



Reflections of a Spiritual Assistant

By Fr. Kevin Queally, TOR

It is now getting close to 20 years since I first began my association with the Secular Franciscan Order. During that time I have been a local, provincial, regional, and national Spiritual Assistant. I have worked through Regionalization as a Provincial Spiritual Assistant. I have been part of the development of a region and I have even seen the International Fraternity in action, during my five and a half years in Rome. It may be seen as bold to list all of these experiences, but it is necessary, since I want to reflect as a Spiritual Assistant after some years of working with Secular Franciscans on many levels.

One of the joys of working with SFOs over the years has been seeing the growth of *awareness* and *responsibility* within the Order. The 1978 Rule was still in its implementation phase, as I got involved. I did not seek out the SFO. I was invited (“drafted” might be a better word, come to think of it) by a newly forming group to work with them. It is a unique fraternity and I always felt privileged to have worked with them for those few years. In many ways, I was part of the group, while being Spiritual Assistant. This formative experience has colored my work with the SFO all these years.

By growth of awareness, I mean that I have seen that the Seculars have taken ownership of their Order. One of my first experiences with the Order was being invited to speak at the 1987 Quinquennial in San Diego. Most of the speakers there were friars, and the exceptions were notable people who were not SFOs! That would not happen today. The Seculars are now used to taking the lead role in their own Order and the friars only need to assist. Our friar/assistant role is safe, but it is no longer dominant.

Another joy of working with the SFO has been to see the deep commitment to Franciscan life among the sisters and brothers. They are proud to be called *Franciscan*. The sisters and brothers are aware of what it means to be Franciscan and are very dedicated to living the Franciscan life in their homes, work places, and parishes. It is inspiring to see this and to know that the vision of Francis is being taken to the “marketplace” daily and in so many ways.

During visitations to Regional Fraternities, I have been inspired, also, to hear about the apostolic activities of fraternities all over the nation. It is a tribute to the Order to see how many are involved in the works of mercy. Needless to say, our heritage is

alive and well. The first members of the “Third Order” were also people dedicated to serving others, performing the “Works of Mercy,” especially for the poor, the sick and those most in need.

On the other hand, there are some things about the SFO that cause me concern. It is always surprising for me to see how many Secular Franciscans are not aware of the larger Order. I try to mention in Visitations, whether on the local or regional level, that we are an international Order. (I am currently a Regional Spiritual Assistant, as well as National.) There is so much information and it is so accessible today through the Internet that it puzzles me why, for example, at least one person in a fraternity does not subscribe to the free Internet newsletter offered by CIOFS at: <http://www.ciofs.org/sfo.htm> and then report to the fraternity what is happening internationally. Some wonderful things are happening. Even to read reports of international visitations is quite educational and thought provoking. It would be well if more of us were acquainted with the “higher” levels of the Secular Franciscan Order!

Along these same lines, I have heard things like, “What does the Region do for us?” and “Why should we pay fair share?” To me this is quite astonishing. Why would we be members of an Order, if we don’t want to support its activities? The Region conducts visitations, elections and the Regional Council must meet. The Regions that I have seen usually sponsor events for the members like retreats, gatherings and services, such as the *Transitus*. Regions also have obligations to the National Fraternity and must send the Minister of the Region to the national meeting and the Regional Spiritual Assistant to the Spiritual Assistants’ meeting. These are some of the things that Regions must do besides the many services for the local fraternities.

There is one other concern I would like to reflect on. It seems to me that there is too much legalism in the SFO. This is difficult for me to say, since in my own Region knows that I will read from the Constitutions or Statutes when a question comes up! Laws are good and it is important for things to be well ordered, but legalism takes the law too far. Jesus’ word is spirit and life. (John 6:63) We must concentrate on being good Franciscans, being compassionate and loving followers of Christ in the way of Francis. Sometimes I have seen compassion getting lost for trying to keep the letter of the law.

It has been a privilege to work with the SFO these many years. I hope I have been of some service and I hope that these reflections will invite the SFO to further growth as an Order as well as growth in *holiness*. May the Lord give you peace!