



# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



## HONORING YOUR SACRED THREE

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I have been a professed Secular Franciscan for nearly 15 years, and yet I still need ongoing formation, continuing education. I am not done yet. This is not just as a Secular Franciscan, but also as a human who lives and moves and have my being in Christ. Our Holy Rule states that we must conform our thoughts and deeds to those of Christ; but because of human frailty, we must renew our minds and hearts daily (cf. Article 7). Personally, I have not met anyone who knows everything there is to know or who has arrived. I have found that the more one learns, the more you realize all that one doesn't know.

Ongoing formation is vital to us as Secular Franciscans. I believe it to be more vital than initial formation. When we heed the call from the Holy Spirit to pursue this way of life, we know we are new and need to learn all we can. So we take the formation "classes" and learn all about Saints Francis and Clare and the gospel life. Then after a couple of years of these classes, we are professed. But profession does not equal graduation. It is not the end of formation, of learning the gospel life. It is a new beginning; a new season of formation and learning.

When we enter into a new season of life, we need to learn how to navigate that new season. We become different with each passing season, and the way we got through life in the past season won't necessarily work in the new one. Having worked with the dying and the bereaved, we know all too well that the next season will not act like the one that just passed. It will be totally different. But the hardest part of it is that everything will look very similar or the same as before. This similarity will cause us to behave the same as before. Soon we will feel strange in this new existence – like wearing shoes on the wrong foot. They are our shoes and they do fit, but something is not quite right. We need to adjust your way of being.

So now we have a baptismal certificate, a confirmation certificate and a piece of paper that says

you are a professed Secular Franciscan — three pieces of paper that we tend to bury in a drawer or in a box of other important papers. We know they are there, but out of sight often means out of mind. Those three sacred pieces of paper say that we are members of a very elite family with a very specific call. We get a degree or a doctorate and we proudly display that piece of paper in a frame on a wall for all to see and admire. Yet our sacred three remain in the drawer – forgotten and ignored.

Okay, so what does all this have to do with peace and justice? Everything! Ignoring those sacred pieces of paper tends to give way to ignoring the call to the gospel life. Those three pieces of paper explicitly say that we will follow the nonviolent and compassionate Jesus. One definition of *follow* is "to be or act in accordance with." Most of us have no problem worshipping Jesus. We are praying warriors, and that is wonderful. But Jesus never told us to worship him; he did tell us to *follow* him. Having those sacred three pieces of paper means that we are following; and our following becomes our worship. One aspect of following Jesus is to become like Jesus. To become like Jesus means we are willing to live the gospel life, working for peace and justice. It means obeying the call the Holy Spirit has placed deep within us to live a compassionate, nonviolent life.

So, here is your challenge (if you choose to accept it): Go and dig out your sacred three pieces of paper: your baptismal, confirmation and profession certificates. Place them on a table in front of you. Contemplate the meaning of those three pieces of paper. Ask the Holy Spirit to speak to your heart. Based on what the Holy Spirit speaks to your heart, ask what are you to do for the work of justice in the Kingdom of God. Then go and do it! And share your stories with me at [ctownes26@hotmail.com](mailto:ctownes26@hotmail.com).

May the Lord give you His peace.