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# FORMATION COMMISSION

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by Francine Gikow, OFS  
National Commissioner

## “IF TODAY YOU WOULD HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS<sup>1</sup>”

As a Secular Franciscan during this time of coronavirus, I have been forced to confront my own racial biases and the inequality that exists in our society based on race. From the earliest days in initial formation, we are told “go from gospel to life and life to the gospel” with a careful reading of the gospel.<sup>2</sup> But what **do** the gospels say to us at this time? How do we act/react as Secular Franciscans? How can I make sure that I do not “harden my heart”?

Since Vatican II, the Church has directed us in this essential element of our vocation:

”At all times the Church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the gospel...”<sup>3</sup>

“...[the Church] can draw from the Gospel the most profound reasons and ever new incentives to promote the generous dedication to the service of all [people], the poor especially, the weak and the oppressed- and to eliminate the social consequences of sin which are translated into unjust social and political structures... the Church...leads toward freedom under all its forms—liberation from sin, from indwelling or collective selfishness—and to full communion with God and with [people] who are like brothers [and sisters].”<sup>4</sup>

The message is clear. The Church invites me—no, actually demands of me—as a secular, professed Franciscan, to work toward the equality of all people in our society. Of course, depending on our particular gifts and personalities, what I do may be different than your response to the call of the Holy Spirit. But we *are all* the body of Christ, here on earth. What DO scripture and the gospels say? In search of the answer, I have compiled some of my favorite passages for your prayer, meditation, and consideration. They are not a complete listing; for that you would need to read/meditate on the ENTIRE Bible! However, they are a start. You may want to take a different specific passage each day to prayer and meditation. You may want to

share at your fraternity meeting which passages “spoke” to you and why. You may want to cut up all the Bible citations, put them into a bowl and pray a different one each day.

Make an effort to be open to the Word of God and not “harden your heart,” let go of any pre-conceived ideas and see where God leads you, then act on it. Make a decision to change a behavior. Decide what you can do differently. Do penance. Ask forgiveness. Open a respectful dialog. The list is endless. As Francis said to his brothers:

***“I have done what is mine; May Christ teach you yours.” (Lmj14:3)***

### Scripture Citations:

Essence of the Law (Deut 10:17-20)  
The Beatitudes (Mt.5 1-10 or Lk 6 20-26)  
Sheep Amidst the Wolves (Mt 10”16-23)  
Parable of the Sower (Mt 13: 1-17)  
Forgiveness (Mt 18:21-22)  
The Rich Young Man (Mt 19:23-27)  
The Greatest Commandment (Mt 22:34-40)  
Persecutions Foretold (Mt 24:9-14)  
Welcoming a Stranger (Mt 25:31-40)  
Judgment of the Nations (Mt 26:31-36)  
Woman at the Well (Jn 4: 4-42)  
Love for Enemies (Lk 6:27-36)  
Do Not Judge... (Lk 6:37-38)  
The Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)  
The Rich Man and Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31)  
Woman Caught in Adultery (Jn 8:1-11)  
Transformation (Romans 12:2)  
Mutual Love (Heb 13:1-3)  
Mercy and Judgment (James 2: 12-13)  
Justification By Works (James 2:22-24)  
Judging Others (James 4:11)

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 95:7b-11. (NAB)

<sup>2</sup> OFS Rule: Art.4

<sup>3</sup> Guadium et Spes, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Synod of Bishops, “Evangelization of the Modern World,” Third General Assembly, October 26, 1974, in *The Gospel of Peace and Justice: Catholic Social Teaching Since Pope John* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976. p.597)

# NATIONAL FORMATION WORKSHOP GOES VIRTUAL

by Mary Stronach

On Friday evening, August 21, Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, kicked off the Regional Formation Director's Workshop with a "hug." "I've got my arms wrapped around everyone in a virtual hug around my screen!" He reached out to nearly 100 Secular Franciscan Formation team members and spiritual assistants from across the United States and the Pacific Ocean, all the way to Guam. His hugs reached them through their computers, iPads, and Smart Phones.

During his presentation on the importance of initial formation, Father reminded the formators that "we are formed in fraternity. We bring the outside in... It is the 'privileged place.'"

"A listening attitude is quite fundamental," he continued. "Good initial formation should provide opportunities for listening," he told the group, whose faces sometimes filled the screen, intent on his every word.

The inspirational kick-off took the virtual attendees from the spiritual to the practical. On Saturday morning, after Diane Menditto, OFS, Chair of the National Formation Team, gave an update on the new formation program, the

National Formation Team provided a sneak preview of a draft of the components of the new formation program: the first draft of the *First Steps* brochure, an outline of what the chapters would include, a sample chapter in full color, and its companion guide.

During the afternoon session, the formators learned "How to Talk Like a Franciscan." The basic message guided the formators through listening, mediation, and conflict resolution techniques a la Francis.

The day ended with the Formation Team participating in a Panel Discussion addressing numerous issues, including ideas and resources for ongoing formation, virtual formation, formation team building, handling difficult situations, discernment, and the role and need for well-formed of Spiritual Assistants.

The National Formation Team, chaired by Diane Menditto, OFS, includes Justin Carisio, OFS, Francine Gikow, OFS, Layna Maher, OFS, Mary Stronach, OFS, and their Spiritual Assistant, Anne Mulqueen, OFS.



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