



Formation Commission

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

by Bob Fitzsimmons, OFS
National Formation Commission Chair

Gospel to Life Are we making it real?

As my time of being your formation chair draws to a close, I have paused to reflect on my journey over the past six or so years. One thing speaks very strongly to me and will be my recommendation to the next NFC chair and commission. Transformation! Yes definitely, but transformation that brings the Gospel to Life. Perhaps I can call it the Gospel to life formation project or exercise for the Franciscan heart and soul.

I think we all agree that we were founded by Francis directly, and not to be an Order of great teachers, apologists, preachers, etc. Not apostolic but evangelical, people called to become the hands, feet, and loving heart of Jesus, using the very Word of God (Jesus and the Gospel) to become little words of God, who do the will of the Father by being Christ-like and learning to be His active presence loving a world deeply in need of loving.

I also believe we have all spent much time studying the Gospels, but have we really entered into the Gospels to make them our own? I was drawn back to an older study back in grad school (Fordham – Jesuit) on something called the Lost Gospel of “Q” (from the German *quelle*, meaning source). “Q” is a lost document believed to be the sayings of Jesus, that echo today in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. The evangelists used the sayings of Jesus and added the context needed for understanding and for speaking to the needs of specific early Christian communities. Matthew, in his Torah-style approach, speaks directly to the early Jewish Christians, while Luke addresses the needs of the ever-growing Gentile converts, with a special place for the women of his day and culture.

BUT

The Gospels are living documents, and the words of Jesus woven throughout the Gospels are eternal. I believe that for us Franciscans the ultimate spiritual discipline and hardest challenge is make the words of Jesus alive today and understandable in addressing the needs facing the Christian community today. To some degree, we need to be Gospel redactors, just like the blessed Evangelists, and apply the words of blessing,

healing, forgiveness and love to our communities, families and fraternities today.

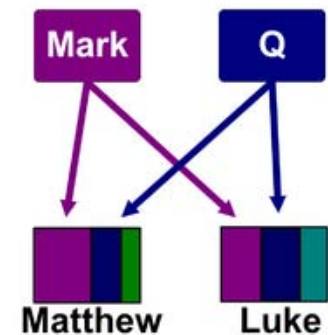
So the Formation Project. Many, many, many moons ago, back as a catechist for RCIA and a Parish DRE, I had the blessing of teaching Scripture. One thing I asked was that the candidates or students as part of their journaling was to begin writing their own gospel. The “Q” document was virtually unknown outside of theology schools, and there were not so many “red letter” New Testaments around, so at times it was a daunting assignment. It might be easier today, with all the new Scripture research, to discern the Words of

Jesus and to see how the Evangelists incorporated them to build up their communities and to continue to make Jesus known in future generations.

So how do we make the Gospel come alive, make Jesus jump off the pages of Scripture and through us feed the spiritual hunger that exists today?

To make Jesus come alive today, not the historical Jesus of 2,000 years ago, but the living Beloved Son the world needs today, we need to become the gospel. The gospel of Joe or Sally or Mike or Anne needs to be written. We need to weave the words of Jesus through our own stories, our own lives, our joys and sorrows, so the gospel becomes us and we become the gospel.

Two-source Hypothesis



The Gospels of Matthew and Luke were written independently, each using Mark and a second [hypothetical](#) document called “Q” as a source. “Q” has been conceived as the most likely explanation behind the common material (mostly sayings) found in the [Gospel of Matthew](#) and the [Gospel of Luke](#) but not in Mark.

No longer just the Gospel of Matthew or Luke, or for that matter, Mark and John, but our gospel too. The story of Jesus is the golden thread running throughout the New Testament; it's our golden thread too. We have set ourselves to this project at profession, when we echoed Francis' words by also proclaiming "This is what I want".

It takes time to write our gospels, a lifetime, but this is our calling as Franciscans, not to become great teachers, apologists, or preachers, but to be gospel and to infuse all of life with love of Christ.

We can begin by reading and reflecting on the sayings of Jesus; a re-creation of the lost "Q" or perhaps a red-letter New Testament might be a good starting point. Let the sayings of Jesus speak to your heart, then observe how the evangelists expanded and added the context needed for their communities. Then with a prayerful start you might begin writing your own gospel and how Jesus speaks to our needs now, with an eye on your own life's experiences, your family and your fraternity.

Gospel to life and life to Gospel must become the project of our lives if we are to speak Jesus to our world today.

Dear sisters and brothers, it has been a great honor to have served you these past years as your formation chair, and I pray that your desire for the Gospels and being transformed into the love of Jesus continues to enflame and bless each of you.

Peace and all good,
Fitz



A Call for Application

from Tom Bello OFS

Beloved National Family,
May the Lord give us Peace!

I write to ask for your possible application to and prayers for a new National Formation Chair or Co-Chairs for our National family.

As you all know, our beloved Bob "Fitz" Fitzsimmons has served long and well and was Chair when the National Formation Commission gave us our incredible FUN Manual and helped us implement it across the country.

Our National Executive Council (NEC) is tasked to search for his replacement, as difficult as that will be.

One, we are seeking someone thoroughly Secular Franciscan (see General Constitutions Article 31.3) who understands that proper Formation must flow directly into our living our Gospels, Rule and General Constitutions, not merely in "knowing" them.

Two, we want someone who has first-hand and, if possible, extensive experience with adult learning methods and techniques that are beneficial for adult faith formation.

Three, we need someone who has the time and the vigor, the organization and wisdom to serve and focus the whole National family on matters of Information, Formation and Transformation from Inquiry to Ongoing Formation within our Rule and the greater Gospel tradition.

We need your active prayers and help! Ask yourself: "Who has helped form Secular Franciscans the best in my lifetime?" Then ask that person or persons to apply. Please! We don't need recommendations; we need actual applications.

Our timetable is this: We would like to bring this person or persons to our NAFRA Chapter in October, with Fitz, so we can say Goodbye to one and Welcome to the other, in person.

The only time that the NEC will meet face to face before NAFRA will be just before the Summer Seminar in July. Thus, please submit your application, in private, to me or any member of the NEC by, say, Sunday, June 1.

An application need be no more than what you would do as National Formation Chair. What is your vision? What do you see is necessary or essential in a National Secular Franciscan Formation Program? You may submit a more formal resume or CV, not required, but you must give us some sense of your experience and interest in assisting both Regional and Local Fraternities in their Formation efforts.

Please do not hesitate to ask any questions to any member of the National Executive Council or the National Formation Commission.

I ask all to pray that the Holy Spirit will guide us to find and properly utilize the best Secular Franciscan person or persons to promote effective Secular Franciscan Formation throughout the United States.

Peace and love,
Tom