



“Forming the Formators” the CIOFS Formation Project

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Dear Sisters and Brothers;

This issue I will deviate from my customary formation article. 2010 marks our year to complete the initial “Forming the Formators” Project Manual and start a series of National Formation Workshops (2011). With that in mind, I want to share with you some of the insights from the past 2 General Chapters of our Order. These segments are excerpted from the Introduction of the CIOFS Formation Manual. I hope they will help you all understand the impetus behind this global Initial Formation project, “Forming the Formators.”

***** CIOFS Comments *****

“This [Formation] was by far the theme that received the most attention. The importance of formation has emerged as the essential element to guarantee an authentic and deep sense of belonging, rooted in a clear notion of identity and knowledge of the true nature of the OFS and of its place in the Franciscan Family and in the Church. The Chapter has manifested the urgency of finding new, original and efficacious ways to give to formation the completeness and uniformity which an Order, spread around the whole world, deserves to accomplish the fundamental role of mature and authoritative apostolate it is called to offer, in collaboration with the rest of the Franciscan Family.” (Conclusions, General Chapter 2002)

Encarnación del Pozo OFS - Minister General

In a certain sense the Order of Penitents of Saint Francis (Franciscan Third Order), in its secular component, today called SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER³, lives a new era, some kind of rebirth marked by the new Pauline Rule, the new General Constitutions, new Statutes, the new Ritual and an Ecclesial Status clearly redefined.

³ The official name of the Order is : *ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS*. In this text we will refer to our Order always with the acronym **OFS**.

“In the process of renovation of religious life called for by the II Vatican Council, all the religious Institutes had to question their institutional identity in the light of the new doctrinal acquisitions ‘canonized’ by the Council and to offer an adequate response of their charism to the changed conditions of times.”⁴ The SFO is not a Religious Institute of Consecrated Life, however our foundational history, our laws, our Profession place us in a state which makes these words applicable to us as well. Let us not forget, moreover, that the same Papal Magisterium has defined us a «True Order» and a «Lay Order».⁵ We must, therefore, become fully aware that our Order is a «unique» reality in the history of the Church.

This process of renewal has already produced deep changes in our structures and in the way we “understand” our Order and ourselves as members. Such changes, however, have remained, to a large extent, confined to some restricted circles and have a hard time to break through, without a strong effort to “push” formation, to reach the very roots of the Order.

All this demands:

- a clarification of the identity of the Order
- the awareness of being a fully authentic and an essential component of the original Franciscan Trilogy.
- a great effort to integrate into the DNA of each of the individual OFS member and of the OFS, as a whole, the complete dimensions of Secularity, Unity, Autonomy
- a new understanding and awareness of the role that the OFS and, consequently, every Secular Franciscan, has in the Church and in the Franciscan Family,

The Presidency Formation Commission, and subsequently, the Presidency itself, after a close study and consideration, have approved a project to reshape the

INITIAL FORMATION OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS of the entire Order.

- We are moving our first steps towards a unified *ratio formationis and studiorum*. Organic and systematic *Guidelines for Formation in the OFS*, prepared by the 1996-2002 Presidency, were offered for the first time only in 2004 and they will have to be implemented starting with a solid INITIAL FORMATION program.

⁴ **A. Boni** OFM, “La Novitas Franciscana nel suo essere e nel suo divenire,” *Spicilegium Pontificii Athenaei Antoniani*, pag. 13

⁵ **Benedict XV**, Encyclical Letter “*Sacra propediem*,” **Pius XII**, Speech to the Tertiaries, 1st July 1956; **John Paul II**, to the SFO General Chapter, 14 June 1988.

- The OFS has been for many centuries an Order divided in four branches, fully subjected to the religious and, due to this, there never was a homogeneous initial formation, a true discernment of vocation or a significant extent of sharing of formation experiences.
- Too many OFS members were simply “enrolled” in the OFS because they were “good and pious people” and they were accepted to profess without really ascertaining vocation, spiritual life and too many of them had (many still have) very foggy ideas on revelation, doctrine and Franciscan spirituality.
- Initial Formation in the Order takes place in the local Fraternities, irrespective of whether there are adequate and prepared formators or not. Assistants have played an important substituting role in providing a support to formation but most of them have little knowledge of the OFS and of its true specificity, and formation has been (in many cases, still is) limited to good Christian living with some underlining of Franciscan devotions.
- Due to the foregoing, there are at times very great differences in the formation and perception of the Order from nation to nation, from region to region, and even locally between local Fraternities of the same “assistance.”

A good, systematic and well-assimilated initial formation is the necessary prerequisite for a fruitful permanent formation, which is nothing but a formation that starts and never ends, until the end of our life.

A reflection on Permanent Formation is, therefore, not perceived as being as urgent as the INITIAL FORMATION in the framework of our present fundamental goal which aims at shaping the OFS of the third millennium on a fully shared and uniform basis . .

*** **End CIOFS comments** ***

During 2010 we, the NFC, hope to assist you in preparing for the Workshops of 2011, scattered throughout the US. Besides the NAFRA channels and TAU-USA, we are considering several Formation Conference Calls to gather your comments and, if we can, answer some of your questions on this formation project.

As we build momentum for the workshops, I am asking the formators of the Order to let us know your feelings, thoughts and concerns. Here in the US, we have tried to insure the materials assembled for the

formation directors will be “user” friendly to assist and support the formation of our future sisters and brothers in our Franciscan Traditions. This is easier to do if you dialogue with us, let us know what would be most helpful. I look forward to your insights and comments.