



Formation Commission

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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Transformation?



Several editions ago, I gave a very general overview of the Interior Castles or Mansions of Teresa of Avila, a great Carmelite Mystic, not as a thermometer to take our spiritual temperature, but as an invitation to explore, deeper and deeper, our own hearts and desires for a relationship with the Divine. Transformation, though implied throughout the *FUN Manual*, is perhaps not addressed explicitly enough. Formation is just the beginning and profession merely a door that invites us into deeper relationships. Profession is not graduation, or the reward owed for sticking it out and “passing” the course. I would like to say that all who profess, like all who are baptized, understand the call to go deeper, though reality shows that most do not have the desire to embrace this type of journey, or understand that a deeper journey awaits. Our goal in emphasizing transformation is to raise awareness that a deeper richer journey awaits all who desire to seek it and allow themselves to pursue it. Will we mirror God’s desire for us with our desire for Him?

Building on the groundwork discussed by Fr. Dan Horan, OFM, at the last National Chapter, we gathered in Denver a few weeks ago to look at our focus for the next phases of formation. Our initial thoughts emphasized our continuing commitment to enhancing our desire for deeper spiritual transformation. There is a golden thread that runs throughout Christianity, and more specifically in our Franciscan Spirituality. Our Franciscan Spirituality is more than simply observing the Gospel of Jesus Christ, but becoming the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Fr. Dan’s discussion of Franciscan contemplation as *speculatio*, looking into the mirror, from the writings of Bonaventure, is our clue to the transformation commitment inherent in our Profession. If we delve into the writings of Clare to Agnes, we hear the charge once again, *speculatio!* Mirror, gaze into the mirror, and behold the Christ. BUT, the reflected image is us! Right again! The legacy left us by Francis is just that, to gaze at the mirror of the Cross, of the Christ and in that mirror to see ourselves.

But we are flesh, and to delve deeper, we need to be encouraged by our sisters and brothers to journey on, to always be a seeker of Christ reflected back to us in the mirror of ourselves. We

need that safe and special place of the Gospel, our fraternities.

The next very important phase in our continuous development is the need to intensify our on-going formation. The *FUN Manual* focused on initial formation, the first phase of the process. Now we need to focus our attention and energy on both on-going sustained formation and additionally on that special first year after profession. We need to provide a period of *Mystagogia*, where the newly professed, full of joy and energy can gather with other newly professed to fan the flame and breathe the fire back into all the members of their “extended” fraternities.

How can fraternities invigorate their fraternal life and collaboratively bring the Gospel to life? What activities might the fraternity embrace that make our charism visible in the world? How might several fraternities work together giving witness to our larger identity as an Order within the Church, and not simply as isolated groups? Lastly, how might we bridge the gap between hearing the Gospel and being Gospel, an authentic experiential link between our spoken Profession and living the Gospel as other Christs.

Perhaps we have made everything too heady, cerebral and academic. Perhaps we have removed the life from our Gospel to Life motto, and we have failed to connect this Gospel with its mandates to actively seek Peace, Justice and Solidarity with the poor. This I believe is the reality of our vocation when we profess to be Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel. Our Rule guides us by saying:

Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite

choices in harmony with their faith. (Rule chapter 2:15)

Inherent then in our Profession is a commitment to make the Gospel visible, not simply in our church lives, but by becoming kin/family to all creation and through prayer, love and elbow grease, to be the peacemakers, the reconcilers, and the lovers of all that God has made, and where we fall short in our humanness is where our sisters and brothers are needed most. It is here we are nourished with human touch, reaffirmed in our journeys, and encouraged again to become imitators of Christ.

Yes, on-going formation or maybe better on-going nourishment is what is next, for my final year in the NFC and hopefully with full NAFRA support this is the mandate for the new NFC. To help us be aware of the nourishment we need and to empower us to provide this sustenance for each other. I believe this will enable us to become what we eat at the Eucharist and in turn become Eucharist, to add flesh to our God for the world today.

Yes Transformation! We cannot teach it, only walk with each other and encourage each other to seek and to desire a deeper, way past dating, relationship with Our God. Here the head stuff must give way to experience, to touch, to hear encouraging words. We need the laying on of hands frequently, to experience and know we are loved, to sustain our searching and enflame our desire. This I think is our purpose to guide, accompany, to animate our fraternities so we all experience our souls’ journey into the mind of God.

Pace e bene
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