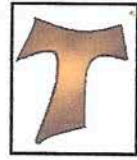


CNSA

News



Views

Lester Bach OFM Cap - Summer, 2017

Some personal reflections

In the last few months (*April, May, June*) I experienced surgery. It has happened before. This time it was a total reverse left-shoulder joint replacement followed by several weeks of re-hab - with more to come! I had no access to a computer for at least two months. To my chagrin, I realized that I caused no little frustration to many people. They were waiting for answers about questions or requests for the appointment of fraternity spiritual assistants.

Which led me to reflection about dealing with requests and offering a response. Helping Franciscan folks, when I can, goes with the territory.

I recognized that the *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the SFO (OFS)* will not wear out from over-use. It contains lots of good information in its 67 pages. Among those pages are the process for establishing a new fraternity (Pages 37-41) or appointing spiritual assistants (Pages 6-9 - i.e...*what to do and who does it.*).

At times the *OFS Constitutions and Statutes'* in the book: *Essential Documents of the OFS*, experience a similar fate. With each new fraternity election difficulties seem to arise. Outgoing (or re-elected) fraternity councilors can give knowledgeable assistance by sharing ideas and using appropriate books with newly elected members. (Cfr. *The inside back cover of TAU-USA contains texts to order and their costs. Councils and spiritual assistants need such texts*)

Using the *Pastoral Handbook* can help to deal organizational issues! I trust Franciscans to choose resources that help things run smoothly. Secular Franciscans collaborate and find ways to follow the OFS Rule and Constitutions.. They learn to develop ways that help councilors conduct fraternity meetings and business and enhance personal and fraternity growth.

As fraternity business runs smoothly we can invest more time and energy on well-tuned and helpful formation sessions. **Prayerfulness**, plus energizing fraternity members to **action**, can blossom at regular gatherings. Growth is a possible result

What about FORMATION?

Formation is a lifetime pursuit for all of us. What we learned and practiced, last year or last week or yesterday, will need refinement today. There are ***special programs for initial formation, formation for the newly professed, and ongoing formation for all professed members.***

As far as I know, from my experience and that of others, no one is automatically excused from ongoing formation after profession!

Intellectual learning and practical implementation of that learning is always needed and essential. Neither learning nor practice are enough by themselves. They need to be practiced together throughout our Franciscan lives. Anyone, at any point, who thinks "*I know everything I need*" is already in trouble.

How we ***learn and act*** when we are 25 years old changes a lot by the time we reach the ages of 30, 40 or 50 etc. Our country faces new challenges; our church changes with new leadership; we face unexpected events in our families; natural aging gives a different look to life; violence moves us to struggle with solutions that are life-changing and supportive for victims of violence. *Conversion* is normal for us.

Personal attempts to avoid ongoing formation is not wise. New times and experiences recognize a need for *conversion* as a part of daily life (Cfr. *OFS Rule #7*) Without it Franciscan life can become stagnant.

If we become passive about ongoing formation, we may fail our permanent profession. *Conversion* stories have a personal flavor, but it is a common experience for all of us. Even a simple tool like sharing stories with others at gatherings can be helpful and challenging. The personal stories may look different for each of us. But sharing them can strengthen us in our *conversions*. At all times we listen with respect and warm concern. Stories that are shared remain within our Franciscan family unless the person says otherwise.

More ...

The initial pages of *For Up To Now (FUN Manual)* cover ways and means that formators need to address the formation people they guide. It is a good tool for the Seculars who are part of the formation teams. The manual offers a plethora of helpful material for working with people in various stages of formation.

When intellectual insights are not joined to practical implementation in daily life, OFS formation is a farce. Formation never ends but changes as we live our lives as Franciscans.

♦♦♦♦

Here are some qualities (*A limited list*) that continue to develop as the OFS Rule is lived:

Peace - love - forgiveness - understanding - dialogue - being good listeners - involved in ministries of love - design ways to help the needy - being faithful to prayer and contemplation - continuing formation at all levels - enriched prayer life - dealing with various political opinions which may need change to be in accord with the Gospel - recognizing personal limitations while we realize that the Trinity can move us beyond them - avoid arrogance - collaborate with other dedicated groups - social ministries - quiet time - willingness to share experiences in living the OFS Rule. Etc.

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Quotes from **FOR UP TO NOW**
Chapter: "*Fraternity and Francis*" - Page 17

Life in fraternity, as the ideal and normative situation for gospel living has the following components:

- + *A particular structure (OFS Rule 20-22)*
 - *a real fraternity (not a club or sodality) existing on various levels*
 - *animated and guided by the leadership of a council.*
 - *fulfilling a particular ecclesial, apostolic and Franciscan function*
- + *A necessary vitality (OFS Rule 23)*
 - *brought alive by adequate formation*
 - *deepened through the permanent commitment of its members*
 - *matured through dialogue and harmonious problem-solving.*
- + *Sustaining forces that nourish fraternal life (OFS Rule 24-26)*
 - *regular and frequent gatherings of the Fraternity and its council*
 - *on-going support of its members*
 - *adequate spiritual assistance*
 - *pastoral and fraternal visits*

Formation at all levels finds expression in a change of attitudes, opinions, love for others etc. If people in formation look the same after several months, something is missing in their formation. Understanding is good but it is only a half-way point without personal conversion in practice!

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Words of Pope John XXIII

There is an immense task incumbent on all people of good will, namely, the task of restoring the relations of the human family in truth, in justice, in love and in freedom - the relations between individual human beings, between citizens and their respective political communities, between individuals, families, intermediate associations and political communities on the one hand, and the world community on the other. This is a most exalted task, all will agree, for it is the task of bringing about true peace in the order established by God.

Pacem in Terris - Pope John XXIII (OFS)
- Paragraph #163 - April 11, 1963