



Following Christ in the Footprints of Francis of Assisi - A Resource for Ongoing Formation for Secular Franciscans ¹ -

Elements of a Formation Session

Themes for ongoing formation should be chosen in advance. Each session needs to contain the following elements:

- OFS Rule
- Scripture readings
- St Francis' life or writings related to the theme
- The Church's teaching – perhaps from the Catechism or Church documents on the topic
- An action to be taken in the coming month (or perhaps for the rest of one's life) as a result of the study
- Where possible, a prayer relating to the theme

At least an **hour** is recommended for this formation.

The minutes of the meeting should give a brief outline of the work done. It is, in addition, a good idea to keep a record. Further, an excellent idea, suggested in many books on formation, is for everyone to keep a personal *Franciscan Journal*. Here one can record individual actions to be followed as a result of the study/any thoughts on the ideas resulting from formation at the fraternity could also be recorded. Alternatively, these and one's notes made from studying could be recorded on file paper and placed in a file together with the sheets themselves.

How to Use the Material

This material has been prepared in order to help those delivering the sessions. The introductory paragraphs will help to focus attention on the main thrust of the theme – but this is not intended to replace other reading. Then follows a list of references intended for all the fraternity, especially the basic reading list. So far as each person is able it is intended that all professed members should prepare the formation at home so as to arrive at the monthly meeting both willing and able to share their insights. The relevant articles of our Rule & Constitution, Scripture references, references to the lives of Francis & Clare, relevant pages in

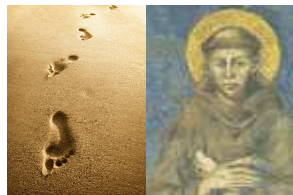
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the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* and Church Documents are all included in the reading lists. As one discovers them, add other references to the lists.

Enquirers & candidates will have enough to do for their own courses, but they need to attend fraternity monthly meeting, of course, and should be encouraged to share their own insights too.

It is suggested that each member gets a ring binder in which to keep all the material. In this way file paper may be added to, or inserted, to include other interesting points made during the session.

It might be useful to keep a tabular record of what has been studied from 'Following Christ...' in the fraternity. This is a useful tool when Visitations are due – because Visitors will be able to see at a glance what has been studied in ongoing formation. On the website there is a Bibliography which contains many of the books/pamphlets etc. used throughout this resource. It covers books which each professed member should, ideally, be familiar with – or *own*! Such books would make useful presents to give each other....or to be made available in a fraternity library....



Part I

The Essence of Franciscan Spirituality

Contents

1. The Essence of Franciscan Spirituality
2. Living the Gospel Life
3. Loyalty to the Church
4. God is Love – his love for us
5. Our love for God – how do we show it?
6. Christ the Son of God and the Light of the World
7. The Holy Spirit
8. Mary our Mother and Mother of all Franciscans
9. In Imitation of Christ – following in the footprints of St Francis

1. The Essence of Franciscan Spirituality

These themes help us understand the simplicity of St Francis. We are called to be centred on God, fully aware of his love for us. Below are some characteristics of the Franciscan charism. Each of these will be developed further in the whole programme. You will have encountered all these points in your Initiation and Initial Formation courses. They are not in order of importance but are here as a basis for dialogue. You may want to reflect upon them with your fraternity and see if you can spot the part of the Rule of the OFS that would apply to each point. It would also be useful for you to reflect on how far you have progressed along the road to achieving these goals in your spiritual life –

- to be totally committed to living the gospel life in the manner of St Francis
- to see God as supreme to be in constant communion with the Poor Christ of Bethlehem and Calvary
- to see poverty and freedom from sin as freedom to love God and our neighbour
- to see God's love working of all creation as our brothers and sisters
- acknowledging the dignity and worth of all creation, especially our fellow human beings, in whom we can see Christ
- being Christ to others
- observing the continuing presence of Christ in the Holy Eucharist
- to live a life of penance and daily conversion
- to live a life centred on prayer and contemplation
- to be prayerfully acquainted with the Scriptures – daily if possible – so that we can go from 'gospel to life and life to gospel'
- to be totally committed in our fidelity to the Church and her teachings cooperating with the Father, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, by participating in the life of the Church (liturgy, sacraments)
- to further the redemptive work of Christ in both the Church and the world
- to be instruments of peace in the world
- to make present the charism of St Francis in the Church
- to look to the Holy Spirit to guide us in our way of life and in particular to help us in our striving for perfect charity with our brothers and sisters in fraternity
- to try to follow God's will as Our Lady, St Francis and Clare did.
- ...*You may want to add more points...*

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 4 (p 13-15)
Rule 1, 4

2. Living the Gospel Life

To live the gospel life is to live our life as God wants us to live it. St Francis said, 'Here is God's living Word. He is speaking to us today.' *The Word* is Jesus showing us how to live with a set of values that is not of the world. To do this we need to allow ourselves to be led by the Holy Spirit to transform our life to gospel values. Christianity is this way of life and the gospel is the 'good news' that God our Father loves us so much and we are his beloved children. This knowledge gives us great security. St Francis shows us a spirit of childlike confidence in the Father: we have nothing to fear. This simple truth thrilled St Francis. So, we need to *know* the gospel so that we can live it – 'going from gospel to life and from life to gospel.'

The deeper becomes our knowledge the more we experience more fully his presence and power in our lives. Note: the Rule tells us to 'observe' the gospel. This implies that we act upon it. Remember, too, that Francis personally encountered Christ in the Gospels. The Word of God is rich. The more we read it the more we learn from it. By living the gospel life we are then able to fulfil the first Rule of our way of life – which is our whole aim – to 'make present the charism of our common Seraphic Father [Francis] in the life and mission of the Church' [Rule 1]

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 3 (p 10-12)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 118-120)
Rule 2 'to live the gospel in the manner of St Francis'
Rule 4 – see Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 25)
Constitutions art 8
Rule 5 'seek and encounter the living and active person of Christ...in sacred Scripture'
Matt 6.1-6, 16-18; 16.15-16; John 13.12-17; Phil 1.27

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 67-83, 85-98; all of cap 19)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 15-17)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 39-42)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 18-23)
Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 7-8)
Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 14-16)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis caps 9, 10 (p 201-204); Vol II Legend Three Companions cap 8 (p 84-86), Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 4 (p 550-559)

Prayer

Handbook (p 211)

Suggested action

Pray to live the gospel life well. Read the daily Gospel – either at Mass or at home and spend some time in reflection. Become more familiar with the bible – Christ present in the Scriptures; He IS the Word. Always remember: ‘We are what we read’ so, get to know Christ Jesus our Lord better by reading the Word of God.

3. Loyalty to the Church

Francis was completely loyal to the Church. Schaluch [*Challenges of 2000* (p 20-23)] says, 'The Church is our vital place'. Our communion with God is only accomplished in the Church. The Church is our Mother. As Franciscans, we are called to help the Holy Spirit realise the kingdom of God on earth. We are unworthy sinners, yet God calls such as us to do it. We can do this, firstly by prayer, then by our example. To give some concrete examples –

- when we pray we need to put our complete trust in God – as St Francis did
- Christ founded the Church and he is not going to allow it to falter. He sent his Holy Spirit to guide it. We are going to put ourselves into the hands of God and become his instruments
- pray for priests
- help in the effort to bring back the lapsed. Bring them to the sacrament of Reconciliation at Easter and Christmas when special services are held
- remember the wolf of Gubbio – the wolf was told not to eat people. Our wolf is 'materialism'. Our personal wolf may be our anxieties and fears. We need to love ourselves and see ourselves as precious in God's eyes and then we will be able to love others
- in the parish make the OFS presence felt by such conduct as making strangers welcome; friendliness towards converts; zeal in promoting RCIA and preparation for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation, first Holy Communion

Francis

Under the pope's guidance three Franciscan Orders were canonically established. Francis always stressed that no matter how much a priest lacked in personal holiness, he still commands our utmost respect because he *is* a priest. St Francis was told: 'Repair my Church!'

The Church

The Second Vatican Council reminds us that we share in the priesthood of Christ. Through his Mystical Body we are a community of love; we are Christ alive and active. If all its members are healthy, the body itself is healthy. The people of God need each other to grow in living the gospel. As *Lumen Gentium* says, 'God has established them as the Church'.

Basic reading

Rule 6 – calls us to work together to build up the Church

Rule 3 – reminds us that its interpretation belongs to the Holy See; its application by the relevant Constitutions and particular Statutes

Rule 22 – says that the local fraternity ‘is the privileged place for developing a sense of Church’

Constitutions art 4; 99 – together with the whole corpus of Constitutions – contain the whole basis for the above

John 13.34-35; I Cor 12.1-12; I Pet 2.4-9

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 123)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 8 (p 30-32); Reflection 44 (p 162-165)

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 32-33, 46-47)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (cap 2)

Benet Fonck OFM *Called to Follow Christ* (cap 4)

Philip Marquard OFM *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 19-23)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II

Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 3 (p 548-549); Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 8 (p 196-197); cap 13 (p 210-212)

Suggested action

Pray for the Church. Pray for your parish priest. Always affirm the pope, the bishop, the priest. Avoid anti-clerical thoughts and words.

4. God is Love: his love for us

God is love. Love does not force, nor does it push us into things. Love invites; we respond.

God is love: he is all goodness. This is the fundamental principle of Franciscan Spirituality.

God's love for us was seen when he sent his only begotten Son to earth to save us. The Scriptures reveal his love for us in so many ways. God's closeness, intimacy and concern are the tender affectionate love of our Father Creator. Without God's love we could not even exist. He lives within us – that is how close he is! Our true happiness can only come from God. When we are able to enter into a deeper relationship with God in prayer, then we will begin to realize his infinite and unconditional love for us.

Often we seek for happiness elsewhere. We look for 'substitute' forms of happiness – seeking power and control; greater esteem from others; we crave to be loved. The world entices us away from God, offering money, position, power, possessions, sex – which become our gods instead.

God's humility is shown in the Incarnation, his coming to earth in poverty for us. God joins us in our weakness and powerlessness. We cannot exaggerate God's love for us. We cannot possibly earn it. Yet we do not give God the credit for loving us. This may be because we do not fully realise that we are the 'beloved' of God who loves us unconditionally as a parent loves a child. We seem to be afraid to be loved as much as God loves us. Divine intimacy is much greater than a human one. We should consider entering into a deeper relationship with God in prayer.

Consider Scripture –

- In the OT God establishes a covenant of love with us: 'Israel is my firstborn son' (Exod 4.22). It was because of his love that he intervened on behalf of his people: '...because he loved your ancestors, he chose their descendants...' (Deut 4.37) and '...the Lord your God has chosen you...because the Lord loved you and kept the oath that he swore to your ancestors...' (Deut 7.6-8).
- In St Paul's letters we see frequent descriptions of the growth of the disciples into a deeper realization of God's love. This is also seen (John 21.15-19) when Christ asked Peter if he loved him. We ought to realise our need to replace our substitute forms of happiness – love of food, clothes etc – for the gospel values.
- 'The sons of thunder' wanted dramatically to bring down fire from heaven. Jesus saw that they had not grasped all his teachings – Lk 9.54-56. They needed the Pentecost Spirit to enlighten them fully.

- Through the parables Jesus was able to show us the redemption. The 'great banquet' was a symbol of Christ's coming and his rejection – excuses for refusing to come to the feast. In the parables of the lost (Lk 15.1ff) the shepherd goes in search of a lost sheep; the woman searches for a lost coin; the lost son returns to a father who has been searching for him – all comparisons aimed at demonstrating the joy of finding and being found; the way God keeps searching for his lost creation.
- The whole of John's Gospel is about God's love for us. NB especially: 3.15-18; 13.33-35; all of 14. And not forgetting the epistle: I John 2.3-6; 3.1-2; 4.11-16.

Basic reading

Rule 4

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 5 (p 16-22)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1604 (p 359)

Other books

Murray Bodo *The Journey and the Dream* (p 8-9) – The Cave

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 30 (p 254-257); Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 148 (p 373); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 9 (p 596-604)

Prayer

Handbook (p 172-174) – Canticle

Suggested action

Think of God as 'Abba' – 'Father' or colloquially as 'Daddy'² – Our Father, who art in heaven

² Cf. Joachim Jeremias *The Prayers of Jesus* cap 1 'Abba' (p 11-65, esp. p 57-65 "The significance of 'Abba' as an address to God")

5. Our Love for God: how do we show it?

Christ taught us that the way we show our love for God is by keeping his commandments. St Francis taught us to love God by thinking of his goodness to us. The 1st Rule of St Francis shows us this – which is worthy of close scrutiny. Parts of this are selected in Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 5 (p 16-22). [Also take special note of the sections in this Reflection: ‘Mother Teresa of Calcutta’ and ‘The Franciscan Heart’, as well as consulting the Prologue to the Rule – reproduced here – concerning all who ‘love the Lord with their whole heart’.]

God wishes us to show our love for him by loving our neighbour. St John declared, ‘Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another’ (I John 4.11). If anyone ever loved God perfectly, it was Christ. He showed his love and obedience to God by giving himself to us. ‘Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children’ says St Paul, ‘and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God’ (Eph 5.1-2).

The Church taught us in the old Catechism that the reason God made us was to love him. The new Catechism greatly enlarges on this – 2201 (p 437) and 2012-2014 (p 438) – our spiritual progress is made in greater intimacy with Christ. Keeping the first three commandments is one way of showing our love for God. They ‘make explicit the response of love that man is called to give to his God’ – see new Catechism 2083-2188 (p 453-473). Rule 12 tells us quite clearly that we ‘should set ourselves free to love God’. We are only free to love God when we are free from sin.

St Francis taught us to love as Jesus loved: that is what the gospel life is. He showed us that doing the will of God is how we love God. He taught us how to love the Father by his great love for all creation, how to love the Son by his imitation of his life, and how to love the Spirit by making him Advocate of the Order.

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 28)

Deut 6.45; Matt 5.23-24, 44-48; Mk 16.15; I Cor 13; Phil 3.7-11; I John 3.3-24; 4.7, 16-21

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too*

John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* (p 24, 36)

Murray Bodo *Tales of St Francis* (p 26) – Story of the Leper

Suggested action

Live each moment in God's presence. Be present to God; (explore what this means) so that you can pray more effectively. God is always present to us – although we do not seem to grasp it – but sometimes we pray without being really present to him, and this is most disrespectful on our part. Try not to live in the past or worry about the future. Live instead in the present, 'the now', trying always to realise that God is always with us, loving us so much. Realise that you are the beloved of God, and knowing that God loves us unconditionally – even though he knows us through and through – can only increase our love for him.

Prayers

Handbook (p 84) – concluding prayer

St Francis' Hymn of Praise (p 171); Franciscan Peace Prayer (p 177); An Act of Love (p 192)

6. Christ the Son of God and the Light of the World

As brothers and sister of St Francis our lives should be centred on our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God and Light of the World. We start our day with our Morning Offering, 'O Jesus through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer you all my prayers, works, sufferings and joys of this day for all the intentions of our Divine Heart in the Holy Mass.' It is in the Mass that we encounter the living, active person of our Brother – the Most High Son of God, who is the inspiration of our lives. We also encounter Christ – the Word – in the Scriptures.

Through our Office and prayers we focus our lives on Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life. St John writes, 'No one can come to the Father except through me.' Only the light of faith and meditation on the Word of God can enable us to find everywhere and always the God in whom we live and exist. If we seek Our Lord's will in all things then we can realise the truth of John's Gospel: 'I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will have the light of life and never walk in darkness.'

It is through the Incarnation of the Son of God that the world, which had been plunged into the darkness of sin, was once again bathed in the light of God's grace through his Son. *Gaudium et Spes* tells us that 'Christ blazed a trail' for us to follow. He showed us the way to life and how to live it. He told us to let our light 'shine before men' (Matt 5.14-17).

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 8 (p 30-32)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 429 (p 96)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 25)
Rule Prologue (ii)
John 1.8-14; 8.12; 13.12-17; I John 1.1-8

Other books

John Paul II *Redemptor Hominis*
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 43-46)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 17-23)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 99-106)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 28 (p 247-250); Vol II Celano: Treatise on Miracles cap 14 (p 447-453); Bonaventure: Sermon on the Feast of the Transferral... (p 737-746); Vol III Little Flowers of St Francis cap 49 (p 649-652)

Suggested action

Consider what life was like before Our Lord was born when people lived in fear and darkness. Think of how Christ has shown us how much we are loved and has given us the light of faith and hope – and thank God for it.

Hymn

Lord, the light of your love is shining,
in the midst of the darkness, shining:
Jesus, Light of the World, shine upon us;
set us free by the truth you now bring us –
shine on me, shine on me.

*Shine, Jesus shine,
fill this land with the Father's glory;
blaze, Spirit blaze, set our hearts on fire.
Flow, river flow, flood the nations with grace and mercy;
send forth your word, Lord, and let there be light!*

7. The Holy Spirit

St Francis chose the Holy Spirit to be the Advocate of the Franciscan Family. He is said to have been 'seized' by the Holy Spirit when he experienced the life-giving power of Scripture on the occasion of hearing the Gospel passage for the feast of St Matthias calling him to a life of preaching and total dependence on God's providence.

What can we learn from Francis' constant reminders of the centrality of the Holy Spirit to our Christian lives? One way of answering this question would be to go to the Scriptures as Francis did with such regularity. Look, for instance, at the story of the first Pentecost (Acts 2.1-42; Cf. Gal 5.16, 22, 25). The apostles were charged with a vitality of an entirely new kind. The sheer wonder of participation in the life of the risen Christ gripped them firmly. In his acceptance of the cross, Jesus had ultimately triumphed. The prophecies of Ezekiel (36.25-27; 37.1-14) were fulfilled in a marvelous and unexpected manner.

Francis came to grasp the meaning of this and to walk in faith on the strength of it. It was the Holy Spirit that filled him with life. Francis lived 1200 years after the Pentecost event! The same fulfillment is on offer to us today. The Holy Spirit is willing to lead us on our journey of faith, each in his own way. We are cordially invited to respond. Will we open our hearts in trust to him?

The Holy Spirit is at the centre of our life in the fraternity and leads us to the love we have for one another. He is the source of our Franciscan vocation and the principal agent of formation.

Basic reading

Rule *Prologue* (i) 'we are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit'; Rule 2 'In these fraternities the brothers and sister, led by the Spirit...'
Constitutions art 1.3 'moved by the Spirit'; art 11 'Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation'; art 12.1 'filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit'; art 37:2 'Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation'
Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 10 (p 36-39)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 683-685 (p 157-158)
Rom 5.5; 8.14-17, 8.26-27; I Cor 2

Other books

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 28 (p 247-250); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 3 (p 542-549), cap 10 (p 605-611)
John Paul II *Dominum et Vivificantem* – on the Holy Spirit in the Church and the world

Andrew Apostoli *The Gift of God: The Holy Spirit; The Comforter: The Spirit of Joy; The Advocate: The Spirit of Truth*

8. Mary Our Mother and Mother of all Franciscans

Each time we come to examine **Our Lady** as a theme for our formation we shall find different aspects to consider. We should consider the following – each alone could be the basis of one month's formation –

1. Francis' deep devotion to Mary as we see in his prayer to her (Handbook, p 140). Examination of this prayer in detail is very rewarding indeed. He chose her to be Queen of the Order and Advocate of the Franciscan Family.
2. Mary's obedience to the will of God, and her utter trust in him, is clearly demonstrated when she said 'yes' to the angel Gabriel and agreed to become the mother of our Saviour. This is ably presented by Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 49-56)
3. Our great love for her and our imitation of Mary's self-giving. 'Veneration and imitation of Mary is a Franciscan tradition' says Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* in cap 7. We could give particular attention to our prayer to Our Lady, especially the Rosary, the Franciscan Crown Rosary and the Angelus – Cf. Rule 9
4. The Church's teaching on Mary (explained in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 484-511 (p 108-114), 964-975 (p 220-223) tells us of the role she played in 'salvation history'.
5. Examination of the Gospel appearances of Our Lady – Lk 1.26-38; 2.33-35, 41-52; John 2.1-12, 19.25-27; Acts 1.12-14; Rev 12.1-6 – reveal that she was the perfect disciple as well as mother of Jesus. Formation time at meetings could allow each member to share the significance of each of these incidents to individuals as they have grown in faith and understanding as this might greatly assist others who have not yet found devotion to Our Lady in their experience of faith.
6. The Magnificat – Lk 1.46-55 – prayed meditatively can deepen our insight into how God is glorified in human actions and gives a glimpse into Mary's understanding of the way God has intervened in history. Mary is an example of the poor, humble servant whom God chose. Her Son would live in poverty of spirit, guiding us to the values of the kingdom of God and away from earthly values. She is also the perfect example of a human being in total submission to God's will.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 11 (p 40-43)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 147-151)
Rule 9

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 239-256)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 41-43)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 57)

John Paul II *Redemptoris Mater* – on Mary's role in the mystery of Christ and the Church

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Undated Writings Antiphon (p 141); A Salutation of the BVM (p 163); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 9 (p 598); Vol III Little Flowers of St Francis cap47 (p 645-646)

Prayer

Handbook (p 175) – Prayer to Our Lady

9. In Imitation of Christ - following in the footprints of St Francis

Francis wanted to live the same kind of life as Jesus, his Master, lived. He loved Jesus with great fervour. As Franciscans we, too, wish to imitate him. Francis used the crib and the cross to help him focus on the Incarnation and on Redemption. In order to fix our minds on how we can imitate Christ let us consider some aspects of Francis' life which helped him to draw closer to Our Lord.

1. Francis closely imitated Jesus' tendency to seek out a quiet place to be alone with his Heavenly Father. His prayer-life was the well-spring of all his endeavours. The Hermitage was his place of meditation. How do we follow in their footprints prayer-wise?
2. As Jesus fasted in the desert so Francis sought to subdue 'Brother Ass' by daily conversion and sorrow for sin. Penance was his means of controlling sin and temptation. Set free from sin he was free to love both God and neighbour. This is to be our endeavour too.
3. Willing to submit to his Father's will, Jesus was prepared to undergo the suffering of Calvary. Francis was likewise willing to suffer. He suffered the loss of his own father, put up with humiliating mockery, and accepted the suffering of the treatment for his sick eyes before he finally accepted death after a lifetime of suffering. Do we submit to God's will – or do we just grumble?
4. Our Lord chose poverty for himself and his Mother. Francis wanted to live the same kind of life as Christ lived and so he, too, chose Lady Poverty. He also insisted on his brothers doing likewise. We, too, can simplify our lives by being detached from material wants. We are not expected to behave as friars. Francis wrote a Rule especially for those living in the world – Seculars. We are not to indulge ourselves but to give ourselves: our time and compassion. Not to give of our 'excess', but to give until it 'hurts'.
5. Christ wanted to improve the lot of those on the fringes of society – the poor, the sick, tax collectors, lepers; sinners of all kinds. Francis followed suit. He cared for lepers, the poor, the sick. He shared his food, faced the wolf of Gubbio and tried to be a peacemaker (even to the extent of visiting the Sultan to sue for peace at the time of the Crusades). Justice and peace – our Presence in the World – should also be a part of our Franciscan life along with saying 'sorry' – almsgiving, recycling, sharing.

All of the above points are covered in the Rule 8, 10, 11, 12, 15, 19. (Can you spot which article of the Rule applied to which ideal?)

Talk together as a fraternity about other ways in which St Francis tried to live the same life as Christ lived which we, too, may imitate. Is there a part of the Rule which covers this very point?

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 9 (p 33-35)

Rule 1 – we recognize that we are ‘called to follow Christ in the...

Rule 14 – ‘anyone who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more a man himself’

I John 2.3-6

Other books

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *St Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 1 (p 530-535); Vol III Mirror of Perfection cap 6 (p 339-340)

Suggested action

In the coming month, consider other ways in which you might follow in the footprints of St Francis in his imitation of Christ. You might write it down in your personal Franciscan *Journal*.

Part 2

A Life of Penance and Daily Conversion

Contents

1. A Life of Penance – Conversion
2. The Sacrament of Penance
3. The Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament
4. Baptism
5. Poverty and Simplicity of Lifestyle
6. Humility
7. Chastity I
8. Chastity II (helping young people)
9. Obedience to the Will of God
10. Suffering

1. The Life of Penance – Conversion

The word 'penance' has the same meaning as the Greek word *metanoia* which means a change of heart, i.e. *conversion*.

Conversion requires us to surrender to God and become what he wants us to be – turning away from the values of the world and following the way marked out for us by the life of Jesus. Overflowing with love, Jesus fulfilled the Father's plan for salvation through the work of the Holy Spirit. By his Passion he redeemed mankind. The life of Jesus, 'The Way' (John 14.6) gives us direction for turning back.

Our motives for conversion will be twofold:

- (a) a repugnance towards sin because it separates us from God
- (b) a desire to share in Christ's cross, accepting suffering and engaging in acts of penance.

As we strive for a radical interior conversion we experience sorrow and love. We realise that our own efforts will not bring about the conversion. The power of the Holy Spirit which prompts our hearts and changes our lives is grace at work. We will find help in prayer, the sacraments, the Scriptures, contrite self-examination and necessary changes in lifestyle. Conversion engages both mind and heart, and leads to a genuine integrity for our wholeness which will only be found in union with God.

St Francis' life shows us a lifelong conversion process seen easily in all Franciscan documents. It began with his embrace of the leper, 'The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflections 12 & 13 (p 46-53)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 129)
Jonah; Lk 9.23-25, 15; Passion Narratives; John 8.1-11; Eph 1.4; 2.1-2; 4.22-24
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1420-1498 (p 319-335) – but esp. 1428 & 1431
Rule Prologue, 7

Other books

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 26-31)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* cap 3 (p 33-43) – also cap 9 (p 135-151)
cap 14 (p 223-238)
Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 14)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 50-53)
Adele Sabath *Called to Follow Christ* (p 33)
Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 25-26)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life
of St Francis cap 3 (p 187-188); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 1 (p 530-
535)
Murray Bodo *The Journey and the Dream* (p 8-9)

Suggested action

Examine your conscience before going to sleep. Daily determine to start afresh
and do your best to do God's will.

2. The Sacrament of Penance

The sacrament of Penance helps us in our daily striving for conversion. Even though we are baptized and have all the graces available from that sacrament we can still damage our relationship with God by sin. So, we need to ask his forgiveness as Jesus taught us in the Our Father. The sacrament enables us to receive God's grace, mercy and healing. For a Christian, sin is not a private affair but a social one. Every time a sin is committed it affects the whole body of Christ. The Church is wise and emphasizes this and also the social nature of forgiveness. When we turn our backs on God through sin we are also turning our backs on the body of Christ – the Church.

We believe that Jesus imparted his own power to forgive sins to the apostles and that he gave them authority to reconcile sinners with the Church. Jesus received sinners and reintegrated them into the community even though they had been outcasts.

To receive the sacrament worthily it is required that:

1. we are truly sorry. It can stem from fear of punishment or more perfectly from love of God and a sense of humility – exemplified by St Francis himself.
2. We confess our sins to a priest. In the case of 'serious sin', confession is necessary before receiving Holy Communion. Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1457 (p 327)
3. We receive Christ's absolution from the priest.
4. We complete the 'penance' given by the priest.

Adequate preparation for the sacrament would include prayer, examination of conscience, and perhaps the reading of some suitable Scripture passages. Retreats and Days of Recollection are also ways to help us to know ourselves better, discover our sinful tendencies and give us time to make an assessment of our spiritual life.

St Francis shows us how important Penance is in his *Admonitions*. (Cf. Rule *Prologue* – 'Concerning those who do Penance' & 'Concerning those who do not do Penance')

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1422-1426 (p 319-321), 1432-1498 (p 322-335)

Ps 31.1-2, 5-7; Ecclesiasticus [Sirach] 17.24-29; Mk 1.14-15; 2.7; Lk 7.48; 15; John 20.21-13

Rule 7

Constitutions art 13.1, 3

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 14 (p 54-58)

Other books

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Earlier Rule cap 20 (p 77-78); Letter to the Entire Order 38-39 (p 119); Later Admonition 22 (p 47)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 233-235)

Murray Bodo *Song of the Sparrow* (p 21-22)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 37-38)

Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 27)

Suggested action

Try to receive the sacrament of Penance as often as possible – at least once a month. If we go for too long a time, our conscience becomes dulled, it fails to register our faults and we lose spiritual sensitivity. Daily examination of conscience helps us to identify our habitual sins.

Handbook (p 192) – An Act of Contrition

3. The Real Presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament

Secular Franciscans will meet Christ first and foremost in the Eucharist. It is our life-blood and our nourishment for the spiritual journey. This sacrament, together with the sacrament of Reconciliation, enables us to have the strength to undergo our necessary conversion as Franciscans.

We have known the importance of the centrality of the Eucharist in our spiritual lives and since our first Holy Communion we have been made aware of the Real Presence of Christ in the sacrament. What we do not realise perhaps is that being in communion with Christ is an active, not passive, act. Christ becomes our servant and *washes our feet* in the Eucharist, but he intends this for the whole world – not just for a privileged few. Our active part in this is to become ‘other Christs’ – his hands and feet in the service of others.

In recent years, Adoration before the Blessed Sacrament is being practiced more. Our frequent reception of the sacrament helps – as St Francis saw for his brothers – to sustain us in our trials and tribulations. Its importance for St Francis emerges in almost all his writings and reflecting on some of his words may help to increase our devotion to the Eucharist.

Let everyone be struck with fear, let the whole world tremble, and let the heavens exult when Christ, the Son of the living God, is present on the altar in the hands of a priest! O wondrous loftiness and stupendous dignity! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! The Lord of the universe, God and the Son of God, so humbles himself that for our salvation he hides himself under an ordinary piece of bread! Brothers, look at the humility of God, and pour out your hearts before him! Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by him! Hold back nothing of yourselves, that he who gives himself totally to you may receive you totally! [Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Letter to the Entire Order (p 118)]

The enormity of the awe he felt at the Real Presence in the Eucharist led St Francis to admonish any priest who did not keep scrupulously clean altar cloths, vessels or anything connected with the Sacred Species. To the Custodians he wrote that ‘you humbly beg the clergy to revere above all else the most Holy Body and Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ and his holy names and written words that sanctify his Body.’ [Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I First Letter to the Custodians (p 56)]

Francis seemed to convey the great mystery simply because of his complete faith, his love for the Saviour and his grasp of the humility of the Word made flesh. He saw this in the Incarnation, the Passion, and also in the Eucharist. And his words, love and faith remain a remarkable witness for us.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 27 (p 101-103)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1328-1333 (p 298-300), 1406-1419 (p 318-319)
Rule *Prologue* (para 1), 5
Constitutions art 14.2
Matt 26.26-29; John 6.32-35, 51-58; I Cor 10.15-19

Other books

Teresa Baker *Living the Gospel* (p 43-46)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Exhortations to the Clergy [earlier edition] (p 52-53); Second Letter to the Custodians 4 (p 60); Letter to the Entire Order 12-14 (p 116-121); Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 52 (p 375-376)
John Paul II *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*

Suggested action

Sincere preparation before receiving Holy Communion and giving time to our thanksgiving after reception of Holy Communion.

Partaking of the Eucharist should not be a *passive action*. Pray – to realise **fully**, that the active part of the sacrament is *to become* ourselves that which we receive. We *become* sacrifice – therefore we go away from the Eucharist as other Christs – pouring ourselves out for others. This is our Christian mission. This understanding needs prayer for us to internalize and begin to activate.

Share in your own fraternity the meaning of the Eucharist and practice Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament at times – after the meeting where possible.

If we are inspired by St Francis' respect for the Eucharist we will become witnesses for others.

4. Baptism

Baptism is the beginning of new life. We are 'born again' and given a new start. Baptism plunges us into 'death' so that we may *die* with Christ and be raised up with him to new life.

We are given God's own life which raises up to be God's own children; brothers and sisters of Jesus; joint-heirs with Christ himself. This special life of God is GRACE. We cannot earn or deserve it; it is freely given – a gift to us. This was God's purpose all along. This he always desired for us, and when it was lost through 'original sin', he sent his Son to redeem us so that we could have his life once more. Baptism is a sign of the presence of God in our lives and the grace given to us by the Holy Spirit enables us to work with God and for God.

Rule 6 tells us that we 'have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in Baptism;' and that we have 'been united more intimately with the Church by Profession.' In fact, we are really *one* with Christ in Baptism – this is the fact of Baptism. Confirmation confirms this and Profession affirms this.

St Francis recognized the importance of Baptism as we see in the early documents.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 7 (p 26-29)

Rule 6

Constitutions art 14.3

Rom 6.3; 8.14; I Cor 6.11, 19; Gal 3.2, 26-28; I Pet 2.5-6, 9-10

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 27-28)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 36-37)

Armstrong, Hellmann, *Short Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol III Mirror of Perfection cap 11.118 (p 366); Little Flowers of St Francis cap 24 (p 605-607);

Deeds of Blessed Francis & His Companions caps 27-29 (p 490-500)

Suggested action

As Secular Franciscans we are called to take part in the community of life of our parishes. If programmes of preparation for Baptism are running in your parish – consider taking part. If you feel you are not suitable to do this, pray this month for

young parents who will have difficulties in bringing up their children in the full life of the Church

5. Poverty and Simplicity of Lifestyle

Franciscans have come to understand that no one has given up as much as Jesus did when he became man. The Incarnation filled St Francis with wonder. God became man. He was born in obscurity – and there was no room for him at the inn (Lk 2.7; Cf. John 1.11).

We are asked to follow the poor crucified Christ who did not seek comfort or status in this world but experienced total poverty (particularly in his death – having surrendered his will as well as his body for love of us). Benet Fonck reminds us that; goods are not merely material possessions or worldly standards, but also our inner property: our mind, our talents, our affections, our emotions, our will.' (Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 60-62)

We are urged to seek – those living in the secular state – 'a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods' (Rule 11). This exhorts us to imitate Christ in his trust of the Father, not in a security found in wealth, power and possessions of a worldly kind. In fact, this Rule 11 urges us to follow the spirit of the Beatitudes – Matt 5.3-12.

Prayer can help us to distance ourselves from the drive to satisfy the desire of thinking that our 'wants' are in fact our 'needs'. It can help us to develop a spirit of detachment and learn to simplify our lifestyle.

Francis' insistence on *poverty* for himself and his brothers left them free to love God and their neighbours. Poverty and simplicity of lifestyle for Secular Franciscans is a way of coming closer to God and bringing others with us. An uncomplicated life built on gospel values can only bring good to the world – especially by our example.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 15, 16, 17 (p 59-68)
Constitutions art 15
Lk 12.15, 22-32; II Cor 6.10; 8.9

Other books

Benet Fronk *Called to Follow Christ* (p 60-62)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 125-132)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 64-67)
Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 45-46)
Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 41
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I The Sacred Exchange between St Francis and Lady Poverty 19-22 (p 535-536); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 7 (p 577-579); Celano: Remembrance of the

Desire of a Soul cap 25 (p 284-285); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 7.1-3 (p 577-579); Vol III Mirror of Perfection 41-42 (p 249)

6. Humility

Humility allows us to see that we are utterly dependent on God for everything. In *pride*, its opposite, we become arrogant, see ourselves as better than other people and imagine that our talents and gifts are a result of our own achievement. We need to respect all humanity as equal since all are made in the image of God: yet all are unique. As we see that all gifts come from God, we can then realise that we should use our talents and gifts in his service and the service of others. In this way we shall imitate Christ and his Blessed Mother as Francis and Clare did later.

St Francis had a horror of seeming better than he was – [Cf. Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 19 (p 74)]. Humility was in the name of his First Order in describing them as ‘Friars *Minor*’ – that is, the smallest of all brothers. Both Francis and Clare are good models for us. Both were deeply aware of God’s love and overwhelmed by it. Following Christ’s example, they lived their lives in the service of others – always respectful of the value of each individual. For St Francis, the embrace of the leper brought about his once and for all sense of freedom. This conversion gave him the freedom to serve God and his neighbour. Clare freed herself from her family but her path was not immediately clear. She found freedom in serving her sisters wholeheartedly at San Damiano. Francis and Clare’s lives of generous service to the poor are renowned. Their ways of freedom to love God only came about through their prayerfulness, trust in God, and self-surrender.

Rule 11 speaks of living ‘in the spirit of “The Beatitudes”, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of their Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.’
Reflect on this in fraternity...

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 18, 19 (p 73-76)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 27-28)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 525, 526 (p 117-118), 2559 (p 544), 2628-2631 (p 560-561)
Matt 25.14-30; Lk 19.1-10; John 13.1-17; I Pet 5.5-7

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 64-70)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I A Rule for Hermitages (p 61-62); Vol II Anonymous of Perugia cap 6 (p 45-48);

Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 6 (p 569-576); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 102 (p 337-338)

Suggested action

Try to find ways in your life of becoming more humble in order to serve God and others better. Prayer and integrity of intention will help this to happen – i.e. if our intentions are pure and we do not seek the world's approval or acclaim.

7. Chastity I

Christians are called to live a chaste life in a way that is appropriate for their state of life. Those who choose celibacy usually do so because they wish to give themselves to God in the priesthood or religious life. Single people including those engaged to be married should live in continence. Married people remain chaste by keeping their marriage vows in fidelity to their spouses. There are offences against chastity – Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2351-2356 (p 503-504). Homosexuals are also called to chastity – Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2357-2359 (p 504-505).

It is probable that Francis was subject to temptations of the flesh as he was particularly aware of lustful passions. He would roll in the snow rather than allow himself to succumb to temptation. [Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Julian of Speyer: Life of St Francis cap 4.24 (p 385-386)] He commanded his brothers to avoid any familiarity with women, yet he had a very deep friendship with Clare who was his close spiritual companion. We know that Jesus also had close women companions and that he called his disciples friends – but we know that he himself remained celibate.

The teaching of the Catholic Church on chastity is quite clear and uncompromising – Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* {citing Exod 10.14 & Matt 5.27-28} Sixth Commandment (p 499). In this the Church seems to be out of step with the Western world of today. Its teaching on respect for life, sexual relations and the avoidance of any action that comes under the general heading of adultery, as specified in the chapter on the 6th commandment, is set out very clearly in *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2331-2400 (p 499-513).

The positive aspects of chastity, including those on love, self-mastery, the successful integration of sexuality within a person's spiritual and bodily being, are all to be found in the above paragraphs too. Chastity is a gift and a grace in which spiritual effort bears fruit. Christ is the model of chastity. The chaste person maintains the integrity of the powers of life and love placed in him. Therefore, sexual acts should be the expression of a loving relationship. 'God is love' and there can be no true love without God or where God is excluded. Sex divorced from love is a perversion of human nature.

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 55)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 20 (p 77-79)

Gen 1; 2.15-25; Matt 5.27-32; 19.9; John 15.15; I Cor 6.15-20; Titus 2.1-6; I Pet 1.22-23; I John 3.3

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 207-209, 218-219)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 83-84)

Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 46-47)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 82 (p 324-325); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 5.4 (p 562-563)

8. Chastity II (helping young people)

Young people are surrounded by challenges to living a gospel way of life. The lack of restraint in many aspects of Western society today has resulted in a situation where young people grow up in a culture where self-gratification seems more important than moral principles. Young people can be strengthened and encouraged by the witness and experience of those around them who live a life of faith.

What the family can do:

- pray for their own families and young people in general
- set boundaries to which children must hold fast while allowing them to express independence within those limits
- create an atmosphere for growth where the individual chooses the way to grow
- offer help and support when young people have problems whilst being good examples of living the gospel life; thus, they can show respect for each person and place God's vision of our destiny above earthly values
- make their home a place where young people know they are secure and appreciate a loving family life
- parents can be a good example that sexual intercourse is to be reserved for married spouses
- parents can be available for their children to talk to even when there is argument and disagreement.

Young people:

- can see that every human being is sacred and that all people deserve respect
- can be challenged truthfully to discern in their friendships whether they are acting out of selfishness and whether they are treating all with respect
- have many talents which enable them to pursue creative ideas while carrying on an active life; they often want to put their cares and concerns into action
- can be encouraged to accept their sexuality as beautiful and essential
- can become more open and mature to prepare for their state in life, married or single; members of religious orders are examples of a different way of responding to God by making themselves free to serve God's people.

Young people need guidance and will know whether their families 'practice what they preach'! Their peers and the media may have alternative ideas from the values Christian families hold. They can be influenced by the examples of their families.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 21 (p 80-83)

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 165-170)

Ps 119.9-14

Other books

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 64-68)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 205-215)

Thomas & Donna Finn *Making True Love* {excellent book on chastity for young people}

Richard Rohr *Spirituality and Sexuality: the gate of the temple* {set of 6 CDs}

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II

Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 4.6 (p 553-554)

Suggested action

Some countries have active Franciscan Youth (YouFra) movements and the UK members of the OFS are concerned to respond to the needs of young people. Some existing members may have gifts that could promote Franciscan youth activities here. Is there anything that your fraternity members could do or are already doing to address this important matter? Could you join with other fraternities and consider running an event directed at young people? There are so many young people in our parishes who are so good and so gifted who just need a little guidance from a spirited leader to show them the way to gospel living.

9. Obedience to the Will of God

St Francis gave up all to follow God's will. Francis' brothers took a vow of obedience, so that they would (a) have the means of self denial together with chastity and poverty, and would give up their own will under a Rule; and (b) have total loyalty to the Church. We Secular Franciscans do not do this, and the Rule and Constitutions do not bind us under pain of sin. However, we all can benefit from the counsel of obedience. Obedience and loyalty to the Church have been dealt with above (Part I: caps 2 & 3). Here, we are more concerned with obedience to God's will. We show our adherence and love of this counsel of obedience by the way we obey our Rule, by our regular attendance at the monthly fraternity meetings and our acceptance of (if elected to it) 'office' within the Order.

Our Blessed Lady, the Virgin Mary, was a perfect example of someone who was obedient to the will of God (Cf. Lk 1.26-38 – the Annunciation). In the OT, Abraham too was obedient to God's call – and often, in consequence, is called the 'father of faith' – since he 'believed [trusted] God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness [put him into a right relationship with God]', Rom 4.3. By our obedience, we show our 'trust' too that God knows what is best for us; and we make ourselves available for the Holy Spirit to work in us.

How do we know what God's will is for us? He wants us to live in a relationship with him based on trust/faith 'from start to finish' (Cf. Rom 1.17), living our life as Jesus has shown us, as we are conformed to Christ by the sanctification brought about by the Spirit. As Secular Franciscans, as we 'faithfully fulfil the duties proper to [our] circumstances in life' (Rule 10), we are fulfilling God's will. When we have important decisions to make that accord with his will, we need to pray for discernment in deciding what these might be. Living as a Secular Franciscan, being the best that we can be as Catholics, is guidance itself for our life of faith. He might not call us to do 'great things' (but if we expect great things from God we must be prepared to attempt great things for God) but he does call us to keep his commandments. He calls us to love him not the world (I John 2.15), but to love our neighbour – I John 3.17 – to love one another which demonstrates the reality of our love for him – I John 4.7. If we follow our way of life as the Rule bids us, we shall of a surety follow his will – for this is what he has granted us by the vocation to which he has called us.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 22 (p 84-86)

Rule 10

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 27)

Gen 12.1-4; 22:1-18, Matt 1.18-25; 2.19-21; Lk 22.39-47

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 293-295, 304-307)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 61-63)

Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 20-21)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 58-60)

Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 44-45)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 9.22 (p 201-202); Vol II Legend Three Companions cap 5.13 (p 75-76); cap 12.46-49 (p 95-97); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 1.3-4 (p 532-533); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul caps 111-114 (p 344-346)

Suggested action

Consider which aspect of your life you will give over to God this month.

10. Suffering

We often find it difficult to understand why we and those we love have to suffer. 'Why does allow it?' we may ask. We are told it is the result of original sin but this would make God seem cruel and we know he is not like that. He is a loving Father; he does not want to see us suffer. Suffering seems to be a great mystery – but it not for ever. God does not abandon us in our time of suffering; he cares for us deeply and shows compassion according to the greatness of his unfailing love (Lam 3.32-33). Suffering must, therefore, be understood in different way by us who know God from those who do not. We can only comprehend suffering from the standpoint of his redemptive action – salvation history.

Jesus himself suffered for us. He suffered physical and mental anguish bearing the sins of the whole world – the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Since we are his children we will share his treasures, for everything God gives the Son he gives to his adopted sons. But if we share his glory we must share his suffering too – although what we suffer now is not to be compared to the glory we will later receive (Rom 8.17-18). He has gone through suffering and temptation and is able to help us when we are tempted – Heb 2.18.

Francis embraced suffering. He, like St Paul, wished to live the same kind of life that Christ lived – and that included his suffering. In his final illness, St Francis joined his sufferings with those of Christ. (Cf. 'I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church. I am become its servant according to God's commission that was given to me for you...' Col 1.24-25). He wanted to suffer to save souls since suffering is the most powerful means of saving others as well as oneself. Thus, St Francis could welcome Sister Death with such joy; his early task now over, he could 'depart and be with Christ, for that is far better' (Phil 1.23).

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1435 (p 323)

Rule 10

Gen 3.6-23; 37.28; Deut 8.2; Lev 26.43; Prov 3.11-12; Job 5.17-18; Matt 17.12; Lk 24.26; John 3.16; Rom 5.3-4; II Tim 2.10; Heb 12.10; Jas 1.1-3; I Pet 4.14; [as well as Ps 34.18; 147.3]

Other books

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 4 (p 266); Vol II Assisi Compilation 83 (p 184-187); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul caps 160-161 (p 382-385)
John Paul II *Salvifici Doloris* [on the meaning of human suffering]

Prayer

Handbook (p 143)

Part 3

Prayer

Contents

1. Living a Prayer-Centred Life
 2. The Mass
 3. Meditations on the Our Father
 4. The Office said by the OFS – how to pray the Divine Office
 5. Meditation
 6. Contemplation
 7. Lectio Divina – praying the Scriptures
 8. St Clare
- Appendices: (a) Prayer as a Relationship with God
(b) A Method of Centering Prayer
(c) Praying the Rosary

1. Living a Prayer-Centred Life

‘Pray as you can, not as you can’t.’

As Franciscans we are called to lead a prayer-centred life. A person who is devoted to prayer is a channel of God’s work. To be able to pray we need to be in a right relationship with God. He is our loving Father and we need to trust him completely. We do not need to impress him because he knows us better than we know ourselves. We might fool ourselves but we cannot fool him! Prayer is health-giving – the sick who pray often recover more quickly as they put their trust in God.

The Divine Office or, Office from the Handbook (p 54), a decade of the rosary meditated upon with Scripture (Cf. Appendix (c) below), or Lectio Divina (Cf. cap 7 below), or praying the Scripture reading and Centering prayer (Cf. Appendix (b) below) – are all ways we can be in communion with God in prayer. During Lent, we can pray the Stations of the Cross.

We need to put ourselves in the presence of God before we begin to pray, for prayer is ‘practicing the presence of God’. Like a child approaching its father, we approach God, our loving Father. He wants us to pray – as St Paul exhorted the Thessalonians, ‘prayer without ceasing’ (I Thess 5.17). God is always present to us. But are we always present to God?

Prayer itself does not always have to be formal, or even have words. Just *being in the presence of God* silently attentive, can be prayer. Working quietly in the garden; polishing the floor; doing the washing-up...can become a time of prayer as long as we are aware of God’s presence, and we are present to him. Our complete trust in him while at prayer will make us docile to him like the clay in the hands of a potter. As Tertullian said, ‘If, then, you are God’s workmanship, await the hand of your Maker which creates everything in due time. Offer yourself to him in a soft and docile state and preserve the form in which the Creator has fashioned you, having moisture in yourself, lest by becoming hardened, you lose the impression of his fingers.’

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 23 (p 88-90)

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 27)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2559-2560 (p 554-545)

I Sam 2.1-10; Matt 21.22; Lk 18.9-14; John 17.1-26; Rom 12.12; Phil 4.6; Col 4.2

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 367-8)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 53-57)

Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 31-33)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano:
Life of St Francis cap 27 (p 243-247); Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire
of a Soul cap 61 (p 308-310); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 10 (p 605-611);
Assisi Compilation cap 76 (p 179-180)

Suggested action

Switch of the Radio/TV for ten minutes each day. Make yourself present to God,
and enjoy the silence. Do not be afraid of it. Increase the time as you progress
and feel more comfortable with what you are doing. Relax, and enjoy your daily
time with God.

2. The Mass

When St Francis looked upon the crucifix he saw the great love that Jesus had for him. Thus, St Francis was drawn to the Eucharist – the holy sacrifice of the Mass – because it is here that the death of Christ proclaimed (Cf. I Cor 11.26). The Mass is a re-enactment of the sacrifice of Calvary. This was the once and for all act of Redemption – the summation of Jesus' earthly life.

The Sacrifice of the Mass was, thus, the centre of St Francis's life. As his followers, it should be the centre of our lives too. When we participate in the Mass we are united with the whole Church in giving praise and thanksgiving to God. 'Do this in memory of me' *1 is not just remembering a past event. In the Mass we join ourselves to the 'Act' itself; the Act of Christ giving himself to God the Father as he did on Calvary. Calvary cannot be restricted to 'Good Friday' per se. Christ's work was a cosmic event which radiates through time and space wherever the community of Christ is present in the celebration of the Mass. The Mass: our highest act of worship.

*1 Christ's words, 'Do this in memory of me' recall the Hebrew word *zakan* referring to the commemoration of the Passover. In their remembrance the Jews believed that the Lord [יהוה] would continue to be with them. In the Mass it would be more accurate to describe this 'remembrance' as **making present what we are celebrating**.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 26 (p 98-100)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1136-1204 (p 260-275), 1345-1390 (p 302-314)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 141)
Rule 5
Constitutions art 7.4
John 6.25-59

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 22)
Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 33-34)
Armstrong, Hellmann, *Short Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol III Little Flowers of St Francis cap 53 (p 656)

Suggested action

Attend the Mass daily (if possible), or as often as is possible. Try to absorb the words of the Mass, internalizing them, such that they are known and loved and meaningful for you.

3. Meditations on the Our Father

This must be the best of all prayers since Jesus himself taught it to us. It is in the Mass and in the Divine Office of the Church – Morning and Evening Prayer. The best information available for ongoing formation on this topic is in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2759-2856 (p 586-609).

Our Father is a petitionary prayer. This kind of prayer is important because, in expressing our needs to God, we remind ourselves that we are creatures and that we depend on God for everything. Our first concern must be for the coming of God's kingdom and that God's will be done. In praying the Our Father we hope that the most important effect is that our will is gradually conformed to God's will; through our prayer we take on the mind and heart of Christ since he taught us to pray in this way.

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church [as above]

Matt 6.7-15

Rule 8

Preparing for the Millennium 3 [The Year of God the Father]

Other books

Murray Bodo *Through the Year with Francis of Assisi*

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father [Expositio in Pater Noster] (p 158-160)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* cap 22 (p 367-378))

Suggested action

Always pray the Our Father with great care: slowly, thinking of the meaning of the words. During the coming month, say, take care with this especially when praying it in the Office and in the Mass.

4. Office Said by the OFS: how to pray the Divine Office

Professed members of the OFS are expected say an Office each day. This could be any one of the following:

1. The Divine Office (Morning and Evening Prayer)
2. A shortened form as in the Handbook (p 76-127)
3. The Office of the Passion which incorporates the traditional Twelve Our Fathers, Hail Mary, Glory be, as in the Handbook (p 128-133)
4. Special prayers suitable for the respective season, e.g. the Stations of the Cross. We are encouraged, according to our circumstances, health and age, to prayer the Divine Office daily. The reason *why* this should be and *how* we should do it is explained in the Introduction to the Shorter Morning and Evening Prayer (p x-xlii)

A summary of *why* –

- Christian prayer is the joining entire community of all mankind to Christ himself.
- The official prayer of the Church is the very prayer which Christ himself, together with the whole Church, addresses to the Father. In this we pray *to* Christ, and he prays *in* us.
- Christ asked us to prayer without ceasing and this command is fulfilled at every minute of the day all round the world when the Divine Office is said or sung – ‘As o’er each continent and island the dawn leads on another day, the voice of prayer is never silent, nor dies the strain of praise away.’ [*The day thou gavest Lord is ended, John Ellerton, 1826-93*]
- When a group assembles to pray – as at our fraternity meeting – it becomes an unmistakable sign of the Church at prayer fulfilling its duty and its joy of prayer before the throne of God. It ‘serves to nourish the spiritual life’ of the people of God.

To summarise *how* we pray the Divine Office –

- It was intended to be sung or chanted. This is facilitated by praying it with at least one other, or in a group. The hymn at least should be sung. The Office itself is usually recited *antiphonally* [the group/choir divided into two facing halves, as it were, ‘speaking (or “singing”) in answer to each other’]. If it could possibly be chanted in church this would continue the way the Psalms were sung in community by the early Church – the way monks/nuns usually do it.
- The Office is prayed by the whole Church for the salvation of the whole world. Intentions for world peace, world poverty and world ecology should come before local and personal intentions. The Our Father is given pride of place three times daily – at Mass, Morning and Evening Prayer.

- Pauses for silent reflection or meditation are a necessary part of the prayer in order to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit. These pauses should be after the Scripture reading, at the end of each Psalm following the second (repeated) antiphon, and after the Intercessions to enable us to reflect on our own needs and the needs of others – most especially those who have asked for our prayers.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 28 (p 104-107)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2623-2672 (p 559-569)

Rule 8

Constitution art 14.4

II Cor 6.6-17; Col 3.16; I Pet 1-3

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 53-57)

Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 34)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Letter to the Entire Order 40-42 (p 119-120); Vol II Assisi Compilation cap 120 (p 229-230)

Suggested action

Resolve to pray the Office giving time to pause for silent reflection where appropriate, especially after the Scripture reading.

5. Meditation³

Meditation suggests pondering, reflecting, questioning, emphasizing and seeking deeper meanings. When we meditate we start with a subject on which to reflect, for example, a mystery of the rosary or an event from the Gospels. We actively use our imagination, feelings, memory and will to involve ourselves in the experience. Eventually this will lead to a prayer in our own words of praise and thanksgiving and may lead us to discover what God says to us and wants from us. This may lead to feelings of sorrow, shame, or even anger. We eventually have to give our feelings to God and trust him like a child, thus coming closer to him.

Meditation becomes part of our prayer life in the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Holy Eucharist. As we prepare for these sacraments and give thanksgiving we are able to meditate. The Our Father is most appropriately prayed slowly, meditatively, giving thought to each invocation (Cf. cap 3 above). Meditation is essential in praying the Rosary (Cf. Appendix (c) below) – pondering on the life of Christ and Our Lady. It is also part of praying the Scriptures in *Lectio Divina* (Cf. cap 7 below). St Ignatius of Loyola and his followers developed a particular form of meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Much earlier, St Francis meditated on Christ's passion and death and this led eventually to his own *Stigmata*.

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2705-2708 (p 575-576)

Rule 8a

Constitutions art 12.3

Lk 22.39-46 (the agony in the garden); Matt 4.1-11(preparing for his ministry in the desert)

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 247-249)

Suggested action

Spend some time each day in meditation as part of your prayer life – if you do not do so already. Ask your priest or spiritual director if you need help with this practice. Meditation times? Here are some suggestions:

- at Mass, reflect at the elevation 'this is Christ sacrificing himself for me'
- after Communion, reflect on 'this is Christ present within me'
- when saying the Divine Office, after reading the Scripture, pause and reflect on it

³ Cf. *Christian Meditation* in the folder "Additional Resources" Formation on OFSGB website

6. Contemplative Prayer

St Clare is a perfect example of a 'contemplative'. St Francis was a contemplative, especially when seeking solitude at La Verna. At one time he was unsure whether or not to devote his life entirely to prayer – which was his inclination – or whether to preach – which he felt God was calling him to do. It was gradually revealed to him: you should do both! Likewise, we are also called to the both 'Martha & Mary' (Cf. Lk 10.38-41 – often called the 'locus classicus' ⁴ of Christian meditation because of Jesus' comment to Martha in verse 42). Like the Samaritan woman at the well (Cf. John 4.1-42), we are all called into a deeper relationship with God.

We meet Christ first and foremost in the Eucharist. The frequent Communion and contemplative prayer are two of the ways of union with God. Whereas, the Eucharist is a special, physical presence of Christ of a shorter duration, contemplative prayer helps us realise that as temples of God's Holy Spirit we have the continuing indwelling of the Trinity (Cf. Rom 8.9).

At first, this prayer has a honeymoon period when we discover God's great love for us, but fairly quickly we enter into a 'drier' prayer of faith which will lead ultimately to divine union as described by St Teresa of Avilla, and in particular by St John of the Cross (Cf. *Living Flame of Love*; & *Letter I*, 'God has done all things well, for, after all, desolation is a file, and the endurance of darkness is preparation for great light.'). In this deeper prayer we lay aside all thoughts, feelings, words and emotions. Its root is interior silence. It is the opening of the heart and mind to God himself – the ultimate Mystery, beyond all thoughts. We do not resist them, but accept them and let them go. We sink into the presence of God, forgetting past and future, completely alert though totally relaxed. We let go of everything, sinking into this infinite, immense, limitless, gentle love which is God. In forgetting self and resting in God it is like coming home. We wait patiently, silently and attentively for the divine Healer to work on us and act upon us.

Centering prayer (Cf. Appendix (b) below) as taught by Thomas Keating ⁵, William Meninger and Basil Pennington ⁶ is a way to dispose ourselves to contemplation which is ultimately a gift from God himself. If we choose to try this way of praying in order to enter into a closer relationship with God, we shall need to put aside two twenty minute periods each day devoted entirely to it. Centering prayer helps to lead into contemplative prayer.

⁴ Cf. *The Cloud of Unknowing* – where this verse is regularly cited by the anonymous 14th Century writer [and with the hymn writer who recalls the Lucan passage: 'God only knows the love of God; O that it now were shed abroad in this poor stony heart! For love I sigh, for love I pine: this only portion, Lord, be mine, be mine this better part.']

⁵ Thomas Keating *Open Mind, Open Heart*

⁶ Basil Pennington *Centering Prayer*

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2709-2719 (p 576-578)

Rule 8a

Constitutions art 12.3; 14.5

Ps 51; 139; John 14.23; I John 2.12-17; 3.18-22

Other books

Thomas Merton *Seeds of Contemplation*

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 370-372)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 55)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II

Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 9.2 (p 597-598); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 64 (p 312)

7. Lectio Divina⁷

[This chapter should not be attempted until caps 5 & 6 above have been completed]

Lectio Divina is a process which opens the mind and heart to the contemplation of God through his Word. Praying the Scriptures is quite different from *studying* the Scriptures – which is an intellectual exercise. Lectio Divina is a simple and effortless way of praying through Sacred Scripture. There are four steps which are followed in sequence when learning the method but which eventually, with practice, need not necessarily be followed in the same order. Eventually, however, to rest in contemplation is a necessary part of Lectio Divina. The four steps are –

1. Lectio – reading. This could equally be called ‘listening’ to the Word of God (as St Francis did) in a chosen passage of Scripture.
2. Meditatio – meditation. When we reflect upon the words. Here we use our imagination to enter into the situation of the chosen passage ourselves. We deepen our relationship with God in this way; when God’s love touches our hearts we respond in real prayer in:
3. Oratio – prayer of the heart. We speak to God in our own words and put ourselves at the disposal of the Spirit. This increases our desire for God and increases our capacity for him. We might well return to a word or sentence of the passage at this stage and repeat it.
4. Contemplatio – contemplation. Here thoughts and words are unnecessary. In the first three stages, our activity is dominant. At this stage, the Holy Spirit is working in us – Rom 8.26-27. We gaze inwardly upon God as he takes over. Our imagination and reason close down; our feelings are dried up. This is the prayer of pure faith/trust. We entrust ourselves to God who is now in control. We let God move in and do the talking.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 24 (p 91-94)

Rule 4 – careful reading of the Gospel; Rule 5 – seek and encounter the living person of Christ...in Scripture; Rule 8 – let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do

Matt 17.1-8; John 5.36-47; 10.27-30; Rom 10.14-21; 15.1-6; Heb 4.12-13

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 369-370)

Thelma Hall *Too Deep for Words*

⁷ Cf. *Four Ways of Praying the Scriptures: a guide to Lectio Divina* in the folder “Additional Resources”
Formation on OFSGB website

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II
Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 11.1-2 (p 612-613); Celano: Remembrance of
the Desire of a Soul cap 68 (p 314-315)

Suggested action

If you have not already tried to pray in this way – give it a go! It will almost
certainly deepen your spiritual life.

8. St Clare

['Love him totally who gave himself totally for your love']

Clare was a woman of deep prayer, quiet determination, simple humility and self-sacrifice. Inspired by Francis' renunciation of worldly things, she decided to do the same. Clare lived out the prophecy made to her mother before her birth that she would give 'light more clearly than light itself.' Her whole being was filled with love for Christ. She had no other desire than to let his light stream through her. For Clare, the suffering Christ was a mirror into which she gazed daily in order to learn how she should live. This inspired her life of prayer.

She became a mirror of Christ reflecting only his glory. Clare's gift to us was her willingness to become empty of self so that she could be filled with Christ. Her model was the self-emptying of Jesus whose poverty enabled us to be rich.⁸ Her whole life was a daily living out of the Paschal Mystery. In this she followed the example of Mary and did it so completely that she was called 'the footprint of the Mother of God.' Mary, so close to her Son in life; Clare, so close to him in prayer.

St Clare saw herself so much as part of St Francis – and she called herself his 'little plant'. From him she learned everything about poverty and humility and transferred it to life in the monastery of San Damiano. For Clare, as for Francis, there were no half measures; no compromises. She saw that Christ's gift of himself was total – and in total obedience she responded, no matter what the cost. She wrote to Agnes, 'Gaze upon him, consider him, contemplate him as you desire to imitate him.' As Clare gazed on the face of Jesus she saw a servant, so she became a servant herself. She saw poverty, so she became poor. She saw suffering willingly accepted, so she did the same. She saw a man full of love, close to his Father in prayer, so she became a contemplative. And the Order she founded – the Poor Clares – are contemplatives.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 30 (p 111-113)

Other books

Murray Bodo *Clare: a Light in the Garden*

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 383, 149-150)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol III Little Flowers of St Francis cap 15 (p 590-591), cap 33 (p 624)

⁸ II Cor 8.9 'For you know the generous act of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.' (see also, Phil 2.6-8) – and with Mr Charles Wesley: 'He left his Father's throne above - so free, so infinite his grace - emptied himself of all but love, and bled for Adam's helpless race...'

Prayer Handbook (p 180) – Prayer to St Clare

In Legend 36 of St Clare and her sisters we read, 'First of all she taught them to drive away every noise from their dwelling place of their mind so that they may be able to cling to the depths of God alone.'

Appendices:

(a) Prayer as a Relationship with God

<i>Human friendship</i>	<i>Our prayer-life</i>	<i>Lectio Divina</i>
Acquaintance	Acknowledge God in formal prayer	Reading Scripture
Friendliness	Thinking about what we are saying, praying regularly	Meditation
Friendship	Speaking to God in our own words, praying daily	Prayer of the heart
Marriage	Contemplative prayer praying frequently during the day	Contemplation

Our right relationship with God

Pride was the first sin, not disobedience. Adam heeded the serpent, 'You will be like gods' (Gen 3.5). We need to know how we stand before God – it is the relationship of a small child before its parent – totally dependent on him ['except you become like little children...' (Cf. Mk 10.15)]. A small child cannot be nourished unless a parent picks it up and feeds it. It is only in our helplessness before God that we are in the best disposition to pray. It is not by our own efforts – God calls us and we either respond or ignore him. We must give ourselves in love to God; he knows what is in our hearts; he sees through our pious disguises. We cannot fool him.

When we accept God's immense love for us and give up any sense of guilt (once we have confessed and been forgiven) then we can put aside the obstacles, recognizing this love. It is indeed a subtle form of pride which makes us think our sinfulness is too great for his infinite mercy.

Prayer cannot be placed apart from our everyday lives. It is only by our daily on-going conversion, through our everyday experiences and relationships, our constant falling and being picked up again, can we be changed. Through daily conversion, our lives of penance, we can prepare ourselves to be rightly disposed to pray, seeing ourselves before God as we are, handing ourselves

over to him. Our very life is a gift from God who gives himself to us in unconditional love.

(b) A Method of Centering Prayer⁹

A Method of Opening to the gift of Contemplation

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to cooperate with this gift. It is an attempt to present the teachings of an earlier time (e.g. *The Cloud of Unknowing*) in an updated form and to put certain order into it. *it is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer.* It simply puts other kinds of prayer into new and fuller perspective. It enhances other prayer. Words (e.g. at Mass) become full of meaning.

A. Preliminaries

The Vestibule: preparation for the prayer period.

- (a) Choose a time when you are most alert.
- (b) Find a quiet place where you will not normally be interrupted.
- (c) A short Scripture reading or relaxation exercise helps to dispose the mind for prayer.

B. Guidelines

- (a) Choose a sacred word¹⁰ as a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within, such as: God, Love, Peace, Joy, Jesus.
- (b) Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly, and silently introduce the sacred word as a symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
- (c) When you become aware of thoughts, return, ever so gently, to the sacred word.
- (d) At the end of the prayer time remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes. Pray the Our Father to conclude.

The minimum time for a period of Centering Prayer is 20 minutes.

What Centering Prayer is NOT:

- relaxation exercise
- charismatic gift
- para-psychological phenomena
- mystical phenomena

⁹ As taught by Thomas Keating *Open Mind, Open Heart*. An easy introduction is to be found in Smith & Chalmers *A Deeper Love*

¹⁰ This is also called a 'mantra'. A very common word used in meditation for the same purpose is MARANATHA – I Cor 16.22 ('Our Lord, come!').

(c) The Rosary

The rosary is a powerful prayer for peace. Our Lady has constantly asked us to pray for peace and John Paul II suggested that we pray the rosary for that intention. He has also suggested that we use Scripture as an aid to meditate upon the rosary. If you have not prayed the rosary this way before, the following guide may be helpful.

1. Just choose one decade to begin with – we could use the Annunciation as an example. Firstly, read the Scripture (Lk 1.26-38) one or more times.
2. Pause and reflect on the story, engaging your imagination and feelings. Put yourself in Our Lady's place and feel her bewilderment and eventually her utter trust in God. Realise her complete humility as she bows to God's will.
3. Re-read parts of the text so that you can keep the events to the front of your thoughts, and begin slowly to pray the Our Father with Our Lady's humility and trust before you.
4. Meditate a little more before praying the Hail Marys. It is easy in this particular Mystery to keep the theme ever present in your mind since the very words you are using are those of the angel. Similarly, with the Visitation. When praying other Mysteries the holy name of Jesus will bring to mind the particular event in his life.
5. Ponder for a while what this particular story of our Lord can teach you about how you should be living your life. The poverty of the Nativity may lead you to see that you detach yourself from things of this world a little more and perhaps realise that 'needs' are only 'wants'.
6. After 10 Hail Marys you may want to look back at a phrase or word which has seemed important to you in the passage. Stay with this a little while, resting in God for a few minutes.
7. Finally, pray the Glory Be with great joy and praise of the Trinity. Take as long as you please in your wonder of God's greatness and mercy.

You will doubtless find this somewhat more prayerful and refreshing than rattling off a whole rosary at a rate of knots with little thought than you might give to a recitation of the telephone directory! This way you are really *praying the rosary*, not just saying or reciting the rosary. Maybe it will take 15 minutes to pray just one decade this way, but this could lead to a deeper relationship with God.

In his Luminous Mysteries, the late John Paul II brought to our notice that it was possible to meditate on other events in the life of Christ and his mother when praying the rosary. Here, then, are a few suggestions of other groups of events which could be prayed as a whole rosary, or a decade at a time.

Rosary meditations on Manifestations of God made to man

1. Adoration of the Magi, Matt 2.1-12

2. Marriage feast at Cana, John 2.1-12
3. Baptism in the Jordan, Matt 3.13-17 (& paras)
4. The Transfiguration, Lk 9.28-36
5. Resurrection and Ascension, Lk 24.1-8, 50-53

Rosary meditations on the Last Words from the Cross

1. I thirst, John 19.28-30
2. Father, forgive them, Lk 22.33-34
3. Son, behold your mother, John 19.25-27
4. My God, why have you forsaken me?, Mk 15.33-39
5. Into your hands I commend my spirit, Lk 22.44-46

Rosary meditations on the People Christ Befriended

1. Martha and Mary, Lk 10.38-42
2. Zacchaeus, Lk 19.1-10
3. Woman at the well, John 4.5-30
4. Centurion's servant, or Jairus' daughter, Lk 7.1-10; Lk 8.40-56
5. Woman with haemorrhage, Mk 5.25-34

Rosary meditations on Parables

1. Prodigal son, Lk 15.11-32
2. Sower, Mk 4.1-9, 13-20
3. Great banquet, Lk 14.16-23
4. Rich young man, Mk 10.17-27
5. Wise and foolish man, Matt 7.24-27

Franciscan Rosary of Mary's Joys

These 7 decades are clearly seen in the OFS Handbook (p 132). A similar rosary may be prayed with the seven sorrows of Our Lady. As with all the above, Scripture may be used. The above are suggestions of how you may pray the rosary in a way that is similar to Lectio Divina. You may well have ideas of your own using, for instance, episodes in Our Lady's life. However, it should be noted that such Mysteries as the Assumption are based on Catholic tradition, and are not found in Scripture. It is possible to pray a rosary using incidents from the Stations of the Cross, but again, some of these are traditional and are not found in Scripture – e.g. Veronica wipes Jesus' face.

Part 4

Building the Kingdom of God on Earth

Contents

1. The Kingdom of God on Earth
 2. Repair My Church
 3. How the Holy Spirit Works in Us (Confirmation)
 4. Purity of Heart
 5. Being Christ to Others
 6. Seeing Christ in Others
 7. Our Attitude to Other Christians
 8. The Apostolate of the Sick
 9. Our Apostolate of Good Example
 10. Perfect Joy
- Appendix: Members of OFS in History who have been outstandingly “Pure in Heart”

1. The Kingdom of God on Earth

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* tells us that Christ came on earth to proclaim that God's kingdom is near at hand (Cf. Mk 1.15) and to establish its beginning on earth by his life, teaching, death and resurrection. The Church is the seed and beginning of this kingdom (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 567) and it will be fulfilled in the Church at the end of time (Ibid. 865). However, this kingdom has nothing to do with power or domination; it is not a kingdom of this world – as Jesus said to Pilate (John 18.33-38).

In the Old Testament writings, two ideas stand out: (1) God's sovereignty over all creation; (2) God's sovereignty over a people he has chosen for himself. In the Psalms particularly, God's universal sovereignty is revealed, speaking more of his reign than his condition as king. Thus, he carries out his divine plan of salvation in his kingdom. He especially chose those who were to collaborate in his plan: Abraham, Moses, David.

Rule 14 tells us that we, in the OFS, are called 'to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.' It is in our mundane every-day life that we slowly bear fruit in the Church to the glory of God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1724). The Holy Spirit gives us the virtue of "hope" to enable us to desire the kingdom of God (Ibid. 1817). This theme is expanded in chapter 3 below – How the Holy Spirit Works in Us.

Francis' life is rich in incidents that show, by his service, he was a perfect example of someone cooperating with the Holy Spirit in building the kingdom of God on earth. In your preparation for this topic, bring to the meeting some of the events in his life which illustrate this.

Our Lord's invitation to enter his kingdom comes in the form of parables. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 546 – gives all the Scripture references for these) and the signs that he was the Messiah sent by God came in the form of miracles for the unbelieving Jews (Ibid. 548).

The best way for us to help to bring about God's kingdom on earth is to participate fully in the life of the Church and its sacraments – particularly the Holy Eucharist. When we become *active* in this sacrament we go beyond self-focusing – hoping to make ourselves more holy – to become, like Christ himself: other-person centred. Only then can we be Christ *to* others and see Christ *in* them (see below chapters 4 and 5). Since we Secular Franciscans are called by the Holy Spirit to advance the presence of God's kingdom on earth, we need to give it some serious thought. All of this Part [4] and Part 5 included topics for our formation in which we will be considering this notion that we, as Franciscans, are

called to collaborate with God's plan in establishing his kingdom – just as the OT prophets were [albeit it in a less dramatic way].

Basic reading

Isa 49.15; 61.10-11

Matt 5.3; 11.25; 13.1-9, 33, 47-50; 20.1-16; 21.18; 22.1-14; 24.32-35; 26.28; Mk 1.14-15; 2.23-26; 4.30-32; Lk 4.18; 9.57-62; 14.15-24; 15.7; John 4.6-7; 19.28 – the kingdom is open to all who have accepted it with humble hearts

Mk 2.17; John 14-17 – he invites sinners to his table

Rom 8.9; 14.17-19; I Cor 12

{Select one or two of these Scripture passages for reflection}

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived The Apostolates* (p 115-116); Reflections 31-47 (p 117-174)

Rule 13, 14

Constitutions art 20

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1040-1050 (p 238-240), 2816-2821 (p 598-599)

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 74-77)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 257-261; 267-271)

Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 29-30)

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 43-45)

Thomas Keating *The Kingdom of God is Like* (esp p 85)

Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 2, 3, 5

John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* 14, 16-17, 36

Benedict XVI *Jesus of Nazareth I* cap 3 (p 46-63)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents I* Celano: Life of St Francis cap 12 (p 207-209), cap 15 (p 214-217)

Suggested action

God uses us to build up the kingdom as 'living stones'. Examine how, in our everyday lives, we are cooperating with the Holy Spirit to achieve this.

2. Repair My Church

When Francis heard Our Lord speak to him from the crucifix in the church of San Damiano, 'Go Francis, repair my house, which, as you see, is all in ruins' he immediately thought that this meant him to repair the tumbledown building of San Damiano itself. Jesus had, in fact, commissioned him to put right the ills [such as the moral decay among the clergy and faithful] which beset the Church of which Christ himself is both head and corner stone. Other reformers in Francis' time tried to evangelise – but outside the Church. Francis was determined to heal the Church from within. Just as Christ had commissioned Francis to go out as his witness to repair the damage done by sin and to proclaim Christ in the gospel, so we are commissioned by our Profession to go and do likewise (Rule 6). The Church, of course, can only be repaired with Christ **himself**, through his Holy Spirit.

In the Rule we are instructed to 'go forth as witnesses and instruments' of the Church's mission 'among all people, proclaiming Christ' by our life and words (Cf. Rule 6). The second part of the article tells us unequivocally that we are 'called like St Francis to rebuild (repair/restore) the Church'. This involves our 'living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.' By our obedience pledged at Profession, we join ourselves 'to the redemptive obedience of Jesus' and become partners in Christ's redemption (Cf. Rule 10).

So, our mission is to be modern day apostles, living the gospel life as Jesus taught us, 'in full communion' with the Church¹¹ Apostolates are the special way of living this gospel life. The Secular Franciscan Order has established commissions to support Apostolates of Work, Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation and Family. There is also a Formation Commission and a Youth Commission.

In a similar way, we can be engaged in personal Apostolates of our own choosing, guided and inspired by the Holy Spirit. We can trust the Spirit to lead us, and so, in the words of Anthony Ricards, 'bloom where we are planted.' These various Apostolates – such as visiting the sick and caring for our neighbour – in various ways are explored in Part 4 below, while particular themes relating to Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Part 5. All these ways of 'loving our neighbour' fulfil our Lord's commandments as seen in the Gospels, and are part of our 'mission' as Secular Franciscans called, like Francis, to 'Go, repair my Church.'

¹¹ Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* has this to say, 'There is no authentic Secular Franciscan ministry without union with the Church in obedience and cooperation. To live the gospel means to know the Lord, seek out his presence and share his life and mission.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 44 (p 162-165); & in the introduction Apostolates (p 115-116)

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 123) and No 16 (p 56)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Rule 6, 10

Constitutions art 17

Isa 42.6-7; 61.1-4; Jer 1.4-10

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 111-112, 165-166)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 44-47 - Constitutions)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 29-31- Rule)

John Paul II *Redemptor Hominis*

3. How the Holy Spirit Works in Us (Confirmation)

Jesus' gift to us is the Holy Spirit (his Spirit). The gift of the Spirit within us helps us to reach our potential in spiritual life – to become holy and wholly alive; to restore our flawed human nature and give glory to God, the author and finisher of our faith. The work or power of the Spirit in our lives is due to his enabling presence. This gift of the Holy Spirit completes the work of justification in Christ: sanctification – his Spirit makes us holy and we produce the fruit of the Spirit as a result (Cf. Gal 5.22-26).

Both the *presence* and the *power* of the Spirit enable us to become fully spiritually alive: but these two are different from one another. The *presence* of the Spirit is primary; the *gifts* secondary. That is to say, **being** is more important than **doing**. Of course, it goes without saying that we are exhorted to 'become what we are' (Cf. Col 3.1-17, esp. v.17 'and whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.').

The presence of the Spirit at Confirmation grants gifts, gifts that may lie dormant if we do not take time to discover them and develop them, bringing them into action. The Holy Spirit gives us the grace to follow the variety of ways in which he himself inspires us. We cooperate with him and follow his guidance – or, we can disregard him!

The bedrock of our lives as Secular Franciscans is 'prayer'. Through prayer, we can seek what it is that God wishes for us. The Holy Spirit is our spiritual director and we pray in the way that he leads us to pray. As Secular Franciscans we know that we are committed to the building up of God's kingdom. But we cannot do it without first: his prompting, and second: his empowering.

We need to be open to the Spirit, allowing him to possess us and work in us. For, it is the work of the Holy Spirit in us which enables us to go 'from gospel to life and life to gospel'. He helps us to live a life of simplicity, in littleness and the selfless service which is the hallmark of our Franciscan life and which enables us to build up the kingdom. He helps us humbly to realise the task and complete it to the glory of God – our humility demonstrating his magnificence. We are the beloved of God and 'we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us'; 'we work together with him' at this acceptable time – which is the day of salvation (Cf. II Cor 5.20; 6.2). And elderly, sick, infirm or disabled are not excluded from this ministry. OFS members – whatever their situation – are committed by their Profession to follow in the footprints of St Francis, welcoming sanctification, living the gospel life in purity of heart, and with courage.

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 7363-736 (p 169-170), 737-739 (p 170-171), 797-801 (p 185-186)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 10 (p 36-39)

Isa 11.1-3 – gifts for personal holiness given at Confirmation

I Cor 12.7-11 – charismatic gifts to build up the Church

Matt 25.25-30; Lk 12.4-12; Rom 12.1-14, 20-21; 8.26-27; Phil 4.11-12

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 164)

Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 17, 33-34, 39-40, 42

John Paul II *Agenda for the Third Millennium*, 1966 (p 22)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I The Admonitions cap 1.5-8, 12-20 (p 128-129), cap 8.1 (p 133); Earlier Rule cap 22.27-31 (p 80); Later Admonition & Exhortation 48-49 (p 48-49); Celano: First Book cap 11.26 (p 205); Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 6 (p 249-250), cap 61.95 (p 309-310); Assisi Compilation 83 (p 184-187); Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 1.2-3 (p 531-533); Anonymous of Perugia cap 1.6 (p 36)

4. Purity of Heart

In Part 2 cap 7 'Chastity I' (above) the theme of Chastity dealt with one aspect of the subject: but purity of heart in its widest sense has several components which embrace much more than the virtue of chastity. It includes honesty and the integrity of our entire being. To examine fully what the phrase 'purity of heart' means we need to look at what we mean by the 'heart'. Scripturally speaking it means the seat of the emotions – thinking, feeling and deciding. Hence, 'I love you with all my heart' means my love for you is so complete and all-embracing that it includes my thoughts, my feelings, and my actions. In terms of spirituality, the heart is the sacred space at the centre of our being which we open to the presence of God. Full purity of heart is my self-emptying so that God can dwell in me supremely. Look closely at Rule 11b – '...in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as pilgrims on the way to the home of their Father they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.'

Our Lady was the perfect example of 'purity of heart', and you will have no difficulty in finding many examples of why this should be so. Explore this in fraternity – it is an excellent topic for dialogue.

Looking at the lives of Francis and Clare, we may find many of these characteristics which distinguish one who is pure in heart:

1. selflessness – one who neither seeks self advantage nor exploitation of others
2. clear sense of purpose – not being side-tracked in matters which take us away from our goal
3. compassion – such a heart knows no bounds; it is infinitely spacious
4. complete trust in God – that he might use even our mistakes for good
5. awareness of the continual presence of God in our lives – seeing God in everything
6. honesty and integrity – openness with both self and others; no pretense.

The Beatitude, 'blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God', is the keystone upon which the other Beatitudes rest. Its meaning is: seeing through the eyes of faith; seeing God present in every experience and in all creation. Here, we can see St Francis as a perfect example of one who is 'pure in heart'. He is probably, among all the saints, the one who most exemplifies in his life that close conformity to Christ which is captured in the teaching of St Paul in Col 3.1-17 – the locus classicus of Christian perfection. This virtue of purity of heart is closely linked with that of humility itself (see above, Part 2 cap 6 'Humility').

One barrier to spiritual development could be the inability to be completely honest with ourselves – lying about our feelings could cause a dis-ease which prevents us from accessing our feelings and having our hearts touched. On our spiritual journey we should neglect neither our bodies nor our emotions. St Francis, 'More than anything else he desired to be set free and to be with Christ.'

Thus his chief object of concern was to live free from all things that are in the world, so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed even for a moment by contact with any of its dust. He made himself insensible to all outside noise, gathering his external senses into his inner being and checking the impetus of his spirit he emptied himself for God alone. [Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Celano: Life of St Francis cap 27.71 p 243)].

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 32 (p 121-123)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1720 (p 386), 1723 (p 387), 2517-2519 (p 535-536)
Ps 24.3-4; Matt 5.8; 6.21; 15.1-20; 23.13-32; John 7.31-35, 15.8; Eph 6.5; Phil 2.13-16; Heb 12.2; Jas 4.7-10; I Pet 1.22-23; II Pet 3.14-15; I John 3.14-19
Rule 11b-12
Constitutions art 12, 15.4

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 63)
Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 25-26)
Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 37-39)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Later Admonition and Exhortation 13-16 (p 46)
Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 40-42

Suggested Action

Choose an OFS saint and find out all you can about the ways in which that saint exemplified the attributes we associate with purity of heart.¹²

¹² There is an Appendix at the end of this Part containing information about some of the well known saints of the Order.

5. Being Christ to Others

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, and as members of the Church we are his body on earth. St Francis showed us how to become Christ for others when he washed the body of a leper – ministering to him with love, as taught by the Lord Jesus. We are asked to cooperate with Christ in the building of the kingdom of God, and when we do this we are living and visible signs of Christ in the world. Part of our vocation as Secular Franciscans is to act as Christ himself did by bringing peace, patience and kindness to all – showing them just how much God loves them by helping to carry their burdens (Cf. Gal 6.2). We should perform the corporal acts of mercy. By suffering *with* others, fighting for their human rights and offering prayer for their salvation, we can be as Christ to them. Christ has no hands but ours; he has no eyes but ours. We have to be images of Christ, so conformed to his likeness that we can indeed ‘build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively’ – as we exhorted in the Rule (14).

As Secular Franciscans, we have the responsibility of living our daily life – within the circumstances in which we are placed – in a spirit of service, using our gifts and talents (‘let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service’, Rule 14). Jesus gave us the parable of the Good Samaritan to demonstrate the obligation placed on the Christian to regard everyone who needs us as our neighbour. As we are now, as it were, *Jesus’ hands*, we have the task of ministering to broken humanity. Francis’ ministry to lepers was imitating Christ. The apostolate of the early brothers was caring for lepers – with a compassion that reflected what motivated the Samaritan to give help, give money, delay his journey, and make guarantees for the future, in the story recorded in Luke’s Gospel. Francis’ first candidates for the novitiate were similarly involved in ‘leper care’. St Francis’ attitude to his brothers, as his *Letter to a Minister* illustrates, was one of mercy and compassion.¹³

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 34 (p 127-129)

Rule 14

John 14.20 – Christ in us as we are in him

John 17.14 – we are to live wholeheartedly in the world

Matt 7.12; 20.24-28; 25.31-46; Lk 10.29-37; 14.12-14; Rom 8.9; I Pet 1.22-2.1

[The Eastertide readings for Mass between Ascension and Pentecost can inspire us to follow the lead of the young Church in action of the book of the Acts – which work we continue.]

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 70-71)

¹³ Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I A Letter to a Minister (p 97-98)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 51-55)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 146-148)

Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 22.38

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Later Admonition and Exhortation 47, 49-53 (p 48-49); Earlier Rule cap 16 (p 74-75); Later Rule cap 6.4-8 (p 103); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 1 (p 530-535)

Prayer

‘Make us worthy, Lord, to serve our fellow men throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands this day their daily bread and by our understanding love, give peace and joy.’

(Mother Teresa of Calcutta)

6. Seeing Christ in Others

St Francis said to his companions of a man who was both poor and sick, 'When you see a poor man, brother, you should see in him Christ and his mother.' Francis devoted much of his life in the service of lepers – this was because he saw Christ in them. When he was first converted in his kiss of the leper, St Bonaventure tells us, that after leaving him the saint turned back and saw Our Lord himself standing there.

Francis is our example. He imitated Christ who laid down his life for us. We, likewise, should be imitators of Christ (Cf. I Cor 11.1 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.'), to the point of devoting our whole life to the service of others – even to the point of death.

Baptism transfigured us into images of Christ. Potentially, we can love as much as Jesus loved, but in reality this power is hidden inside us. God did not intend this to be the case. How can we be transformed into the living likeness of Christ and love divinely as he did? This transformation (trans + formation) can only come about in the daily sacrificing of our life in the service of God and our fellow human beings.¹⁴ As well as *being* Christ to others we should also see Christ in others, recalling that while Satre said 'hell is other people' for the Christian other people are Christ!

God sees in every person the features of his Son (Rule 13). Do we see Christ in others? Do we accept and welcome *all* people as a gift of the Lord? We find it difficult to see Christ in someone's rage, selfishness, laziness, stubbornness or cruelty. To ignore the faults and see the person with all their brokenness and needs requires both faith and a refusal to *condemn*. Looking at another person as someone for whom Christ died, whom the Spirit can transform – as it did me – is true Christian vision. I am exhorted to see in the unlovely, the loveliness of Christ. In the hungry, the sick, the despised, the lonely, the unhappy, the suffering, the oppressed I must see Jesus; for in others, Jesus is waiting to be loved. Therefore, it behoves us to welcome, to clothe, to visit the sick and imprisoned – for there is Christ waiting for us in our ministrations.

Do I really know that God loves me unconditionally? He waits at the doors of our hearts to be welcomed so that he can work actively in our lives (Cf. Rev 3.20). And it is in prayer, waiting quietly for him to answer, that we become increasingly aware of his presence. As we follow Christ's command, 'love one another as I have loved you' (John 15.12), we may also begin to realise that he is equally present in absolutely every person we meet. We are the unfinished children of God and he is working hard on us. He sees the end product; we are just seeing the beginning.

¹⁴ The key passage here is Rom 12.1-21, noting esp. verse 2 'but be transformed...'

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* Rule 13 and commentary (p 28)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 35 (p 130-132)

Isa 53.2-5; Matt 25.31-46; Lk 6.35; 10.25-37; John 13.1-15; I Cor 10.16-17; Col 3.9b-11; I John 4.16-17, 19-20

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 43-46; 71-74)

Lester bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 94-95)

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 40)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of Saint Francis cap 15:39 (p 218), cap 28 (p 247-259); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Life cap 1.5 (p 533-534), cap 8.5 (p589-590); Legend of the Three Companions cap 4 (p 74-75); Assisi Compilation 53 (p 152); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 17 (p 278), cap 133 (p 359-360)

Suggested action

Try to make a deliberate attempt to see Christ in at least one person each day in the coming month – whether they be healthy, attractive, sick deformed, and outcast or a beggar (or, perhaps just someone you find it difficult to get on with).

7. Our Attitude to Other Christians

In recent years there has been a real change of attitude towards other Christians. No longer do we consider *Protestants* to be the 'enemy'. Now, in a spirit of humility we have dialogue with other Christians and where previously we looked at the differences between our beliefs and practices, now we focus upon what we have in common. This is mainly due to the ecumenism instigated by pope John XXIII.

Whilst we need to remain open and be listening to other Christians, it is essential that we remain loyal to our Catholic faith. We need to have an essential catechesis of our faith so that we are in a position to answer honestly the questions which will be put to us when we are in dialogue with other denominations.

In living the gospel life as taught us by the Rule given by St Francis we become living witnesses to our beliefs without the need 'to preach'. A better knowledge of the Scriptures is essential for us. The Vat II decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* [on Ecumenism] 7 states, 'the more purely they strive to love according to the gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian unity.'

What we learned at school in our religious lessons in childhood is not sufficient to help us in Christian dialogue. Firstly, in our maturity, we require the religious knowledge and spirituality of an adult; secondly, we need to be up-to-date in our theology – what the Church has to say on current issues such as 'cloning', 'euthanasia' et al. Reading Catholic magazines and newspapers will help in this, as, hopefully, will the current ongoing formation sessions at the Monthly Meetings. We should understand the importance of these sessions. Each member of the fraternity should strive to prepare for them as well as they are able. What we have to say from our studies will benefit others and the benefit will surely be reciprocated. With a clearer understanding of our own faith, we should be confident in passing it on to others. We may need to explain what we understand of the Catholic martyrs in Britain who died for this faith – holding them precious – without according blame to those who now belong to a tradition which was, in former and very different times, responsible.

Benedict XVI writes in *Sacramentum Caritatis* – dealing with the reception of the Eucharist – that members should be familiar with its contents for their own knowledge, but also to enable them to explain the position of the Catholic Church with confidence and clarity.¹⁵

¹⁵ For example: the reason why those not in full communion with the Holy See are unable to receive Holy Communion when they attend a celebration of the Mass. [Cf. CIC Canon 844 § 2, 3]

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 45 (p 166-168)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 820-822 (p 190-191), 838 (p 194-195), 855 (p198-199), 1271 (p 288)
Matt 7.1-5; 12.46-50; John 17.21; Lk 14.12-14; 10.25-37; Rom 13.10; Gal 3.28;
Phil 2.1-2; I Pet 1.22-2.1
Rule 13, 19
Constitutions art 18:1-3

Other books

Vat II *Unitatis Redintegratio*
John Paul II *Agenda for Third Millennium* (p 214-216)
Benedict XVI *Sacramentum Caritatis*

Prayer¹⁶

As the seed grows silently in the earth, as the yeast rises in the dough, may the power, Spirit of God, be at work in us. Like a city set on a hill, like a lamp shining in the darkness, may we witness together, calling our brothers and sisters to the glory of your light, and the peace and justice of your kingdom. AMEN

¹⁶ Catholic Agency to support Evangelisation

8. The Apostolate to the Sick

As part of the Christian spirit of service (Rule 15), charity to the sick features prominently. Here we are not concentrating on the *suffering* sick which theme is dealt with above (Part 2 cap 10) but on *all* those sick in body, mind or spirit who are particularly weak and vulnerable. Often, medication and palliative care today takes away physical pain, but there remains the feeling of inadequacy and vulnerability. St Francis always had a tender regard to the sick that he treated with the utmost kindness.

The sick in our fraternity should not be overlooked. They should be visited regularly – at least monthly or more often if they have no family near to deal with basic needs – and kept up to date with fraternity news. Minutes of meetings and any ongoing formation material should be sent to them, along with OFS magazines etc. Our fraternity sick should be prayed for at meetings and at home in our private devotions. On our sick visits we should be aware of Christ in every one of these vulnerable people. This is an opportunity to make them feel loved and not forgotten. This is a time to remind the sick that they are still able to live out the Christian life, being a help to others – perhaps also sick – by their prayers. Suffering brings grace and they may be able to appreciate the immense value and power flowing from offering their suffering to God, encouraged to understand that their suffering unites them with the redemptive suffering of Christ. Sometimes it is not necessary to say much at all, but our presence may help to correct any residual anxiety about sickness as a punishment from God (Cf. John 9.1-17). Being there, in a spirit of fraternal love and care, is so important to a sick person. If our visits reveal that some are angry with God, or in denial of their true state, they may just need to see that they are accepted.

As an example of those who cared for their sick brothers and sisters we need to look no further than St Francis and St Clare. Francis cared with such tenderness for his sick brothers – think of the simple minded Juniper. His care for lepers is well documented. Clare looked after her sisters until she was worn out and ill herself, dealing most tenderly with all their most intimate needs. Our own Patroness, St Elizabeth of Hungary, also exemplifies the same tender mercy. Without neglecting our own family responsibilities, it is a priority of our apostolate to care for the sick of our fraternities.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 43 (p 158-161)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1503, 1506, 1509 (p 336-338), 2447, 2449 (p 523-524)
Rule 5, 14
Deut 4.44-49; Job; Ps 34; Matt 15.29-39; 25.35; Mk 6.30-44; 10.46-52; John 6.51; 13.15, 35; Gal 2.19-20; Jas 5.13-16

Other books

Vat II *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 8, 17; *Gaudium et Spes* 24

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Earlier Rule cap 10 (p 71-72); Later Rule cap 4 (p 102), cap 6 (p 103); Admonitions cap 18.1-2 (p 134); Celano: Life of St Francis caps 22-25 (p 236-242)

Suggested action

See the practical help for the sick in *To Live as Francis Lived* (p 161- Application to Daily Life)

Prayer

Heal, O Lord, your servants who are sick and place their trust in you. Send them help, O Lord, and comfort them from your Holy Place. AMEN

9. Our Apostolate of Good Example

St Francis frequently taught us to preach, not with words, but by example. Those of us with children of our own know just how true this is. We need to have a genuine inner commitment to the Christian life to maintain a good example to our fellow humans. We can only influence others by what we are: 'What you are thunders so loud' – it is often said. Our reverence in church, our dedication to work, our behaviour at home with the family, in fact, in all our activities in the world – we can show *what we are* by how we act.

There are people who have had a powerful influence upon our lives. Each of us can look back over our lives and think about these people, perhaps recalling a specific incident. If positive, it is easy to thank God and bring them before him – whether they are alive or dead. We can invite Christ to come into our bad or sad memories to bring about healing.

It was the example and the spirit of St Francis which was such an inspiration to his brothers and which attracted so many followers. It was the loving attitude of a non-judgmental good father which made him a true leader of his brothers. To help to realise the kingdom of God on earth – as all Secular Franciscans may do – is to live a life in full union with the Church, striving to be people of integrity, honesty, and free from hypocrisy. Where others see members and fraternities of the OFS as a witness of love and care for one another, they will find the Order itself attractive. Disharmony is a stumbling block and certainly not a way of promoting our way of life within the Church.

Our example in the parishes and the help we give to our priests should ensure that we are never short of new recruits to the fraternities. Always remembering: 'Actions speak louder than words!' Elderly or disabled Secular Franciscans may take heart in the knowledge that if too frail or elderly to participate in more robust apostolic activities good example is all that is called for. The joyful ways in which we undertake our work, deal with our families, cope with our illnesses and suffering and enjoy all creation can only but promote the Faith and the Order.

Basic reading

Foly, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 46 (p 169-171)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2471-2472 (p 527)

Rule 12

Constitutions Art 31.2

Deut 6.5; 16.12; II Sam 12.1-13; Matt 5.16, 39; 18.21-22; 25.25-30; Mk 12.30; Lk 21.1-5; Rom 12.1-14; I Cor 15.12; 16.20; I Tim 4.7-16

Other books

John Paul II *Christifideles Laici*

Vat II *Apostolicam Actuositatem* 4, 6, 8, 10-16, 18, 33

Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 36, 38-39, 41

Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 43, 52, 75

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Earlier Rule cap 17 (p 75-76); cap 22 (p 79-81); Later Admonition 22-50 (p 47-49); Admonition 21 (p 135), 36 (p 136); Vol II Anonymous of Perugia cap 5.24 (p 45); Legend of Three Companions cap 11 (p 92-95)

Prayer

Dear Lord, keep me from being a hypocrite. Let me always act with honesty, with integrity, not just for my good but for the good of all the Church. AMEN

10. Perfect Joy

The story of *Perfect Joy* is told in the 'Fioretti' ¹⁷ and re-told in Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 47 (p 172-174).

Perfect Joy is known when we truly realise that God loves us unconditionally; when we truly realise that we are the Beloved of God and that one day we will be with him eternally. Until then, we are exhorted to rejoice in our sufferings, humiliations, insults and hardships for the love of Christ Our Lord. This, St Francis taught us in the story referred in Reflection 47 – referred to above.

Jesus himself, asked us to be cheerful and rejoice in all circumstances – Matt 6.16-18 – even when we fast or do penance. We do not need to put on a long face so that we are asking for human praise. Our Father in heaven looks on us and delights in our efforts, especially when they are done without ostentation and for him alone. Then, our love for God becomes a personal love; our motivation for our actions comes from a purity of heart – not for personal gain or human respect. This personal love, found so often in St Francis, is natural to those who know God's love enfolds them. Thus, Francis did not mind looking like a fool when dressed in rags; he was imitating Christ himself who appeared a fool to the world who had rejected him (Cf. John 1.11; I Cor 1.22-23), in his life, his passion and his death – for our sake.

If we should reach this state of perfect joy enjoyed by St Francis, then we really are set free from the encumbrances which prevent us building God's kingdom on earth.

Basic reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church 164-165 (p 41);, 618 (p 141), 1508 (p 337-338), 1521 (p 340)

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 59, 130)

Rule 19

Ps 16.9; 34.9; 84; Matt 6.33; Lk 16.19-31; John 3.28-30; 16.20-24; I Pet 1.3-9; I John 3.1-2

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 59)

John Paul II *Salvifici Doloris* cap 1:1; cap 4:16, 18; cap 5:21-22

Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 41

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 11 (p 205-207); Vol II Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul (p 239-240)

¹⁷ Cf. Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I True and Perfect Joy (p166-167); Vol III Little Flowers of St Francis cap 8 (p 579-581)

Prayer

O Bringer of Joy, awaken my heart; pour you love and blessings through all my being! Free me from attachments and desire, that I may become a clear mirror, reflecting your love and joy to the world. AMEN

Appendix:

Members of OFS in History who have been outstandingly “Pure in Heart”



St Thomas More

Here is a man of integrity. Thomas was a great friend of Henry VIII yet he valued the life of his soul more than his loyalty to the king. He knew that what the king was asking of him – to agree that the marriage to Katherine of Aragon was invalid – that while he was the king's good servant, he was God's first. This cost him his life. Spared the usual penalty of hanging, drawing and quartering accorded the commoner, he was beheaded.



St Elizabeth of Hungary

This saint had known great wealth and status. She was a princess by birth and wife of the Langrave of Thuringia. She used her wealth and influences to help the poor and needy to the point of emptying the coffers of Thuringia when she was given charge during her husband's absence. She tried to live simply, especially when her husband was away busy with the affairs of state. Then she dressed as a humble peasant woman and went among the poor laden with food for them. When her husband died she was thrown out of the land with her three children, lived a simple life and became of Franciscan Teritary. She spent the rest of her life in poverty, simply tending the sick, the poor, the lepers.

St Rose of Viterbo

As a young child, Rose showed exceptional holiness. She wanted to enter a monastery at the age of seven but could not do so without a dowry. Instead, she made a cell for herself at home where she spent long spells in prayer and mortification, going without food until she was at the point of death. Our Lady appeared to her, telling her to enter the Third Order of St Francis. She preached openly, calling on the people to be faithful to the pope. Her father feared for the safety of the crowds who gathered around her to support her protestations against the emperor's oppression of the Church. He forbade her to go out but the parish priest supported her. She tried to open a home for both herself and her followers, but without success. She died in 1252 aged only 17, and was canonized in 1457.

Ven Matt Talbot

Matt was born in Dublin in 1856. He and his family were housed in filthy tenement buildings in harsh living conditions. His mother, like so many of his neighbours, had to wash, clean or sew for others in order to feed the family. The men, in contrast, drank away the meager wages they earned. All, that is, except Matt – until aged twelve years he learned how to drink in his first job: a wine bottling store. He stole to pay for drink, ceased to receive Communion – though he still attended Mass. One night, having no money, he took the pledge, and once he started receiving the sacraments his whole life changed. He attended Mass early every morning, he spent most evenings in prayer in distant churches. Avoiding drink was a torment to him, but he worked hard as a builder's labourer, humbly hiding himself and subjecting himself to the severe penances of little food and an uncomfortable bed. His confessor urged him to learn to read and he soon became familiar with the Psalms, Wisdom and the New Testament. He was professed into the OFS in October 1891, but died on his way to Mass in June 1925 having spent a life of prayer, penance and charity to his poor fellow workers – wearing chains on his body.

St Bridget of Sweden

She lived from 1303-1373 and from her early days was a prayerful child. A vision of Jesus on the cross so deeply impressed her that her love for God and devotion to the Passion of Christ grew throughout her life. She married, but when her husband was away at war, her prayer life grew stronger. She gave birth to eight children. Her spirit of penance inspired by visions and prayers troubled her as she lived in such comfortable surroundings. Bridget and her husband became Franciscan Tertiaries, showing that even at court they could embrace the spirit of poverty. Her husband became sick and vowed that, if he recovered, he would enter a monastery. He recovered, and he kept his promise. Bridget herself received the gift of contemplation and underwent severe penances. In visions she was told to return to court and preach the love of God; she denounced corruption, urging those in public life to do penance and reform. In her visions she saw her husband reach heaven, and Our Lord and his mother told her to found a new Order. She did not wish to enter a convent herself, wishing to remain a Tertiary. However, she drew up a Rule based on Franciscan poverty and began the foundation of a religious community which was eventually approved after her death.



St Louis IX

King of France, Louis (1214-1270) is, with Elizabeth of Hungary, the Patron Saint of the OFS. As king of France from 1226 he was famous for his mercy, justice

and protection of his subjects. He lived devoutly throughout his life and was model for those he ruled. He worked to secure peace between his barons and sought to protect his vassals. In order to secure peace he insisted on a written law, for clarity, and he reformed the unjust taxation system. He furthered justice by reforming the court system, introducing trial by jury. He lived among his people, finding lawyers for those seeking justice. Even foreign monarchs asked him to involve himself in the unraveling of disputes. His integrity and bravery can be seen in his defense of the Holy Land during the troubled times of the Crusades. He loved truth, and kept his word with the Muslims who imprisoned him. He was renowned for his charity to hospitals, churches and the poor. He fed poor beggars, caring for them in his own home. He washed the feet of old men, poor and crippled on Maundy Thursday. And although there is actually no written evidence of Louis' Profession to the Third Order, there are many other Franciscan elements to his life as well as the evidence cited above. His mother was St Elizabeth of Hungary, which in turn influenced his own life. He certainly followed the Franciscan ideal of eating all that was put before him and wearing modest dress whenever he could.

Other Secular Franciscan Saints

St Elizabeth of Portugal, St Angela Merici, St Margaret of Cortona, St Charles Borromeo, St Pius X, St Joseph Benedict Cottelengo, Bl Angela of Foligno, Bl Raymond Lull, husband and wife Bl Luigi and Bl Maria Beltrami, St Conrad of Piacenza, Bl Luchesius, Bl Contardo Ferrini and St Mary Frances of the Five Wounds...

Part 5

Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

Contents

1. Integrity of Creation 1 – ‘Francis’s Love of All Creation’
 2. Integrity of Creation 2 – ‘Ecology’
 3. Justice – Compassion and Love
 4. The Dignity of Human Life 1 – ‘Work’
 5. The Dignity of Human Life 2 – ‘An Aspect of Restorative Justice’
 6. The Sanctity of Human Life – Abortion, Euthanasia, Genetic Manipulation
 7. Public Life
 8. Peace
 9. Being a Peacemaker
 10. Family Life
 11. Sister Death
- Appendix: *The Poems of John Bradburne*

1. Integrity of Creation 1 – ‘Francis’ Love of all Creation’

To understand the idea in the title we need wholeheartedly to appreciate the simplicity of St Francis in his instinctive perception of how every living thing – features, trees, plants, the tiniest particle of matter – is a God-given gift. According to Gen 1.31 ‘God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.’ We realise that through his closeness to God, Francis fully understood that all of God’s creation was *very good indeed*.

St Francis’ reverence and joy for the whole of the creation inspired him to praise God in *The Canticle of the Creatures* –

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,
especially Sir Brother Sun...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire...
Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,
and who produces various fruit with coloured flowers and herbs...¹⁸

By using ‘Brother’ and ‘Sister’ Francis points to a close, intimate relationship between all the elements of creation. The whole of humanity is part of that creation, within which, God the Creator, intended that everything would live in unity and inter-dependence. We try to absorb the simplicity and joy of St Francis in his fullness of understanding that we live in a cosmos in which everything was created to live in harmony. The cosmos embraces the *micro-universe* (such as the minute creatures that inhabit one drop of water from a garden pond) and the *macro-universe* (the contents of the vastness of outer space, the galaxies, stars and planets). Everything has been endowed with excellence and the stability of its own order. All the elements of creation are inescapably inter-dependent and sanctified by the presence of God the Creator.

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 30, 58)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 41 (p 151-153)

Susan Saint Sing *St Francis, Poet of Creation*

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2415-2418 (p 516-517)

Gen 1.27-31; Ps 21; Dan 3.52-90; Matt 6.26-33; 7.12; John 17.21-23; Acts 4.32-35; Eph 1.3-4

Rule 18

Constitutions art 18.4

¹⁸ Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Canticle of the Creatures (p 113-114)

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 18)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 37-38; 89-95)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 88-91)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 50)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 343-344)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 21(p 234-236); cap 28 (p 247-250); d' Avranches: Versified Life of St Francis (p 488-489; 503-504); Vol II Assisi Compilation 88 (p 192); 110 (p 217-218); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 124 (p 353-354)

Prayer

Each leaf, each petal, each grain, each person, sings your praises Creator God. And yet the Land of Greed has patented and plundered your splendour, has taken and not shared your gift, has lived as owner of the world, not guest. And so the ice is cracked, the rivers dry, the valleys flooded and snow caps melt. God our Father, show us how to step gently, how to live simply, how to walk lightly with respect and love for all that you have made. AMEN

(*Walk Lightly* – a Cafod prayer)

2. Integrity of Creation 2 – ‘Ecology’

Creation came about because of God’s love. St Francis was only too aware of this. He was proclaimed the Patron Saint of Ecology by John Paul II on 29 November 1979 for a very good reason. Francis had a natural reverence and courtesy for all that God had created. This, in turn, caused him to love God as the Creator of the beauty which the saint perceived in creation itself.

Integrity of Creation relates to the inter-relationship between all elements of creation. Everything exists in interdependence with everything else. Such bonds and relationships include humanity and its interdependence with the environment. The word ‘ecology’ comes from the Greek ‘oikos’ (house, home; and referred originally to the running of the home – usually a woman’s responsibility!). Thus, Ecology refers to what we need to do as caretakers of the earth. Ecology is one of the most rapidly developing of modern sciences, embracing physics, chemistry, biology, biochemistry, zoology and geology. And it confronts us with the most urgent of challenges.

Planet earth is our ‘home’ (oikos) and our garden and we are its tenants.¹⁹ We share with all other species a common origin in the creative act of God which continues to unfold around us. Having been entrusted with the care of the earth, we have significant responsibilities for all elements and resources of creation – animal, vegetable and mineral. They are God’s gifts to be used wisely and carefully, recognizing that each has its own sacredness. This is often referred to as ‘stewardship’ of the gifts which God has entrusted to us. As stewards, we are responsible for promoting good practice such as simple living and the reduction of our carbon foot printing. We are also collectively responsible for exploitation and misuse. Present day problems such as climate change from pollution, the uncontrolled use of fossil fuels, genetic modification, waste disposal, the destruction of the habitats of other species and so on, call for our most serious, urgent attention.

As Franciscans, the inter-relatedness of humanity with the whole of creation is central. Christ, through the Incarnation, takes the whole of creation into himself. We are, therefore, called to preserve the integrity and holiness of God’s creation through fraternal love and respect for the created order.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 41 (p 151-153)

John Michael Talbot *The Lessons of St Francis* cap 10

Ilia Delio *A Franciscan View of Creation*

Sean McDonagh *To Care for the Earth*

Eric Doyle *St Francis and the Song of Brotherhood and Sisterhood*

Eric Doyle *My Heart’s Quest* (p 46-66)

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 30)

¹⁹ Gen 2.15 ‘The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.’

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2420-2421(p 517), 2424, 2426 (p 518)
Gen 1.28-29; 2.15; Ps 8; 65.8-13; 104; Lk 12.13-21, 42-48; 16.1-13; Rom 8.18-22; I
Cor 4.1-7; II Cor 5.17-19; II Pet 3.13
Rule 18
Constitution art 15.3

Other books

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 89-95)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 395, 141)
Theodor Herr *Catholic Social Teaching*
Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 55 – para 2 'Exploiting Creation')
Washington Theological Union Symposium Papers 2003 *Franciscans and Creation: What is our Responsibility?*
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II Bonaventure:
Major Legend cap 8.6 (p 590-591), cap 9.1 (p 596-597); Celano: Remembrance of
the Desire of a Soul caps 124-130 (p 353-357)

Meditation

Choose one of John Bradburne's poems (Appendix) –

- A Ballade of a Rectory Garden
- Excelsior
- In Principio
- Spring in the Air

3. Justice – Compassion and Love

Christ's supreme example of justice is expressed in the words he spoke from the cross, 'Father, forgive them for they know not what they are doing'. His love and compassion for his enemies teaches us a different way of 'doing justice'. The justice of God, upon which Christian faith and hope depend, is *restorative justice*. This justice heals, restores, and reconciles – whereas *retributive justice* punishes, hurts or kills. Restorative justice flows naturally from fundamental Christian principles and values: repentance, forgiveness, restitution and rehabilitation. We are all children of God and, therefore, brothers and sisters; so all victims and offenders are part of one family from which no one is permanently excluded. Therefore, what we do – good or evil – affects us all. The restorative way acknowledges the harm done in the past but then moves forward through the process of justice done with love, in the light of good in the future. It focuses upon healing hurts, and restoring peace in hearts and communities.

Restorative justice means that those who break the law and harm the peace of the community will be held accountable. For those who truly threaten safety there will be appropriate punishment – including imprisonment. However, restorative justice is not merely to be equated with punishment and prison: it is built on the hope that with God's help all can be transformed – into wholeness.

As Christians, redeemed by God in spite of our sin, we are obliged to practice restorative justice in our homes, in workplaces, and in personal relationships; to speak the truth whenever and wherever we see injustice – from grass roots to governmental and international levels. The path to restorative justice is both a human challenge and a personal, spiritual quest.

Christ's way, which we have chosen to follow, redeems, reconciles and sanctifies. That is: it brings us back to God, it reconciles our broken relationship with him, it makes us holy. In working to bring about justice in today's suffering world we are recognizing the equality and dignity of all creation – made for, and loved by, God. If we love and value each person, as Jesus Christ himself did, we are helping to restore the Church – Christ's body – to its mission of worldwide evangelization and all that this implies for the created order. As Franciscans, we are continuing the mission given to St Francis: 'Repair my Church!'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 36 (p 133-135)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1807 (p 400-401), 2411 (p 515), 2487 (p 530)
Exod 23.1-9; Lev 19.15; Ps 82.1-4; Wis 8.7; Jer 22.13-16; Amos 5.21-24; Matt 5.13-16, 43-48; 23.23; 25.40; Lk 3.10-14; 16.19-31; 10.25-37; 14.12-14; 18.1-8
Rule 15
Constitution art 22.2
Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 27-28, 66

Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* 81

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 46-48)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 399-401)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 38-41, 58-63)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 73-76)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 78-81)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 6 (p569-576); cap 8 (p 586-595); Evening Sermon on St Francis III (p 762-765)

Prayer

Let us pray for the courage to seek out and redress injustice, and for the grace to relate to one another as God relates to us – with unconditional love and compassion.
AMEN

Suggested action

In any discussions we have about justice, we need to remind ourselves that we are representing Christ. Do we really recognize the equality of all persons and wish them to be treated with love and dignity, or do we have 'blind spots' which causes us to discriminate?

4. The Dignity of Human Life 1 – ‘Work’

Work gains nobility as an essential part of the Integrity of Creation.²⁰ Since the very earliest Christian centuries, the social doctrine of the Church has placed much emphasis on the ‘Common Good’, defined in the Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* of Vatican II as ‘the sum total of social conditions which allows people, either as individuals or groups, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.’

In remembering the hands-on labours of Jesus as he went about teaching and healing and recalling the response of St Francis to God’s call ‘Go and restore my Church’, we recognize the integral significance of work. Francis himself makes specific mention about working faithfully and from a sense of dedication – in the Later Rule of 1223 cap 5. Right at the last, in his Testament, he says, ‘And I worked with my hands, and I still desire to work; and I earnestly desire all brothers to give themselves to honest work. Let those who do not know how to work learn, not from desire to receive wages, but for example and to avoid idleness.’²¹

In our work we recognize our vocation to cooperate with God’s continuing plan for the whole of creation. To this end work requires us to utilize – to the best of our ability – the many gifts given to us by God: our intelligence, curiosity, manual skills, talents and creativity, with a spirit of contentment in whatever roles we find ourselves.²² Every worker’s input is unique and invaluable. Where work is carried out in common, sharing hopes, difficulties and achievements, it bestows reciprocal blessings and builds up a sense of community. What is more, work may inspire and provide a valuable Christian witness to others.

The dignity of the human person requires that work be positive, meaningful and fulfilling. Work practices such as exploitation, forced labour, child labour, human trafficking – together with inhuman conditions and unjust/unfair wages – severely compromise human dignity.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 42 (p 154-157)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 2284-2287 (p 492), 2427-2429 (p 518-519)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 57)
Gen 1.28; Lk 17.7-10; I Cor 10.31; Gal 5.22-23
Rule 16
Constitution art 10, 21.1-2

²⁰ Cf. Col 1.10 ‘so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God.’

²¹ Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Testament (1226) 20 (p 125)

²² Cf. St Paul in Phil 4.11-13 ‘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.’

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 49-51)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 82-84)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 77-79)

Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 33-34)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 349-365)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 55-58)

Paul VI *Populorum Progressio* 27-28

John Paul II *Laborum Exercens*

John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* 37 (Promoting the Dignity of the Person)

Doug Clorey *Work and Workplace* (in Bulletin, Advent 2005 p 10)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Earlier Rule cap 7.3-15 (p 68-69); Later Rule cap 5 (p 102-103); Vol II Assisi Compilation caps 47-48 (p 147-148), cap 103 (p 207) – brothers not to abandon prayer to work with their hands

Prayer

Let us pray and give thanks for the gift of work and for the skills to perform it; for the joy of contributing to God's work of ongoing creation, and for the ability to serve the common good of all. AMEN

5. The Dignity of Human Life 2 – ‘An Aspect of Restorative Justice’

Sadly, in today's society the dignity of many is undermined. Certain groups are marginalized and excluded. Amongst these groups are those who are weighed down by poverty, sickness or infirmity (both physical and mental); those of other race, colour or creed, immigrants, asylum seekers, migrant workers; ex-prisoners, single parents, homosexuals, lesbians, male and female prostitutes; the homeless, the unemployed; those who are HIV positive, AIDS sufferers – and so on.

At the heart of exclusion are injustice and a failure to recognize the ultimate value and preciousness of each person as a child of God. In his ministry, Jesus sought out especially those who were excluded from society – prostitutes, tax collectors, Samaritans – and made it clear that everyone has a place in the kingdom of God. This fact challenges our attitudes towards those who are marginalized or ‘different’ in our society.

After his conversion, when he embraced the leper, St Francis recognized Christ in all those he met and treated everyone with love, total openness and respect. He wholeheartedly tried to bring Christ's inclusive love to all he encountered. As Franciscans, we aspire to show Christ's inclusive love to all, embracing our own ‘leper’ as St Francis did. We bear in mind that this (leper) could be another person, or even ‘us’. We would see Christ in ‘our leper’, responding as though Christ is standing before us and within us. Through mutual help and love for each other we come to realise that we become more closely united with, through, and in Christ, in all of the joyful and painful situations of life.

Christian justice requires us to work pro-actively in the protection and maintenance of the dignity of all. So, we should pray: *O God, liberator of the oppressed, show us how to participate in your work of helping people everywhere reach their full freedom and humanity. Give us light to see that no individual does the work of justice alone (nor can we do it alone) but only as instruments of your power and love, which is omnipresent. AMEN*

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 39 (p 144-147)
Catechism of the Catholic Church 1928-1942 (p 421-424), 2442-2448 (p 521-523)
Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 41; *Gaudium et Spes* 27
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 56)
Exod 19.5-6; Isa 11.2-3; Matt 7.12; 25.31-46; Lk 3.11; 13.6-9; I Cor 9.14-27; I Pet 4.8-11; Jas 2.15-17
Rule 13
Constitution art 18, 19, 21.2

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 41 – para 2)

John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* 4

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 146-148; 399-401)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 47-53)

Action

Reading Ramos (above) might suggest an idea for action for this month.

Prayer

Franciscan Peace Prayer, Handbook (p 177)

6. The Sanctity of Human Life – Abortion, Euthanasia, Manipulation

Today, more than ever before, the fast paces of scientific and technological advances often challenge us by presenting us with complex moral and social dilemmas. Solutions and answers to the life-affecting matters of abortion, euthanasia, genetic manipulation etc. are not clear-cut or black and white issues, but matters that require deep soul searching.

Francis of Assisi, like Christ himself, always had a very positive attitude which was life-giving to others. His way with others was open, inclusive and non-judgmental. This way is, and must be as Franciscans, our way too. Francis was full of God's love, his compassion, his mercy – which brought repentance and reconciliation.

In an ideal world, there would be no need for abortion or euthanasia, and no need for any form of genetic manipulation. However, we live in a world filled with suffering and vulnerability, in which painful decisions have to be made. Although we may view certain decisions, and subsequent actions, as wrong or contrary to divine law, we need to be careful not to alienate the person(s) making those difficult decisions. Unconditional love for all is mandatory for the Christian. Through compassion, Jesus showed there was a better way of life. Francis – who once 'walked in sin' – still seeing himself as a great sinner, acknowledged that God loved him as he was – and totally.²³ Like St Francis, we are all sinners on our journey of life, trusting in God's mercy and compassion, and it is this message of conversion, joy and hope that is life-giving to others, not condemnation.²⁴

We need to realise that we are all called to holiness and that as we weave our way through these and other dilemmas of life, we accept with humility that we are not there yet and that throughout life our responses fall short. With good heart and

²³ Cf. Rom 5.8 'But God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.' & 7.15-25 'I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.... Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!'

²⁴ I once was a stranger to grace and to God;
I knew not my danger, and felt not my load;
Though friends spoke in rapture of Christ on the tree,
'Adonai Tsidkenu' (Jer 23.6 – 'The Lord is our righteousness') was nothing to me.

My terrors all vanished before the sweet name;
My guilty fears banished, with boldness I came
To drink at the fountain, life-giving and free:
'Adonai Tsidkenu' was all things to me.

E'en treading the valley, the shadow of death,
This watchword shall rally my faltering breath;
For, when from life's fever my God sets me free,
'Adonai Tsidkenu' my death-song shall be.

(Robert Murray McCheyne, 1813-1843)

loving sincerity, we do the best we can in the circumstances in which we find ourselves. The dignity of human life is uplifted with respect, truth, mercy, compassion and love.

There are pro-active choices we can make to help us in responding to the dilemmas facing our society. First of all, we need to become fully informed of the issues and pray about them. The hugely difficult issues surrounding abortion, euthanasia and genetic research demand a loving response from us. As Christians, we are called to reach out with compassion to those whose lives are affected. At the same time, we need to be mindful of our responsibilities as good citizens to be pro-active. For instance, we can engage in lobbying our members of Parliament, sign petitions, raise awareness by discussion, join suitable pro-active groups, and support individuals by journeying with them in their difficult decisions.

A two-day international congress titled: 'Oil on the Wounds: a response to the aftermath of abortion and divorce', was held at the Vatican on 6 April 2008. In a speech, pope Benedict XVI reflected on the defense of the dignity of the person and of human life. He pointed out that the Church must not forget always to offer the comfort of the gospel of mercy. In fact, he acknowledged, it is 'human freedom' that, 'faced with the difficulties of life, is led in its fragility to painful decisions.' These decisions are 'sometimes undertaken in difficult circumstances; they often bring trauma and are causes of deep suffering for those who make them.' He added: 'These wounds also hurt innocent victims; the child who has just been conceived and is not yet born.' Benedict concluded: 'Only in the attitude of merciful love can we draw near and bring succour and allow the victims to stand up and return to the journey of existence.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 41 (p 151-153)

John Michael Talbot *The Lessons of St Francis* (p 148-150)

Catechism of the Catholic Church 355-357 (p 81), 2258-2262 (p 486-487), 2270-2300 (p 489-495)

Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 27, 51

John Paul II *Evangelium Vitae* 2, 3, 28; *Christifideles Laici* 38

Gen 1.26-27; 9.5; Exod 20.13; Job 10.8-12; Wis 11.24-26; Jer 1.5; Matt 19.18-19; 21.28-32; John 10.14-15; Acts 17.28; Rom 2.14-15; I Cor 12.26; II Cor 13.13; Eph 5.8-9

Rule 18

Constitution art 26.1

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 55-57)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 219)

What you need to know series (SPUC) – esp. ‘Stem Cell Research’; ‘Human Cloning’

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Admonitions 5 (p 131)

Prayer

Holy Spirit, teach us to become aware of the issues and conditions facing us and our brothers and sisters, and the difficult decisions that are being made. Help us, Lord, to act justly, with integrity and compassion, knowing that although we are all sinners, your love is all without exception. For this we thank you. AMEN

7. Public Life

Franciscans do not generally seek power, prestige and public acclaim, but all those who have some time and freedom from responsibility in family concerns, are encouraged to engage in public life. It is through involvement at different levels of social and public life that issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation can be raised, promoted and engaged with.

As public citizens who are able to vote, we have been given the opportunity and responsibility of bringing into power a Party whose overall policies exhibit fairness, integrity and justice. In a democratic society, an active Christian has an obligation to be involved in promoting reforms which can lead to a more integrated and holistic society. Our concern for the welfare of our brothers and sisters in different societies and countries would hopefully spur us on to speak up and demand justice for all whose voice, rights and dignity are compromised through oppression, exploitation and/or corruption. In public life, an honest person, with the responsibility of a high position in local or central government, can help to promote and work for justice, peace and the integrity of creation.

Rule 15 states: 'Especially in the field of public life they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.' This has many implications for us, especially as we are living in a pluralistic, multi-faith and multi-cultural society. St Francis helps us in our approach if we remember that he never condemned or criticized the Church per se, those of other Faiths, or individuals – but showed a better way.²⁵ This way, of course, is the way of the gospel – the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ to whom we are seeking to be conformed – moving from gospel to life and life to gospel.

As Franciscans, we are committed to a radical living of the gospel life – meaning we need to be both collectively and individually pro-active, that is: not remaining uninvolved in changes which promote social justice.

For those of us who, for whatever reason, are unable to be actively involved in public life we nonetheless have an important role to play. As members of Christ's Mystical Body (the Church), we are called to be supportive in various ways –

- prayer – always the bedrock of our lives
- inspiration – where appropriate, by example or through words of inspiration
- encouragement to those who we feel are capable, but lack confidence
- raising awareness and sharing relevant information when action needs to be taken.

²⁵ I Cor 12.31, 'And I will show you a still more excellent way', leads St Paul into what is often called the *Love Chapter* where he emphasises the centrality of 'love' (ἀγάπη) in Christian living (I Cor 13.1-13), and which in its turn leads to the climacteric exhortation: 'Pursue love' at I Cor 14.1.

By being involved in public life then, like St Thomas More – a Secular Franciscan – we may further the work of the kingdom of God here on earth.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 37 (p 136-138)
Rule 14, 15
Constitution art 20
Catechism of the Catholic Church 912 (p 211), 1915-1917 (p 419-420), 2235-2237 (p 422-423)
Mk 1.32-34; 1.40-42; 2.1-12; 5.1-20; Acts 10.38

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 43-48)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 399-401)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 53-55)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 76-77)
Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 31-32)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 78-81)
John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* ²⁶

²⁶ A Grail publication in a simplified version is available under the title 'This is the Laity' (esp. important reading p 56-59). This helps us understand the importance of the formation of members of the OFS. It is now the total responsibility of the OFS itself – instead of relying on the spiritual assistants as we did under the old Rule. We realise that formation of individuals and fraternities at all levels is firmly in our own hands, with the help of our spiritual assistants, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our 1978 Pauline Rule – which goes back to the original Rule given to us by St Francis – is more challenging than the old Leonine Rule. It calls for a more radical living out of the gospel. Like St Francis, we are called to 'practice a better way' of living and doing; a way of conversion, humility, compassion, and justice in the spirit of the Beatitudes (Matt 5.3-12).

8. Peace²⁷

At a time when the world is increasingly torn apart by unrest, violence and war, we need to foster ways of tolerance and mutual respect between people of difference, including ourselves, in order to bring about peace. St Francis is a model Christian who shows us how to witness to and promote peace. He loved peace, he lived it and he preached it. Peace, and the making of peace, is an essential feature of the Franciscan way of life.

What, then, is 'peace'?

Peace is a very positive concept, and means more than just the absence of war. Peace is being in a right relationship with God,²⁸ with us, with others and with the whole of creation. It is an active commitment to establishing the tranquility of order.

True peace rests upon mutual love and goodwill between people and their environment. In 2001, on the *World Day of Peace*, pope John Paul II said that peace is 'the primary objective of every society and of national and international life'. Justice is essential for true and lasting peace. The situation of justice and rightly ordered social relationships is marked by respect for the fundamental rights of individuals. These include: the right to life, religious freedom, and free exercise of political, economic, and cultural rights. Peace is a necessary prerequisite if people are to grow and reach their fullness.²⁹

Before we can bring peace to others, including our 'enemies', we have first to become people of peace – i.e. having peace deep within us. We need the *Peace of Christ*, a peace the world cannot give – for it is the gift of God [as footnote 27]. This God-given gift is nurtured through prayer and contemplation. In this way, we develop the deep and personal relationship with God [as footnote 28]. And through daily conversion, we seek to reach out to all our brothers and sisters in love, justice and peace.

Peace is not just a job to be done; it is always a process in the making. The structure of peace, so precious and so precarious, can only be grounded on the firm foundation of the principle of solidarity, of a sense of belonging, of mutual love and respect, of non-violence and the upholding of fundamental human rights. As Paul VI said: 'Peace is something that is built up day after day, in pursuit of an order intended by God, which implies a more perfect form of justice among humankind [*Populorum Progressio* 76].

²⁷ Cf. John 14.27 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'

²⁸ Cf. Rom 5.1 'Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God.'

²⁹ John 10.10b 'I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 39 (p 144-147)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 58) [This concerns both topics – caps 8 ‘Peace’ & 9 ‘Being a Peacemaker’]
Rule 17, 19
Constitution art 23
Catechism of the Catholic Church 2304-2305 (p 495-496)
John XXIII *Pacem in Terris* 165; *Mater et Magistra* 215
Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 77-90 [esp. ‘Peace is the fruit of love’ 78.2]
Ps 4; 34.9; Isa 9.5-6; 32.17; Matt 5.9; Lk 6.27-38; John 14.27; 16.25-33; Gal 5.22-23; Eph 2.13-18; Col 3.12-17; I John 4.16, 20

Other books

Peter O’Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 58)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 217, 324)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 19-21, 61-63, 84-86, 187-189)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 91-94)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II (p 808 – St Francis preaching at Bologna); Vol III Bernard of Besse: A Book of the Praises of St Francis cap 3.17 (p 44)

Prayer

St Francis says:

Praised be you, my Lord, for those who give pardon for your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation. Blessed are those who endure in peace for by you, Most High, they shall be crowned. [*Canticle of the Creatures*, 10]

God, Creator and Holy Spirit, give me the grace to follow the way of Jesus, to resist evil without violence but with my whole being; to accept suffering rather than inflict it; to strive for peace in the world, beginning with my whole heart, and to live in the joy, simplicity and compassion for the gospel. AMEN

9. Being a Peacemaker³⁰

As Franciscans, we are called to be instruments of God's peace. This is possible because, like St Francis, we recognize that all human beings belong to one family; that we all have one Creator and a single origin; that human nature is the same in all people; that we have been redeemed by Jesus Christ, and that we are all called to the same final destiny. This should prompt us to be at the forefront of courageous initiatives (Rule 15) in seeking ways of promoting unity, harmony and right relationship. As Secular Franciscans we are challenged by the Rule (19b) to be 'messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance' so we 'should strive to bring joy and hope to others.' God's love for us and all creation is the source of our joy. Francis believed that the divine seed was present in everyone and this enabled him to become an excellent peace-giver and peacemaker. He was able to see Christ in others.

The spirit of reconciliation was always evident in Francis' life: his dialogue with Malek el-Kamil, the Muslim Sultan, at the time of the Crusade contemporaneous with St Francis; settling the dispute between bishop and mayor of Assisi; and the encounter with the wolf of Gubbio; are perfect examples. Had the Nobel Peace Prize been in existence then, Francis certainly would have won it for doing so much to end feudal wars in Europe. He managed this by his Rule: 'they are not to take up lethal weapons, or beat them about, against anybody.' When his Third Order of Penitents multiplied throughout Europe a radical Franciscan peace movement evolved which 'swept across the globe, leading people to lay down their weapons and their disputes, and dealing a final blow to the militaristic feudal system.'

Along with peacemaking comes understanding, wisdom, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation, (sometimes compromise) – but above all LOVE. In I Cor 13.4-7, St Paul explains this love (ἀγάπη). In bringing this love to the world we can all be peace-givers and peacemakers to the world.

Peacemakers in our fraternities, where love (ἀγάπη) is the essence, it is in the spirit of love, honesty and mutual respect that we hope to acknowledge, resolve and transform any conflicts that arise. In the doing our fraternities become places of healing, growth and joy. Following our Rule – 'in life-giving union with each other' – fraternities will hopefully be characterized by fairness, cooperation, openness, gentleness and kindness. We will be looking out for opportunity and encouraging each other in a spirit of fellowship (κοινωνία – Cf. II Cor 13.13) on our journey in holiness. As the prophet reminds us: The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon us: 'the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord' (Isa 11.2).

³⁰ Cf. Matt 5.9 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 40 (p 148-150)
Rule 19
Constitution art 32
Matt 5.44-45; Lk 6.27-32; 15.21-24; John 13.15; I Cor 10.31; 11.1; Jas 3.13-18
Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 78-79, 82

Other books

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 20 – love and peace; 40 – peacemaking)
Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 39-40)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 97-103)
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 5.99 (p 269) ['The Lord gave me a learned tongue...in a stronger bond of love']

Meditation

John Bradburne *Cheerfully at None and Paradise Tossed Aside* (see Appendix: *The Poems of John Bradburne*)

10. Family Life

The Holy Family had to face many hardships – the potential scandal of Mary's pregnancy; the Christ-child placed in a manger because there was no room at the inn; the flight to Egypt; the resettlement in Nazareth (a somewhat despised place, it would seem: John 1.46 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?'); implied lowly social status (Matt 13.54-57 He came to his home town and began to teach the people in their synagogue, so that they were astounded and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these deeds of power? Is not this the carpenter's son?...Where did this man get all this?' And they took offence at him.); and Mary seeing the suffering and death which resulted from his earthly ministry. Yet, throughout it all, this family remained steadfast and loyal, and we see nothing but their love and trust in God. This example gives hope to us all – and the fine paraphrase of Ps 34 reminds us:

Through all the changing scenes of life,
in trouble and in joy.
The praises of my God shall still
my heart and tongue employ.

In his deliverance I will boast,
till all that are distressed
from mine example comfort take,
and charm their griefs to rest.

The hosts of God encamp around
the dwellings of the just;
protection he affords to all
who make his name their trust.

O magnify the Lord with me,
with me exalt his name;
when in distress to him I called
he to my rescue came.

O make but trial of his love,
experience will decide
how blest are they, and only they,
who in his truth confide.

Fear him, ye saints, and you will then
have nothing else to fear;
make but his service your delight;
your wants shall be his care.³¹

Although the ministry of family life has parents, guardians and children at its core, it also consists of the 'wider family' which includes single people, widows and widowers, single parents and divorced, childless couples and so on. The main

³¹ Nahum Tate, 1652-1715 (Poet Laureate) & Nicholas Brady, 1659-1726

theme of family ministry is to build up the human community in such a way that it is convincingly clear that the Word-made-flesh really does dwell among us.

The special ministry of family life has two thrusts. Firstly, the family itself ministers to the world in being a living witness of Christ's loving presence. Secondly, by journeying with their children, parents and guardians³² reflect the important dynamic which takes place between Christ and the whole Church, a dynamic unit of society, becomes, therefore, a living example of the Church in miniature. It is the primary place for evangelization to happen, both in its interior dimension of coming to know, love and serve the Lord Jesus and in its external dimension of learning how to bring the gospel to others.

Our Rule calls us to cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life; striving to make family life a sign of a world already redeemed by Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives seek to bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. Parents and guardians are to accompany joyfully their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

However, we recognize the difficulties families face, and the need for healing and evangelization both in families and the wider society. Consequently, we see the importance of the Franciscan spirit and way of life.

In the Rule (Prologue) we see that Francis understood the importance and value of family relationships. He calls us to be spouses, brothers, sisters, mothers of Christ and of each other by being shining examples through ministry and holy activity.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 31 (p 117-120)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 57-58)
Vat II *Gaudium et Spes* 47-52; *Lumen Gentium* 41-42
John Paul II *Christifideles Laici* 40
Rule 17
Constitution art 24.1-2
Catechism of the Catholic Church 2201-2233 (p 475-482), 2364-5 (p 506-507), 2366-2379 (p 507-510)

³² This word 'guardian' is preferred to 'carer' (1) because the latter might be confused with someone attending to the unwell, infirmed etc., 'guardian' is a legal alternative where a parent is lacking; (2) 'guardian' refers directly to Christ himself – the supreme example of guardianship – I Pet 2.15 'For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.' and linking nicely with the 'love of Christ for his Church' cited above (Cf. Eph 5.32)

Hos 11.4; Mk 7.21-22; Lk 1.26 – 2.52; 6.31-35; 7.36-50; 11.5-8; John 15.5; Rom 8.28-29; 12.21; Gal 4.6; Eph 1.4; 2.19; 5.25; Phil 4.13; Col 3.12-17; I Thes 4.9-11; I John 4.16

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 52-54)

Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 35-36)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 81-88)

Tersa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 85-88)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 205-221)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Earlier Rule cap 11 (p 72)

11. Sister Death ³³

Francis, between the kiss he gave to the leper and the stigmata on Mount La Verna, spent twenty years journeying to God. He waited for, and prepared for, his ultimate encounter with God, apologizing to his body for treating it so harshly through over-zealous attempts to mortify the flesh – in accordance with the standard practices of dealing with the sins of the body in mediaeval times. He believed that the Spirit called him to holiness and he acknowledged that nothing is impossible to God when one cooperates with him. St Francis prepared to welcome Sister Death by embracing her joyfully. Sister Death, in the eyes of Francis, was a loving sister indeed, to be eagerly anticipated, who leads us by the hand.

We can all prepare for death as part of our mission of peace, joy and hope. It is in death that we shall ultimately fulfill our earthly journey, finding peace and wholeness in God's loving embrace. St Francis teaches us that death is not to be feared, but rather to be welcomed. Franciscans see death, not as a break or disintegration, but rather as continuity – a crossing to a more beautiful life; a fulfillment of one's calling to proclaim the life and message of the Lord Jesus Christ. Death can be accepted as our participation in the resurrection of Christ, which itself brings eternal life – ('and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life'). As part of our ministry of peacemaking, we strengthen this approach towards death within ourselves and by proclaiming to, and thereby promoting, this outlook in others through our attitude, words, and actions.

An aspect of peacemaking more evident in previous Rules (but only implied in the 1978 Rule) is the necessity of putting all our affairs in order by making a will. It is also a prudent thing to do for legal reasons – not least by helping to avoid family squabbles over material possessions. From the standpoint of the gospel, it is a salutary reminder that we are only temporary stewards of material goods. Whatever we 'possess' or 'use' is not ours for the keeping and ultimately passes onto others.

Nearing death, Francis prayed: 'Praised be to you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape...Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks and serve him with great humility.' ³⁴

Welcoming death, Francis said 'I have done what was mine to do. May Christ teach you what is yours.' We pray that we, too, may answer likewise.

³³ Cf. John 14.1-3 'Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many dwelling-places. If it were no so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also.'

³⁴ Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I The Cantic of the Creatures 12, 14 (p 114)

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 60)

Rule 19 – last sentence

Constitution art 27

Catechism of the Catholic Church 1010-1014 (p 230-231), 1025-1029 (p 234-235), 1523 (p 341), 1681-1683 (p 375-376)

Ps 22-23; Matt 24.1-25; 25.34, 45-46; Mk 8.27-38; Lk 22.42; 23.43, 46; 24.26; John 5.21-30; 11.25-26; 14.1-3; 16.28; II Cor 4.13-15; Heb 13.14; I Pet 1.21

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 59-60)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 71-73)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 340-342, 396-397)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 102)

Vat II *Lumen Gentium* 5, 48-51

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II
Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 14 (p 640-644); Celano: Remembrance of the
Desire of a Soul cap 161 (p 384-385)

Appendix:

The Poems of John Bradburne



A Ballade of a Rectory Garden

Take towers, turrets, copper-beeches, aisles
And roses, rows of reverential yews
And lilac and laburnum and the smiles
Of Maytime married to the chiming views
Of swallowdom and cuckoomerry news,
And harness them together in a train
Of thought that runs from fountain-upon-Muse
Infusing wine, not water, into brain.

Brain takes it in and Aubrey beams, beguiles
Both lilies gay and Galilean views
With something like a symphony of miles
And miles of hilltops hopping to the News
Which is the Gospel-Truth: then, all those pews
Of swanks and all those ranks of chairs, that gain
No grace for congregations, face my Muse
Infusing wine, not water, into brain.

The oddness of God's airy-fairy styles
Gets even with the echoes that enthuse
As, underneath that hayrick which beguiles
My head by being hair, the mountain-views
Marry the rolling panoramas, fuse...
My mouth is as an organ not in vain
Made vibrant by the South-West Wind: my Muse
Infusing wine, not water, into brain.

Envoy Prince, the daynewehmont: above the yews
Amidst a copper-beechen crown I reign
Playing a mouth-organ... La Reine ma Muse
Infusing wine, not water, into brain.

Excelsior

First time I ever wrote a verse
Was on a ruined wall
At Baconsthorpe, I might do worse
Than quote it, - after all
This other stuff that has ensued
On eight and thirty years reviewed.

I quote aright, I cite the note
Made long ago to play the goat: -
Alas, alack, I am undone,
I want to eat a currant-bun;
But God is good, he told me so,
The trees are swaying to and fro.

Would it be wise
To analyse
That silly-sounding thing?
I'd like to spell
Emmanuel
As currant-bun: our King
In twofold eucharistic kind
Of grape and grain there reigns resigned,
If you will have it so;
Trees swaying to and fro
Could be the springing from the Cross
Of Hagios Athanatos:
A toss and two he took, and then,
Spread-eagled, soared and sent accord to men.

That ruined wall belonged to what
Was once a Priory, a plot
Blessed specially for praise, God ne'er forgot...

In Principio

That sweetness concomitant with the giving
And the reception of the seed of man
Should never be divorced from God whose living
Thrills in the life-force, source of it and plan;
Even before the Fall it all stood clear,
And bid were Eve and Adam, Multiply!
Not without intercourse which is full near
Drawn to the unity of Love on high;
Switching a bit from fit enjoyment rife
Enter upon the point of primal food,
E'en as you read you'll see our means of life

In herbs and fruit was meant, not slaughter rude:
Alpha and Omega in time descends
Making our meat the bread which with Him blends.

O admirable commercium!
Mary conceived without the seed of man,
Even the night stood shining, bright and dumb
Giving its whole attention to the plan;
Alpha remained Himself with Omega
Lost in the lyric of her loving heart,
Plainly the song of that heard each still star
Hilariously glad in God's great art;
And so the food, the corn and oil and wine
Serenely sealed themselves in what would be
That Bread of Life whose wife would rise and shine
Intent full soon on leaving Galilee:
Lilies of Galilee stood gaily then,
Leaned to God's Mother who would mother men.

Spring in the Air

The thought of God is written in the air,
Weather and wind express Him with His Word,
Behold the hills so high above low care
And hark to Yahweh's Voice in lark song heard;
The Thought of God is God the Father good,
The Word of God expresses what God thinks,
The voice of God wings vibrant in the wood
Singing, or in our hearts with silence links;
These Three are Love Begetting, Love Begotten
And Love Proceeding as the Voice of both,
Love is our God and King and nothing loath
To sink into the silence, unforgotten:
Switch off that Radio, it rots the scene,
Besots our souls that Television Screen!

Cheerfully at None

Struck on the one cheek swiftly turn the other,
Swallowing down your wrath you'll swallow his
Up quickly and improve your sickly brother
Without reproving him while temper flies;
I migrant am and migrant you are not?
Our big reward is broader than the sea,
Play cool until you rule your anger hot
And we'll roucoule like doves with ungloved glee;
If thieves will think our shirts well worth the stealing
Then after them we'll run to give them pants!

Adhere to Truth as flies do to the ceiling,
Walk upside down like clowns whilst frowning rants!
Should you go over-Sext more fast than most
Buxom's the Barmaid of Mine Highest Host.

It's closing time already, two o'clock...
We'll open up for Evensong, old cock!

Paradise Tossed Aside: 'Incipit Lamentatio...'

Here in Mashonaland, God's dwindling park
Where fragrant cherries wild bloom white midst crowns
Of red masasas, looms a large dark
Dragonlike Axe with many heads that downs
Badly good woods in pumps, leaves stumps to rot
Blackened by fires, by bulbul-choirs forgot.

Lest this lament should seem insipid, take
As starting-point I only one great kraal
And that's a leper-camp, where for the sake
Of terror of the Snake, they root up all
Attempts of grass to grow, and this despite
Handicaps on the left and on the right.

Salt of the earth in many ways, in this
These lepers are no wiser than the rest
Of Shona Fraaldom, scenery like bliss
Is swept aside with deft defiant zest!
Twould seem the ancient fiend in serpent's shape
Has won the desert by the garden's rape.

Here in Mashonaland, where orioles
With liquid notes make haloes for the Spring,
Is all the score for war memorials
Any why then still do bulbuls trill and sing?
The axe presents the Hammer and the Sickle
With fellow promise never to be fickle.

Sever the forests, limb by limb, from heaven
And sharply bring them down flatlong to earth
So that your habitat, with hell for leaven,
May crave the Brave New World for all its worth
Of knavish tricks that gird against the King
Whose Tree still stands where axe and hammer ring.

Is it fear of snakes and lasting dread

Of Eden's serpent that they scour the land
Clean of each blade of grass, to show its head so keen?
Keen winds shall blow on scene of sand
Swept willy-nilly into eyes and chests
Of this mad race that graces glad arrests!

Attests that Garden to the mind of God
But their desserts are Desert as they hack
Since, all along each track Prince Shona's trod,
The trunks are slashed, the branches are bent back
Or severed...nay, not even for their fires
Nor for odd posts to prop their toppling byres.
'Byres' is homely as I'll get in telling
Such savage wantonness, such random felling.

So many think that heaven is a slab
Of concrete! now in both the hemispheres
The mind of potty man has got so drab
That there's no love therein to cast out fears
Of viruses and microbes, snakes and worms:
Take we Hell's diet on the Devil's terms!

Else it is greed, for money and for land,
That makes a desert of God's wide wild Eden;
When I was young a Heronry did stand
With three-score nests and ten twixt earth and heaven:
It stood in Norfolk near Kings Lynn until
Cut down to grow potatoes still?

Man is vandal and a beastly thing
Where'er his ears are deaf to Pan's sweet piping,
Yet he was set as viceroy and King
Eternal once: oh may this dunce's typing
Re-stir the springs of immortality
And may my wit befit eternity.

As gentle and unwarlike as the Shona
May seem to earthbound beings on two legs
He is not fit a bit to be the owner
Even of one old acre: whose eggs
Him on to getting of good land should tax
Unyieldingly his wielding of the axe!

The snake has triumphed over Africa,
Can Pan not pipe it to renounce its gain?
For fear of snakes they sweep the near and far

Clear of all grass that grows: greedy for grain
Of sterile sand and barren rock, they bring
Down to a desert bare fair nature's fling!

Hark, this amongst the gentle lepers: one
Who calls his own at least four acres, found
That two most fruitful mango-trees kept sun
Off from his maize and razed them to the ground!
Such ravin, for the sake of mealie-cobs
Maybe ten more, on this my score sets nob.
The sun shall glare on thee, unshining Shona,
Of moonscape only, Goat, be gloating owner!

They hate the flowers and they loathe the blooms,
Wild cherry-trees in blossom make the writhe,
Barren their brides are not but hot! their brooms
Bear away beauty: booty for the scythe
Is each green blade of grass in reach, they are
Grooms that graze nightmares on this lightsome star.
Their destiny must be to stoke the fires
Where there are greenwoods none, no sun, no choirs!

The Shona patience shines not in this war
Brightly as might attribute it to Christ,
The Matabele saw its like before
When here were neither Church nor Eucharist:
Frail apathy in face of whirling woes
Hails not the Cross that still stands still and glows.

To honour of their titular Saint
Ignatius were men loyal when guerillas
Threatened because, upon the face, the paint
So rightly white gave nightblack knaves the shivers?
That statue, by those 'faithful', was destroyed
Utterly and the mutterers deployed.

Unstable Boy, Aunt Mabel ruled you well
And set you to the garden with the hose
And if you squirted it at Clarabel
Over the fence it kept here on her toes
Till soon, at heat of noon, you two would weave
Together, yes, and never wish to leave!

Far better be at that than hacking down
The 'Nyama-ropa' with its flesh and blood
Or else then laying waste the woodland-crown

As far from Town as Justice from M'Lud
Who sentenced you to hanging for your tricks
So heavily involved in Politics.

Let us salute the shades of bootless fellows
Who stole the fruit whence bad o'erwhelmed the good!
Well Bottom wove, well Flute did mend the bellows
But 'Fudza-momb?' felled not well the wood
Since, starveling prince, he left the ragged stumps
Looking like jagged scarecrows in the dumps.

The sole desire is body's sustenance,
Main inspiration of their souls is maize,
Their minds lie fallow to the foe's advance
With tales of fellowship – fools in a haze
Of brash transistors, high-heeled shoes and prams
They skip towards that Russian Bear like lambs!

Daleth hath dalliance with Dillitant?
Hies to Dry-Cleaners H? three times a week
And both of them have got a book on Dant?
Of both of them 'tis better not to speak
Since neither of them knows two words in Greek:
Kyrie ?leison.

Unstable Boys, Aunt Mabel ruled you well
And though mine English Aunt was not the rage
Bad Cain enables you for naught but Hell,
For cabbages is all your pilgrimage!
Shalom, Mashonaland? such greeting good
Will but come back as ill, still hacking wood.

God clothes the earth with humus, grass, and leaves
Its decking to the forest's tossing crown;
If we are Adam's still, if we still were Eve's
We'll seek like migrant swallows not the gown
Of lasting summers and eternal springs
With which is clad rich land of angels' wings.

Man unregenerate is drab as dust
And dry as parchment whereupon he writes
The history of his unlyric lust
Which Lucifer bestrolls in scarlet tights:
I know a bank though, flows that stream beside
And Babylon has nothing on Love's Bride
For pure allure as certain of itself

A she is Queen of angel, fay and elf.

Haters of life, they lust to kill, their joy
Is first to fell those trees that look most fair;
Masasas they would utterly destroy,
Wild cherries in the Spring they'll swing at: There!
Forty years on their seed shall con but sand
And read a book about this once fair land!

Green is for mealies only, else for greed
Or envy of some Shona's shining Fridge:
White-Bread shall o give them cancer, they shall feed
On natty gain and strain at every midge!
They shall grow poker-faced, forget to grin
And change their beer sublime for grimy gin.

Then shall they say, 'Our Progress now surpasses
That of the white-man! bright, we all wear glasses!...'
Then at their lasses makes this ass no passes.

Firewood: with 'Hoonnee soi qui mal y pense'
They justify their savage enterprise
And, playing on your heartstrings, they advance
With no more truth than beauty in their lies
But, if their eyes and lips and hips and curves
Remain alluring, sure, their reign unnerves!

So, match the iron of the axe they wield
And give no wench an inch, though she's appealed
You still must steel your senses and your mind
And heart against that Shona art that shined
And, having shone in vain, watched till you went
Ere swinging on, following her drear bent
For bearing earth of greensleeved loveliness
Treeless, her gleeless is the wilderness!

The oriole, the raven and the dove
Agree with me and sign this plea with love;
The auger-buzzard and the lanner-falcon
Accord with the Lord-God and nod with John
Watching and praying on the chicks no less:
What voice more choice to bore the wilderness?

Part 6

Life in Fraternity

Contents

1. The Franciscan Family
2. The Special Role of the OFS
3. Life in Fraternity (a) Building Fraternity (b) A Dying Fraternity – how can we avoid it?
4. Franciscan Youth – how can we promote it?
5. The Fraternity Meeting
6. The Fraternity Council Meeting
7. Formation – Initiation, Initial Formation, and the need for Ongoing Formation
- *8. Profession – how the fraternity prepares for Profession
- *9. Preparation for Elections – the role of each council officer; leadership
- *10. Preparation for Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations
- Appendices: (a) Guidelines for a typical Council Meeting
(b) Guidelines for a typical Fraternity Meeting
(c) Stages in the journey to Profession
(d) Chart of Stages of Formation – rites and symbols

[The * indicates that caps 8, 9, 10 should be studied at the appropriate occasion]

How to use Part 6

Rule 6 forms the basis of Part 6; and not only this but also the greater part of the General Constitutions which relate to Rule 6 – making it more clearly understood.

Chapters 8, 9, 10 below should be studied in turn as the course progresses but, one or two months before one of these special occasions is about to take place, the fraternity should return to that theme and re-study it. It is advisable that all members of the fraternity should be familiar with all the matter of Part 6, even council meeting matters, so that when new members join the council, its duties will be understood which, in turn, will give each one confidence to proceed. These three topics – caps 8, 9 10 – may each require more than one session, so it is advisable to use it in formation well before the event.

Chapters 5 and 6 describe the ideal; each fraternity is unique and not all fraternities are able, for various reasons, to reach this ideal. However, they should strive by prayer to reach it.

1. The Franciscan Family

Rule 1 ³⁵ tells us that the Franciscan family was raised by the Holy Spirit to follow Christ in the footprints of St Francis of Assisi. This family consists of priests, religious and laity who work together to make the Franciscan charism present in the life and mission of the Church. This charism is quite distinct from that of the other Orders of the Church. Francis is our inspiration; he always insisted that we are one with the Church and that clergy are always respected in spite of the scandalous lives that some led in his time. This article emphasizes the fact that we are all bound together as a family in the life of the Church *and its mission*.

St Francis, who loved God intimately, asked the whole of his family to live the gospel of Jesus Christ. For members of the OFS it is humbling to belong to this family because we are not sufficient alone – we need the guidance of our spiritual assistants. However, it is also reassuring to be part of this family since it helps us on our road to holiness. Franciscanism strives to bring back people to the spirit of Christ away from the world's materialistic attractions. The family works together in love and in mutual support.

All the three Orders [Secular, Friars, Sisters] possess all the three states of life – apostolic male and female religious for the world. The First Order [OFM in the three Obediences], is exclusively male, but the Third Order Regular [TOR] for *men and women* who take the 'Three Vows' and live in community. The Second Order [OSC/Poor Clares] is female contemplative religious, offering themselves for the life of the world in prayerful union and praise for the entire family, yet enclosed. The Seculars – both *in the world* and *for the world*. God raised up this family specifically to restore the Church, the Body of Christ. All three Orders of the Franciscan family were born simultaneously, and all were founded by St Francis himself; and all coordinated to involve all states of life. This is different from other religious families – where the 'Secular Order' was often founded much later by a member of the First Order.

Rule 1 also tells us that Franciscans are only one of several spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit – but ours has a different charism from the others. In order to be fully informed regarding the 'Franciscan Charism' one should read the very words of St Francis himself, meditating on them prayerfully.³⁶

Our Franciscan family will remain together in perpetuity: 'funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur' [a rope with three cords does not break easily]. This family, of three Orders, stays together because of its interdependence.

³⁵ '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 recognise that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps [footprints] of St Francis of Assisi.'

³⁶ Cf. Armstrong, Hellmann, *Short Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I The Saint (p 40-167)

Basic reading

Handbook (p 1-10)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 2 (p 6-9)

Rule 1

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 24)

I Cor 12.3; Col 1.15-24; Eph 4.1-16

Other books

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 53-58)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 187-189)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 11-13)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 23-28)

Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol III Bernard of Besse:

Book of the Praises of St Francis cap 7 [The Three Orders] (p 53-65)

2. The Special Role of the OFS & its Place in the Franciscan Family

Formerly, OFS was known as the Third Order of St Francis or TOSF. It was indeed, the *first* Order founded by St Francis because so many ordinary people followed him and wished to imitate his way of life and prayer. We hold a special place within the Franciscan family circle for this very reason. Together with the First, Second and Third Orders Regular, we are bound together – religious, clergy, laity – in living the gospel way of life. Together, we are called to holiness – our vocation, with St Francis as our model. We work together in love and mutual support, trying to ‘wean the world away from its materialistic drives back to the spirit of Christ.’³⁷ We were formed by St Francis *not* by the First Order. OFS is unique. Our mission is to be performed in the name of the Church – *missio in nomine Ecclesiae*. We need to ask ourselves, therefore: ‘What does the Church expect from us?’

We are a *secular* Order – with special status in the Church – and therefore we have a ‘secular character’ to our spirituality. The basic prerequisites of being an Order are seen in Rule 2 which uses such terms as ‘organic union’, ‘led by the Spirit’ and ‘profession...of this Rule approved by the Church.’ It would be useful in the fraternity itself to examine what each of these specific terms means – thereby, reaching a clearer understanding of why of the OFS is described as ‘an Order’ at all. Not a ‘group’, not a ‘prayer group’, not a ‘sodality’ – ‘**an Order**’.

It would also be useful to reach a clear understanding as to what *secular* means in our designated title: *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*. It is problematic that in common parlance ‘secular’ has come to mean ‘against that which is holy’. Its true meaning, however, and certainly in ecclesiastical terms and in Canon Law, is ‘living in the world’. That is, in the world, but not belonging to it. The world is our ‘locus operandi’ – our place of work. We were formed by St Francis to be **in the world for the world**. By fulfilling our own particular duties, we can contribute to the sanctification of the world – as we have studied in Parts 4 and 5 above.³⁸

³⁷ Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 11-16) – it is said of this book in general and this passage in particular: ‘This is excellent!’

³⁸ In the time of Christ the ‘world’ tended to mean the Roman Empire. All outside of this was rather vague. In biblical language ‘world’ is frequently used for the inhabitants of the earth, but in the Johannine literature in particular, ‘world’ like ‘worldly’ is commonly juxtaposed to that which is spiritual – the world, the flesh and the devil etc. But we must not pluck, ‘Do not love the world...’ (I John 2.15), from its context and use it as an excuse to hate the unbeliever (whom God loves so much – John 3.16), or misuse the world, when seen as the whole of the created order which has waited with eager longing, like man, for the arrival of the gospel (Cf. Rom 8.19-23) to put to rights what has gone wrong, of which Scripture tells us that when God looked at his handiwork ‘saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good’ (Gen 1.31). For this ‘not to be loved world’ is pre-eminently the world which God gave to man in its entirety to ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion over’ – to use, but not to exploit or ruin. Today, as still the blood of Abel cries from the ground (Gen 4.10), it is the blood of the poor, rejected and crucified Christ that’s got the best things to say (Heb 12.24) about the world’s future.

As part of the Franciscan family, we Seculars have been 'led by the Spirit of the gospel' in fulfilling our own individual duties in the world, helping to contribute to the sanctification of mankind and, by witnessing in this way, showing Christ to others. Guided by gospel teaching, we take upon ourselves the task of aiding the Holy Spirit in bringing about the reign of God on earth. As we follow in the footprints of our Seraphic Father St Francis, and together with all the faithful of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church – our lives shining examples of those all-important Christian virtues: faith, hope and love [of which the greatest is LOVE (Cf. I Cor 13.13).]

The 1978 Rule is entirely in the spirit of the primitive Rule put together for us by St Francis himself, but brought up to date so it can be realized by all Secular Franciscans throughout the world, irrespective of individual cultures.³⁹ This Rule is interpreted and applied universally by the Constitutions, and locally by the National Statutes. This new Rule (1978), responding to the wishes of the Second Vatican Council which called upon all the Orders to go 'ad fontes', and to respond with 'aggiornamento', has the approval of the Holy See, promulgated by Paul VI – of perpetual remembrance.

Basic reading

Rule 2, 3

Constitution art 1.5, 99.2

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 91-95, 177)

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 48 (p 176-178), 50 (p 183-185)

John 3.8; 15.16; 17.20-23; Acts 2.42, 46-47; Rom 5.5

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 28-32)

³⁹ Cf. The Apostolic Letter of Approval of Paul VI which precedes the Prologue to the Rule itself (p 1-2)

3. Life in Fraternity

(a) Building Fraternity

This topic is closely linked to the one which follows it, (b) A Dying Fraternity – how can we avoid it? [They may be studied as one topic] If they are kept separate, (b) should follow the next month. Fraternity is an integral element of the Franciscan way of life. This is just as true for the OFS as it is for the other Franciscan Orders. Our fraternity is built up particularly at the monthly meetings but also at any other OFS gatherings at local, regional, and at national levels. Rule 24 tells us that we should also meet with other Franciscan groups (which we do during our Franciscan Association meetings), with Franciscan Youth and with our ‘deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.’

Because we in the OFS are a family who live separately and not in community like the other Franciscan Orders, it is important that we see each other regularly to know each other better and share our joys, sorrows and worries – as other families do. For this reason, the *minimum* amount of local fraternity meetings each year should be twelve. At holidays – Christmas, Easter etc. – we need to rearrange meetings *well in advance*. Many fraternities in the UK are meeting more than once a month now, for either social, prayer or video watching meetings. This is because the monthly meeting – with an hour given to formation, then prayers, business, socializing. For some members, especially the elderly, more than two hours at one session would take too long (bearing in mind distance traveled or other factors).

Building Fraternity can be facilitated in the following ways –

1. Regular and frequent meetings where one can pray together, study together, socialize together, discuss together and minister together
2. Maintain our spiritual growth by continuing our education together in the ongoing formation sessions
3. Ensure that the meeting is long enough to give at least one hour's formation – less business, more formation! To be sure that one has enough time for the whole meeting, favourite devotions like Rosary or Benediction take place on another occasion
4. Ensure that the socializing is not neglected – even if meeting socially takes place another day – perhaps at someone's home, and perhaps (on occasions) including something like a ‘religious video’

Some fraternities meet weekly. As long as we remember that the main monthly meeting is where the essential ongoing formation takes place, there is no reason why those who wish should not meet as often as circumstances allow in order to *build up fraternity*.

We call one another 'brother' and 'sister' because we belong to a 'family'. It is here that we serve and support one another. Each has a different personality and differing talents, especially when joined in prayer, we can be a force to be reckoned with – for God. In developing these close bonds – personal and spiritual – our vocation to the apostolic life is nourished (such thoughts well expressed in Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 178) 'At such gatherings they share their apostolic commitment as followers of St Francis through prayer, instruction, dialogue, and personal involvement in each other's needs. All members contribute their energies in cooperation with the Council to make every reunion of the community an experience of growth in the spirit of St Francis. No one can be passive in community life.'

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 48 (p 176-178)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 97-100, 177, 180)
Matt 20.24-28; Lk 14.7-11; John 13.33-35; 15.13; 17.20-21; Acts 2.42-47; Rom 12.9-21; 15.5-6; I Cor 10.16-17; Gal 6.2; Col 3.12-15; Phil 2.1-4; I Pet 1.22-2.2; 3.8-17; I John 1.3
Rule 22, 24
Constitution art 53.1-5
National Statutes art 3-6

Other reading

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 61-63)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 107-109)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 112-114, 124-126, 129, 199)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 99-102)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol II Legend of Three Companions cap 11.41 (p 92-93); Celano: Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul cap 17.46 (p 278)

(b) A Dying Fraternity – how can we avoid it?

This topic is evidently related to the previous one, 'Building Fraternity'. On reviewing the previous theme it would seem obvious that if any of the factors which build fraternity are missing, then the lack of any one of these could be the cause of its ailing – so also may be the factors which help maintain fraternity. Those fortunate enough to have a spiritual assistant, and who have regular, encouraging Visitations (both pastoral and fraternal), who have well organized financial input from members, will have a good way of maintaining fraternity. But there are other factors which could be the cause of an ailing fraternity –

1. An elderly fraternity which fails to attract new (particularly younger) members. Have you had visitors who have ceased to attend? One must ask why they decided not to stay (and be prepared to face any challenges discussion of this give rise to).
2. Have you made an effort to advertise your existence – placing posters/information leaflets about OFS on the parish notice board? As a fraternity project you might design your own poster aimed at attracting interest. Remember, many parishioners don't know we exist!
3. If you have had problems in your fraternity, have you discussed them with the regional minister? This might be done during fraternal Visitations, or when meeting at regional level. Better still, you might ask the regional minister to pay a visit to your meetings. Experienced Secular Franciscans can often discern quite easily what is amiss – especially, coming as they do, from the 'outside looking in'.
4. If your difficulties arise because you feel that the ongoing formation is unsatisfactory, and your council or fraternity members are not sufficiently active in preparation, or are not able to cope with the available materials, then you need to seek help from the regional formation minister, who can give advice over the phone or by coming along to assist.
5. Are your fraternity meetings too short to give time to adequate formation?
6. Does your fraternity keep in touch with other fraternities by exchange visits/attending regional meetings regularly? An exchange of ideas and socializing with fellow Franciscans widens perspective and builds fraternity.⁴⁰
7. Nowadays, there is no such thing as an *Isolated Tertiary*. Every member of OFS, by definition, belongs to a fraternity. If someone is too old or too frail to attend meetings that member should be visited regularly by someone who does attend fraternity meetings so that minutes can be given out and news passed on. Such people should not be neglected. They are with us in spirit and their prayers for us, especially, valued. Anyone moving to another part of the country, but who is unable to get to meetings, should be encouraged to contact the regional minister for the location of the nearest fraternity.
8. Lack of council meetings might cause your fraternity to weaken.

⁴⁰ Cf. Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 124) – last paragraph particularly apt.

9. Lack of spiritual assistance puts burdens on a council. (Study Rule 26b and Constitution art 90 for guidance here).
10. Constant prayer over many years can build up a fraternity which appears to be fading away. Prayer works wonders – ‘The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective’, the Scripture says.⁴¹ - provided we are prepared to make the necessary adjustments recommended above. Likewise, a lack of prayer, either collectively in fraternity or individually, also has its effect!

Basic reading

Matt 7.1-5; Lk 6.36-38; 12.32; Eph 4.1-6; 1 Pet 1.22-2.5

Rule 25, 26

Constitution art 30.3, 45

National Statutes 12

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 50 (p 184) – some practical matters

Peter O’Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 76, 79, 80)

Other books

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 109-110, 133-134, 168-173)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 282-286)

Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 51-52)

Suggested action

To encourage visitors and attract new members, put up posters in the church – preferably in a prominent place where they catch the eye! Give out leaflets – especially on occasions like the feast of St Francis, 4 October – introducing yourself as a member of the OFS who’d love them to come along and take a look at us for themselves.

⁴¹ Jas 5.16

4. Franciscan Youth

Rule 24 urges the fraternity council to ‘foster communion among members’...by organizing ‘regular and frequent meetings...with other Franciscan groups, **especially with young groups**’. Youfra is ‘Franciscan Youth’ formed by young people for 14-30 years of age. They accept the OFS Rule as an inspirational document. Youfra belongs to the Franciscan family as an integral part of OFS. They make temporary Profession, renewable annually. There are three elements to the formation (which takes a year): human, Christian and Franciscan. Members of Youfra do not necessarily become members of OFS – but during membership the idea is that they discern their vocation in life – single, married, religious life, perhaps.

Constitution art 96 is quite explicit and should be studied very carefully by the fraternity in advance of the formation session. It makes clear that young people will be called by the Holy Spirit to take part in Franciscan Youth. However, it is up to Secular Franciscans actively to promote Youfra itself, otherwise young people will not get to know of St Francis (as Franciscans do), and might be missing the chance to receive such a vocation. The Constitutions suggest that young people are preparing in this Movement to join eventually the OFS.⁴² The element of vocation is something for us to share with youth.

Once such a national group is formed and becomes active with its own studies set out as a formation document, it is then able to set out its Statutes for that particular country, and present them to the national and international councils (Constitution art 96.5). The formation content for young people in Youfra will vary according to the culture of the country in question.

Constitution art 97 gives more details as to how the leaders of the youth movements should be included in council meetings at various levels. So far as Great Britain is concerned, studying the Rule and Constitution is no longer an academic exercise. But great efforts *are* being made to promote Franciscan Youth. However, finding committed people to undertake the work of ‘leader’ is no easy task. The instructions which have been given to spiritual assistants in recent years regarding such leaders suggest that the leaders themselves should be ‘young’ and unmarried – thereby uncommitted to a family of their own. Finding such a person is very difficult – but should not be an impossibility.

Youfra teaches young people to discover what fraternity might mean for them. They have a period of formation – which might last for two years – before a temporary Profession. They have a mission in the Church and in society, and

⁴² Constitution art 96.2 reads: ‘The Franciscan Youth (Youfra), as understood by these Constitutions and in so far as the OFS considers itself to be particularly responsible for it, is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of St Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.’

have to leave once reaching 30. Meeting with the OFS helps them to integrate, build a relationship, and thus transfer naturally to OFS itself – should it be clear that this is their vocation. There is a 'generation gap' – greater today, perhaps, than ever before due to modern life with its new technology, the cultural tendencies of youth (like fashion clothes, adventure, being 'beautiful', instant results without effort, cars, computers and so on). Youth often feels lost, isolated and distanced from the previous generation due to the pace of present-day life. We can offer them a unique experience of prayer, the freedom of poverty, and Franciscan joy.

Basic reading

Rule 24

Constitution art 96, 97

John 17.22-23

Lester Bach *Caled to Rebuild the Church* (p 67-68, 183-186)

5. The Fraternity Council

The duties of the Fraternity Council are very clearly set out in article 50 of the Constitutions of the OFS. Ideally, the council should meet regularly in between the monthly fraternity meetings. If this cannot be done every month, it should meet at least every second month. Once the fraternity council has studied this section in the Constitution it will realise the importance of very regular meetings.

Guidelines for the format of a council meeting are to be found in Appendix A. This is an ideal format, and may not necessarily be followed in this precise order, but the contents should be adhered to as closely as circumstances permit. Once the council gets used to following this format it will almost certainly conclude that at least an hour is required to accomplish the necessary prayer, study, business and formation preparation.

Constitution art 49 gives the composition of the fraternity council and requires that an elective assembly of the council should take place every three years. This article, together with articles 50-52 which point out the duties of the council as a whole and the individual duties of each officer, would be a good place for the council to begin their studies at this meeting – if it has not begun to do this yet. Articles 31-32 are also pertinent to this early study. It can be seen quite clearly, for example, in art 31.4 that the preparation for formation should be done during council meetings: 'The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings both of fraternities and of the councils.'

The importance of the council is expressed succinctly by Benet Fonck: 'The vitality or stagnation of a Secular Franciscan community depends mainly and directly on the council which is led by the minister and advised, where one is available, by the spiritual assistant. The quality of fraternity life is in direct proportion to the quality of the council's leadership. Hence, the council must repeatedly question itself on its commitment, on its capacity to work together as a team and on the concern it shows toward the group and toward each member.'⁴³ This, 'working together as a team', must be animated by a really fraternal spirit.

It is the council's duty to see that in fraternity all the members experience true Franciscan fellowship. Bonds of brotherly and sisterly love are strengthened by the council itself, and as well as by the reaching out to neighbouring fraternities. It is up to the council to see that – through ongoing formation – the members are familiar with the duties of councilors so that they will then choose suitable people for the offices when election time comes round.

Basic reading

Lester Bach *Catch Me a Rainbow Too* (p 273-278)

⁴³ *Called to Follow Christ* (p 109)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 81-86, 114-124 – particularly good as all the offices are dealt with in great detail – p 148-152, 158-159)
Peter O' Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 64-66)
Matt 24.42-51; Lk 22.24-27; John 21.15-17; Rom 12.3-13; II Cor 4.5-7; Gal 5.13-15; Eph 4.11-13; Col 3.23-25
Rule 21
Constitution art 31-32, 49-52
Nation Statutes art 5.1-5

Other books

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 102-105)

Smaller Fraternity Groupings

Should a fraternity become large in size – such as, much more than 18 – it might be useful for the council to consider smaller groupings. In a large group, some individuals are lost sight of and do not voice their opinions or get vocally involved in discussions – especially if, by nature, they are diffident or shy. Remaining still 'one fraternity', it might be possible to split into two or three smaller groups for ongoing formation, then regrouping for the remainder of the fraternity meeting.

It is, of course, up to the council to organize extra meetings in the month – where fraternity members are keen to do so – for social meetings which are designed to foster fraternity, or to look at Franciscan or other resources (perhaps videos/films/tapes) about Franciscan saints – or meeting for Lectio Divina, centering prayer etc. By their very nature, these will have smaller numbers than the fraternity meeting itself because they are optional (which the monthly meeting is not!)

6. The Fraternity Meeting

A *suggested* outline for the agenda of a Fraternity Meeting is found as Appendix B at the end of this section. As each fraternity is unique, so each fraternity meeting is unique, and its agenda has to be adapted to local needs. What is important is that meetings are 'regular and frequent' (Rule 24). It has been suggested that the meeting should be *monthly* at least. There is, of course, no reason why fraternities should not meet more often – especially if it is difficult to include in the monthly meeting all the necessary elements in the time allocated (Cf. Appendix B). Some fraternities have extra meetings in the month for socials, for prayers and, of course, to hold council meetings.

The meeting should be an occasion of fraternal love where all are made welcome and where all feel part of a family. Whilst most families expect there to be minor disagreements and friendly 'ribbing', there should be an absence of animosity, rivalry or jealousy. Whilst older and longer serving members should be respected, the newer and younger members should have their fresh ideas welcomed – and not just dismissed out of hand. Younger members can be quite enthusiastic, and this can be used not dampened down. Newcomers should be welcomed, finding a meeting so inviting that they will desire to return.⁴⁴ No opinion should be felt to be unworthy of expression; family love should be tangible; visitors should feel supported. Fonck says, 'These fraternities are meant to be active and productive experiences of togetherness.'⁴⁵ This is where the Franciscan way of living the gospel life is on view – perhaps for the first time ever – for strangers to the Order (Rule 4-19 esp.).

The meeting should, therefore, mirror our communal calling: we do not seek only personal sanctification but must act together with our brothers and sisters in prayer and gospel living, which is our spiritual calling – the fellowship that sanctifies the whole.

Looking again at the suggested format in the Appendix, we need not adhere to this order of procedure – but it has been found to be more helpful if the ongoing formation⁴⁶ comes before the business part of the meeting to avoid cutting it short through lack of time remaining. Remember, the formation should be for about an hour. Fonck suggests the following elements as necessary for *true fraternity*:

- prayer
- ministering together

⁴⁴ Cf. Heb 13.2 – 'Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.' – which actually happened to Abraham and Sarah (Gen 18), Lot (Gen 19), Manoah (Judges 13) & Tobit (Tobit 5)!

⁴⁵ Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 107, also 123-125)

⁴⁶ Initiation & Initial Formation play no part in the fraternity meeting and should be done at another time during the month. Enquirers and Candidates do need to experience the fraternity meeting, however, and participate in the ongoing formation.

- study
- dialogue
- socializing

A good period of study (i.e. ongoing formation) should result in some action being performed either by the group as a whole or by individuals.

In order to run a fraternity successfully, and pay the necessary expenses and dues to the higher councils, a realistic amount of money needs to be collected from those actually in the Order. Here, Rule 25 requires close inspection.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 48 (p 176-178)

Lk 17.7-10; I Cor 10.31; Eph 4.25-32; 5.1-2

Rule 22, 24, 25

Constitution art 51.1c, 53.1

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 67-69)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 124-125)

Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 113-115)

Questions and Answers

A good practice, which some fraternities have adopted during formation sessions, has been to use *questions* to stimulate thought and dialogue between members at the monthly meetings. The topic decided, such questions might be prepared beforehand, written on cards/pieces of paper, to be picked up, read out and answered/discussed by the group. There are suitable questions at the end of each chapter in both *To Live as Francis Lived* and *Gospel Living*. Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 39-67) also provides useful questions and answers for use in this way. Some councils provide their own questions to suit their own fraternity. One fraternity put the questions on bookmarks which were distributed with the preparation sheets at the end of the meeting.

7. Formation

Formation is a process of growth which involves *all* the faculties of a person as part of his daily life and work. There should be constant growth and openness to renewal. Franciscan formation, by its very nature, is in accordance with the charism of St Francis under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

New Franciscans – discernment leading to Profession has three stages:

Visitor, Enquirer, Candidate ⁴⁷

In Appendix C, these stages are clearly outlined. [See also Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* cap 15 (p 114-117): 'The second element which produces a vibrant and effective fraternity in the Secular Franciscan Order...is the vitality of membership. This vitality expresses itself in three ways: the stages of formation, the depth of permanent commitment, and the healing of relationships in problem situations.'] The chart in Appendix D shows the ceremonies which initiate one into each of these three stages, the symbols received at each ceremony, the commitment one makes at each stage. For those admitted as candidates, it is useful to provide a sponsor who can support them on their journey. The sponsor may, or may not, attend initial formation sessions.

Ongoing Formation – is essential for all the professed; only arrogance or pride will suggest otherwise. Lester Bach stresses quite urgently the need for ongoing formation. ⁴⁸ Using Rule 4 and Constitution art 44 as his basis he states that 'Formation in Franciscan living does not just happen. It is not magically achieved without steady work and prayerful seeking. Radical conversion requires radical formation and learning. The fraternity has a serious responsibility to design ways and means to achieve this task.' Ongoing formation assists us in our daily life to deepen our responses to God's call and conversion to his will, as Rule 4 says: 'going from gospel to life and life to gospel.' Ongoing formation provides a way to perfect our fidelity to the life-long commitment of the gospel life within the Franciscan family.

St Francis was permanently in formation – 'He used to say to the brothers: *Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord our God, for up to now we have done little.* He burned with a great desire to return to the humility he practiced at the beginning; to nurse the lepers as he did at the outset and to treat like a slave once more his body that was already in a state of collapse from his work.' ⁴⁹ Throughout our life we never cease to be molded – by means of education, teaching and the example of our brothers and sister. To be true to our vocation we cannot avoid this by complaining that Francis disliked study, preferred simplicity, embraced

⁴⁷ The National Statutes, Title 3 art 10.1-3, 11.1-2 – defines the time-scale for these stages and the courses of study which are obligatory in OFSGB. Some who come as visitors may not choose to go further. Here, we are thinking of the 'required stages' for those who are eventually professed.

⁴⁸ Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 107)

⁴⁹ Armstrong, Hellmann, *Short Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 14.1 (p 640)

poverty. To be able to read (let alone own a book) in the 12th Century was a luxury... This is not the case today!

Basic reading

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 93-102, 106-108)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 114-117)

Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 8-9, 17-27)

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 76)

Isa 42.1-4; 43.1-2; Mk 4.1-20; Lk 10.23-24; John 10.27-30

Rule 23

Constitution art 37-40, 44

Books for use

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>overview

Overview - formation

Guidelines for Formators

Visitor:

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>visitor

Booklets

www.ofsgeb.org > formation>other formation resources

Bibliography – esp. Biographies of St Francis

Enquirer:

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>enquirer

Course approved by national council for enquirers

www.ofsgeb.org > additional resources

for the various materials/resources referred to in the prescribed course

www.ofsgeb.org > formation>other formation resources

Bibliography

Candidate:

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>candidate

Course approved by national council for candidates: Preamble/Major/Minor Modules

www.ofsgeb.org > formation>additional resources

for the various materials/resources referred to in the prescribed course

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>other formation resources

Bibliography

Ongoing formation:

www.ofsgeb.org >formation>ongoing

Following Christ in the Footprints of Francis of Assisi

Preparing for the Millennium (3 booklets)

Bibliography

8. Preparing for Professions **- Commitment for Life -**

Profession is a grace granted by God whereby we consecrate ourselves to the cause of the kingdom. It is a solemn, public and ecclesial event, and is simultaneously **an action of Christ and of the Church...a salvation event**. In living the life as set out by the Rule and Constitutions the professed person is committing to live the rest of life centred on **the gospel in the manner of St Francis**.

It is a way of fulfilling the promises of one's baptism (Rule 6.1-2). Profession produces *fruition, a strengthening and an enrichment* of baptism. There is, then, a strong relationship between Baptism, Confirmation and Profession. **Profession acts on Baptism and develops it, producing a new effusion of the Spirit**. Within the Franciscan family we are given 'stability, direction, support and depth' in our search for holiness as a person in the world where we live out the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience (according to the Rule of the OFS and according to our station in life).

Life as a Secular Franciscan, *in fraternity* is understood as a way of 'rebuilding the Church', of displaying the Franciscan charism through example and spiritual growth, and of supporting our brothers and sisters in fidelity to the gospel life and the Rule. Our Profession entails a commitment to this. Benet Fonck says 'Profession is not a watered-down promise, but a commitment as real as religious vows or marriage vows (but different in its binding force in Church law).'⁵⁰

For candidates, the Profession is a priestly act. The rite of Profession must take place during mass. By making the promise of an evangelical life, one puts oneself at God's disposal **and offers one's body on the altar of Christ's sacrifice as a victim, holy and acceptable to God**.⁵¹ Profession is a commitment of one's life for life. The decision of permanent commitment is a conviction to live one's life to the end 'proclaiming Jesus, after the example of St Francis, within the context of the world.'⁵² It is an act with which a person puts oneself into the hands of God and lets him take over. The consequence of this is that this person is no longer theirs but God's property – and therefore sacred.⁵³

⁵⁰ Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 117)

⁵¹ Cf. Rom 12.1 'present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.'

⁵² Benet Fonck *Called to Proclaim Christ* (p 48)

⁵³ That which was given to God in the OT was 'sacral' whether it be the king (anointed), a wife (adultery carried the death penalty – only otherwise for blasphemy), or even things. The consequence of stealing or taking such sacral things for one's own use was dreadful indeed: Cf. Josh 22.20 'Did not Achan son of Zerah break faith in the matter of devoted things, and wrath fell upon all the congregation of Israel? And did he not perish alone for his iniquity!' Remember, 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' (Heb 10.31)

A month before Profession takes place the formation session at that monthly meeting should be taken up with studying the Rule and Constitution – Rule 23, Constitution art 41-43. At this meeting, as well as deciding who does what during the ceremony itself, it is an excellent occasion for everyone to re-examine their own commitment to the Franciscan way of life. Members of the regional council and nearby fraternities will have been invited to the Profession – a means of prayerful support and fraternal solidarity.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 51 (p 186-188)
Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 183) – but also question 5 (p 52), 6 (p 51), 7 (p 52 & 63)
Deut 7.7-9; Isa 6.1-8; Jer 1.4-10; Lk 8.4-15; I Cor 1.2-9 – vocation
Lk 9.59-62; 12.35-49; 14.27, 33; John 12.24, 32; 15.12-17; II Cor 6.1-10

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 70-75)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 113-121)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 102-106)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 187-197 – for Candidate re commitment), (p 413-414 – for ongoing formation)
Philip Marquard *Called to Live the Dynamic Power of the Gospel* (p 88-89)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 108-112)
Armstrong, Hellmann, Short *Francis of Assisi: early documents* Vol I Celano: Life of St Francis cap 6.103 (p 272-273); Vol II Bonaventure: Major Legend cap 14.5 (p 643)

Suggested action

Daily prayer for candidates. A good action is to renew one's own Profession privately on a regular basis, but annually publicly – perhaps at a retreat.
A newly professed member makes a contribution of fresh life to the community, so it is good to rejoice and celebrate with a party/refreshments!

9. Preparing for Elections

For several months before elections are to be held the minister will have written to one of the national spiritual assistants and the regional minister to invite them to attend. A suitable date for all concerned will already have been chosen. Every three years elections for a council should be held and for several months beforehand the fraternity needs to pray for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

For a month or two before the elections the ongoing formation time should be spent studying Rule 21 and articles 31 and 32 of the General Constitutions. It is also useful, at this stage, for the duties of the various members of the council to be looked at. It is not right that anyone should be elected to an office that they are in total ignorance about. All members of the fraternity council should have studied these articles of the Constitution during their council meetings, but the ordinary professed members may not be so familiar with them. These articles of the Constitution – 49-52 – are those with which we are concerned. In addition, the National Statutes, concerning the duties of the formation minister need to be consulted as these are not explained in the Constitution.⁵⁴ Thus, it can be seen that it will take some time to be familiar with these responsibilities. But it is of the greatest importance that these God-given responsibilities are not taken lightly.

Qualities of **leadership** should be considered. A leader is not necessarily one with a sparkling personality, or one who seems to lead a saintly life, one who goes on many pilgrimages or retreats, or even one who is a good organizer (let alone well organized!). These can be useful qualities; but the main quality to look for in a good leader and – in particular in OFS – is willingness to serve the fraternity. For willingness to serve is the ultimate meaning of being conformed to Christ, following in the footprints of St Francis. The notion of 'servant leader' brings to mind Christ's leadership, so wonderfully demonstrated, when he washed the disciples' feet.⁵⁵ A bossy-boots, who just likes power, is completely alien to the Franciscan understanding of servant leadership, of which both St Francis and St Clare are perfect examples. For those who seek leadership let these words be the watchword:

*How do thy mercies close me round!
For ever be thy name adored!
I blush in all things to abound;
The servant is above his Lord!*

*Inured to poverty and pain,
A suffering life my Master led;
The Son of God, the Son of Man,
He had not where to lay his head.*⁵⁶

⁵⁴ The National Statutes, Title 2 art 5.1-5

⁵⁵ Cf. John 13.1-11

⁵⁶ Charles Wesley, 1707-1788; Cf. Col 3.23-24

Lester Bach considers that the 'quality of fraternity life is in direct proportion to the quality of the council's leadership.'⁵⁷ He suggests that the aim of fraternity leaders should be to animate and guide the fraternity by their 'good example, wise decision, and courageous action.' Rule 21b reminds us that a necessary quality of a leader of a fraternity is a 'ready and willing spirit.' Indeed, to be elected as a council member should not be considered as a reward for long service or membership, but it is a ministry to be spent in love and service for an appointed time.

Practical details of duties entailed in preparing for receiving the Visitors from the regional council to preside at elections, and catering details, can take some time. For this reason the formation time should be adequate and why this may take more than one session to complete.

Basic reading

Ramos *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (p 62)

Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 153-163)

Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 110)

Rule 21

Constitution art 76-84

Jer 45.5; Matt 16.21-26; Mk 10.43-44; Lk 17.7-10; John 1.9-12; Acts 6.3-5; Rom 12.1-2; I Cor 10.3; Eph 6.10-20; Col 1.9-14; I Tim 3.1

Twelve Principles of Spiritual Leadership

Seldom will any one person have all the following attributes, but possession of some of them is often indicative of suitability as a leader for the fraternity.

1. Discipline – faithfulness to prayer, able to follow, loving service, perseverance
2. Vision – foresight, insight, keeper of vision, inspirer of vision in others
3. Listening – with the ear of the heart often and long, talking little and seldom but with understanding, no pre-judgment
4. Courage – meets difficulty without discouragement, total trust in God
5. Decision – no blame cast on other councilors, take responsibility for decisions made on sound premises; prayer helps one listen for God's will
6. Humility – sacrificial service, allows other to become 'greater' as you become 'less', glad to work as an assistant, admit frailty, only ask others to tackle tasks one would oneself
7. Integrity – transparent character, innocent and without guile, sincere in commitment, patient with self and others, loyal in service, honest in speech

⁵⁷ Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 273-278)

8. Sense of Humour – relaxes tension, sees things in perspective, alien to sarcasm
9. Inspirational – a light for others, inspires others to service and sacrifice, translates vision into action, helps to build and encourage leadership in others
10. Wisdom – as inspired by the Holy Spirit, spiritual discernment, 'knowledge' born of a deep relationship with God
11. Trust – is the fruit of the love of God (Cf. fruits of the Spirit, Gal 5.22-23) for when trusting on the Spirit thoughts of God as judge or 'policeman' disappear
12. Collaboration – ability to work closely and trustfully with others not seeing work as 'mine' but willingness to share generously both labour and reward

10. Preparations for Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations

Our spiritual growth as members of OFS is maintained in several ways. Ongoing formation, spiritual assistance and Visitations are three of these ways. Formation was looked at in Chapter 7 above. The other two topics involve an interaction between the Friars and the Seculars in such a way as to ensure a proper development of our simple Secular Franciscan style, our ministry and, above all, our spirituality. The spiritual assistant is a highly visible member of the council who, with his guidance, ensures a growth and maintenance of the spiritual life of the individual member.

Rule 26 tells us that the purpose of Visitation is to 'promote the fidelity of the [Franciscan] charism as well as observance to the Rule to receive greater support in the life of the fraternity.' Practically, this means that the fraternal and pastoral Visitations – which may be carried out simultaneously, where practical and convenient – ensures that the council is functioning properly, that gospel life is being observed, that members live in peace and harmony with one another, and that the fraternity is engaged in apostolic work. In addition, it gives the opportunity for the affairs of the fraternity to be discussed, any problems tackled, and allows the Visitors to check the registers, financial accounts and records of elections. All this is to ensure the proper running and maintenance of the fraternity itself.

These Visitations should be requested by the minister every three years. As well as the above purposes of the visit, the fraternal visit is an expression of the service and practical interest in the leaders of the fraternity. The visitor is concerned about the validity of Initiation and Initial Formation – that it is being done in accordance with what is specified in the National Statutes⁵⁸, as well as ongoing formation; is expected to examine the relations with other fraternities at various levels, with Franciscan Youth and with the entire Franciscan family. He/she will ascertain whether the council has observed the guidelines given by the councils at the different levels and, where possible, to gauge the Franciscan presence in the local parish churches.

The Pastoral Visit is carried out in the name of the Church and is an expression of the pastoral care of the OFS entrusted, by the Church, to the First Order. The Visitor will try to examine the observation of the Rule, and fidelity to the Franciscan charism in the fraternity; as well as verifying the canonical establishment of the fraternity itself, examining the quality of spiritual assistance in the fraternity and the relationship between spiritual assistant and the members; and as encouragement to the spiritual assistant, give attention to the formation programmes, to the liturgical prayer life and apostolic activities of the fraternity.

⁵⁸ Cf. Articles 10 & 11

We can see, therefore, that while the Visitation is a time of accountability – such as the council reporting to the Visitors any efforts made in ministries undertaken inside and outside the parish – it is also a time for receiving assistance with difficulties, indeed: an opportunity for the fraternity to be animated by the Visitors.

Basic reading

Foley, Weigel, Normile *To Live as Francis Lived* Reflection 50 (p 183-185)
Rule 26
Constitutions art 81-95

Other books

Peter O'Grady *Rebuild My Church* (p 80-82)
Benet Fonck *Called to Follow Christ* (p 125-128, 135-137, 139-142, 150-151, 179-181)
Lester Bach *Called to Rebuild the Church* (p 171-182)
Lester Bach *Catch Me A Rainbow Too* (p 281-282)
Teresa Baker *Gospel Living* (p 119-122)

N.B. You may wish to spend *two sessions* on this chapter, one full session to Spiritual Assistance and one to Visitations. When preparing for a Visitation you may wish to spend only time on that particular Visitation. However, it would be sensible to return to the consideration of Spiritual Assistance as soon as possible thereafter.

Appendices:

(a) Guidelines for a typical council meeting

Prayer and silence are an important part of this meeting under the guidance of the Holy Spirit

1. Opening prayers (including, perhaps, a prayer specifically to the Holy Spirit)
2. Scripture reading or a reading from the life and writings of either St Francis or St Clare followed by a short time of silence and reflection
3. Details of fraternity business dealt with – summary made for fraternity meetings. Such business will consist of diary dates for fraternity and regional events and meetings, preparations for Professions, Visitations, Elections, and any problems members might have that need to be dealt with at council level
4. N.B. sick members who need prayer and visiting; distribution of minutes to the sick, elderly, infirmed members

5. Formation minister's reports about those in Initiation and Initial Formation. Any help required, e.g. sponsors. Reading of requests in writing from those wishing to proceed to the next stage

6. Preparation of formation for the next fraternity meeting – or, next two meetings if the council meets only every two months. This work is shared by the whole council, coordinated by the formation minister. Theme is chosen, and the following elements chosen from the formation materials at hand:

- Scripture
- Rule
- St Francis
- Church's teaching
- Prayer
- Suggestions for action (action is chosen by the fraternity meeting)
- All focused on the chosen theme

7. Development of the fraternity council – brought about by the study of the duties and responsibilities of the councilors. Each has a role. The study of Rule 21, 25-26 and the Constitution art. 49-52, as well as the National Statutes, will help the council to understand its duties. Choose new article for each meeting. Qualities required in a leader should also be looked at (see above, p 147). Eventually, the other articles of both the Constitution and the Statutes will require study.

8. Closing prayers – time should always be given for joint prayer for the whole council. If possible, attending Mass together would be ideal

(b) Guidelines for a typical fraternity meeting

1. Opening prayers

2. Scripture reading or a reading from the life or writings of St Francis, followed by reflection

3. Ongoing formation. The theme is given and each of the following elements, where possible, should be used to illustrate the theme

- Rule
- St Francis' life or writings
- Church teaching from *Catechism of the Catholic Church* or Church documents (e.g. Vatican II)
- Readings from Scripture

Ideally, the fraternity will have prepared the formation in advance at home by using materials supplied beforehand. The council itself will have decided at their meeting who should introduce each element on the chosen theme and the fraternity members will be encouraged to talk

about what they have studied on the topic. There should be periods of silence for reflection on the various elements in question. An action might be chosen as a result of the study and a chosen prayer relating to the topic may be said to conclude the session itself. The theme for the following month should then be decided.

At least one hour is recommended for formation. Enquirers and Candidates should take part, but since they have their own preparation to do, they should not be expected to study the theme at home.

4. A time for refreshment should be included in the meeting (perhaps 15-20 mins) to allow opportunity for everyone to socialize.
5. Office of the day may be said
6. Fraternity business – correspondence, financial report, apologies etc. – is best kept to the latter part of the meeting to ensure enough time is given to formation.
7. Dates of forthcoming events, date of next meeting etc.
8. Closing prayers

(c) Stages in the journey to Profession

There are three stages: visiting, enquiring, candidacy

1. Visitor

At the first meeting, Ceremony of Welcome (Handbook p 43)

There is no formal instruction at this stage. Some may come as visitors for a long time, some may never express an intention to proceed further – but wish to share with others in the experience of things Franciscan. For some, the eventual decision to proceed further may have taken years! But, for those who do decide to go further, the time as a visitor must be a minimum of 6 months⁵⁹ during which time a short life of St Francis may be given to read, together with the booklets to be found in the Formation folder ‘Visitor’ on the website et al. If desiring to proceed to Enquiry stage, the visitor should write to the fraternity minister accordingly. A questionnaire is filled in by the formation minister of pertinent questions to ascertain the suitability of the visitor for the OFS.

2. Enquirer – Initiation

This period begins with the ceremony (Handbook p 44), and lasts at least one year⁶⁰ during which time the enquirer follows the prescribed course under the direction of the formation

⁵⁹ National Statutes, Title 3, art 10.1

⁶⁰ National Statutes, Title 3, art 10.2

minister. These sessions are run in accordance with the *Guidelines for Formators* as found on the website, and should take place separate from the fraternity meeting.

3. **Candidate** – Initial Formation

This period begins with the Rite of Admission (Handbook p 46) – which is a celebration of the Word and held during the fraternity meeting. This ceremony receives the candidate into the OFS, and the occasion may be marked by the receiving of the distinctive sign of the Order ⁶¹. The period of candidacy lasts for at least two years ⁶² during which time the candidate follows the prescribed course under the direction of the formation minister. A letter is written to the fraternity minister stating the wish for Profession and the minister decides, with the whole council, whether the candidate is ready for the big step of lifetime commitment to the OFS. At Profession (Handbook p 56) the candidate receives a copy of the Gospels, a crucifix and lighted candle.

(d) Stages of formation – rites and symbols

<u>STAGE</u>	<u>CEREMONY</u>	<u>SYMBOL</u>	<u>COURSE/STUDY</u>	<u>COMMITMENT</u>
<u>Visitor</u>				
min. 6 months	Welcome ceremony	none	life of Francis/information literature	monthly meeting
<u>Enquirer</u>				
min. 1 year	Rite of Entry	copy of formation programme	OFSB course of 6 caps	monthly meeting & Initiation
<u>Candidate</u>				
min. 2 years	Rite of Admission	OFS Rule & distinctive sign	OFSGB course of Preamble/Modules	as above
<u>Professed</u>				
life-long	Rite of Profession	Gospels, crucifix & lighted candle	'Following Christ...'/ other relevant studies ongoing formation monthly, 1 hr.	to gospel life in perpetuity

⁶¹ National Statutes, Title 3, art 13

⁶² National Statutes, Title 3, art 11.1