



**“Forming the Formators – Part 2”  
the CIOFS Formation Project**

**By Bob “Fitz” Fitzimmons, SFO  
National Formation Chair  
nfcnafra@verizon.net**

As we continue to move toward our first workshops (2011), “Forming the Formators” is the first part of the new plan for Initial Formation, I, again, want to share with you all the comments and thoughts of CIOFS, and the General Chapter/Council of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The topic of this Tau Formation segment is to give you all an understanding of the will of the General Chapter concerning formation for all who would become Secular Franciscans. The following excerpts are from the CIOFS “Forming the Formators” material:

**THE PROJECT FOR THE INITIAL  
FORMATION OF SECULAR FRANCISCANS**

The project approved by the Commission and by the Presidency was aimed at reaching the following objectives:

- To Prepare a **UNIFIED AND HOMOGENEOUS INITIAL FORMATION PROJECT** to be offered to, and be used by, the **OFS (SFO) Formators** in the whole world, covering all the **essential fundamental elements** which must characterize secular Franciscans to be recognized as such, wherever they are, by their “being” and their formation, and not so much because they simply wear a Tau or practice Franciscan devotions or frequent Franciscan Churches.
- To Form **CONTINENTAL or NATIONAL FORMATORS who, in turn, will establish similar INITIAL FORMATION programs for regional and/or local formators**, by implementing all the **necessary cultural adaptations**, without altering or betraying the spirit and the letter of the International program.

- To Develop the project by preparing a well organized **plan of studies and spiritual formation**, which should be codified into a manual and/or a series of studying and prayer aids.

**THE OBJECTIVE OF THE COURSES (OUR NATIONAL WORKSHOPS)** has been, and is, to shape up a well delineated program to achieve the three following goals:

1. Authentically live a true **LIFE OF FRATERNITY**
2. Deeply live a true **LIFE OF PERSONAL AND COMMON PRAYER**
3. Lead an intense **LIFE OF STUDY**

**LIFE OF FRATERNITY AND LIFE OF PRAYER**

**PRAYER** has to be an essential part of the program allowing communal prayer and individual spaces for meditation and contemplation.

The fundamental elements of the Course have to be lived and implemented by creating suitable spaces dedicated to individual, collective and liturgical prayer. By sharing experiences and living together during one whole week (or less according to the particular situations), the participants have a formidable opportunity to form a true, though temporary, Fraternity.

The course has to be an authentic **SCHOOL OF FRATERNITY**, and a true spirit of simplicity and openness in our mutual approach must characterize the Courses.

We have to learn how to transmit to one another a strongly **contagious** enthusiasm (a true *seraphic fire*) to pass this *fire of love, joy and belonging* on to the others when we return to our homes.

We have to approach formation with the understanding that formation is not only the learning of doctrinal subjects (although essential). We need to be formed in **essential values** that can be learned only by living them.

The **spirit of prayer and contemplation** cannot be learned from books.

The **living spirit of Fraternity** cannot be learned from books.

The **perfection of love** cannot be learned from books.

Study will help us learn about the “models.” It will offer all the essential background of formation, but the living experience is something else. And this “something else” will have to be strongly present in our courses.

## **LIFE OF STUDY**

Holiness is not a synonym of learning but a sharing into God's life and holiness, and *God gives to his beloved whatever he wants when they sleep* (Ps 127). In any case, while endeavoring unceasingly with all our strength to grow in prayer, contemplation and holiness, by accepting and using God's grace, we have a fundamental obligation to study, as art. 9 of the GG.CC. recites.

We should never forget that the Church expects us to fulfill our mission to be at the forefront of its action in the world.

We are *an instrument of the Church* and, because of this, we have to keep constantly abreast with its Magisterium and its breath.

It is important to re-underline that this [*initial phase*] is designed **as course for formators** and not for each and every Secular Franciscan in the world.

Formators will have to be specially prepared persons who, subsequently, will have to use their best judgment to adapt and to offer whatever their brothers and sisters, locally, need, **making sure they offer, at least, the absolutely essential rudiments** to become, be and be recognized as **true secular Franciscans**, throughout the world. \*\*\* END of CIOFS comments\*\*\*

It is in this spirit that the National Formation Commission along with the gracious assistance of some of our own formation directors, have worked to adapt the CIOFS materials for use here and to serve the needs of formation in the U.S. As a Nation, we have an abundance of formation materials at our disposal, yet formation at times still seems hit and miss, without a sense of what core elements are needed to understand our Franciscan and Secular tradition. This project moves us closer to being able to delineate those essential elements required for all of our formation programs and will also attempt to provide some of the training and background needed by our formation directors, so we might better assist our sisters and brothers to be "recognized as true Secular Franciscans."

*Pace - Bob Fitzsimmons SFO*