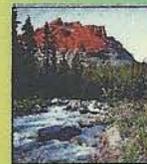


News Views

Franciscan life in the 21st Century

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Meandering through Franciscan ideas

MEANDERING

Sixty five years as a Capuchin-Franciscan helps me to discover fresh ways to learn about living a Franciscan life in this interesting, frightening, and frustrating 21st century. It is a challenge for all of us who use the Gospel as a primary source for making choices in life. I'll share a few ideas that invite "conversion" in my life. I invite you to "meander" with me, and take time to see how you would personally, or as a fraternity, respond to modern situations with a Franciscan spirit.



Some meanderings take us into issues that influence many peoples' lives. Some will touch your life, inviting an exploration and evaluation of your decision-making process. Many events touch people who, in a gospel sense, are "neighbors" whom we are called to love. People may have little control in many events. How do Franciscans deal with such situations? Are we able to offer quick solutions? Or does it take time and patience to design a program that makes a difference? What contribution can you and the fraternity offer?
So, meandering we go:

Dealing with violence:

1. Some areas in our world face police and citizen violence, or the rejection of individuals, immigrants or other groups, often with uncertain information about the threat these people supposedly pose. Serious injustice or even death can be part of these situations. Lots of comments from public figures often follow.

How does a Franciscan respond as "neighbor" to these people? How could violence be avoided? Is racial prejudice involved? How do you respond to the "experts" who offer solutions? Do you analyze their "solutions" to see the values on which their solutions are based? Do you understand the attitudes of the involved people? What does our Franciscan spirit require of us? Does your response radiate from a gospel source?

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Dialogue at fraternity gatherings might help Franciscans recognize that we have a multitude of different ideas. What is the source of your feelings? Will they contribute to solutions or make the violent situation worse than before? In reality, what is required by our Franciscan spirit? How will you come to reasonable, gospel-oriented decision(s) as a community? What hinders a good solution? What can be done? How long will it take?

2. International violence is a serious breach in the implementation of human rights. Franciscans support actions that respect human rights, but it will take time to deal with all the ethnic, tribal, cultural, national, religious, and financial attitudes and interests within countries and among groups and individuals around the world!

What can we do beyond fervent prayer? All of these people are God's people. The differences and needs are often contradictory, even among Franciscans. We need true knowledge about the realities that are involved. Not everything proclaimed in the media is the whole truth. Sometimes it is quite the opposite.

Franciscans avoid violence and invest in embracing and expressing the open-hearted spirit of St. Francis. Personal experiences may confront you with many situations of violence - physical, vocal, or the "silent treatment." It happens in family life, in parishes, and in social groups around the world. In dealing with violence we search for effective and realistic solutions. Or we may choose to support people who offer good ideas. Serious, prayerful and practical dialogue is part of the Franciscan calling to be *instruments of peace*. For motivation, reflect together on *Article 19* of the OFS Rule. The following words of St. Francis illustrate the requirement of mercy.

I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, his servant and yours; that there is not any brother in the world who would have sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after he looked into your eyes, would depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before

your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord; and always be merciful with brothers such as these.

*A Letter to a Minister - Francis of Assisi - the Saint
Vol 1- Page 97- 98*

These elements of a Franciscan spirit invite us to show mercy in marital arguments, in neighborhood disputes, in religious or parish conflicts, in disputes in fraternity life, or in governmental disagreements at all levels. Choosing violence as a solution can create future problems in achieving peace. It can seem to be the "simplest" way to take care of enemies. Get rid of (kill? deport? separate from?) the present enemies! Doing so might create an atmosphere for future problems. Whether it shows a gospel spirit is quite another question.

Dealing with environmental issues

Mis-understandings about environmental issues, including climate change, abound. People whose investments are threatened by responsible environmental action, may face a loss of income, plus a need for conversion to new ideas in dealing with nature. Such changes are not easily accepted. Some people poke fun at the "tree-huggers" or people who have fresh (and sometimes threatening) information about environmental issues.

Some people say these folks are incorrect! (Whether they are or not is often not examined.) There can be conflicts between people who accept or reject the challenge posed by ecological facts. Convincing more than 300 million Americans one way or the other is no easy task. Convincing other countries is no simple process. But at least we Franciscans will be part of the search for practical solutions.

We each want to believe whatever supports our side of an argument. Our *listening ability* is called to account. Earth's resources are not unlimited. Droughts kill the possible growth of food. Floods can wash out fertile fields. Our use of water can create problems that have no simple solutions. The use of various fertilizers and crop protection can have multiple effects on land and crops. They may not always be helpful tools in the long run.

As stewards of the earth, we take time and effort to treat the earth with care for the benefit of all people. Pope Francis' Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si* (On Care for our Common Home) spells out many issues to be addressed. He calls on the spirit of St. Francis to form our insights about creation.

He (Francis of Assisi) shows us just how inseparable the

bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace.

Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and take us to the heart of what it is to be human. ... His response to the world around was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. His disciple, St. Bonaventure, tells us that: "from a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call all creatures, no matter how small, by the name of 'brother or sister'." (Francis of Assisi; early documents - Vol II - Page 590) Such a conviction cannot be written off as naive romanticism, for it affects the choices which determine our behavior, if we approach nature and the environment without this openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united to all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously. The poverty and austerity of St. Francis were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled.

Si Laudato - Articles 10-11

Pope Francis offers a foundation for concern for ecology. *It is not romanticism!* It is human practicality, showing sincere care for the earth which supports life. The ministry of ecology has to do with the consequences of what we receive from God as stewards of the earth. Recycling and re-use of materials of the earth is good. (Habitat for Humanity/Restore, Vincent dePaul, Goodwill and many other programs offer ways to share). But it does not exhaust what we need to accomplish.

Stewards of God's gifts, we share what others need in order for them to achieve a healthy way of life: from hugs to loans; from acceptance to support; from forgiveness to embrace; from clean parks to open minds; from recycling to welcoming people whose practices differ from ours: from learning how to love to abandoning ways of hatred.

God of love, show us our place in the world as channels of your love for all the creatures of this earth, for not one of them is forgotten in your sight. Enlighten those who possess power and money that they may avoid the sin of indifference, that they may love the common good, advance the weak, and care for this world in which we live. The poor and the earth are crying out. O Lord, seize us with your power and light, help us to protect all life, to prepare a better future for the coming of your kingdom of justice, peace, love and beauty. Praise be to you. Amen

Si Laudato - Article 246