

Re-formation

by
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Initial formation is just that: the first (initial) things you learn about the SFO. Many people come to initial formation already knowing a lot about Francis; but the SFO is uncharted territory, so to speak. If they're anything like me (which ain't all bad!), they had no idea they could actually BE a Franciscan without taking vows, etc. I, personally, had no desire to live with a bunch of women; so the existence of the SFO was welcome news to me. Initial formation was eye-, heart-, and soul-opening. That's how it should be.

A lot of water has passed over the bridge – under the dam? – (OK, that's why I'm not an engineer.) since I was in initial formation. I mean, good grief! It was in the last century!! Formation materials now range from SFO-lite (“To Live as Francis Lived”) to the industrial-strength stuff (“Fully Mature in Christ”) and everything in between. Which is great as initial formation is extremely important – those are our “formative years” as SFOs.

But Profession is not the end of the story, anymore than graduation from school or marriage is. On the contrary, it's the beginning of a whole new chapter in your life. A chapter that you will continue to write as long as you live. This is where “ongoing formation” comes in.

Let's face it: you didn't stop learning about your job the day you were hired. If you want to hang on to it, you will continue to learn about that job and all it entails on an ongoing basis. Even if you started the company or worked your way up to the top of it, there will still be stuff to learn. Ask any of those guys who are on “Undercover Boss” – a very interesting TV show no matter which rung of the ladder you're on.

But just as with a job, there may be some re-formation called for. I know when I switched jobs many moons ago, I simply went from one insurance company to another. But it wasn't a matter of just getting used to a new office; I had to unlearn quite a bit, and take on a different mindset in some ways. The product may have been the same, but the operation of the company was very different.

I think that's the way it with us SFO's. Once we're professed, we have to be re-formatted to some extent. After all, we didn't come to the Order as innocent children; we already had all sorts of baggage, some good, some bad, much undecided. Whether all of our old mindsets, opinions, feelings, priorities, values, etc. still had a place in our lives was something we still had to figure out.

Some would have to go, others could stay with a bit of re-vamping. And there would be others that would be adopted as we delved more deeply into our vocation. That's the purpose of ongoing formation. Re-formation.

Oddly enough, a good source of that re-formation is the initial formation material. It's very much like the Bible in that way: no matter how often you read it, you always find something new. Not because it wasn't there before, but because you're seeing it through new eyes (or, at least, more experienced ones).

Ongoing formation can also include a revisit of the Rule or a group discussion of this or that TAU-USA article or something mentioned in your regional newsletter. Fr. Lester Bach, OFM has written lots of good stuff. And there are also books on specific aspects of SFO life (“Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership” or “Franciscan Family Connections”).

There are also many fantastic things coming down the pike from National and International that are being disseminated through your region.

And keep in mind that ongoing formation is not just for the monthly gathering.

Ongoing is the operative word here. The daily newspaper or the evening news will tell you how badly the Franciscan charism is needed in the world. Just understanding that is re-formatting!