

**CONSIDER**

As we examine our country and our world at this time of history, it seems a muddled place to live. The list of troubles and problems are a bit discouraging. But at the same time Christians and Franciscans are not unemployed gospel people. Following the Gospel is not universally embraced and that fact opens employment opportunities for gospel people. Our vocation (employment) is to develop and pass on the love we receive from the Trinity. Faith and hope are qualities that aide us in sharing love. Loving one another is essential if we wish to be faithful to the Gospel and the OFS Rule. Our relationship with the Trinity is built on faith. Faith opens the door to hope, with love as a consequence. We do this in a world where many experiences do not fill us with hope. Our Franciscan vocation calls for faith, hope and charity. We recognize how important they are for profession as a secular Franciscan.

*Hearing that he had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees came together in a body, and one of them tried to catch him out with this question: "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment of the law?" He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." That is the greatest, the first commandment. The second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself." **Everything in the law and the prophets hangs on these two commandments.***

Matthew 22: 34-40 (REB)

We do not need to be a genius to believe and understand this basic scriptural text. The scriptural formula doesn't require a lot of dialogue. It's meaning is clear!

The difficult part is **HOW to practice love** in our lives? Here are a few issues for personal reflection and dialogue: E.g. Dealing with spousal arguments; children's conflicts; terrorist tragedies; medical emergencies; experiencing the loss of a loved one; dealing with problems of old age; handling unemployment; loving people who are homosexual; reaching out to refugees; helping migrants find a home; forgiving people who hurt us; dealing with people's arrogance; accepting our need for conversion; dealing with public figures whose values differ from our own; dealing with Franciscans who skip tough articles of the OFS Rule; people who criticize others but rarely share supportive ideas; people who talk a lot but rarely show up to work; arrogant people who are always right; people who are unjust and blame others when things go wrong; people who act like the Franciscan vocation is just another club; people who create disunity; people who refuse to even try to love their 'enemies.' These issues begin a list that invites serious dialogue among Franciscans.

QUALITIES of the OFS Rule

Article 1: ... *they intend to **make present the charisma** of their common Seraphic Father ...*

Article 2: ... *In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, **led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity** in their own secular state. ...*

Article 3: *The present Rule ...adapts the OFS to the **needs and expectations of the Holy Church** in the conditions of changing times. ...*

Article 4: ... ***Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life he has come to give abundantly.***

Article 5: ... *seek to **encounter the living and active person of Christ** in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, and in liturgical activity. ...*

Article 6: ... *Therefore, they should go forth as **witnesses and instruments of her (Church's) mission** among all people, **proclaiming Christ** by their life and words ...*

Article 7: ... *let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of **Christ** by means of that **radical interior change** which the Gospel calls "conversion" ...*

Article 8: ... *let **prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.** ... Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, ...*

Article 9: ... *The Secular Franciscans should express **their ardent love for her (Mary)** by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.*

Article 10: ... *let them **faithfully fulfill the duties** proper to their various circumstances of life. ...*

Article 11: ... *Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper **spirit of detachment** from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. ... In the spirit of 'the beatitudes,' ...*

they should strive to **purify their hearts** from every tendency and yearning for possessions and power.

Article 12: ... they should set themselves **free to love God** and their brothers and sisters.

Article 13: ... the Secular Franciscans, with a gentle and courteous spirit, **accept all people as a gift of the Lord** and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people ...

Article 14: Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to **build a more fraternal and evangelical world** so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. ... let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the **Christian spirit of service**.

Article 15: Let them ... **be in the forefront in promoting justice** by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives ...

Article 16: Let them **esteem work** both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

Article 17: In their family they should **cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life** ... By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives ... should **bear witness ... to the love of Christ** for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their journey, providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Article 18: ... they should **respect all creatures**, ... and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

Article 19: ... they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should **seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue**, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and the transforming power of love and pardon ... **strive to bring joy and hope to others**. ... and serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father

Read Articles 20 to 26 dealing with organization (20), Structures and fraternity life (21), canonical establishment (22), formation / profession (23), Gatherings (24), Expenses (25), Spiritual assistance (26).

The narrow columns in this article summarize the OFS Rule, listing qualities we profess to follow as Secular Franciscans. The OFS Rule is a Trinitarian gift for us to model in the Church and the world.

The following short list of Franciscan responses might help personal reflection and practice. As you reflect, do not wallow in guilt feelings. Rather let the Rule stimulate and guide you to nurture these good seeds. Respond to the Trinity's call and choose to dialogue with one another to give "flesh" to the requirements of the OFS Rule.

Our task as gospel people is to impact both the wider world and our at-home world. In place of revenge we bring forgiveness. In place of fear we bring confidence. Instead of anger we bring gentleness. In place of indifference we bring love. In place of competition we bring co-operation. In place of put-downs, we bring support. In place of artificiality we bring spiritual reality. In place of rivalry we bring community. In place of false ideas we bring gospel truth. In place of technical tools we bring scriptural insights. In place of selfishness we bring generosity. In place of resistance we accept our need for conversion. In place of arrogance we bring a listening heart. In place of know-it-all-ism we open our mind and heart to fresh ideas. In place of ultra-busyness we bring gentle quiet. In place of revenge we bring forgiveness - etc.

Each day we embrace the wisdom of the **Trinity**. We are not convinced by shallow human arguments. We look for rich ideas that show respect for the Trinity, people (obviously) and to all of creation.

*With this in mind, then, I kneel in prayer to the **Father**, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name, that out of the treasures of his glory he may grant you inward strength and power through his **Spirit**, that through faith **Christ** may dwell in your hearts in love. With deep roots and firm foundations may you, in company with all God's people, be strong to grasp what is the breadth and length and height and depth of Christ's love, and to know it, though it is beyond knowledge. So may you be filled with the very fullness of God.*

Ephesians 4:14-19 (REB)

I think we are aware that many Seculars had a limited or non-existent time of *initial formation*. I don't think we need to spend time blaming people. After the new Rule appeared in 1978, it took time to develop programs of *initial formation*. During that period and, even now, some people have very little formation. Whoever recognizes their lack of *initial or ongoing formation should seek it!* We need Franciscans who are well-formed. Seculars who lack good formation need to get updated formation. We hope to come to a point when all fraternity members are on the 'same page,' formation-wise, contributing wisely.

Councils on each level normally assist in this task. Without common knowledge, direction and a true Franciscan spirit, we un-intentionally put obstacles in our ability to live Franciscan lives. Common dialogue at regular gatherings can be a part of *ongoing formation*. We readily relate to each other through shared Franciscan experiences.

**The Franciscan way of life is our way to create a Church and world of respect, faith, hope, love and peace.
Let people know your beliefs by the way you live the OFS Rule!**