

**GROWING IN LOVE
A PROGRAMME OF FORMATION FOR
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
Radically revised with additions
Merle O'Driscoll of**



Book 1
BEFORE ADMISSION

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FOR LEADERS OF FORMATION

Growing in Love is a programme of formation built on the basic principles for the development of prayer and Gospel living –

Prayer Read/Listen Reflect Pray

Active Life Read/Listen Reflect Respond with change and/or action.
The aim is that these two become as integrated as possible with both an individual and a community response. The basic structure follows that of the initiation of adults for those seeking entry into the Church, which, according to the expressed wish of the Church, should be the model for all other programmes of formation for its members.

Introduction to Growing in Love (revised)

Since the original version of Growing in Love first came into circulation forty years ago, post Vatican II constitutions came into being and were later revised, the Franciscan source documents have been newly translated and the Catechism of the Catholic Church has come into existence. These developments alone made the revision necessary if Growing in Love was to continue to be of value as a basis for formation in the Secular Franciscan Order. Whilst the changes take account of these factors, despite initial appearances to the contrary, nearly all the material contained in the original version can be found in the revised version though some text has been moved.

Book 1, for the time before admission, has six sessions created from a rearrangement of the existing material and the addition of new material. There is a new chapter on the sacraments and liturgy in general, part of which came from former chapter C3 on prayer that had sufficient material for two sessions anyway. The chapter on the church, originally after admission is now included in book 1. The eleven chapters remaining in Book 2 for the time after admission have been spread with additions to create twelve. No chapter is totally new.

The formation meeting material and the liturgy associated with it, now include full texts rather than just references. One exception is the prologue to the rule that is rather long and is in the manual. The scripture references, which are supplied for study and prayer, now include an indication of the subject matter of each. Other adjustments have been made for easier reading, smoother continuity and a more integrated whole. I hope the work has gone some way to achieving this.

Using the programme

- 1. Normal use - one chapter per month.**
- 2. Opening prayer/reflection to closing prayer - with the formation minister,**
- 3. 'BETWEEN MEETINGS' material is for the enquirer/candidate to use at home. Other material may also be suggested.**
- 4. Liturgical service - at the fraternity meeting.**

Please read THE WAY AHEAD. Ensure that each enquirer receives a copy and has the opportunity to talk it over with you before embarking on the time of enquiry.

The Franciscan way is not the only way to God. We may just help someone to take a step towards finding his/her true vocation elsewhere. A prayerful disposition, a love of friars, friaries, Assisi or of animals are not in themselves an indication of a

vocation and no one should be accepted out of concern for lack of numbers. The Secular Franciscan Order is for those who wish to love God with a greater intensity in the footsteps of St. Francis and after his example.

Reflection on the gospel message is both a lead into prayer and direction for our lives. For Franciscans, this message is clarified by their rule and the life and words of St. Francis. The commitment is both an individual and a communal experience. The knowledge of what God wants of us can also be better understood from the insights of others. Shared reflection and dialogue is an essential part of initial formation as it is of every fraternity meeting where we should experience mutual support. Participants in the programme should feel able to share personal difficulties with complete trust in confidentiality and a non-judgmental hearing. You may also need time to plan or evaluate apostolic action. Apostolic involvement is an active expression of a fraternity's moral personality. (See rule 20).

Study each session beforehand and arrange for the meeting of the fraternity following it to include the liturgical service. The liturgies are centred on the word of God and have a sign or expression of intent appropriate to the theme and the desired grace for both the candidate and the fraternity. Make any preparation necessary. Celebrating together in this way gives outward expression to the support offered by professed members. At the same time it refreshes for us a particular aspect of our own commitment maintaining in a small way a constant call to renewal. It is part of the active role we have in the discernment of the enquirer/candidate's vocation and whether or not this person will usefully contribute to the capability of our fraternity to carry out its mission. It must be evident too, that he or she can function well as a part of a community, in particular, this community. For these reasons **the liturgy should be celebrated with the whole fraternity** and not independently of it. It only lasts a few minutes.

Sponsors

Sponsors are very valuable to the candidates and to the working of the programme. They should be chosen before it begins and instructed as to their responsibilities. They need to be welcoming and willing to share their faith. Their presence at the formation meeting also makes possible some sharing when there is only one candidate. It would be very helpful to ensure that at least one other person is present even if it cannot always be the same one.

Merle O'Driscoll



Growing in Love [GIL]

The Way Ahead (For the Enquirer)

By now you have probably been attending fraternity meetings for at least six months. You are already endeavouring to live out your Christian vocation. Now you are about to take your first formal steps to discover whether or not God is calling you to do so in a secular Order within the Franciscan family. If you and the fraternity are in agreement you will be *welcomed* into a ‘Period of Enquiry’. **During this time no commitment is made but you are asked to attend the sessions arranged for you as well as the meetings of the fraternity.** Also, between meetings and with the help of the material provided you should continue to seek to know God’s will for you through study, prayer, dialogue and action. There will be six or more meetings for Enquirers – normally once a month.

On the successful completion of this time you may wish to involve yourself more deeply in the Secular Franciscan way of life. If the fraternity also sees the possibility that you have a vocation, you will be *admitted* as a ‘Candidate for Profession’ through the Rite of Admission and will begin a further period of formation. This will last for more than one year. On its completion both you and the council take a decision as to whether or not you are ready to make your commitment more permanent. Up to this point you may leave at any time.

To participate in the programme you will need:

- Bible¹
- Copy of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS).²
- File for materials provided, your own material, notes etc.

You will receive material for your meeting with your Formator and for private study, practical application and for your prayer. It is important too that your daily prayer is fed by the Scriptures to bring about that change of heart [‘conversion’] that your study of them informs you about. Plenty of texts are provided so that there are sufficient for this purpose according to the needs of each person rather than an expectation of prolonged study of them all. When deciding how best to use these materials, bear in mind that *a little each day* to direct life and prayer for that day is ideal. The aim is to become familiar with, and accustomed to, a way of life – not simply to get through a set amount of study.

What is the aim of each chapter?

- Daily conversion and growth in living the Gospel way of life in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi.
- Day to day study, conversation, attitude of life, prayer and Christian undertaken with others and individually.
- Use in a manner suited to you. It is *not* for one high-powered learning session, *nor* are you expected to study as if to pass an exam. However, it is important

¹ The New RSV [Catholic Edition] is mainly used in this programme

² As found in the OFS Handbook.

to have a thorough knowledge and practice to make an informed decision and to be capable of living the Franciscan life.

- To inform, to motivate, to initiate and direct action and to ‘feed’ prayer.

Select from Scripture texts according to the advice of your Formator and/or Spiritual Assistant. If, during your private study and reflection, questions occur to you, make a note of them and raise them at your next meeting. Make a note of answers too [valuable additions to incorporate in your ‘Portfolio’]. Remember: seek the Holy Spirit’s guidance in everything.

A ‘Sponsor’ is a member of the fraternity chosen as a special companion for you on your journey; someone you can rely on for support and who will share with you in whatever way he/she can. Pray for your Sponsor, your formation minister and the fraternity, as well as for yourself.

The Liturgical Service

As soon as you begin a new chapter, look over the liturgy for that session in case you are required to prepare something for it in advance. It will not be anything difficult, but you might need some notice.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Drawing on the lists of scripture texts in Fully Mature with the Fullness of Christ by Fr. Benet Fonck OFM saved me much time. From this work also came some ideas, particularly questions for sharing, suggested activities and some historical information for all of which I am grateful.

My thanks to John Power of, current National Formation Director for enhancing chapter headings and prompting the use of illustrations and footnotes.

Thanks also to Anne Mulqueen of for allowing me to include her brief life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.

SOURCES

The Bible – RSV, Jerusalem Bible (JB)

The Divine Office

Francis of Assisi Early Documents, New City Press

Conciliar Documents – Flannery

The Secular Franciscan Rule and Constitutions

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

ABBREVIATIONS

Church Documents

Ch Vat. II *Lumen Gentium* Dogmatic Constitution on the Church

Ap Vat. II *Apostolicam Actuositatem* Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity

MW Vat. II *Gaudium et Spes* The Church in the Modern World

DR Vat. II *Dei Verbum* Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation

CCC Catechism of the Catholic Church

Franciscan Sources

1C First Life of Celano

2C Second Life of Celano

LM Major Life of St. Francis by St. Bonaventure

MP Mirror of Perfection

Adm Admonitions

LF Little Flowers of St. Francis

LP Legend of Perugia



Growing in Love

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Growing in Love¹

1. Answering God's Call

*Seeking to encounter the living and active person of Christ in our brothers and sisters
[Rule 5]*

Prayer to the Holy Spirit

Leader: Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of the faithful

R. And kindle in them the fire of your love.

Scripture: Mk 12.28-31

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, 'Which commandment is the first of all?' Jesus answered, 'the first is, "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." The second is this, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."' There is no other commandment greater than these.'

- Reflect for a few minutes on (a) loving God, (b) loving yourself, (c) – in the light of (a) and (b) – loving your neighbour
- Share your ideas

Jesus said, 'Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.' [Matt 5.48]

In baptism each of us receives the seeds of new life. Through the sacraments and many other ways and means the Holy Spirit waters them. Depending on how we respond, they grow, blossom and bear fruit. God revealed his creative, life-giving love especially in the redemptive love and obedience of Jesus. 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people' [Mk 1.17], he said. The more like him we become, the more our lives proclaim the Gospel message. Through prayer and service, using whatever ways are open to us, we can bring his love to others and hope to the world. By sharing, caring, supporting and reconciling we give life from what we have received. 'Love one another just as I have loved you' [John 13.34]. The more we live by the values of Jesus, the more people will be drawn by the quality of life they offer and ultimately to Jesus himself. As we realise increasingly how much we are loved by God our own capacity to love grows and with it a hunger to love more.

For lay people the field of operation is family and home, the workplace, our leisure and other occupations. Some areas of life are only accessible to lay people. Their role is vital and cannot be fulfilled without them.

What the Church says: 'It is quite clear that all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of love, and by this holiness a more human manner of life is fostered also in earthly society. In order to

¹ Before commencing this programme the Enquirer should have read, or at least begun to read, a life of St Francis. A useful place to start might be with the booklet in Initial Formation [Enquirer] in folder 5) St Francis, as an introduction to more substantial reading.

reach this perfection the faithful should use the strength dealt out to them by Christ's gift, so that following in his footsteps and conformed to his image, doing the will of God in everything, they may wholeheartedly devote themselves to the glory of God and to the service of their neighbour.' [Ch. 40]

Aware that this ideal is not fully attained until God completes his work in us, we are drawn ever nearer to it by the Holy Spirit. We need to discover and embrace the way that our Father would have us follow. If there is an idea which appeals how do I know if it is the Lord's will for *me*? Will I be most effective in fulfilling God's purpose that way? Will it bring about the greatest growth in me? Discernment is required and since the source of any misconceptions may be deeply rooted along with the Spirit's call, it is much safer to allow another to accompany me in the process. The programme you are beginning to follow is designed to give you every opportunity to discover what it means to be a Secular Franciscan and if it is right for you.

The Holy Spirit addresses the needs of the Church by working through certain individuals. The same Spirit may raise families around them to help them to accomplish their mission. Secular Franciscans are part of such a family that has inherited characteristics of its founder-father, St Francis of Assisi. He was called to repair Christ's Church, and we continue that work under his leadership and after his example.

As someone responds positively to the call of baptism they grow with a developing sense of urgency to be one with Christ. They desire to make him known and loved in the world and to build up the Church with a loyalty to it such as was characteristic of St Francis. By simplifying their lifestyle and by living a life of prayer, on-going conversion and service they become more available to the Lord and like him in love.

Gospel references to the Holy Spirit at work in Jesus:

'Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness.' [Mt 4.1]

'Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee' [Lk. 4.14]

In the synagogue in Nazareth he read a passage from Isaiah, which he applied to himself which began, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,' [Lk 4.18]

- In recent years, where have you felt God's hand in your life or his Spirit at work in you?
- What response have you made or feel called upon to make?

Closing Prayer

To the first members of our Order Francis said:

'We are spouses of our Lord Jesus Christ when, by the Holy Spirit, the faithful soul is united to him.'¹

'We are brothers to him when we fulfil the will of the Father who is in heaven.'²

'We are mothers when we carry him in our hearts and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give light to others by example.'¹

¹ Cf. 1Cor. 6:20

² cf. Mt. 12:10

Silently Reflect Close with Glory be... or other chosen prayer

At the Fraternity Meeting

Pray together for those beginning their formation as Enquirers as they try to discern the path God wishes them to follow. Pray also for those assisting them.

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Scripture for prayer and study:

Matt 5.3-12 (Beatitudes);

Lk. 6.27-38 (love your enemies)

Rom 8.8-11 (those interested in unspiritual things);

Rom 8.14-17 (all who are guided by the Spirit)

Col 2.6-7 (living in Christ);

Col 2.12-15 (buried with Christ in baptism)

Praying with Scripture

There are a number of Scripture texts in each section of this programme so that you can find something each day to feed your prayer and renewal. There are also suggestions as to how you might use them. The first of these is as follows. Studying Scripture is, in itself, a mental process, which needs to be translated into a conversion process. In other words, we need to move from head knowledge and understanding to a change of heart. And that is a work of the Spirit.

Lectio Divina – sacred reading²

One way of describing prayer is being with God, speaking and listening as friends do. We are all good at talking, but what about ‘listening’? What do we listen to? God speaks to us through everything, but ‘hearing’ is not always easy for us. When God speaks through Scripture the message is much more accessible, so the Scriptures are a good basis for prayer. ‘Lectio Divina’ or sacred reading is a very ancient form of prayer. The chosen passage is read and meditation flows from it. Begin by reading the Scripture you have chosen.

Entering Prayer: we will hear what the Lord is saying to us so much better if our attention is undivided – so preparation is very important.

- Choose a suitable time and place for prayer.
- Choose a comfortable position and take a few moments to relax – perhaps closing the eyes and listening to your breathing.
- Be aware that your Father in heaven, who made you, loves you as you are, beyond anything you can imagine. Rest quietly in the Lord’s presence.
- Allow yourself to become aware that you are going to speak and listen to this God who is always with you.
- God teaches us to pray and the Holy Spirit prays in us. Ask God to teach you to pray and leave it in his hands.

¹ cf. Mt. 5:16

²Cf. Initial Formation [Enquirer] in folder 1) Scripture ‘Praying the Scriptures – a guide to Lectio Divina’

The Central Part of Prayer: read the passage of Scripture again, slowly this time. 'Listen' attentively to the words. You might feel like repeating certain words or phrases to yourself.

When you feel drawn to a word or phrase you may experience a feeling of God's love, of peace or joy. You may feel disturbed or confused. **God is speaking to you.** Just let it happen. Don't try to work anything out. Don't be too quick to move on. 'Savour' the words; absorb them so that they become a part of you. Once you feel drawn to stop put the book down.

Respond: as you feel you want to, maybe with thanks and praise. Share any mixed or troubled feelings. Ask for help or forgiveness. Let it arise naturally. It may be a wordless gathering up of all that is within you – joy, sorrow, gratitude, wonder, peace or anything else there is, and presenting it to the Lord.

To Close: talk to the Lord about the experience. Openly and honestly tell God your thoughts and feelings. You might like to end with the Our Father.



Growing in Love

2. A Secular Franciscan Vocation?

Opening Reflection

Leader: Lord, open our ears, our minds and our hearts to receive your word.

R. Speak Lord, your servants are listening.

Scripture: Eph 4.11-13

The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

Reflect. Briefly share your reflection.

When the Holy Spirit draws an individual to a particular spiritual family God plans for them to share in its mission. It also gives them the direction and support that they need. They make a life-long commitment in a public profession before Christ and his Church. They declare their intention that Jesus shall reign in their hearts and that they will be available for the spreading of his kingdom throughout the world according to that tradition.

‘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, priests – who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other they intend to make present the charism of the common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.’ [Rule 1]

Secular Franciscans ‘commit themselves through profession to love the Gospel in the manner of St Francis, in their secular state, following the Rule approved by the Church. The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care and spiritual assistance of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), because it belongs to the same spiritual family, to the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular (TOR)...’ The OFS is a ‘public association in the Church’ with fraternities at local, regional, national and international levels. It is open to lay men and women and secular clergy. [See Const, Ch. 1, art 1 & 2]

What is Charism?

Every human being is gifted by God, whether they recognize his existence or not, to enable them to fulfil their role in life. Gifts are many and varied. Some we would perceive as being of a spiritual nature. Traditionally these were called graces. Each of us also has a range of talents and skills. These, together with personality traits help to indicate to us where and how we might be most effective. Unlike graces, charisms are given to us specifically for the benefit of others. All of them together give rise to our own personal charism, especially in evidence when we use them well. The Franciscan

Movement, strongly coloured by the charismatic influence of its Father-Founder, is also enriched by that of each individual within it. Together they form the Franciscan charism. It is not something static handed down to us, but is very much alive and organic. As Secular Franciscans, in our attempts to adopt a more radical approach to living out our Christian vocation, we receive particular enabling gifts for the purpose but also have a share in those of St Francis and the Franciscan family. In our Secular Order the charism of the Franciscan family takes on a specialised character suited to our secular calling for which we are constantly being gifted.

Francis was truly charismatic. He lived his faith and love of God to the full, openly and authentically, winning the hearts and minds of people from all walks of life in his own day and down the succeeding centuries. Still today he touches those of various religious persuasions and none.



Initially, his attraction and popularity often stems from his well known love of the natural world – God’s creation, his communication with birds and fishes and such stories about him as making peaceful the wolf of Gubbio that had been terrorizing the town.

But Franciscans know that his charism goes much deeper than that.

Francis ‘spoke to the brothers in the fervour and power of the Holy Spirit saying, “My brothers! My brothers! God has called me by the way of simplicity and humility, and has truly shown me this way for me and for those who want to trust and imitate me.”’ [MP, 68]

Near the beginning of his conversion Francis sought to know what the Lord was asking of him. He prayed fervently before the crucifix in the church of San Damiano. It seemed to him that Christ spoke to him from the cross saying, ‘Go and repair my Church.’ At first he took it literally. Only later came a much clearer understanding that the words referred to the Universal Church rather than the building he was in. He was living in the little chapel of St Mary of the Angels, the ‘Portiuncula’, when the first ‘Penitents’ who wanted to undertake this mission with him joined him. They were: Bernard of Quintavalle, Peter of Cantania and Giles. Francis wrote a simple Rule for them composed of Scripture texts. They lived in huts, begged for their food and preached in the surrounding area. Many more were to follow. There was a number wishing to undertake the same mission with Francis but they had family responsibilities and were clearly called to a life in the midst of secular affairs. These formed the beginnings of what we now call the ‘Secular Franciscan Order’.

The Franciscan Family and the Secular Franciscan Order

‘The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this (Franciscan) family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to love the Gospel in the manner of St Francis by means of this Rule approved by the Church.’ [Rule 2]

The Franciscan family has been in existence now for more than eight hundred years. Francis and his followers laid the foundations for religious Orders for men and for women and also an Order for those who remained involved in secular affairs – that is, lay people and secular clergy.

Share your reflections on the following questions:

- What attracts you to the Franciscan way of life?
- What in particular attracts you to the Secular Franciscan way of life?

Questions and comments from Enquirers

Concluding Prayer¹

Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of our heart
and give us true faith,
certain hope, and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord,
that we may carry out
your holy and true command.

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Discerning a Vocation

Discerning the Spirit of God at work in us is learned over time with practice like other things in life. I may think I recognise a call from God but there are always other possibilities even when I am drawn to something good in itself. It may not be the direction for me. It could even be masking a genuine call that, to date, I have not heard. My own imperfect desires could be the source or at least they may cloud my judgment. I might be unaware of the fact. It is so for everyone. For this reason those who accompany you through this time of formation have a serious responsibility to discern with you because they also are involved in assessing the evidence of a vocation. In addition, it falls to them to endeavour to discern God's will for the Order. It can be helpful to have someone with experience, a spiritual director, to help one's own discerning.

The process involves much of a purely practical nature too, and continues until the final decision and beyond. Each day, and using the materials, suggestions and helps you have been given, study, pray and endeavour to make a reality in your daily experience and activity, the way of life that you discover it to be.

Prayer

Set aside time each day for prayer. It is important that it is *your prayer* rather than just *saying prayers*. Some lines from Scripture might help you to start:

Matt 11.28-30 [My yolk is easy];

Matt 19.16-22 [rich young man]

Col 3.12-15 [You are God's chosen race - put on love];

Col 3.17 [Do everything in his name]

¹As given in the handbook and based on words of St Francis from the unconfirmed Rule of 1221.

John 13.34 [Love one another just as I have loved you]
Eph 1.13-14 [seal of the Holy Spirit];
Eph 1.22-23 [Christ the head of the body];
Eph 4.11-13 [Christian maturity]
I Thess 4.3 [God's will – sanctification]

Spend one prayer time reflecting on your gifts, graces, talents and personality traits – and thank God for them.

Early Life of St Francis – headlines

1182 – Francis is born and named ‘Giovanni’ [John], but later called ‘Francesco’ by his father. His parents were Pietro [a landowner and cloth merchant] and Pica Bernadone [who was from the south of France].

1190-1195 – Francis attended the Church school – evidence suggests that he was not scholarly. He often sang French songs.

1202 – He joined the army in Assisi, which was engaged in a conflict with neighbouring Perugia. He was captured, spent a year in prison, suffering ill health for about a year afterwards.

1205 – Hoping to be a knight, he set out again for battle but in a dream at Spoleto a voice, which seemed to him to come from the Lord, told him to return home. He was unsure what this meant but one day as he prayed in the church of San Damiano he heard a voice speaking to him from the crucifix, ‘Go and repair my Church.’ The church was in a poor state and, taking the message literally, he set to work renovating it. He went on to restore the chapel of St Mary of the Angels, the Portiuncula, for which he had special affection.

1209 – Francis is living in the Portiuncula. His first followers join him and live in small huts. He compiled a simple Rule made up of Scripture texts. Pope Innocent III verbally approved it. They begged for their food and preached in and around Assisi.

Activity

Talk to at least one member of the fraternity about what they value most in being a member of the Order.

With your Formator, talk over any difficulties you may have.

A Secular Franciscan Vocation?

LITURGICAL SERVICE

[Introduced by the Formator at the next fraternity meeting.]



Centre piece: A San Damiano crucifix. It was here especially that Francis prayed for light and was called to repair God's Church that was falling into ruin.

Minister:

Let us thank God for the light of his Spirit and ask for his continued guidance.
Loving Father, we thank you for your guiding light in the life/lives of NN and for his/her/their willingness to answer your call.

Enquirer(s):

'Teach me, your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path.'¹

Reading: Eph 1.3-8

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace that he previously bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us.

Minister:

Let us pray together the prayer of St Francis before the crucifix.

All:

'Most High, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me true faith, certain hope
and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord,
that I may carry out your holy and true command.'

Minister:

May the Lord bless us all + in the name of the Father...

¹ Ps. 27.11



Growing in Love

3. 'To Observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ'

Seeking to encounter the living and active person of Christ in sacred Scripture [Rule 5]

Opening Prayer

Minister: We come to meet you in sacred Scripture.

R. Your words are Spirit, Lord, and they are life.

Scripture: Matt 5.3-10

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

'Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

- Pause to reflect and pray
- What does the passage say to you about the way you are called to live?

Questions relating to prayer/study/activity between meetings

Rule: 'The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: To observe the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and people.' [Rule 4]

'Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ...in Sacred Scripture,' [Rule 5]

What the Church says:

...The Church has always venerated the Scriptures as she venerates the Lord's Body. She never ceases to present to the faithful the bread of life, taken from the one table of God's Word and Christ's Body. [CCC 103]

'In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them.' [CCC 104]¹

The Gospels 'are our principal source for the life and teaching of the Incarnate Word, our Saviour... The apostles preached, as Christ had charged them to do, and then, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they and others of the apostolic age handed on to us in writing the same message they had preached, the foundation of our faith.' [Vat II DR 18]

¹ Quoting Vat. II DR 21

‘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” [Acts 17.28]; only thus can we seek his will in everything, see Christ in everyone, acquaintance or stranger, make sound judgments on the true meaning and value of temporal realities both in themselves and in relation to man’s end.’ [Ap. 4; cf. 30]

Only thus can we learn to love as God loves with a heart at one with the heart of Jesus. Don’t let the fact that it seems an impossible ideal put you off – that is where we are heading with Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Do you read the Scriptures often?
- Share your experience of using them as a basis for prayer and a pattern for life.
- What difference does Jesus make to life based on his values handed down to us through the Gospels and the Church? How does it compare with the ways of the world? – Give examples concerning relationships, attitude to possessions; ideas of justice, self-importance, the value of life etc.

Christ is our focus. We aim to make his values our own and influence as far as possible those of the world around us. We are sanctified [made holy] ourselves by bringing about the sanctification of the temporal world. It will not come about through coercion or by being judgmental – whether we convey this attitude through criticism or an air of superiority – but by our own faithfulness to God’s call. According to his word spoken to us, particularly through the Scriptures, in the person of Jesus Christ and in the Church he founded we set about carrying out our mission to the best of our ability and with the power of God’s Spirit. His love in us shines out to others when we do as much as we can to build a happy, healthy, just and peaceful world. What better example of this could we see than in the life of St Francis who relished the Gospel like something delicious to eat and endeavoured with every fibre of his being to put it into practice?

In our own particular state ‘Secular Franciscans commit themselves by their profession to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality ...’ [Const. art 8. 1], ‘going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel’ [Rule 4]. It follows that Secular Franciscans ‘must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture.’ [Const. art 9. 2]

Share comments.

St Francis

At the Mass of the Apostles Francis discovered God’s will for him in the Gospel of the day [‘Take no gold, or silver, or copper...’ Matt 10.9-10] and he cried out with delight saying that this was what he wanted with all his heart. 1C IX 22. He desired to free himself for God and ‘shake off the dust that clung to him’¹ 1C II.

In the same way he sought God’s confirmation of the vocation of Bernard of Quintavalle in the Gospel. ‘When Blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily increasing their numbers, he wrote for himself and his brothers, present and future,

¹ Lk. 10:11

simply and in few words, a form of life and rule. He used primarily the words of the holy Gospel, longing only for its perfection.’ [IC 32]

‘His highest aim, foremost desire, and greatest intention was to pay heed to the holy Gospel in all things and through all things to follow the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and to retrace his footsteps completely with all vigilance and all zeal, all the desire of his soul and all the fervour of his heart.

Francis used to recall with regular meditation the words of Christ and recollect his deeds with most attentive perception.’
[IC 84]

Unflagging zeal for prayer
with continual exercise of virtue
had led the man of God to such serenity of mind that,
although he had no expertise in Sacred Scripture through learning,
his intellect, nevertheless
enlightened by the splendour of eternal light,
probed the depths of scripture
with remarkable incisiveness.
For his genius, pure and unstained,
penetrated hidden mysteries,
and where the knowledge of teachers stands outside,
the passion of the lover entered.
Whenever he read the Sacred Books,
and something struck his mind
he imprinted it tenaciously on his memory...
...he would mull over it
with affection and constant devotion.

LM XI 1

- How does the way Francis went about it appeal to you most?
- How do you see this in the Franciscan family today?
- How have you found that your character, temperament, background, environment and talents play their part in your life and prayer? What are the difficulties and advantages?
- How might you use them to live the Gospel according to the same spirit as St Francis?

Though there are differences in the way we are called to serve, here we have a pattern for us to follow. Our best efforts may seem so feeble alongside St Francis but that need not concern us. It is what God will do with us that counts. Our rule ‘the marrow of the Gospel’ to use the words of the saint, expresses in Franciscan style the Gospel message for the world of today. It complements the Gospel study of Secular Franciscans.

Enquirer’s questions and comments

Concluding Prayer

'I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.' [John 14.6]

- Pause for silent reflection
- If you wish, add 'bidding' prayers

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Something each day is the ideal

St Francis encouraged his followers to study the Scriptures as long as 'they do not neglect zeal for prayer'. And, as long as they study, not to know what they should say, but to practice what they have heard and, once they have put into practice, propose it to others. He said 'I want my brothers to be Gospel disciples and so progress in knowledge of the truth that they increase in pure simplicity...'

'In these last times,
a new evangelist,
like one of the rivers of Paradise,
has poured out
the streams of the Gospel
in a holy flood over the whole world.
he preached the way of the Son of God
and the teaching of truth in his deeds.
1C 89

Scripture texts for prayer and study

John 8.12 [walking in the light]; John 13.12-17 [washing the feet]

Matt 11.25-30 [revelation]; Mk. 16:15-16 [world evangelization]

Phil 1.27 [worthy life-style]

Col 1.15-20 [Christ: God's image]

I John 1.1-4 [Christ existed from the beginning]

St Francis' Life Continued – headlines

1209-1221 – OFS was probably established sometimes during this period. Francis wrote two Letters To All the Faithful.

1224 – Francis receives the 'stigmata' at La Verna. His health was poor, he suffered much pain and he was blind.

About this time he wrote the Canticle of brother Sun

1226 – Francis adds the final verse to the Canticle in praise of Sister Death shortly before he died on 3 October, aged 44. One of the brothers recited Ps.14 for him as he was dying.

1228 – pope Gregory IX canonized Francis

1230 – Francis' body was transferred to the newly built basilica in Assisi

Prayer and action

Refer to the guidance on *Lectio Divina* in chapter 1.

- God teaches us to pray and the Spirit prays in us. Ask the Lord to teach you to pray and leave it in his hands.

- In addition, it is often useful to ask for a particular grace relevant at the time, so this month it may be for (a) a greater love and understanding of the Scriptures, (b) zeal in putting it into practice, (c) wisdom to know how to apply the Gospel values in a difficult situation. Your own life may suggest others.
- Continue meditation using material in this chapter and allowing reflection to become prayer. Talk to the Lord about it allowing him to direct your life. Form a resolution and act on it.
- If you have a spiritual director you can talk over any difficulties with him/her.
- Talk to other members of the fraternity about how they develop their Gospel-life. If the fraternity is engaged in a project of any kind, try to join in.

The next group session is entitled ‘Living Members of the Church’ and closes with bidding prayers. Be prepared to offer one or two in keeping with the theme. It is up to you whether you choose to write one in advance or not.

'To Observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ'

LITURGICAL SERVICE

[Celebrated at the next fraternity meeting...]

Focal point: An open book of the Gospel and a lighted candle.

Minister:

+ In the name of the Father...
'May your love be upon us, O Lord,

All:

As we place all our hope in you.' [Ps 33.22]

Reading: Col 3-6, 9-12

In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God.

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 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. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.

Minister: [to Enquirers]

Your presence with us is an encouragement to us. As you continue to discover the Franciscan way of life we are also conscious of our responsibility towards you, which we happily undertake.

Members:

We welcome your help and support and hope that through our prayer and example with yours we may grow closer to our Lord Jesus Christ and truly live his Gospel.

Concluding prayer

Lord, you alone are holy, may our love for you grow until we 'desire nothing else', and 'want nothing else except' you, 'our Creator, Redeemer and Saviour. Let nothing hinder us, nothing separate us, nothing come between us' so that 'every day and continually' we may serve, praise and glorify you 'Most High and Supreme Eternal God.'

Minister: May the Lord bless us all + in the name of the Father...



Growing in Love

4. 'Living Members of the Church'

Seeking to encounter the living and active person of Christ in the Church [Rule 5]

Opening prayer

Leader: Spirit of truth.¹

R. Speak to our hearts as we listen to your word.

Scripture: Matt 16.13-19

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, 'Who do people say that the Son of Man is?' And they said, 'Some say John the Baptist, but others Elijah, and still others Jeremiah or one of the prophets.' He said to them, 'But who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Messiah,² the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter,³ and on this rock⁴ I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.'

From the Constitution on the Church [Lumen Gentium] of Vatican II:

- The Church, in Christ, is in the nature of a sacrament – a sign and instrument of communion with God and of unity among all men. *Reflect*
- The Church was prepared in marvellous fashion in the history of the people of Israel and in the old Alliance. Established in this last age of the world, and made manifest in the outpouring of the Spirit, it will be brought to glorious completion at the end of time. *Reflect*
- The origin and growth of the Church are symbolized by the blood and water which flowed from the open side of the crucified Jesus and are foretold in the words of the Lord referring to his death on the cross: 'And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.' [John 12.32] *Reflect*

Consider what you have read and heard so far and share your reflection briefly.

Rule 6a:

'They [Secular Franciscans] have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with

¹ Jn. 14.17

² Or, 'the Christ' – meaning 'the Anointed one'

³ Gk 'Petros'

⁴ Gk 'petra'

the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.’

- In learning about the Gospel way of life, how do you see the Church’s role?

I Cor. 12.4-13:

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but it is the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the **utterance of wisdom**, and to another **faith** by the same Spirit, to another **gifts of healing** by the one Spirit, to another the **working of miracles**, to another **prophecy**, to another **discernment of spirits**, to another various kinds of **tongues**, to another the **interpretation of tongues**. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of the one Spirit.

- What gifts do you bring to the Church and will bring to the Order if you are admitted?

All members of the Church share in the priesthood of Christ but the roles differ. The ministerial priesthood ‘is at the service of the common priesthood. It is directed at the unfolding of the baptismal grace of all Christians. The ministerial priesthood is a *means* by which Christ unceasingly builds up and leads his Church.’ [CCC 1547, p 346]

In his ordained minister ‘it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of the Truth.’ [CCC 1548]

‘Like all the faithful, the laity should promptly accept in Christian obedience what is decided by the pastors who, as teachers and rulers of the Church, represent Christ. In this they follow Christ’s example who, by his obedience to the point of death, opened the blessed way of the liberty of the children of God to all of humanity.’ [Vat. II, On the Church, Lumen Gentium, 37]

Consider together the following questions:

- Has the authority of the Church or what she teaches ever presented a difficulty for you?
- Would you like to see greater cooperation between clergy and laity? If so, in what ways?

During the time of St Francis there was a great need of reform in the Church. He always insisted on respect for the clergy, whatever the state of their personal lives, saying that to honour the Lord is to honour his minister. St Francis promised obedience and reverence to His Holiness Pope Honorius and his lawfully elected successors, and to the Church of Rome. Other friars were, and are, bound to obey St

Francis and his successors. [See Rule of 1223] St Clare and her sisters in their Rule of life promised similar fidelity to the Church.

The Gospel we live by is not just to be found in the four Gospels, nor even in the Scriptures as a whole. Rather, it is **the whole Gospel message** as we receive it through the sacred tradition of the Church and Sacred Scripture as expounded through the teaching authority [Magisterium] of the Church.

With the help of the Holy Spirit the ‘tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the Church’ so that she continually advances towards the fullness of divine truth, ‘until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her.’ [DR 8]

Rule 6b:

‘Called like St Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.’

Our effectiveness in bringing Gospel values and thereby freedom and true happiness to the world begins with the Church community. We pool ideas, resources and efforts. We pray together and are nourished by the sacraments. The Church is ‘the community of love’ in the world. It is Christ alive and active. In living the Gospel we need each other. Within a community we develop our sense of responsibility and grow in love through sharing our lives – our talents, ideas, aims, faith, work and worship. The community then becomes an example to all people of what life can be like even in this world, and a sign of hope in the life yet to come.

Rule 13b:

‘A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people.’

Rule 22:

‘The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of members.’ [See also: Constitutions, art 47. 1, 2]

Closing Prayer Spontaneous prayer or ‘Bidding prayers’

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Study again the contents of this chapter, especially the extracts from the Rule.

Scripture texts for daily prayer and study

Isa 56.7 [house of prayer for all peoples]

Matt 16.15-19 [Peter’s profession]

Lk 10.16 [who listen to you listens to me]

Jn. 13.20 [who welcomes you welcomes me];

13.34-35 [love commandment];

Jn. 14.23-26 [if anyone loves me he will keep my word... the Holy Spirit will teach you]

Jn. 15.4-5 [the vine and branches]

Acts 2.1-4 [tongues of fire];

2.40-47 [early Christianity – community]

I Cor 12.4-13 [varieties of gifts];

12.27-31 [ministries in order of priority]

Eph 2.19-22 [we are the temple of the Lord];

4.1-6 [call to preserve unity]

I Pet 2.4-9 [living stones]

Pray one of the Prayers of St Francis and after some reflection create a prayer of your own based on it.

Consider

What is my response to the Holy Spirit at work in me? What is my attitude towards the same Spirit at work in the Church?

Allow yourself some time to reflect on your community spirit with these questions.

- In the parish, in what ways do I contribute to public worship, prayer, service and care?
- Am I as ready as I could be to assist with parish-based programmes, ecumenical events, youth activities etc.?

Activity

Talk over the above with another member of the fraternity.

'Living Members of the Church'

LITURGICAL SERVICE

[Celebrated at the next fraternity meeting...]

Focal point: Choose a suitable symbol making sure its significance is understood.

Minister:

+ In the name of the Father...

All:

Amen.

Minister:

Reminding ourselves of our Franciscan commitment to repair the Church and to build up each other in love, we ask the help of God our Father to renew and sustain our efforts.

All:

Our hearts are ready, O God, our hearts are ready.

Reading: I Peter 2.4-5, 9

“Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his Marvellous light.” (PAUSE)

[Sponsors come forward and place a hand on the shoulder of the Enquirer they are accompanying during this time of formation.]

Minister [to sponsors]:

You have chosen to express in a more personal way the care and support which all the members of this fraternity offer to NN [or those who are on their journey of discovery]. You especially will share with them the experience of life in our Franciscan community as a true companion and partner in prayer. Are you willing for the love of the Lord and for those whom he sends to us?

Sponsors: We are.

Minister: May God help you in your happy task.

All:

Father, we thank you for our brothers and sisters in this fraternity and for the example of St Francis which has drawn us together. Grant that the bond of love between us will grow stronger that we may have the ability to hear you in each other so that we may learn to live the Gospel more faithfully and effectively. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



Growing in Love

5. The Eucharist and Liturgy

*Seeking to encounter the living and active person of Christ in liturgical activity
[Rule 5]*

Focal point: Open Missal, book of all or part of the Divine Office or the Manual, candles

Opening Prayer

Word of God, you are the bread of life.¹
R. Give us this bread always.

Listen and Reflect

Throughout their history, from the time of waiting for the Messiah to the present day, the people of God, including the Holy Family, have prayed together as one body.

‘Now every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the festival of the Passover. And when he was twelve years old, they went up as usual for the festival.’ [Lk 2.41-42]

Pause

‘...Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.’ [Matt 18.20]

Pause

Now consider how Jesus built on the old covenant to establish the new. He renewed the liturgy of the old to create a fitting offering to the Father and source of life for all, through him, with him, and in him. He is the sacrificial lamb without blemish, the High Priest without sin, the Body of which we are the members and he is the Head.

‘So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and they prepared the Passover meal...While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat it, “this is my body.” ’ [Matt. 26.19, 26]

Pause

‘Day by day, as they spent much time in the temple, they broke bread at home [or, ‘from house to house’] and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God...’ [Acts 2.46-47a]

Pause

‘...Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything...’ [Eph 5.19-20]

Pause

¹ See Jn. 6.35ff

Sacramental life

When God draws us forward to new and greater things there can be in us a new fire, a glow which may seem to ‘carry’ us, enabling us to move out of our comfort zone toward the unknown and a more challenging way of life. Many who come into the Church in or approaching adulthood have this experience. Others, baptized in infancy do so later accompanied by an increased awareness of their calling as Christians. Often God’s work in his beloved is very subtle and discernible only in the effect on their lives. By whichever means, he puts a spark into our love, raises our hope and intensifies the faith we have already been given and by which we live. It is important to understand that what we might call a *tangible* experience does not indicate some kind of virtue we have acquired. It is a gift of God to meet the need at the time, to move us forward and draw us closer. Though it does not normally continue, it may occasionally re-occur if the Lord sees fit. Faith is made stronger when tried and tested.¹ Even so, God who created us is always well aware of what we are made. He calls us to very great things but knows better than we do ourselves our weaknesses and vulnerability. We are not called to climb to impossible heights on our own merits. The Lord provides all that is necessary to make what he asks of us attainable. He does so in a number of ways but in greatest abundance through his Church and especially through the **Sacraments**. Any Catholic who is aware of this and has a genuine desire for the high ideals of the Gospel is hungry for them. It would be presumptuous and foolish in the extreme to imagine that they can manage without. How much more true this is for one who aspires to a more radical following of the Way.²

For some there is first a call that leads them ultimately to the Church; but the full call and commitment to live by the values of Jesus Christ comes when we receive the Spirit in **BAPTISM**. For many it is undertaken on their behalf in infancy until they are of an age to make it their own.

The presence of the Spirit in our lives is reinforced in the sacrament of **CONFIRMATION**. Our faith is confirmed for a more testing time ahead as we grow in the acceptance and carrying out of our responsibilities. [It follows that evidence of confirmation as well as of baptism is required for any person seeking to be admitted to the OFS.]

Whilst we give thanks to God for what his grace in us has won, failure is still a regular feature of our lives. It is necessary to make a new start repeatedly. The sacrament of **RECONCILIATION** intensifies our resolve and supplies the grace that can turn our intentions into reality. We all know how poorly we respond to that grace and we need it again and again. Even so, there is no cause to be downhearted. Quite the contrary: God is still creating us and he wants us to exercise his wonderful gift of free will as part of the creation process. With our cooperation, each of us becomes fully mature.

Three sacraments are administered for a specific need such as the **SACRAMENT OF THE SICK** or a specific vocational event such as **MATRIMONY** and **HOLY ORDERS**.

¹ Cf. Heb 11.1ff, esp v 2 – ‘Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval.’

² Cf. John 14.6



THE EUCHARIST is central to them all and to the whole of life.

Christ's offering of himself on Calvary is made present. It is not repeated, and yet is ever new. The Mass is a thanksgiving [*Eucharist* means 'thanksgiving'] for all God has done for us and especially for the giving of his Son for us. Christ is both *Victim* and *Priest*. And ordained priest stands in the place of Christ, saying the words just as he asked the apostles to do, so that the bread and wine on the altar become the Body and Blood of Christ. This is the food that makes us like him and builds up the Church for the salvation of the world.

Rule 8:

'Let them (Secular Franciscans) participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist.'

The Eucharist has two parts that together make up a single act of worship. They are:

- the gathering, *the liturgy of the Word*, with readings, homily and general intercessions;
- the *liturgy of the Eucharist*, with the presentation of the bread and wine, the consecratory thanksgiving, and communion.

The Eucharistic table set for us is both the *table* of the Word of God and of the Body of the Lord. [CCC 1346, p 303] 'It is the same movement as the Paschal meal of the risen Jesus with his disciples? Walking with them he explained the Scriptures to them; sitting with them at table "he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them".' [CCC 1347]

St Francis:

'Toward the sacrament of the Lord's Body
he burned with fervour to his very marrow,
marvelling with unbounded wonder
at that loving condescension and condescending love.
He received communion frequently
and so devoutly
that he made others devout.'
[St Bonaventure, LM IX, 2]

The Eucharist is the complete way of bringing the whole of life into a great act of worship, so that the whole of life becomes an act of worship. From it we receive the nourishment we need. Liturgy is 'community worship'. Other liturgical ceremonies are extensions of the Eucharist – acts of worship such as the sacraments that impart grace at an important stage or on taking up a particular vocation; the daily prayer of the Church, the Divine Office; and for us, Admission into the OFS and Profession of the Rule. It is appropriate, then that each step along the way, though much smaller, is

similarly marked as in this programme. They extend the offering of the Mass into our undertakings for that month, blessing them with the presence of his Spirit and drawing them into the Mass to be offered with our Lord Jesus Christ on the altar. Whilst we offer in worship what we have put into becoming more like Jesus Christ, he *forms* us more into his likeness. Our understanding is deepened through the form of the liturgy itself and the enabling power of his love. It is one of many expressions of the fact that the Eucharist is central to our lives and keeps it effectively so. Another is participation in the Liturgy of the Hours otherwise called the Divine Office.

The oneness of Christ with his Church, of members with each other, and of all aspects of life in prayer and activity, is both expressed and brought about in liturgical worship. The various parts of the Divine Office, including other approved forms, extend the worship of the Eucharist throughout the day. Though ideally it is ‘sung’ or ‘recited in common’ we are praying with the whole people of God together even when we do so physically on our own.

The Church, wishing to encourage as many as possible to participate in the saying of the Divine Office, recommends to those who cannot say it all, the Morning and Evening Prayer [the main Hours of the day]. Sometimes, the circumstances of life make this difficult on a regular basis. Secular Franciscans have been granted the option of a simplified form such as the two included in the Manual.

- **Questions and comments from Enquirers**

The Psalms and Canticle

Of all composed prayers, the Psalms are of very special significance. Being part of Holy Scripture they were composed under the prompting of the Holy Spirit and drew inspiration from the life of David. They came from a people for whom the whole of life included God - all being referred to him, for him and under his direction and care. Inevitably, they were strongly influenced by the views and spiritual development of their author. For this reason we may frequently not feel at one with particular sentiments expressed. They embrace all human experience, just as it is, and so provide an ideal vehicle for placing the whole of life, throughout time and space, before God as an offering. This is the way we pray the Psalms rather than by saying the words as our own though often we can do that too. Always, we offer someone’s/everyone’s sentiments: turmoil, experience, thanksgiving, misgivings, requests, anguish, praise, contrition, sense of outrage, desire for revenge, desire for God because those things are the realities of people’s lives and understanding. We set all before God just as we should offer ourselves – ‘warts and all’ – with nothing held back, to be ‘redeemed’ for his purpose and glory, and for the healing needed.

These are prayers of the human race with all its imperfections, a race of which Christ himself, though perfect,¹ was a member. This makes the Psalms ideal for liturgical worship. Jesus himself used them in the synagogue. Some of the Psalms using idealistic terms about a king ‘begotten by God and to whom all people are subject’² were later taken as referring to the coming Messiah. The pilgrims’ hymns were often

¹ Cf. Heb 4.15 ‘For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathise with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested [or ‘tempted’] as we are, yet without sin.’

² Ps 2.7 – Matt 3.17; Acts 13.33; Heb 1.5; 5.5; II Pet 1.17

more meaningfully understood in this way and are often quoted in the New Testament. Throughout time, Jesus prays with the people of God, raising their prayer to infinite value in him.

To Conclude [with a brief pause afterwards to *reflect*]

O wonderful 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!¹

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Scripture texts for prayer and study

I Sam 1.9-20 [Hannah prays for a child – her prayer is answered: Samuel]

I Sam 2.1-10 [Hannah's prayer of praise and thanksgiving]

Lk. 1:46-56 [The Magnificat]²

I Chron 29.10-19 [David gives praise to God in presence of whole assembly]

Matt 26.26-29 [Institution of Eucharist]

Lk 24.13-35 [Emmaus]

John 6. 51-63 [Bread of Life];

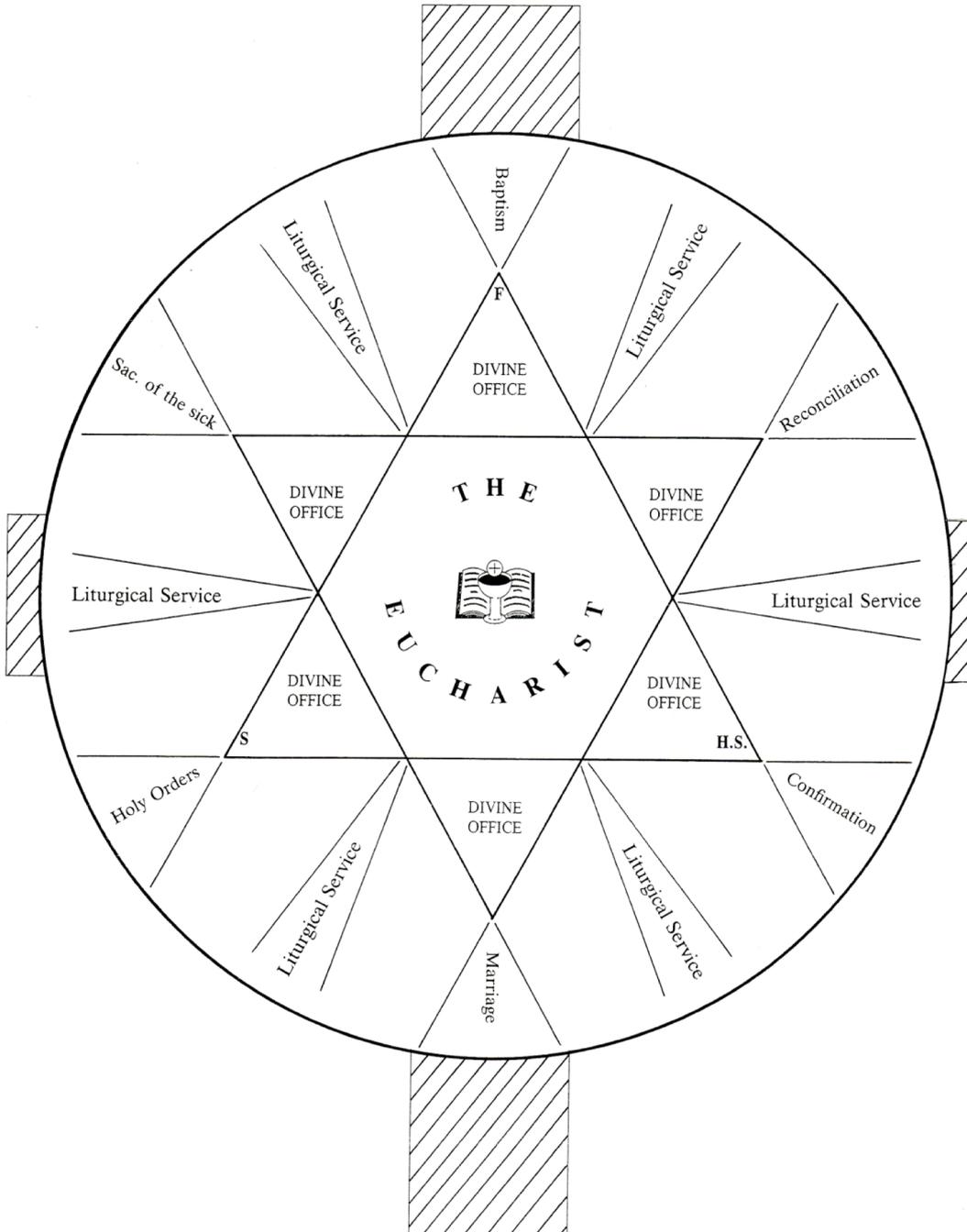
John 17.1-26 [Jesus' priestly prayer.

The liturgical celebration follows the LITURGY chart and its key.

¹ Letter to the Entire Order, 27 [in *Francis & Clare: the complete works*, p 58]

² NB biblical references cited from Gen, I Sam, Psalms

LITURGY



LITURGY

Key to the above chart.



The circle can be seen as representing the whole world, the whole of time or a day.



The triangle represents the Blessed Trinity, F-Father, S-Son, H.S.-Holy Spirit.



The star represents Christ the light of the world and the Mystical Body of Christ, the Church. It is also the Star of David – a reminder that the Jewish people were chosen and prepared for the coming of the Messiah of the line of David. In their race the foundations of the Church and its liturgy were laid in Old Testament times. Psalms feature strongly in Jewish liturgy and also in ours, especially in the Divine Office. The various parts of the star represent the Church reaching out, especially here, in worship throughout the world, throughout time and throughout the day. This is its family prayer in various forms of public worship suited to each occasion and which we call the liturgy.



The central hexagon represents the Eucharist, the highest point of the liturgy and the heart of Christian life. In the middle are symbols of the Word as spoken in Scripture and made present in the Blessed Sacrament. Both nourish us, and through us the world is nourished.

So Jesus is represented here as the Word, the Bread of Life and the Light of the World.



The points of the star are extensions of the Eucharist in the Divine Office sung/recited throughout the world, the day and for all time.



Rays of light from the points of the star are other sacraments marking important events in our lives and reminding us that they are not just for personal benefit but a gift to the world through us. The Eucharist at the centre completes the total of seven.



Other rays represent other liturgical services/ceremonies making public worship of what we do in Christ, sanctifying it and us and reaching out in effectiveness beyond the occasion and those involved in it. Through the Word of God and the signs and symbols used, all liturgical ceremonies educate us about the things of God and the way he works in each of us and in the world as a whole. We are fed and empowered, individually and as a body, so that the Word of God comes alive in us and we are reborn, grow and give life. The remaining space represents the world outside the

Church, and the rest of life, activity and personal prayer, which are given life directly or indirectly through the Eucharist, and all liturgical extensions of it.



Rays not only shine out but, like the inward angle of the star, point back to the centre, drawing all things into the worship of the Eucharist and offering them through, with and in Jesus Christ to the Father by the power of the Holy Spirit. Since the whole of life is caught up into the liturgy and so into the Eucharist, all our activities are redeemed. They reach out like the Liturgy itself as part of that great life-giving prayer made possible through Christ and offered with him in his Mystical Body.



One sign remains, the cross on which the symbol of the world through time, and all represented within it, is mounted. Life is won through great sacrifice, and the resurrection through the cross.

It is a sign of love beyond measure, a sign made present in the Church, at work and at prayer, for all people and for the glory of God. The cross of our salvation represents the pains, trials and sacrifices of life offered in Christ's Body.

In all the symbols we see Jesus Christ the Redeemer – the Resurrection and the Life.

'The Eucharist and Liturgy'

LITURGICAL SERVICE

[Celebrated at the next fraternity meeting...]

Focus: A crucifix and candles [unlit]

Also required for presentation: A book that contains part of the Liturgy of the Hours

Minister:

[while the candles are being lit] + In the name of the Father...

All:

'All nations shall come and adore you and glorify your name, O Lord'

Reading: Acts 2.46 -47a

Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.

Minister:

In keeping with the desire of our Holy Father Francis, Secular Franciscans commit themselves to 'join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms approved by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.' [Rule 8] As a sign of your intention to do so with the people of God, I invite you to take this book and place it before the crucifix.

Sponsor: [hands the book to the Enquirer(s)]

Enquirer(s) [as they place the book before the crucifix]:

'O Lord, open my lips and my mouth shall declare your praise'¹

All:

Lord teach us to pray. May our prayer unite us to each other and to you and fill us with your Spirit. May it draw all people to you, to the glory of God the Father.

[If possible, say the appropriate Hour of the Office together, or the Office of the Passion in the Handbook, p 128. Alternatively, say the Our Father, Hail Mary and glory be... and end with the closing prayer of the meeting.]

¹ Ps. 51:15



Growing in Love

6. Following the Example of St Francis of Assisi

Seeking to encounter the living and active person of Christ in brothers and sisters. Rule 5

Create a focal point



Opening Prayer

Leader: With you is wisdom – send her forth from the holy heavens,

R: That I may learn what is pleasing to you.¹

Scripture: John 15.1-2, 4, 9, and 12

I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.

Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me.

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

- Ponder briefly on what you have just heard and make your own silent response
- Conclude with ‘Glory be...’

St Francis

‘He gleamed like a shining star in the darkness of the night and like the morning spread over the darkness...The former dryness was put to rout and a crop sprang up quickly in the untilled field. Even the uncultivated vine began to produce buds with a sweet smell for the Lord and when it had produced flowers of sweetness, it brought forth equally the fruit of honour and respectability. Thanks and the voice of praise resounded everywhere, as many...aspired to love and reverence for their Creator.

‘Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration, began to come to St Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership. All of these the holy one of God, like a fertile stream of heavenly grace,

¹ See Wis. 9 v 9 and 10

watered with showers of gifts and he adorned the field of their hearts with flowers of perfection...To all he gave a norm of life...' [IC37]

'For set on fire by the fervour of his preaching, a great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance according to the rule which they received from the man of God. Christ's servant decided to name this way of life the '**Order of Brothers of Penance**'. As the road of penance is common to all who are striving toward heaven, so this way of life admits clerics and lay, virgins and married of both sexes. How meritorious it is before God is clear from the numerous miracles performed by some of its members.' [LM 4]

- Both of these passages are from early documents. Share what stands out for you in them. If there is anything that speaks to you personally how do you feel called to respond?

Francis called himself and his brothers the lesser brothers [Friars Minor from the Italian]. These became known as the 'First Order'. Later disagreement over reforms resulted in the three branches we know today – the Order of Friars Minor [OFM], Order of Friars Minor Conventual [OFM Conv] and Order of Friars Minor capuchin [OFM Cap]. Each has its own emphasis and character whilst sharing the one Franciscan Charism.



St Clare of Assisi also wished to live by the same ideals as St Francis and with his help founded what we now know as the Second Order, the Poor Clares.

Secular Brothers and Sisters of Penance, lay and clergy, later became known collectively as the Third Order of St Francis. From time to time groups within the Order, having committed themselves to particular works, sought the backing of religious life and formed themselves into religious communities. Collectively they became known as the 'Third Order Regular' [TOR]. To stress the importance of the specialised vocation of those who give their lives through service to God in temporal affairs, the Third Order Secular is now called the Secular Franciscan Order [OFS from the Latin *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*], an Order in its own right. It is a body within the Church and an instrument of it. It is an institute within the Church having its own distinctive characteristics and is made up of fraternities or communities at different levels – local, regional, national and international. It is structured and governs itself according to the Code of Canon Law and has its own Rule of life, general Constitutions and particular Statutes approved by the Church. In response to a call of the Spirit and by public Profession members 'pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of St Francis by means of this Rule.' [Const., art 1, 3] These are characteristics of an Order. Some have pointed to the fact that a vow is a solemn promise [a 'pledge'] and our way of life incorporates the ideals of poverty, chastity and obedience so why do we not refer to 'taking vows'? It is chiefly because there is a clear distinction between the solemn promise that we make and the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience characteristic of a religious Order. Nor do we live together in community or wear a habit. **Ours is a Secular Order and our place of mission is among and involved in the temporal affairs of the world.**

All branches of the Franciscan family, in their own fields of operation, are equally involved in the life and mission of the Church. Each is as important as the others and the role of the Franciscan family can only be fulfilled properly with the full involvement of each. We aim to keep alive the spirit and ideals of St Francis by our faithfulness in observing the Gospel after his example. For Secular Franciscans, this is fostered in our fraternity life, by prayer, study, dialogue and apostolic activity according to the Franciscan spirit. Members are united by a common bond, as are the members of a family. Within this 'family' we should develop a very special relationship with each other. It is here that we must learn to recognize Jesus present to us in the other and become increasingly aware of Christ within ourselves so that we love them with his love. No one can deny that it is a challenging aim but this is how we are called to be with our brothers and sisters in the Church and from here go out to others.

Francis knew intellectually that whatever he did for the least of persons he was doing for Christ¹ but it was only when he acted on it wholeheartedly and embraced the leper that he felt in the depths of his being the experience of having embraced his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Nothing would be the same again. His eyes were opened and his heart was full of joy. Not only did he realize the dignity of each person but recognized it in one at the bottom of the social pile, he had encountered Christ. Driven by the desire to be with his Lord, especially in the poor and vulnerable where he was most overlooked and rejected, he wanted to be one of them. It was as if he had met the most beautiful of women who led him to the Lord's dwelling place and he was smitten with desire for her as his constant companion. He called her Lady Poverty and remained faithful to her for the rest of his life.

Francis also noticed how unencumbered the poor were by possessions and the need to acquire them and protect them. There were also free from such things as having the right image or status in society. He wanted the freedom that would enable him to give all his heart, soul and energy to loving and serving 'the poor crucified one'.

Every follower of St Francis of Assisi aspires to live by this ideal. Does that mean that we must give away our possessions and live with the poor as he did? Of course not: that was his calling. Ours requires that we use what we have in the execution of our responsibilities to our families, in our work, in our communities, and, as far as we can to address the needs of the world. We are the 'stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children'. [Rule 11] It is a trait of *our Franciscan poverty* that we use possessions responsibly, creatively and generously – with particular attention to the welfare of the poor. By exercising restraint with regard to acquiring possessions and in what we retain for ourselves we have more for aiding those who have little. Through our relationship with those we meet, are served by, and serve, we learn to recognize Jesus in the other. For he is to be found equally in those close to us and in the most unattractive, dirty, smelly and antisocial of individuals who are the lepers for us. What a blessing, if in time, we can rejoice at finding him especially in such as these.

¹ Cf. Matt 25.40 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

All of this practical side of our way of life requires a strong life of prayer and an awareness of Christ in oneself. Since our ability to love others is closely allied to our ability to love ourselves, in prayer [particularly] we need to encounter the poverty, the vulnerability and the leper within us – and embrace them. ¹

Arrange meeting to look over the profession ceremony and make any plans. If not already arranged it is time to invite any relatives and friends you wish to attend.

Close with prayer

BETWEEN MEETINGS

Scripture for study and prayer

Matt 19.16-22 [rich young man]

John 3.3-8 [being born again];

John 20.19-20 [doors closed for fear – Peace be with you!]

Phil 3.17 [united in a rule of life]

Activity

- Talk over with your Formator [and others] the next step for you, and how you feel about it. If all are agreed and it is your wish to be admitted as a Candidate for Profession then you will need to look over the ceremony.
- Reflect on what you have discovered on your journey this far and talk with God about your way ahead. Then rest with him in trusting silence.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary (July 7, 1207 – November 17, 1231)

Reflection by Anne Mulqueen, OFS

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On November 17th, the Church celebrates the feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of the Secular Franciscan Order. For both men and women of the 21st Century, she continues to be a relevant model of sanctity. Although St. Elizabeth lived in the 13th Century, the challenges she faced are all too familiar to many of us today.

For reasons beyond her control—at the age of four—Elizabeth was sent away by her parents to live in the court of the Landgrave Herman I of Thuringia. In spite of the materialism of the court and the wealth of her surroundings, the child Elizabeth grew in holiness with an inclination towards prayer and self-mortification. Because of these religious impulses, Elizabeth suffered the hostility of the more self-indulgent members of the Court. Her piety was a rebuke to their way of life.

St. Elizabeth married young and, with her husband Ludwig, gave birth to three children. Blessedly, their marriage was a union of love; however, Elizabeth was not immune from tragedy. Her third child, Gertrude, was born after Ludwig died in Otranto while waiting to join the crusading army of Frederick II. Elizabeth was only

¹ Cf. Initial Formation [Enquirer], in folder 5) St Francis ‘Wolf without, Leper within’

20 years old, and a single mother of three. In anguish, St. Elizabeth, a widow at the age of 20, cries out, “The world with all its joys is now dead to me.” But Elizabeth’s hardships were not over. One of her servants claims her brother-in-law, the regent for her five-year-old son, drove her out of the castle into the cold of winter. If that weren’t enough distress, her children were taken from her to be cared for elsewhere. Some claim Elizabeth left voluntarily for moral reasons, yet the fact remains that Elizabeth was now a widow, homeless, and without her children. Would anyone blame Elizabeth if she simply took the small sum of money she received from her dowry, remarried as her uncle wished, and lived happily in comfort? Instead, Elizabeth was intent on following the leading of the Lord. She vowed never to re-marry and devoted herself to the care of the sick, especially those with the most horrendous diseases.

Elizabeth chose to renounce privilege in favour of being poor with the poor. We, too, face circumstances over which we have no control, and we, too, have to make choices in line with the Gospel and the will of God for our lives.

How many have had childhoods abruptly changed by circumstances beyond their control and yet continue to have faith in Christ?

How many have loved and lost their spouses and yet find comfort in the love of God?

How many have children ripped from their arms through misfortune or death and yet remain firm in hope in Christ?

How many suffer humiliation because they will not compromise where God is concerned?

How many in the face of hardship continue to follow the poor and crucified Christ?

In answer to these questions:

All, who like Elizabeth of Hungary, have a deep and abiding relationship with God;
All, who like Elizabeth of Hungary, believe in a sense of justice and equality for all God’s creatures;

All, who like Elizabeth of Hungary, find the answer to life’s hardships by giving themselves to God’s providence in joy and wonder;

All, who like Elizabeth of Hungary, find their strength to go on by following Christ in the manner of St. Francis of Assisi.

