

News & Views

Franciscan Life in the 21st Century
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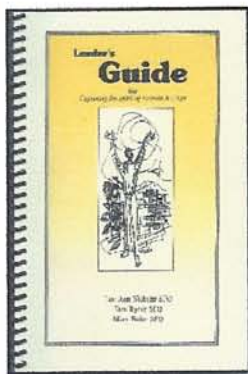


Meandering through the years

Near the end of the 20th century, Benet Fonck OFM and CNSA saw the need for initiating a training program for spiritual assistants. Benet wrote a text to train people as spiritual assistants to OFS fraternities. What began has been enhanced and revised by CNSA, NEC, and Regional councils as they developed programs for training spiritual assistants. CNSA workshops, plus time shared with local assistants at regional visitations, adds to the formation of spiritual assistants. Individual regions are developing formation programs for spiritual assistants. The Holy Spirit guides our efforts to develop practical programs to train people as spiritual assistants.

Dialogue among regions and CNSA/NEC, concerning training for spiritual assistants, supports the development of good programs. Regional Councils and their committees design programs to fit the needs of a region. Sharing ideas and structures (dialogue) enrich the programs as we *learn from one another*.

Training programs require more than book-learning. Programs should touch the hearts of people training to be spiritual assistants. If we do not touch the hearts of trainees we miss an important element for their service to the OFS. They need loving hearts in their service to the OFS. "Vital reciprocity" requires unity between spiritual assistants and fraternities (Building connections between the OFS and the 1st Order/TOR provinces). Promoting unity is vital. These imperfect human productions will need regular evaluation and updating.



2. In 2006 Franciscans of La Verna Region wrote two books for ongoing formation. The titles are: *Capturing the Spirit of Francis and Clare*, and a *Leader's Guide*. The *Leader's Guide* was written by Lee Ann Niebuhr OFS, Don Ryder OFS and Mary Fedor OFS, seculars from the La Verna Region. The *Leader's Guide* provides a variety of activities and programs that help to implement the chapters

of *Capturing the spirit of Francis and Clare*. The books assist ongoing formation programs.

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The *Leader's Guide* offers ideas that touch both the heart and the mind. It has practical ways to guide ongoing formation programs. The *Leader's Guide* includes prayer, quotations from Scripture, activities (and guidance for their use), the time needed, and directions for each session. Such inter-action during sessions helps people engage the ideas in *Capturing the spirit of Francis and Clare*. Information on costs etc are available on the inside back cover of TAU-USA.



3. In 1953 President Eisenhower shared ideas in a speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors. No matter what your political persuasion, these words offer some "common sense considerations" which are not too common today. They encourage us to have compassion for people in need, aware of being called to ... *set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters*. (OFS Rule - Article #12).

*Every gun that is made, every warship launched,
and every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense,
a shift from those who hunger and are not fed,
those who are cold and are not clothed.
The world in arms is not spending money alone.
It is spending the sweat of its laborers,
the genius of its scientists,
and the hopes of its children.*

Franciscans realize that support for violence often means that more violence occurs. People become burdened with the *consequences of violence*. This happens through personal, family, group, national or international violence as is evident in today's world. The OFS Rule calls us to ... *a sense of community (that) will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people ... for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ*. (OFS Rule - Article #13).

4. The words of Christian writers often invite us to reflection. Here are a few words from Meister Eckhart (1260-1327) that invite us to realize more deeply how close we are to Jesus.

What good is it that Christ was born two thousand years ago if he is not born now in your heart? When love is pressed down and brimming over, it can't help but overflow to those around us. When we know love, it

gets paid forward to others. We pay more attention to those who also hunger but don't know where to look for nourishment. In our hearts we know that Christmas is not about pretending that God will be born again this year but about recognizing that God takes flesh for us every day. And we are partners with Christ in that incarnation because ours are the hands and hearts that offer love to the world and give it flesh.

Cfr: Today's Liturgy – Advent-Christmas-Epiphany
2015 - Page 15

5. Vatican II documents offer other helpful ideas: (October, 1962 - to - December, 1965)

By living in faith, Christian people see Christ in all, whether neighbors or strangers, and make accurate assessments about meaning and value in life. ... By living the true spirit of the beatitudes, lay people grow in a true sense of poverty which is neither sumptuousness nor destitution. They grow in a true sense of humility: aware of their gifts but not seeking empty honors. They grow in their sense of justice: leaving everything to pursue it with vigor.

Vatican II in Plain English (Vol 3) - Decree on the
Apostolate of the Laity - Page 22



St. John XXIII

The basic underlying principle of this Christian message to the world is this - LOVE. Everything Christians do should be motivated by love, but certain activities are especially loving: pity for the needy, care of the sick, and other works of charity. Today the world is reduced to a single family in which everyone knows of the needs of others, making charity more urgent and extensive. Christian social action should, therefore, reach out to every single person on earth who is in need, regardless of their faith, to offer food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education and freedom. Christians should seek those in need, search for and find them wherever they are, and offer them solace and comfort.

Vatican II in Plain English (Vol 3) - Decree on the
Apostolate of the Laity - Page 25

Peace, we believe, is not merely the absence of war. Nor is it reduced to a silent, cold standoff where the parties remain armed. And it is not an outcome of dictatorship. What is it then? Indeed, what is "peace?"

Peace is a harmony built into human society by God, the divine Founder of all life, and it is a direct outcome of justice. Such a peace is not attained once and for all but is constantly built up as people control their passions and governments remain vigilant.

But even this is not enough. For peace is the fruit of love as well. It cannot be obtained and safeguarded unless men and women freely and trustingly share with one another their inner spirits and talents. It is based on a firm determination to respect others, and

The God of peace is never glorified by human violence.

Thomas Merton



to live lives of sisterhood and brotherhood. Without such love, peace absolutely cannot prevail in our time.

For all of this flows from the peace of Christ, who first loved us and dedicated himself for us. We urge all Christians, therefore, to join with all peacemakers in the world to plead for peace and bring it about. We praise those who renounce violence and find other ways to settle disputes where fairness for all is assured. We dream of the day when we will say with Isaiah (2:4), "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; one nation shall not raise the sword against another, nor shall they train for war again."

Vatican II in Plain English (Vol 2) - Constitution of the
Church in the Modern World - Page 182-183

6. When we dialogue with one another, attentive listening is vital. It helps us understand each other. It will often require *conversion*. As the world changes; as people change; as we change; "... (it is) necessary that this conversion be carried out daily." (OFS Rule #7) Dialogue brings us fresh ways to express a gospel spirit and enriches our Franciscan experiences.

Reading the signs of the times we recognize possible actions that can to be taken. We implement the spirit of Francis by implementing freshly discovered ideas. Intellectual understanding begins this process. But putting the ideas into practice touches the heart, giving life and flesh to what we have learned. We engage in *the daily conversion* required by the OFS Rule - #7.

Otherwise we will become a devotional Order that ignores social needs or a social-action Order that fails to have a prayerful spirit. A healthy combination is what Franciscans desire i.e. a deep, prayerful trust in God that finds expression in concrete actions of love for our neighbor. The combination is essential. What is done has the handprints of God and our own handprints on it. It is our "working together" that effectively proclaims our Franciscan way of life. *Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.* (OFS Rule #19)

Compassion is a heart-to-heart encounter because compassion flows from the human heart; it is not a rational conclusion to a problem. Rather, it is an act of love beyond what the mind can comprehend. The heart therefore must be able to see what may be blind to the physical eye.

Compassion . living in the spirit of St Francis
Ilia Delho OSF - Page 70

