

THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN FORMATION PROCESS

Part I: The Orientation Phase

When we look at the Secular Franciscan formation process, it is important to see it as a continuum, that is, each stage flowing into the next. Aspects that are essential in the first phase, Orientation, will still be essential in the second, Inquiry, the third, Candidacy, and into the Ongoing Formation of professed members.

During Orientation, it is essential that formation resources allow for dialogue and sharing since this is the ideal time to discern a prospective member's call to a Secular Franciscan vocation. If discernment is addressed early, it can save time and avoid heartache for both the individual and the Fraternity.

The materials used in Orientation should allow for comprehensive, yet nonintrusive, personal disclosure so as to discover the person's reasons for wanting to become a Secular Franciscan. We need to discern the extent to which their motivation is compatible with what we know the Order to be. In this way, potential "mismatching" can be handled early, avoiding much anguish for all concerned.

The formation resources used should encourage ample dialogue and sharing since this type of interaction is invaluable in assessing whether aspirants' life circumstances will allow them to commit to the Secular Franciscan lifestyle. Orientation is a favorable time to observe the whole person, physically, spiritually, mentally, emotionally, and interpersonally.

While we're "getting to know them," we expect them to "get to know us," our roots and our charism. Therefore, some form of introduction to the lives of Saints Francis and Clare are appropriate as early as possible and throughout the entire formation process.

Especially useful during Orientation are resources that allow the Fraternity and the formators to gather knowledge about the individual's understanding of the Catholic faith. Remedial work takes time. If their knowledge is inadequate, perhaps involvement in the local church's adult religious education program or RCIA process would be appropriate BEFORE continuing with Secular Franciscan Initial Formation. Please make sure that these persons are fully initiated members of the Catholic faith.

- The Orientation phase of formation is critical. This is a time to watch for specific clues that the person before you is or is not suited for SFO life.
- It is a time for discerning whether or not the prospective member has the basic dispositions that are essential for entering into mature committed relationships such as those which membership in the SFO requires.
- The *Interview Guide for Prospective Members of the Secular Franciscan Order* is especially useful during this phase.

- **Time frame: at least** three to four months
- **Content for the Orientation phase (an OVERVIEW of):**

- an understanding of discernment and vocation (see *To Cling with All Her Heart to Him* by Fonck, page 5)
- brief review of Catholic doctrine and Christian morals
- an explanation of Franciscan prayer life and apostolic activity
- phases of Secular Franciscan formation and expectations
- introduction to the life of Saint Francis (perhaps in novel form, such as *Francis: The Saint of Assisi* by Mueller; or *Francis: The Journey and the Dream* by Bodo)
- introduction to the life of Saint Clare (perhaps in novel form, such as *Clare: A Light in the Garden* by Bodo)
- branches of the Franciscan family
- 1978 Rule and brief history of the Secular Franciscan Order
- an understanding of some of our Franciscan symbols
- a Franciscan prayer experience

Rite: Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming (see *SFO Ritual*, pages 9-10)

Bibliography:

- Bodo OFM, Murray. (1992, revised & expanded). *Clare: A Light in the Garden*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press.
- Bodo OFM, Murray. (1988). *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*. Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press.
- Fonck OFM, Benet A. (1996). *To Cling with All Her Heart to Him*. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press.
- Mueller, Joan. (2000). *Francis: The Saint of Assisi*. Allen, TX: Thomas More.