



LIVING OUR RULE JUSTICE, PEACE AND CARE FOR CREATION

By Jan Parker, OFS



❁ PART I: INTRODUCTION ❁

I recently asked a room full of Secular Franciscans to write three words to describe the OFS Rule. There were some wonderful replies including “conversion, prayer, humility” and “Gospel to Life,” but the response that sticks in my mind is “*who we are.*” What a profound answer!

In reflecting on the Rule we have professed, we must always ask ourselves, “*Is this who I am?*” Why? Because in any matter that comes before us, who we are — our identity — must drive what we do. In his June 2017 Pentecost letter to the entire Order, Minister General Tibor Kauser stated: “*We must have a clear vision about our identity... Our identity is whom God wants us to see. Without knowing who we are we will never know what we shall do, and will make lots of mistakes, also if with a good intention.*”

As Secular Franciscans, we must truly reflect what it means to be Catholic, to be Franciscan and, as Seculars, how to live out our call in the world. We must reflect our identity — we must “be who we are”. If we know who we are, we will know what we are to do.

This brings us to the topic of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). When the National Fraternity established JPIC as a national priority in 2012, all agreed that incorporating the word “outreach” within the priority would help define it. JPIC is a priority *outward* — our OFS Rule in action. It is “who we are” as Franciscans.

Overall, our JPIC outreach is tremendous, much of it likely unseen. Many OFS sisters and brothers are wholeheartedly engaged in both advocacy and charitable outreach. But sadly, apathy, willful ignorance, reticence, confusion, and at times, resistance exist in our Order. It is clear that formation in JPIC must be ongoing.

At its heart, JPIC is about loving. It is a participation in the life of Christ and the embodiment of the Gospel in response to God’s love. One Secular Franciscan, expressing the importance of JPIC, states, “If we push JPIC aside, we reject the fullness of Christ’s teaching and deprive ourselves of the understanding of how to live our ‘Life in Christ’ — the third pillar of the Church’s teaching.”¹ JPIC is not about only one or two articles of our Rule, but *it is the entire Rule in action*. JPIC is about living each day *aware of how we treat others* in our families, our community and our world, and *being good stewards* of this world God created. JPIC actions include both charitable giving and work for social justice.

It is extremely important that our JPIC efforts be rooted in both prayer and catechesis. Without a strong spiritual life, without daily ongoing conversion, and without knowledge of the Church’s teaching, we quickly become a “resounding gong or a clashing cymbal,”² a stumbling block to faith, and a source of exasperation instead of inspiration. The *Handbook for Animators of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*³ stresses the importance of the interior life and proper catechesis for JPIC Animators:

“...everything begins in prayer! Not merely passing or casual prayer; but deep discernment and contemplation. Our discernment should begin with the question: “Who am I?” Not merely what are my roles and responsibilities; but *who am I* when roles and responsibilities no longer define. After your period of discernment and the Holy Spirit reveals what is yours to do, then you need to educate yourself on the issues that speak to you. Education is

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, #13, and Part Three: Life in Christ

² 1 Corinthians 13:1

³ For a copy of the Handbook for Animators of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, contact your Regional JPIC Animator

not just reading a lot of books. It includes active listening—listening to stories of those affected by the plight you feel called to learn about. After prayerful study and reflection, then and only then, are you prepared to animate others.”

Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap., is quick to agree, “Social action needs to be accompanied by presence and prayerfulness, together with conversion, enriching our ability to love one another. In difficult situations, we need to dialogue with one another. To work and pray together is a treasured goal in serving people’s needs.”⁴ Dialogue as a tool for peacemaking and growth requires that we listen not only to those with whom we agree, but to those with whom we disagree as well, attentive always to the Holy Spirit who guides us in our Franciscan formation.

The need for social action and charitable outreach is as great as ever. The following quotes call us to give serious thought to our JPIC efforts:

“In the face of the present-day situation of the world, marked as it is by the grave sin of injustice, we recognize both our

*responsibility and our inability to overcome it by our own strength. Such a situation urges us to listen with a humble and open heart to the word of God, as he shows us new paths towards action in the cause of justice in the world.”*⁵

“As far as the Church is concerned, the social message of the Gospel must not be considered a theory, but above all else a basis and a motivation for action.” ~ Centesimus Annus, 57

*“You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel, together with all people of good will. Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?”*⁶

It is my hope and prayer that all of us will redouble our efforts to fully live our charism and *be who we are*. With Mary, our Blessed Mother as our model, may our lives reflect her joyful song in praise of the God of justice, peace and love.

After reading through the pages of this special section on JPIC, reflect on and discuss the following:

1. How can we, as individuals or a fraternity, discern new paths toward action?
2. What is the “spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans,” and in what OFS document can this phrase be found?
3. Why is it important to have a JPIC animator in each fraternity?
4. What are the four goals of JPIC according to the *For Up to Now* formation manual?
5. Describe the “two feet of love in action.”
6. Read Matthew 5:1-10 and discuss the gift of power promised in each Beatitude. How do these blessings apply to JPIC?
7. Reflect on the role of advocates as peacemakers. What is a Franciscan prophetic voice?

For further growth:

Request the assistance of the National JPIC Commission to provide formation resources or to help direct a JPIC workshop or retreat.

⁴ TAU-USA, Issue 94, CNSA News and Views

⁵ Synod of Bishops, Justice in the World, 1971:29

⁶ Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order, Rite of Profession, pg. 21

✱ PART II: WALKING WITH BOTH FEET ✱

There are several areas where we, the National OFS-USA family, need to grow in the area of JPIC. We need a greater appreciation of the diversity of our efforts; not all are called to the same ministry. We also see a great need for OFS members to recognize and address social sin. Fr. Dan Horan, OFM, called our attention to this at our 2016 Q, and some found it a difficult challenge. Lastly, we need to learn more about walking with two feet.

Some years ago, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) developed the campaign “Two Feet of Love in Action.” As described on the USCCB web site: “This foundational tool describes two distinct, but complementary, ways we can put the Gospel in action in response to God’s love: *social justice* (addressing systemic, root causes of problems that affect many people) and *charitable works* (short-term, emergency assistance for individuals).”

It is clear that we do much better with the “foot of charitable works” than we do with the “foot of social justice.” We are comfortable with charity, but find it challenging to, as the U.S. bishops put it, “work to address the *root causes* of problems facing our communities by advocating for just public policies and helping to change the social structures that contribute to suffering and injustice at home and around the world.” Yes, this means political activity. Consider our responsibility in this area:

“The Church’s obligation to participate in shaping the moral character of society is a requirement of our faith. It is a basic part of the mission we have received from Jesus Christ.” Faith helps us see more clearly the truth about human life and dignity that we also understand through human reason. As people of both faith and reason, Catholics are called to bring truth to political life and to practice Christ’s commandment to “love one another” (John 13:34). According to Pope Benedict XVI, “*charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as ‘social charity’*”⁷

The Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order further develop this responsibility:

The Constitutions of the OFS call us to “be in the forefront ... in the field of public life” and “collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances.” We are called to “build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities, [and] live our membership both in the Church and in society as an inseparable reality.” They also urge us to “promote common initiatives or participate in them with the religious of the First, Second and Third Orders, with Secular Institutes, and with other lay ecclesial groups that recognize Francis as a model and inspiration in order to work together to spread the Gospel, remove the causes of marginalization, and serve the cause of peace.”

As individuals, we’re all free to choose the ways in which we show love in action. One of us might emphasize charitable works; another might focus on structural change. Each person contributes according to their own gifts. As a body — as an Order — though, we don’t pick and choose — we walk with both feet. Each year the OFS-USA, as a body, donates substantial amounts to various charities (one foot.) Within the Franciscan family there are two organizations that help us fulfill our obligation to work for social justice (the other foot) — the Franciscan Action Network (FAN) and Franciscans International (FI).

The core business of both FAN and FI is advocacy — actions to bring the voice of the voiceless to the attention of decision makers. As advocates, FI and FAN bring a distinct gift: they are in contact with international and national authorities, and also network with those Franciscans who work “on the ground,” close to the most disadvantaged and marginalized individuals and groups, to bring direct experience to the issues at hand. FAN and FI provide awareness, background information and “calls to action” to the wider Franciscan family, uniting us to address the injustice that exists in our world. Individual OFS members are encouraged to support and participate in the work of both FAN and FI.

⁷ See the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on Faithful Citizenship and “Deus Caritas Est”, no. 29

❁ PART III: A GENTLE AND COURTEOUS SPIRIT ❁

“Let the sisters and brothers be gentle, peaceful and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with their vocation. Wherever they are, or wherever they go throughout the world they should not be quarrelsome, contentious, or judgmental towards others. Rather, it should be obvious that they are ‘joyful, good-humored,’ and happy ‘in the Lord’ as they ought to be (cf. Phil. 4:4). And in greeting others, let them say, ‘The Lord give you peace.’”¹⁰

Whenever I read the above quote I have two reactions. One is that I just smile, thinking of so many Franciscan gatherings where love and joy are so evident. The other is serious concern over the lack of “a gentle and courteous spirit”¹¹ in some Franciscan conversations, especially in the arena of social media.

To guard the tongue is not an easy thing. We often speak too quickly, and cringe when our words “come out wrong” and cause hurt. However, with the rise of social media, it is more often what Franciscans write that causes concern. In their zeal, even good-hearted advocates can easily slip into the harsh vernacular that is all too common today, spewing words that create a divisive “us and them” mentality, sadly taking the focus off the issue at hand. Folks react quickly, and it seems that some would rather be outraged than informed. Instead of questions, there are rash judgements and accusations. Conversation quickly turns from “what is right?” to “who is right?” Misinformation and twisted truth are put forth as facts, adding to the fire.

When Secular Franciscans are the authors of disparaging remarks and misinformation, stooping even to defamation of character, we must ask, “Is this who we are?” Are we not called to be “gentle, peaceful and unassuming, mild and humble, speaking respectfully to all in accord with our vocation?” Why are we so quarrelsome, contentious, and judgmental towards others? All of this is of great concern.

My sisters and brothers, how can we bring light to this darkness? What is ours to do? I have a few suggestions. First, we must look at each other with mercy. We are all in need of forgiveness. Second, let us “encourage one another for the good”¹² and address this behavior when it occurs in our midst. It is incumbent upon all servant leaders of the Order at every level, with the support and assistance of the wider Franciscan family, to ensure

fidelity to the charism. Next, let us engage in formation on this topic; good material is readily available. A reflection on the use of the tongue might begin with reading the book of James, Chapter 3, followed by a study of bearing witness to the truth, as found in the Catechism.¹³ In the *Decree on the Media of Social Communications*, issued in 1963, our Church speaks of the wonders of technology, recognizing the great good, but also that “men can employ these media contrary to the plan of the Creator and to their own loss.”¹⁴ Although technology has progressed greatly since 1963, this decree opens the door to an examination of our use of social media. Sometimes the simplest tools are the best, and the word THINK can help us remember to THINK before we speak or write. T-H-I-N-K: Is it **T**True? Is it **H**elpful? Is it **I**nspired? Is it **N**ecessary? Is it **K**ind?

Most importantly, let us pray. In prayer we receive power. In our words and actions, we give it away. As we breathe in the Spirit, let us remember that our very breath is a gift from God. Let us breathe out—in our very words and actions—that which is holy. Let us be mindful of the sacredness of language, the holiness of truth, and the prayer Christ has prayed for us: “*I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you, Holy Father. Keep those you have given me true to your name, so they may be one like us.... I am not asking you to remove them from the world, but to protect them from the Evil One.... Consecrate them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.*” John 17: 11-19



¹⁰ The Rule and Life of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis, Chapter 5 “The Way to Serve and Work”, Art.20

¹¹ Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Art. 13

¹² OFS General Constitutions, 26:2

¹³ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2464-2513, “Respect for the Truth” and “The Use of Social Communications Media.”

¹⁴ Inter Mirifica, Decree on the Media of Social Communication, p.2

✧ PART IV: PEACEMAKING ✧

By David Foster, OSB¹⁵

Making peace with one's enemy before sundown

This is where we move from learning to make peace in our own hearts to making peace in the world. The starting point is recognizing that whatever problems other people cause, we are in exactly the same position as they are, and we need to acknowledge our solidarity with them to that extent. Then we may be able to take initiatives in facilitating the desirable changes. It is not that we have no right to judge others, but it is too easy to judge them as though we were not implicated ourselves in the difficulties underlying their faults. It is too easy for us to play the part of Pilate. It is a good way of trying to make ourselves feel better.

Jesus said “do not judge.” I think the point is not that we cannot or should not judge, but that it will not really address the problem, which can only be addressed by recognizing our solidarity with others, rather than our superiority over them. To be sure, none of us can claim the righteousness needed to “sort things out” on our own account. And Jesus, the only righteous human being, actually shows us someone whose approach, while including forthright words and actions, was fundamentally the path of solidarity with people who cannot help themselves, even to the extent of accepting the role of innocent victim. This is profoundly paradoxical, but we need to learn from it if we are to understand the truth about peacemaking: Peacemaking depends not on an assertion of rights, but on acceptance of solidarity, and on the fact that I may be in a position to take initiatives towards change that another person cannot yet make.

Peacemaking involves setting others free to change, and by putting oneself alongside them, by not asserting oneself over them, trying to create the possibility of change in the human relationships



that need healing. We cannot make friends with enemies just like that, in one step, but we can love them like that, and by playing out the possibility of friendship, offer them the chance of change. This certainly means taking risks and putting our trust in others. If we take initiatives with trust, we will always find ourselves let down in the end; but life would be unbearable if people did not trust each other. Without it there is no possibility of change.

Peacemaking means restraint in asserting oneself, but we do have to assert the truth. However, we need to strive for a truth that can be spoken with love and compassion, a truth that is not being used as a weapon in a contest of strength, a truth that subverts the other person's defensiveness (which is what underlies their violence) and gives them a chance to recognize our own point of view. It does not mean making ourselves a mat to be walked over. This calls for real courage, as well as for self-sacrifice for the sake of the good of the other person. But it is through such Christ-like responses to wrong that the Spirit of new life can work through us in the hearts of others. It is learning to care for others.

¹⁵ David Foster OSB in *Deep Calls to Deep* - Going further in prayer pp.125-127. (Continuum 2007)

❄️ PART V: GOALS OF JPIC ❄️

The chapter on Justice, Peace and Care for Creation in the *For Up to Now Manual* provides the foundation for OFS formation on JPIC. This excellent resource was written by Pat Brandwein-Ball, OFS.

Here are the *Goals of JPIC* and some ideas for *Being and Doing*:

Goals of JPIC

1. To foster an atmosphere in fraternity, the privileged place, where with openness and trust we may share with each other the manner in which our personal conversions are shaping our Franciscan lives.
2. To reinforce the appreciation of the dignity of the human person in the choices made in our professed lives by responding in charity and patience to all we meet and to respond as Franciscans to anything which would denigrate the dignity of the human person, beginning with our own personal communications with one another;
3. To assist in the living out of obedience to the common good as intended by God so that the professed Secular Franciscan builds up all that is good for all of Creation and does nothing which would damage the fabric of communal interdependence;
4. To strengthen the professed Secular Franciscans' commitment to solidarity with all of Creation enabling them to make those choices in life that would bring about a more fraternal and evangelical world. (*Build up the world fraternity*)

Being and Doing

- Read & pray the Prologue and Chapter 2 of the Rule. Pay close attention to the phrasing and the strength of the verbs. Read chapter 2 two to three times per week, then weekly. Each time listen for something new, tie together the articles, one moving into the next rather than one at time in isolation. Be sure to read the corresponding articles of the General Constitutions especially Articles 17 – 27.
- What is the Church asking of me as my part in her mission? How does my daily conversion reflect upon this?
- What one new way can I find to energize my life in the Church?
- What one new way can I find to energize my life in Fraternity?

