

Ordo Secularis Franciscanus

VIEWPOINT





A Letter from Paula Pearce, National Minister

On this snowy day, I pray for anyone who has to face travelling in potentially hazardous conditions and for all those who work to keep our country going, as far as they can, given the circumstances they face. Further from home we must all be thinking about the terrible situation in Syria and praying.

ARKLEY

The National Council held its first meeting at Arkley on January 20th, where we were made truly welcome. Hospitality is clearly a part of the charism of that community. Personal circumstances prevented us from setting up the office at that time, but we are hoping to settle in in March. There was a Lent retreat at Arkley from 7-14 March. Events meant I was away for most of February, but I will be present during some of the retreat and hope to be able to concentrate some of my attention, while there, to setting up the new seat. Any donations towards establishing Arkley will be greatly appreciated. Some regions have already sent us money. Many thanks for your generosity. Thanks to Pam Thornton's son-in-law, everything has been transported from Barton. I have met twice with the OFM Conv Custos – both times were healing and encouraging.

NATIONAL ELECTORAL CHAPTER

Our national electoral chapter is in mid-September and we will be sending out the relevant correspondence soon. An important task remaining for the executive is to make preparation for the election. **Every single professed member has a responsibility to pray and discern, suggesting potential candidates for the executive posts when they come to mind.** So, I urge you to consider the members you know and discern whether any could be the right candidate for the national executive, ofsgb, for today. For many, age, health, ability to travel will be a consideration but, sadly, these considerations apply to many of us so, should not deter you from approaching a potential candidate. Promoting the Order depends on each of us and it will take time for new members to be professed. Consequently, we cannot expect a huge field of candidates to choose from this year. We should remember that we are invited to turn to our good and generous Lord to provide whatever graces he knows office holders need to do their work for his Kingdom in our Order.

OTHER PLANNED NATIONAL PROJECTS

There are three main directions, approved by national council, for ofsgb, which I summarise below. We will make some progress with these before the elections. In your local fraternity, consider these and discern which you might prefer to respond to and support. I hope at least one of these will inspire your local fraternity and rekindle our Franciscan spirit as we approach the jubilee year.

May God bless all of us this Lenten season. Paula ofs

FORTY YEARS OF OUR OFS RULE

From June 2018 to June 2019 the whole Order will be celebrating a jubilee year – 40 years since the Rule was approved by Pope Paul VI. This gives all of us an opportunity to look at the Rule with fresh eyes. I encourage some members, perhaps one from your fraternity, to take time reading the sources for the Rule which will be available on the ofsgb website.

SEPTEMBER 2019 – NEARLY 800 YEARS AGO, FRANCIS MET THE SULTAN.

We have agreed to join with TSSF (Anglican Franciscan Tertiaries) in events to mark this occasion, involving inter faith dialogue. This is one of their key projects for the year. More information to follow

JOHN BRADBURNE

Regions will be sent information about John Bradburne and are being asked to make some time during a regional day to get to know John better. The translation of his biography from French, abridged but still a very detailed and rounded account of his life, is an excellent resource that enables us to find out more about this remarkable secular Franciscan. His life might be inspirational not only for ofs members but also for a much wider British audience. It was reading his life that prompted me to begin to spread his story. I have recently met others, including the international councillor for Zimbabwe and an OFM priest who worked in Zimbabwe for many years, both of whom encouraged me to help get him better known. There will be an ofsgb national day on John Bradburne later in the year at Arkley.

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Basia Rozycka from Bracknell offers us some thoughts on one of these topics

Celebrating the 40th Anniversary of the Rule of Pope Paul VI

on 24th June 2018

Formation in Fraternity is always a joy and a blessing! Attention to **detail** draws us deeper into any topic. God is interested in details! Just look how uniquely and differently He made all of us! And this year, 2018, is a singular year of blessing for all Secular Franciscans, as we rejoice in celebrating the **40th Anniversary** of our **Pauline Rule!** What a good year to look again, in **detail**, at the Rule, General Constitutions and their **footnotes!**

A Franciscan friend recently attended the funeral of a Poor Clare Colettine in Wales. She was surprised to see that, placed on the coffin in addition to the Cross and Bible, was the book of **Constitutions**. Asking why this was the case, she was told that while the Sister lived her **vocation** as a Poor Clare – the **daily practical way** in which she lived her vocation was encapsulated in the **Constitutions of the Poor Clare Colettines**. My friend was struck how we, too, must be imbued by the spirit and practicality of **both** our Rule **and** General Constitutions – the only way to **fully** live our vocation as **Secular Franciscans**.

I don't know why the saying goes: *the devil is in the detail* – when in fact **details** are imbued by the **living spirit** of the entity! Often glossed over or ignored, **footnotes** in our Rule and Constitutions give **important details**, background information, explanation, and context to the main text. The **26 Articles** which make our **OFS Rule**, actually comprise **71 sentences**, including the blessing at the end, and are annotated by **44 footnotes**. A **further 45 footnotes** are contained in the **103 Articles** in the **General Constitutions**, which continue the numbering sequence to **89**. All of these **89 footnotes** merit our attention since they reveal how the **OFS** is grounded in Church documents, Scripture and Franciscan writings.

One way of sharing the Rule in Fraternity is to randomly pick a *numbered white milk carton top* referring to **one sentence** of the Rule, and where relevant, reference it to the General Constitutions and footnotes. We do not have to be scholarly or an academic to undertake this exercise, but we will be rewarded by a deeper insight and understanding, and hence appreciation and love of our Rule, elucidated by the General Constitutions, which after all, is our **Professed Franciscan Way of living our vocation in the world.** • *Basia Rozycka ofs*

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A Meditation; Some thoughts on receiving Ministry in Worship and in Service.

When you are speaking, I am:
Reading between your lines;
Listening beneath your words;
Interpreting posture, gesture, and tone;
Getting a sense of the “you” that is speaking;
Seeking what you are experiencing that generates what you do and say.

When I speak, I hope that you are:
Reading between my lines;
Listening beneath my words;
Interpreting posture, gesture, and tone;

Getting a sense of the “me” that is speaking;
Seeking what I am experiencing that generates what I do and say.

When you are speaking, I am trying to resist the first reactions that surface;
To question what first arises in me;
To take time to discern what is appropriate;
To say at most what needs to be said;
To seek alignment between our spirits.

When I am speaking, I hope that you are trying to resist the first reactions that surface;
To question what first arises in you;
To take time to discern what is appropriate;
To say what needs to be said;
To seek alignment between our spirits.

This is what it means to receive ministry from others, both in worship and in service.

How can I remember:
That what arises in me may not agree with your intent;
That we may not be fully aligned;
That I may be mistaken?

How can I remember:
To take everything said and done as ministry;
As coming from the quiet place in each of us?

How can I remember:
That others may take what I say and do as ministry, even unawares;
That being still, itself distils?

It is so much easier when:
My words and actions come from a still, spirit-led space, in the light;
Your words and actions come from a still, spirit-led space, in the light;
We are centred, in-dwelling a considered space.

Forwarded by Sue Douet ofs

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Incarnation

Incarnation should be the primary and compelling message of Christianity. Through the Christ (*en Christo*), the seeming gap between God and everything else has been overcome “from the beginning” (Ephesians 1:4, 9). Incarnation refers to the synthesis of matter and spirit. Without some form of incarnation, God remains essentially separate from us and from all of creation. Without incarnation, it is *not* an enchanted universe, but somehow an empty one.

God, who is Infinite Love, incarnates that love *as the universe* itself. This begins with the “Big Bang” approximately 14 billion years ago, which means our notions of time are largely useless (see 2 Peter

3:8). Then, a mere 2,000 years ago, as Christians believe, God incarnated in personal form as Jesus of Nazareth. Matter and spirit have always been one, of course, ever since God decided to manifest God's self in the first act of creation (Genesis 1:1-31), but we can only realize this after much longing and desiring. Most indigenous religions somehow recognized the sacred nature of all reality, as did my Father St. Francis, when he spoke of "Brother Sun and Sister Moon." It was always hidden right beneath the surface of things.

The dualism of the spiritual and so-called secular is precisely what Jesus came to reveal as untrue and incomplete. Jesus came to model for us that these two seemingly different worlds are and always have been one. We just could not imagine it intellectually until God put them together in one body that we could see and touch and love (see Ephesians 2:11-20). And—in Christ—"you also are being built into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22). What an amazing realization that should shock and delight us!

The final stage of incarnation is *resurrection*. This is no exceptional miracle only performed once in the body of Jesus. It is the final and fulfilled state of all divine embodiment. Now even physics tells us that matter itself is a manifestation of spirit, a vital force, or what many call consciousness. In fact, I would say that *spirit or shared consciousness is the ultimate, substantial, and real thing*. Yet most Christians, even those who go to church each Sunday, remain limited to a largely inert materiality for all practical purposes. Such emptiness sends us on a predictable course of consumerism and addiction—because matter without spirit is eventually unsatisfying and disappointing.

Matter also seems to be eternal. It just keeps changing shapes and forms, the scientists, astrophysicists, and biblical writers tell us (Isaiah 65:17 and Revelation 21:1). In the Creed, Christians affirm that we believe in "the resurrection of the body," not only the soul. The incarnation reveals that human bodies and all of creation are good and blessed and move toward divine fulfillment (Romans 8:18-30).

Death is not final, but an opening and a transition for ever new forms of life. An Infinite God necessarily creates infinite becoming. God is the one who "brings death to life and calls into being what does not yet exist" (Romans 4:17b).

Everything Belongs

Jesus and Saint Francis had a genius for not eliminating or punishing the so-called negative side of the world, but incorporating and using it. Francis, simply imitating Jesus, goes to the edge of town and to the bottom of society; he kisses the leper, loves the poor, and wears patches on the outside of his habit so everyone will know that this is what he's like on the inside. Francis doesn't hide from

his shadow side, but weeps over it and welcomes it as his teacher.

The history of almost every religion begins with one massive misperception, making a fatal distinction between the sacred and the profane. Low-level religions put all their emphasis on creating sacred places, sacred time, and sacred actions. While I fully appreciate the need for this, unfortunately, it leaves the majority of life “un-sacred.”

Your task is to find the good, the true, and the beautiful in everything, even and most especially the problematic. The bad is never strong enough to counteract the good. You can most easily learn this through some form of contemplative practice. Within contemplation you must learn to trust your Vital Centre over all the passing jerks and snags of emotions and obsessive thinking. Once you know you have such a strong and loving soul, or the Indwelling Spirit, you are no longer pulled to and fro with every passing feeling. You have achieved a peace that nothing else can give you, and that no one can take from you (John 14:27).

Divine Incarnation took the form of an Indwelling Presence in every human soul and surely all creatures in some rudimentary way. Ironically, our human freedom gives us the ability to refuse to jump on board our own life. Angels, animals, trees, water, and yes, bread and wine seem to fully accept and enjoy their wondrous fate. Only humans resist and deny their core identities, which can cause great havoc, and thus must be somehow boundaried and contained. But the only way we ourselves can refuse to jump onto the train of life is by any negative game of exclusion or unlove—even of ourselves. When we read the Gospel texts carefully, we see that the only people Jesus seems to “exclude” are those who exclude others. Exclusion might be described as the core sin. Don’t waste any time rejecting, excluding, eliminating, or punishing anyone or anything else. Everything belongs, including you.

Another two pieces from the Centre for Action and Contemplation by Richard Rohr ofm

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Mary of Nazareth

No place for a woman,
The Via Dolorosa.
No place for anyone
Desiring untroubled sleep.

She should have been prevented from following,
Presented later with His body
Washed and shrouded, smelling sweet.
Wounds decently concealed
For her goodbyes.

But no one dared to speak
Into such terrible silence.

All the way she walked with Him,
Measured his slow steps with hers,
Saw everything, eyes fixed on him.
No place for a woman,
Golgotha.
No place for anyone
Desiring untroubled sleep.

She should have been prevented from watching
And hearing such obscene
Sights and sounds, witnessing such pain.
But no one dared to speak
Into her terrible silence.

All the time, she waited for him.
Measured his gasping breaths with hers,
Saw everything, eyes fixed on him.

Taken from the Passion Play written by Patricia Armstrong ofs

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It is with deep sadness that I report the death of two of our members from the Portsmouth fraternity, namely Rachel Chapman and Gerald Hyde. Both were infirmed and had been housebound for some time. May the Lord grant them eternal rest and peace.

Please pray for them.

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*May the Lord bless you;
May He set His face to shine upon you;
May the Lord give you His peace.*

Edward Cuerden

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