

## FOR UP OF NOW

TO: Regional Ministers, Regional Formation Directors, NEC and NFC  
July 13, 2011

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This model curriculum presented to us by our brother Patrick is wonderful! As our sister Kathleen said, "What a gift to the Order!" I appreciate the work of Patrick and all the others who are moving forward with the implementation of the FUN Manual. Thanks for your time, energy and commitment.

Looking at this model curriculum brought to mind a few thoughts I'd like to share about the formation process and to request further ideas on how to move forward in these areas. In particular I want to comment on the use of other formation texts to supplement the foundational topics covered in the FUN manual. I'll start with some thoughts on Scripture and Prayer, move on to "Forming the Formators" and then conclude with the use of other resources, including other formation texts.

### SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER IN FORMATION

"For Up to Now" makes the case that "all along the way" we need to direct those in formation to prayer, the reading of Scripture, to shared prayer experiences and the sharing of Scripture. Although in some respects this "goes without saying", it's also important to "say it".

So how do we keep Scripture and Prayer "front and center"? Maybe it doesn't make sense to list these as "curriculum topics" because Prayer and Scripture aren't really "topics". They need to become a daily part of the life of an SFO. I'm not sure how to keep them in the forefront except to keep them in the forefront! I did note that this model curriculum included sections on prayer and Lectio Divina, etc., as topics to cover, but the challenge for us is to help others form a prayer life and love of Scripture that undergirds the "learning" about it. What would be your ideas on how to do this?

### FORMING THE FORMATORS

My next thought has to do with formation being "more than just a curriculum". It concerns "forming the formators". How familiar are we with Article 19.5 of our National Statutes? This article states, in part: "The form to be employed in both initial and ongoing formation is that found in the *Guidelines of Initial Formation*. (Const. # 38.2)". Our FUN Manual also stresses the importance of [Guidelines for Initial Formation](#) (GFIF) and is in fact "built on it". FUN builds on GFIF in the chapters "For the Formator" and "What is Formation" and constantly references GFIF as foundational.

Knowing that our National Statutes mandate the use of [Guidelines for Initial Formation](#) we must ask ourselves how familiar are we with this book? Obviously, it is an essential document, and yet how underutilized it is and relatively unknown by many! GFIF is all about "forming the formators". It's great to develop a curriculum to implement the FUN manual, and I mean that sincerely, but that is only part of the task before us. "Forming the formators" is also part of our task.

When CIOFS presented to us the new formation project "forming the formators" was their top priority. CIOFS very strongly stressed that formation in the order was not to be a "course" but required a "lived experience"—a "lived transmission". Those involved in Formation (and that's all of us!) need to learn this art. For CIOFS as well as for the National Formation Commission this remains a major concern. CIOFS did not wish this formation project to be a "course" in Franciscan studies. Their reasons for a "living transmission" were compelling. This is, in part, why we were directed to distribute the FUN Manual only to those who attend a formation workshop gathering.

All that being said how can we "form the formators" utilizing the good and basic principles outlined in GFIF and the FUN Manual? I believe that reading and studying GFIF is part of our task. Each time I read it I am reminded of all that formation needs to be, but I don't read it as often as I should.

How do we encourage this? How do we encourage formators to also read and study the "front material" in FUN? Please ponder this and share your ideas.

In this light of “forming the formators” our FUN Manual also stresses the need to be familiar with the job description of a Formation Director. This job description is found in the “Handbook for Regional Formation Directors”. An occasional review of this resource will help us become effective formators. Need a copy? You can find it at:

[www.nafraformation.org/HBforRegionalFormatorsFINAL.pdf](http://www.nafraformation.org/HBforRegionalFormatorsFINAL.pdf)

Once again to state the obvious, our efforts to improve formation need to go beyond just presenting material to be covered. We cannot forget the “doing and the being” and focus only on the “knowing”. The material and topics to be presented are only part of the formation process. It is critical that we don’t just focus on the “foundational topics” in this new formation project, but that we “form the formators” as well. Knowing what formation is all about is important. How do we teach this? Please share your ideas.

### **THE USE OF RESOURCES AND OTHER FORMATION TEXTS:**

Looking at this model curriculum I am happy to see the column with the heading “Other” which references our “essential documents” (Rule, Constitutions, Ritual, etc.) and various church encyclicals and documents. These are important supplemental resources. Thank you for making these connections for us all!

There may be some variations from region to region as to what “other” material is presented, but we all gain by sharing our ideas. Patrick has offered some great thoughts as to what to include.

Steve may soon present more –Let’s keep sharing our ideas.

When it comes to the use of formation texts other than For Up to Now we need to be a bit careful. Making use of other formation texts has advantages, none the least being what we gain by the insights of other authors, but For Up to Now was mandated for a reason. A formator cannot simply look at the FUN list of chapters and say “Oh, we need to cover this topic” and then find that topic in another place to the exclusion of knowing what FUN has to say about that topic. To put it another way: The topics covered in the FUN manual were written in a new light. Other formation texts might cover these topics, but might not include the emphasis that CIOFS feels has been missing prior to this formation project.

To ensure that we truly are “covering the material” each topic in the FUN manual needs to be read and comprehended by the formation team. It is then the work of the formation team to present this material to those in formation. This can be done in one of several ways, but always with sensitivity to the one being formed.

One option is to hand out the FUN chapters to be read ahead of time and then to come together to discuss the material. If you feel that the chapter will not be read, for whatever reason (even after handing it out) it is important to glean the main points and share and discuss them. Presenting supporting material is always good. Using other formation texts is also an option if those texts cover not only the topic, but also the emphasis given to that topic in the FUN manual.

Many topics covered in the FUN manual are presented in new and unique ways. We need to evaluate older formation texts and ask if they will help or hinder. Let us bring out from our storehouses that which is both “old and new”, but let us also be aware that new wine needs new wineskins.

Perhaps a summary of what I’m trying to say is this: As we implement FUN, I think it’s great to suggest other supporting material that “brings home” the topic. Even better is to further “bring it home” through sharing (talking) about it. To further “bring it home” through a shared prayer experience is heavenly. The icing on the cake is when you teach it by living it day in and day out in your own life, knowing full well the only way this happens is by the graces gained through daily prayer and the sacraments. The goal and the prize is when we see these ideals embraced and lived out in the lives of those going through the formation process. Our efforts and a continued sharing of how to make this happen are much needed!

That being said, I just thank you again for your work and all the sharing that has happened so far. The energy from our May 2011 workshop obviously continues. FUN has had a great reception and I can’t wait to see where we go from here!

Peace and love,

**Jan**

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Jan Parker, SFO, our National Secretary, also serves as a member of the National Formation Commission.

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