



THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

National Minister, Tom Bello, OFS

Lessons Learned or Relearned from the 2012 Quinquennial

What was your greatest joy and learning experience from last summer 2012? I believe mine was attending the 2012 Quinquennial in Chicago. The joy is easy to explain: gathering in prayer with family; sharing Christ in action, word and sacrament; meeting and learning with 617, I believe, the final count, Secular Franciscans from all over the United States, and internationally as well with both our Minister and Vice Minister General of our entire Order, Encarnita del Pozo from Spain and Doug Clorey from Canada.

What did I learn? Well, let me focus in three general areas of lessons learned or relearned. The three general areas are first, doing the work and paying attention to detail; second, understanding and sharing the Franciscan gift; and third, putting our gifted vocation into action and outreach.

First, doing the work and paying attention to detail. As you can well imagine, planning and hosting something as huge as the Q doesn't just happen. Being a good Secular Franciscan leader at any level of fraternity doesn't just happen. Being a good Catholic--a good wife or husband, a good parent, a good worker--doesn't just happen. I learned or relearned this lesson from all the marvelous work of the Q Committee, the National Executive Council and the host Mother Cabrini Region, who all played a huge part in the planning and success of the Q.

One person will have to represent all, and he is the big brother I never had, my predecessor and better, Patrick Mendes. If you didn't see Patrick, you were not at the Q. He was everywhere, helping all in need. You might well ask why an outgoing National Minister would even want to bother with all the headaches and heartaches that go into an enterprise as gigantic as the Q! No matter. As far as I know, Patrick had a voice in every major or minor decision concerning the overall planning and the day-to-day administration of the Q.

For example, from the major, he helped select our excellent speakers; to the minor, he helped me find an alb to wear to assist at the opening Mass when I couldn't bring one in my overloaded suitcase. Further, he helped Debbie Tessier, the National Minister from Canada, find a room when the hotel "misplaced" her registration. Not only that--he "kidnapped" me to go with him to the airport to pick Debbie up himself, personally, to bring her to the hotel!

I'm not sure how many hours of sleep Patrick had in the days leading up to and during the Q because usually the first person I saw in the morning was the last person I saw in the evening: Patrick! Thus, Patrick offers the first lesson I learned or relearned from the Q: Good things don't just happen. They take hard work and attention to details.

The second lesson learned or relearned from the Q concerns the great heritage of our Franciscan tradition, understanding and sharing that gift. In different ways, all of our excellent speakers at the Q, and each person who I talked and shared with, helped me understand and share our Franciscan heritage.

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Again, if I have to choose one person to speak for all, please permit me to choose Sister Ilia Delio, OSF. Where to begin with all she has shared with us in her many books, her three Q talks and in her personal conversations? Well, let me briefly share one of her insights into St. Francis. His prayer before the Crucifix at San Damiano begins, “Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart.” And St. Ilia went on to explain that the heart is the key to St. Francis, not the mind; and love is the highest good. Love is the deepest form of knowledge; love is the knowledge and power of God. God is outward-moving love; God is deeply in love with Creation. Love is relational, seen in the love of the Father for the Son, the Son for the Father, a Love Who is the Holy Spirit. The whole of Creation is a movement of love, a movement of the Trinity into all of Creation.

Thus, Sister Ilia continued, the world is so very rich in God’s love, which is the treasure within, the treasure that God gave us in the gift of Creation, the gift of the Incarnation.

Further, Jesus is THE revelation of God, the missing clue to solving God, the Universe, and ourselves. Creation and Incarnation both show God’s self-emptying outward-moving Love; and our Franciscan gift, our Franciscan call, is to name, proclaim and live that Love Who is always present, the great I AM, in ourselves and in all the world around us. The fullness of the Incarnation is our own Christifying the world, our own self-emptying love in imitation of St. Francis, who himself imitated Christ and begged all of his followers to do the same.

Perhaps St. Ilia explained this gift best to me at the Q, but many sisters and brothers shared that precious gift of our Franciscan vocation with me. I could see, hear and feel the Love of God passing through them to all around them.

The third and final learning or relearning from the Q follows from the second; namely, putting our gifted vocation into action and outreach. Of course, all of us are trying in our daily lives as members of the Secular Franciscan Order to put our calling into the service of our brothers and sisters in the world. This is part and parcel of our Secular Franciscan Rule, as seen for just one example, in Number 19 of our Rule: “Mindful that 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 in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.”

Again, Patrick, Sister Ilia, all the speakers, planners and participants that I heard, saw and met at the Q are striving to put our call into life, but perhaps if one can best represent us all it would be our dear brother Ed Shirley, who has departed this life after sharing his gifts so fully with us at the Q and with all his students and all of us in the Franciscan family and in the world.

How can I summarize Ed? It’s impossible of course to capture in a few words the magnificence of his being. Permit me to say that I remember just after I had been elected National Minister that Ed was attending, I think, a Christian/Buddhist Dialogue Conference in Washington, DC. He had called to discuss with me his continuing in his appointed position as Chair of our National Fraternity’s Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. We met at a local restaurant and had a thoroughly delightful exchange on St. Francis, the Blessed Mother, God, the world, truth, beauty and love, all in no particular order, but each with an absolute rightness to appear at each’s particular moment in the evening.

As we were talking, I couldn’t help thinking, “If there is one person who can bring the Secular Franciscan charism to interface with the Buddhists, the Moslems, and the other members of our Christian family, who might be better than Ed?” Ed walked the talk. He was a theologian who lived what he believed. He in particular, but many others at the Q, showed me how to put our gifted vocation into action and outreach.

Again, these are three lessons I learned or relearned at the Q: one, hard work and attention to detail; two, understanding and sharing our Franciscan gift; three, putting our gifted vocation into action and outreach. Thanks to all of you who helped me learn or relearn these lessons, particularly Patrick Mendes, Sister Ilia and Ed Shirley. May God bless and keep you and all of us!