



Minister's Insights

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Vital Reciprocity

Embracing our way of life will give birth to authentic Vital Reciprocity!

A well-known psychologist stated that “Any commitment that is authentic has two elements.” First element: You are half sure, not knowing exactly how totally your commitment will affect your life. Second element: You are entering this commitment wholeheartedly, entirely and unconditionally. Living a commitment will involve six stages, according to Richard T. Knowles in his book Human Development and Human Possibility: Erickson in the Light of Heidegger, pp 130-137.

The first stage is the **Call**. This is a response to an invitation. We are called to come out of our preoccupations and concerns. For example: your call to serve as a Secular Franciscan, a priest or a married person, as a brother, or friar. The second stage is the **Declaration**. The declaration is the exchange of vows. For example: Profession for a Secular Franciscan, ordination for a priest, wedding vows in marriage. Now, we feel that our commitment is permanent. We are almost positive that we will keep this commitment without sacrifices. The third stage is **Involvement**. We, now, find that the commitment involves more than what we thought it would. For example: You might be saying, “If I knew then what I know now, maybe I wouldn’t have accepted this responsibility to serve in this capacity.” The

fourth stage is **Purpose and Meaning**. At this stage there is an increased sense of purpose and meaning to the commitment. For example: You realize, at this very moment, that you must walk your talk. The fifth stage is the **Struggle**. There is a real sense of personal struggle. You doubt the commitment and feel like you are losing control. For example: your struggles in the Order, crisis facing our religious today, family issues, etc. All commitments involve sacrifice, suffering, self-discipline, and loss of control.

Whoever loves father or mother, son or daughter, more than me is not worthy of me. He who will not take up his cross and come after me is not worthy of me.

Matt. 10: 37-38

Every commitment will take you to a place where you would rather not go.

I tell you solemnly: as a young man you fastened your belt and went about as you pleased; but when you are older you will stretch out your hands, and another will tie you fast and carry you off against your will. John 21:18

The sixth stage is **Divine Identity**. Those who remain faithful will experience feelings of satisfaction, worthiness, a sense of fit with life. **Commitment is no longer what I do but rather who I am.** Those who remain faithful to our Lord will have the strength to bear witness, talents beyond reach, wisdom above and beyond and will be able to experience unconditional love.

This Divine Identity is to see through the eyes of Christ, to hear as He would hear us, to touch as He would touch us and to speak as He would speak to us. This is the identity that Christ had intended for all of us.

What does this way of life have to do with our Franciscan brothers and sisters?

We are all embracing the same charism, the same Gospel, the same Lord, the same Francis and Clare!

Can we contribute to each other's spiritual growth? The answer is an emphatic YES!

Recently, I was asked to present to the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants. In preparing for my presentation, I decided to do a random sampling with the Local Ministers, Regional Ministers, National level and other leaders on the question given to me to respond to by the CNSA.

“Is what the Spiritual Assistants do with and for you (the SFOs) contributing to your own - and their own - spiritual growth? If not, what can we do?” The SFOs who had been surveyed answered the question differently at different levels. The results indicated that at the local level and regional level, most of the ministers believe that Spiritual Assistants contribute to their (SFO's) spiritual growth but generally denied that they contributed significantly to the spiritual growth of the Spiritual Assistant. On the national level, they were more positive about their contribution.

Perhaps, we need to secure a few opinions from our religious brothers and sisters. Let's examine the concept of **“Vital Reciprocity.”**

What is meant by **“Vital Reciprocity?”**
According to **Lester Bach, OFM Cap,**

“One definition of ‘vital’ is *essential to life*. One definition of ‘reciprocity’ is *mutual exchange*. Hence, when we speak of *a vital reciprocity* between the First Order/TOR and the SFO we are speaking about a *mutual exchange* that is *essential to the life* of the whole Franciscan family. Our Franciscan family, through a common *mutual exchange*, helps promote what is *essential to the life* of our Franciscan charism. The implications show themselves in the various ways our documents require this mutual relationship.”

Benet A. Fonck, OFM states, “Speaking as a friar who worked with the Seculars for 32 years, here is how my Franciscan spirituality has been enhanced:

1) The Seculars have given me time and time again an authentic, vivid, and credible witness to true prayer, simple living, and oneness with the Church.

2) The Seculars have given me an expanded, but nonetheless real, experience of ‘life in fraternity’ and ‘fraternity in mission.’

3) The Seculars have provided for me, time and time again, a lived experience of unity of the Franciscan charism: the complementarity between religious and seculars and between clergy and laity, the collaboration between all parts of the Family to make the charism of Francis and Clare present and operative in the Church, the challenge of thinking and doing ‘outside the box’ regarding the understanding and application of the charism and its ensuing spirituality.

4) The Seculars have given me the opportunity for deep appreciation for the secular/lay vocation in the Church and for the great holiness of those called to this way of life; this appreciation leads to hearing/seeing my own story in the story of others; such listening leads to modeling; such modeling moves me toward deeper holiness myself.”

According to **Richard Trezza, OFM**, “It’s time to take ‘Vital Reciprocity’, ‘Mutual Symbiosis’ and ‘Dynamic Interaction’ out of the dustbin of cutesy and clever phrases and allow them to breathe the new life they were meant to breathe into the Franciscan movement of this millennium.”

In a recent article, *The Franciscan Family, “Life-giving union with each other” in the vision of the Poor Clare Sisters*, **Sr. Antonella Perugini** states that “I am profoundly convinced that what unites us is quantitatively and qualitatively much more than what distinguishes us from one another; but it is, nevertheless, true that the distinctions do exist and, in their complementing, constitute a reciprocal richness and contributes to making complete and, thus, more authentic, the face of Franciscanism.”

Who is in denial...not our religious brothers and sisters!!!!!!!