

# FRANCISCAN LIVING

## To Act Like Francis

By Francine Gikow, SFO

*“Look good man, what do you think about this fellow [an unworthy priest] who has care for this parish? He keeps a concubine, and it is clear to all that he is guilty of many sins. Can such a man administer or do anything which is not tainted?”<sup>1</sup>*

With this question, a man with an “agenda” confronted Francis about his opinion.

How do you think you would respond? How could you act like Francis did? How can we integrate our Franciscan ideals with the real world of messy circumstances and act, while upholding our ethics, with compassion and love?

Carolyn Towne, OFS, in this summer’s Confab, gave us some Franciscan action steps to guide our response by her P\_E\_A\_C\_E mnemonic. (Peace is for prayer, E is for empathy, A is for active listening, C is for compassion and E is for evangelical love.)

Note: everything begins with prayer! Francis knew that without prayer, he could not respond to others with a loving heart. As Jean Moore, FSPA, states in her recent article in *The Chord*, “...ensure that the value and acceptance of prayer and contemplation are inherently part of the process.”<sup>2</sup> Empathy, active listening, compassion and evangelical love express the love of God, which we find in prayer. Without deep and ongoing prayer, we cannot be transformed into someone reflecting God’s love to others. Only then can we integrate it into action.

Sometimes we find ourselves responding to situations like Francis’ in comfortable, familiar but definitely not so Franciscan ways! We close the door to truly transforming responses if we don’t pray and think about how we can respond consistently with our Franciscan values

But what should we do when people confront us with an “agenda” designed to trap us? Jean Moore offers us some ideas on how we can identify Franciscan-centered responses by analyzing how our ethical approaches make a difference in what we do. She iden-

tifies four aspects of how we can make ethical decisions<sup>3</sup>. The first is our search for **Truth**. In other words, what do we think is really going on here? What is the overall context and history? Secondly, we look at the possible **Consequences**, i.e., who is going to be affected and how? What are the negatives and positives? Thirdly is **Fairness**. What is fair and just? Is there equality and consistency? Finally, what is the **Character** of the situation? In other words, what are the people’s motivations, character traits (or both) in this situation? By looking at these aspects of an ethical decision we can prevent an automatic non-Franciscan reaction to a situation.

With prayer and ethical pondering, we are open to learn a new habit of looking at all the options and to carefully consider how to respond. Through prayer, we learn an interior sensitivity to these four ethical considerations, which help us in our response. If we do all this with empathy, active listening, compassion and evangelical love, then we can act like Francis did. After a while, this habit of prayer permeates who we are and what we, do thereby changing our responses. We are transformed by the Holy Spirit and give birth to Him in the world!

So how did Francis respond to the person who was trying to trick him into betraying the office of the priesthood? Francis, *“realizing the evil intent of the heretic, went up to the priest in the presence of all the parishioners, knelt down before him and said: “I do not know whether these hands are such as this man says they are. But even if they were, I know that they can in no way lessen the power and the efficacy of the sacraments of God. These hands remain the means through which many of God’s benefits and graces flow to the people. That is why I kiss them, out of respect for the things they administer and out of reverence for Him by whose authority they do so. Having said this he knelt down in front of that priest and kissed his hands, to the confusion of the heretics and their adherents who were present.”<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>1</sup> Stephen of Bourbon, “Dominican Hagiography” in FA/ED II: The Saint. 788.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Moore, FSPA “A Process for Integrating Franciscan Values into Life” *The Cord*. Vol.63 #3.248.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Moore, 238.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen of Bourbon, 788.