

FOR UP TO NOW

WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD?

EXPLORING THE CONTENTS OF OUR NEW FORMATION TEXT

by

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THERE'S A NEW FORMATION VEHICLE IN TOWN!

The "For Up to Now" formation manual made its debut in front of 130 Secular Franciscans from across the country at the May 2011 National Formation Workshop in St. Louis. It was quite a hit!

Formation teams are now at work, and after a test drive or two, they will soon be showing this new manual at regional workshops hoping you will drive home your own copy. While those plans are being developed we thought you might enjoy a look "under the hood" of this new manual to see just "what's she's got."

The complete title of this new manual is:

***For Up to Now /
Foundational Topics for Initial Formation***

We call it "FUN" for short. The FUN manual is an impressive 460 pages in 26 chapters, arranged in a suggested order beginning with "First Contacts" and "Orientation" right through to "Profession." It's all in a loose-leaf format to fit in a three-ring binder and is currently being completely indexed.

The FUN manual was written by a group of Secular Franciscans working under the guidance of the National Formation Commission, and it's truly a major accomplishment for our Order. We hope everyone comes to appreciate its newly designed engine that, of course, runs on an environmentally friendly new fuel!

Why did we need a new formation manual? This manual was written in response to a strong and clear mandate from the 2002 General Chapter of our Order, asking us to engage ourselves to give to the Order a "strong, complete formation, rooted on identity and sense of belonging, based on the knowledge of the true nature of the Order."

Our mission was to "find new, original and efficacious ways to give to formation the completeness and uniformity that 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." The old vehicles weren't bad—they just needed a new transmission.

Before going any further, it must be mentioned that this new manual could not have been accomplished without the great foundation provided over the years by all who contributed to formation in the SFO, especially previous members of the National Formation Commission. This new manual was built on a chassis they provided. We are grateful!

Now, back under the hood, let's look at how the topics for those 26 chapters were chosen.

Thirteen of the chapters are based on material we received from the International Formation Commission via the "Form the Formators" manual developed as a result of the CIOFS formation project launched in 2002.

FORMATION

This material from CIOFS was translated from Italian into English and adapted to the terminology (culture) of the USA. The remaining 13 topics were chosen by the National Formation Commission in our best effort to create a complete program for initial formation. All together these topics are what we call “foundational.” They give us the uniformity and completeness that is so needed.

Authors of the various chapters were invited to participate and asked to write the material in a simple and easy to understand manner— yet be thorough enough to do justice to the intent of the material. They were reminded that the focus was “local formation,” not graduate theology.

This needed to be a family vehicle! The writers were encouraged to provide an appropriate Gospel or New Testament reading to introduce the segment; to include a writing, admonition, or prayer written by St Francis to support the material; and to point towards the study of particular articles of the Rule, General Constitution and National Statutes. They were asked to develop lesson plans, outlines, PowerPoint presentations, prayers, rituals, discussion questions, diagrams and anything else that would be helpful to a local formation team presenting the material. The 26 chapters of FUN have all of this... and more.

Let's close the hood and step back, because you should definitely check out the front end of this little vehicle!

The front material is amazing! Along with several inspirational introductions there is a brief history of this formation project and a very detailed “owner’s manual” in two sections entitled “For the Formator” and “What is Formation.” These sections provide great “how to” and should be read thoroughly before attempting to operate the FUN vehicle.

As if this wasn’t enough, just wait! There’s more! The FUN manual has a companion “FUN” CD full of resources. You would not believe all the material that is on this CD!

There are more than 25 church documents and encyclicals, complete study editions of our Rule and Constitutions, more than a dozen lesson plans, various handouts and PowerPoint presentations for many of the chapters, guidelines for interviews, a complete Profession preparation packet with a sample invitation, a presider’s copy of the Rite, a sample program (worship aid) for the congregation and a timeline to prepare for a profession celebration.

On this CD you’ll find everything from diagrams of the “Pathway to Profession” to an illustrated lifeline of St. Francis; from an updated bibliography of resources to the Prayer of St. Francis in song; from an Assisi Pilgrimage presentation to a slideshow on “gazing.”

It's all there!



“Yikes! Information overload!” you say. Is this manual too technical? Too full of heady information to funnel into our inquirers in order to create SFO intellectuals? By no means! Let’s not confuse “formation” with “formation materials.” Formation is not “just reading” and this manual without a formator who transmits it with passion and living faith is just a bunch of paper sheets with little value. In other words the FUN manual is a great new vehicle, but it’s worth nothing without a well-formed “driver.”

We invite you to hop in and find out for yourself. Attend your regional workshop. Talk to your formation team. Learn what formation is all about. We all need to know, because we are all agents of formation. Most importantly let’s trust our Maker and the Holy Spirit who is the first agent of formation. In the words of our National Minister, Tom Bello, “Let us pray without ceasing that this Formation Manual will help us form true, lifelong Secular Franciscans (including ourselves) as God intends, calls and brings to fruition.” Together we’ll find out this vehicle was designed for the “long haul”— it’s great for journeying! And it’s a great ride!

—Jan Parker is a member of San Damiano Fraternity in O’Fallon, MO., in the St. Clare Region. She is a member of the National Formation Commission and also serves as our National Secretary.