect, and passive voice, i.e. can be elected. ...*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 77.1

✦ The local council must have: a) a minister, b) a vice-minister, c) a secretary, d) a treasurer, e) a director of formation. Other offices may be added for the good of fraternity life. It is encouraged that the local council appoint a team to work with the fraternity's initial and ongoing formation director.

✦ 3. *The leaders of the OFS at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.*



OFS General Constitutions - Article 31.3

1. *It is the duty of the council of the local fraternity:*

✦ *to promote the initiatives necessary for fostering fraternity life, for improving the human, Christian, and Franciscan formation of its members, and for sustaining their witness and commitment in the world;*

✦ *to make concrete and courageous choices, appropriate for the situation of the fraternity, from among the numerous activities possible in the field of the apostolate.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 50.1

1. *The ministers and councilors should live and foster the spirit and reality of communion among the brothers and sisters, among the various fraternities, and between them and the Franciscan family. They should, above all, cherish peace and reconciliation in and around the fraternity.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 32.1

2. *The fraternity, meeting in an assembly or chapter, discusses questions regarding its own life and organization. Every three years, in an elective assembly or chapter, the fraternity elects the minister and the council in the way established by the Constitutions and statutes.*

OFS General Constitutions - Article 49.2



## A few things to discuss

1. What topic did you find most informative in *Potpourri*? Why? Make a list of topics in order of their priority for you. Explain your reasons for the priorities you choose.
2. Why did you find the topics helpful - i.e. how did they help you in living your Franciscan profession? Each topic might have a different reason.
3. If you were to go to the New Testament to find texts that relate to two or more of these topics, list the texts you would choose and read that text(s) and explain how you saw the "connections" with your choice.
4. For your personal reflection: What areas of your personal life need *conversion* as you develop your Franciscan vocation as a professed member? How will you go about making changes? Will the changes actually be noticed?
5. What subjects are still a bit confusing to you in Franciscan life. How will you find resources to help you improve your understanding? Explain.



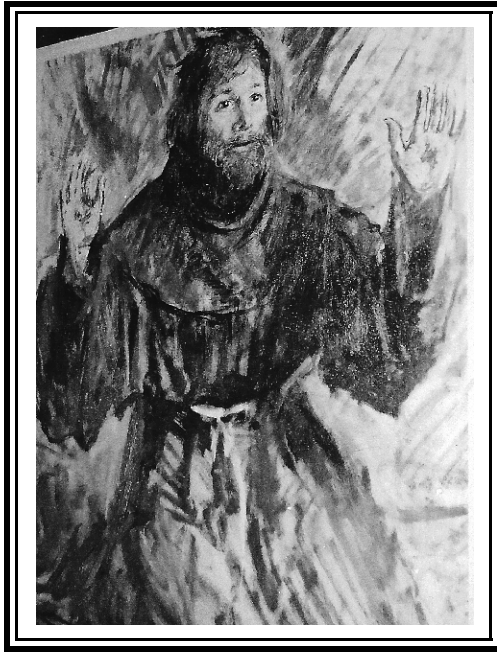
*We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ; we are brothers to him when we fulfill "the will of the Father who is in heaven" (Mt 12:50).*

*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 ...*

Prologue to OFS Rule - Chapter one



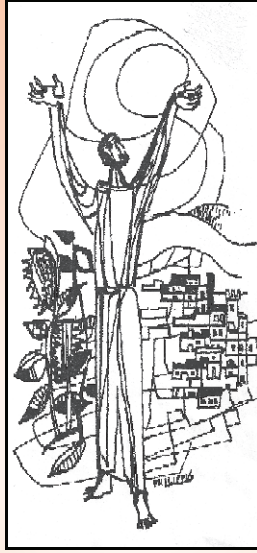
*May the Lord bless you  
and keep you*

*May his face shine upon you,  
and be gracious to you.*

*May He look upon you with  
kindness and give you his peace.*







*As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring. In fact, many people who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet become disciples of Christ.*

*Legend of the Three Companions*  
Francis of Assisi, the Founder (Vol II) - Page 102