

A VISION OF THE FUTURE

by
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I have a vision of the future for the Secular Franciscan Order. A vision of the SFO coming into its own. A vision of our Order, like Pope Innocent III's, of Francis propping up the church to prevent it from falling down. A vision of a dynamic, spirit-filled Order, calling out to a broken Church, a message of love and conversion – a message filled with hope and commitment.

This vision of our future Order must define who we are and who we are about to become. I am convinced that with the recent scandals and clergy sexual abuse of minors, the Secular Franciscan Order's brothers and sisters can stand as witnesses to their fellow lay people about what the Church is really about...Christ's love, forgiveness and salvation! This lay witness is even more crucial with the declining numbers of religious and clergy who had been the visible face of the Church for so long. We can fill the need for spirituality, explain the Church's stands in layperson's terms and witness with our lives the value of our faith. It is an important role in the life of the Church and one in which preparation is key.

We, as Secular Franciscans, must prepare for a time when religious and clergy are scarce. In fact, in some areas this is already happening! Roles currently performed by religious and clergy will have to be assigned to carefully prepared lay ecclesial ministers. Secular Franciscans, based upon their commitment to the Church and spirituality, may be asked to step up and fill the void left by decreasing numbers of religious.

With limited contact with clergy and religious, Secular Franciscans might be the only contact a layperson might encounter who is within reach to help them with their crises of faith, questions or spirituality. Our accessibility and availability to serve, both formally and informally, will be crucial to the vitality and life of the future church.

We must be prepared for this eventuality, and this is the reason formation is so essential to our order! Benjamin Franklin once said: "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail." We *must* be prepared to take on important roles in the Church.

How many times, have brothers and sisters shrunk from taking office or performing an important role in an apostolate?

It might be because they feel they are unprepared.

Their initial formation and/or ongoing formation may not have sufficiently prepared them to accept these roles. This must not happen in the future!

All formation in the Secular Franciscan Order begins with Initial Formation (Orientation, Inquiry, Candidacy), which sets the tone and spirit within the Order for the future. This is why our International Fraternity (CIOFS¹) identified Initial Formation as its *first* priority for all Secular Franciscans.

It is why we now have a uniform Initial Formation program throughout the world, which was presented this past May to all the Regional Formation Directors and which will be coming to your region shortly.

For those involved in Initial Formation in your fraternity, it will be a challenge to implement, but it will be very rewarding to see the effect it will have on those in formation.

It will prepare our future Secular Franciscans to accept their role as agents of change to repair a church broken and scarred by scandal and sexual abuse. However, Initial Formation is not only for the newcomers. I urge *all* Secular Franciscans to get involved with the new Initial Formation curriculum. It can be a way to rejuvenate and enliven our own spiritual life. We must learn the new ways of Initial Formation, which keep the old but add a new depth of knowledge, discernment and spirituality for all Secular Franciscans. CIOFS has said that the new Secular Franciscan needs a foundation in the basics of our faith (catechesis), ecclesiology, theology of the laity, Franciscan theology, tradition and spirituality. All this is needed so the future Secular Franciscan can explain our faith, share our spirituality and be grounded in a deep relationship with our Lord.

If we keep this vision of our future alive, we will be prepared to be "church" for others. Our Church needs us! Christ needs us to be His hands, His face, His love to others! Let us get prepared, "for up to now, we have done nothing!"