



CNSA

News & Views

Franciscan Life in the 21st Century
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Our Franciscan vision/spirit is needed in a world torn apart by violence of various kinds. Franciscans share gospel-oriented lives and stories of activities that spring from the OFS Rule, *especially their personal daily conversion* stories (Rule #7).

OUR FRANCISCAN LIFE



The 21st century brought some predictions of gloom and doom that wandered around seeking a home. I hope they didn't find a home with Franciscans. Franciscans enter this century seeking *personal conversion*, living a life filled with service, hope and joy.

It is about 788 years since the death of St. Francis on October 3, 1226. Throughout the centuries Francis' spirit sought to bring peace and reconciliation to conflicts in the Church; to wars among nations; to attempts at genocide and the holocaust; to ethnic cleansings; and to dealing with violence and the fear it produces. The violence of warfare and civil unrest call Franciscans to push for a spirit of dialogue, attempting to *bring people together through dialogue* (which seeks understanding and works to build relationships).

Our Franciscan profession, for example, calls us to work together for peace - *"unceasingly"* (OFS Rule #19); *to strive to purify our hearts from every tendency and yearning for possessions and power* (OFS Rule #11); *with a gentle and courteous spirit to accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ* (OFS Rule #13) etc. The OFS Rule requires us to *embrace personal conversion* on a daily basis (OFS Rule #7). People have a right to expect us to practice what we profess! We express the OFS Rule by the way we live. We are committed to proclaim the Franciscan spirit each day. We prayerfully rely on the inner strength that comes from the Holy Spirit. While others may lose hope, the Holy Spirit prompts us to personal conversion, implementing the spirit of hope and joy in daily life.

Gospel values and the *person of Christ* are focal goals for us. We model a gospel spirit in a frustrating world, enabling our creative and prophetic insights to blossom. People may question whether we can actually live this vision of a gospel life. Our lives should answer that question! Franciscan ideals, *gospel-oriented and Christ-centered*, influence people (Catholic and non-catholic alike) with a visible example of Franciscan life. As we fulfill our profession, we give a model of commitment to implementing gospel values.



Francis and Clare faced opposition and mis-understanding when living their ideals. Their lives and words are a model for us. The Church gives us the OFS Rule which expresses the way in which we fulfill God's will. We give flesh to gospel ideals. Grounded in the Gospel and Christ, we imitate Francis and Clare. We bring insights, liveliness and joy to a tired world and Church.

So what's the point? Franciscans push ahead in the Church and society with a spirit that is less condemning and more constructive. Our task is to renew the Church and society by providing gospel alternatives to problems in the Church and society. Condemnations and negative criticism are not too

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HELPS & HINTS

Elections are important happenings. Some people in the OFS may be hesitant about being nominated for office.

If you are competent (Gifted by the Trinity) for an office, you are called to use those gifts. Using them as a servant leader (in some form) is an OFS expectation. Even if not elected to a particular office, the gifts need to find expression in fraternity life. Your gifts are at the service of the fraternity! Don't let the challenge deter you!

Aging has needs that change during life. Seculars do not escape those needs. Getting older makes a difference and the Holy Spirit inspires us to do things within our ability. *Do what is possible!*

For younger people: *Do what is possible in collaboration with others Franciscans.*

Too often I looked at being relevant, popular, and powerful as ingredients of an effective ministry. The truth, however, is that these are not vocations but temptations. Jesus asks: "Do you love me?" Jesus sends us out to be shepherds, and Jesus promises a life in which we increasingly have to stretch out our hands and be led to places where we would rather not go. He asks us to move from a concern for relevance to a life of prayer, from worries about popularity to communal and mutual ministry, and from a leadership built on power to a leadership in which we critically discern where God is leading us and our people.

In the Name of Jesus - Henri Nouwen

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helpful. We use critique and dialogue in ways that neither diminish friendships nor destroy relationships with people who may disagree with us. We move into uncharted waters without making fun of people who choose not to walk this way. We are not passive spectators in everyday life.



We do not ignore the Gospel because it offers "hard sayings." We are not fear-mongers, fearful of ideas that may conflict with our personal interpretations of life and faith. Fear tends to paralyze our ability to be creative. We do not ignore evil. But at the same time we do not give it power to hinder our ability to live a gospel and Spirit-powered life.

It is our responsibility to LIVE the Gospel, not just talk about it. We are not naive. We will not change everything in a hurry. But we will persist in bringing love-filled efforts to our lives *which will often require personal conversion*. We receive personal gifts from the Trinity. Whatever we receive freely from the Trinity we offer freely to others. We speak a 21st century language with a Franciscan brogue. Human needs remain consistent though situations may differ. Jesus' example is the mirror for developing Franciscan attitudes and actions. Our common sharing supports us in living a love-directed life.

We bring hope, not despair or fear. We bring imagination, not mental roadblocks. We offer compassion rather than indifference to human need. We recognize the wonder of scientific and technical discoveries but do not make them a substitute for the guidance of the Trinity. We work for social justice rather than fearing how people will respond to our ministries of peace and justice. Sharing our time, treasures and talents enables us bring human dignity to people. Our goal is not to "keep up with the Joneses" nor "beat out" someone in a spirit of competition. Our spirit of sharing reflects a Gospel-spirit. Instead of passive fraternity gatherings, we share stories and insights that offer refreshing ways to engage in Franciscan living. *We recognize the need for regular personal conversion* and offer community support for people who struggle with personal conversion. The Trinity is our inner guide.



We choose not to add to life's problems by arrogance or the presumption that our ideas are the only ones that make sense. We develop heartfelt ways to deal with life issues. Our community is known by how well we love one another. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has never mastered it." (John 1:5) We bring light and friendship to people; we bring understanding and ways of learning; we bring compassion and forgiveness. Franciscan formation/conversion continues until Sister Death calls us to our resurrection to new life. Franciscan profession requires us to embrace ways that bring peace and joy to people. Our gospel-light will shine before people and give glory to the Trinity. To act otherwise diminishes our ability to do God's will through personal faithfulness to the OFS way of life.

After 788 years of Franciscan history we continue to be prophetic and creative in living the OFS Rule.

The Rule offers a model for bringing joy, sensitivity, compassion, peace, forgiveness, caring, justice, reconciliation, prayerfulness and service to people.

We embrace opportunities that help us bring a Franciscan flavor to our Church and the world.

To those who follow us we will pass on a life of Franciscan integrity that continues to bring light to people as did Francis and Clare. *Amen.*

The Trinity calls us to share energy and activity that reflects the Franciscan spirit. People of a fraternity-community help us deal with conversion issues. *Conversion is a regular expectation for Franciscans.* The Church gave us the OFS Rule to guide us in the way we accomplish God's will in daily life.

What makes a Franciscan gathering click?



Probably a lot of things. Variety is one of them. The "same old, same old" will obviously not stimulate the heart. Four elements need to be considered. But each one need not use the same amount of time at each gathering. *Prayer, ongoing formation, business, and socializing* are the generic needs. The time spent on each element can differ at each gathering.

Prayer includes contemplative time. The same prayers each time do not always open everyone to intimacy with the Trinity. *A variety of prayerful forms* can open the door to different ways to pray.

Ongoing formation deals with issues in the Church, the OFS, and the world. To dialogue on how to address them is a healthy learning experience. Sharing stories that apply the OFS Rule to daily life can present fresh ways to "be Franciscan." Inter-action brings us to the reality that expresses our Franciscan life.

The council can share **business issues** from local council meetings as well as information from higher councils. Informing members keeps them *in the loop* of our world-wide fraternal life. (Keep it brief and to the point!)

Enjoy the **social** - which can occasionally fill a whole gathering with joyful community time. We need one another's support and shared joy!