



CNSA

News & Views

Franciscan Life in the 21st Century
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And then ...

It seems to me that we Franciscans need to integrate a few things in our Franciscan lives. Sometimes our fraternal life can be more about devotions than sharing lived experiences. We occasionally excuse ourselves from action by making prayer our only action. That is certainly not a bad thing since prayerfulness is vital to Franciscan life. But it can sometimes seem that we use prayer as a way to avoid personal action among people who face a variety of needs. Some fraternity bulletins mention prayer intentions and the sources of devotional practices, which is fine. But the balance of calling for action within the Church and society is missing. A *both/and* attitude is needed to engage in human-dignity issues beyond prayerfulness, moving to personal involvement of concern and compassion.

Our Franciscan spirit is tested in these days of violence. "Loners or prejudiced persons" use violence as do groups or nations moved by hatred, anger or revenge. Violence becomes a tool for people who seek to silence other people whose ideas and attitudes they find offensive. Lies, injustice, half-truths, mis-interpretations and arrogant claims, with neither truth nor reality on their side, trigger some of these actions. Without attentive listening people are judged, condemned and disposed of - sometimes through violence, death, or suicide; by false stories meant to make the victim look bad and the purveyors look good.

On the other hand, Pope Francis seeks to draw people together. Drawing close to Orthodox church leaders; seeking dialogue with Palestinians and Israelis, inviting them to common prayer instead of common violence; seeking to achieve the value of relationships instead of enmity; recognizing prayer and action as normal partners in response to people problems. He invites us to evaluate the support we give to various issues, groups, or individuals to see if our actions and ideas reflect a gospel commitment and provides gospel-oriented action.

Pope Francis chooses to walk at the side of the poor. He invites honest dialogue about our reasons for acting as we do. He invites us to see if we are protecting personal comfort/safety or if we choose to share in the lives of people in need or who hurt from

lack of compassion. He asks us not to ignore the harsh realities of people suffering from the consequences of political and social ideas and practices. He invites us to *evangelize with joy* in the Gospel through his words in *Evangelii Gaudium*.

Franciscans cannot only be "nice folks" who pray about hunger, lack of friends (loners), homeless people, parentless children, isolated young people or seniors, families in need of education, unemployed needing training, and all the people who face societal fears and frustrations. Some people are immersed in animosity, hatred, fear, without hope, and give up on being able to have a peaceful and hope-filled life. We Franciscans claim to have compassionate hearts, the ability to listen attentively and create understanding, committed to offer loving and unifying action initiated by Francis of Assisi. People sometimes find little expression of love even within the *community of love* (Church) or in the people claiming to have a Franciscan spirit. The OFS Rule (Article 7) calls for *daily conversion* because of our human frailty!



Do we promote a positive Franciscan solution or are we part of the problem? The *partnership of prayer and action* moves us to engage life-issues through the way we live our Franciscan lives! The Gospel does not seem to allow for any exceptions when it requires us to love our neighbor.

You have heard that they were told, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But what I tell you is this: "Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on good and bad alike, and sends rain on the innocent and the wicked. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Even the tax-collectors do as much as that. If you greet only your brothers, what is there extraordinary about that? Even the heathen do as much. There must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds!

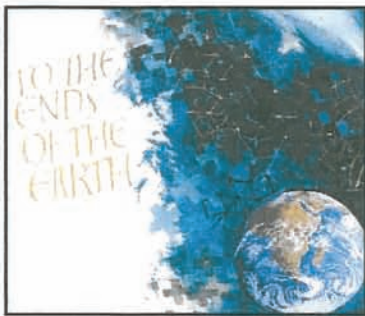
Matthew 5:43-48 (REB)

Understanding these words is not difficult. But they stretch love beyond where we might wish to go.

It would be sad if fraternity life fails to support us to act in ways described in the text from Matthew. It is a text that comes from the heart of Jesus in the Gospel. The OFS Rule addresses these same issues:

Article 12: ... *they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.*

Article 13: ... *Secular Franciscans, with a gentle and courteous spirit, accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. ... ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.*



Article 14: *Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.*

Article 19: *Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon!*

Article 8: ... *let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.*

Article 9 ... *The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her (Mary) by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.*

This article is a clear implementation of both prayerfulness and action, a **both / and** way of living. Article #9 clearly indicates what devotion to the Blessed Virgin should accomplish in us - a **giving of self** in the same way that Mary responded to God - with a daily spirit of self-giving.

Soooo - How does this look in ordinary Franciscan life? How do people concerned about the integrity of creation find ways to link their ministry to programs that support life in all its stages? How do people dedicated to protect life in the womb find ways to support the human dignity of the unemployed or those in prison? How do formators find ways to help people recognize their personal ministries? How do people dedicated to contemplation find ways to support Franciscans working for human dignity in society? How do Franciscans confined to their home or a nursing home support the people working for

peace and justice - or - How do peace and justice ministers support Franciscans confined to their home or in a nursing home? Etc, etc.

What about Spiritual Assistants?

The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and the Franciscan family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to co-operate in initial and on-going formation of secular Franciscans and to express the fraternal affection of the Religious towards the OFS.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral assistance to the OFS - Article 2.3

Spiritual assistants collaborate with local, regional and national councils in accomplishing the things we addressed in this article. SAs offer insights to support the OFS councils and members in being faithful to the entire OFS Rule and Constitutions.

SAs help to link prayer and action in fraternity life and among individual Franciscans. They assure that the devotional life of the fraternity leads to Christ. In turn the Holy Spirit sends the members to serve the needs of his people. SAs guide the rituals used in fraternity life and help avoid extremes of religion that could separate us because of religious (mis)understanding. They support ways of seeking unity in the Church, the world and the fraternal life of OFS members.

Spiritual assistants support councils and fraternity members in showing respect and courtesy to all people - even when they disagree with one another. Dialogue should come naturally to SAs so that all sides of an issue can be understood and handled with respect.

SAs' words and actions should draw people to a relationship that allows us to maintain a healthy dialogue with one another. SAs share the work of well planned and understandable initial and ongoing formation. SAs encourage openness in the hearts of the members when dealing with people in their daily life.

SAs do what is possible to keep the OFS connected to all the members of the Franciscan family in their relationship with the 1st Order, 2nd Order, and TOR members and vice-versa. As a Franciscan family we find ways to work together to make our Franciscan spirit influential in **both** the Church **and** the world.

*... The purpose of **altius moderamen** is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans.*

OFS Constitutions - Article 85.2

Like the lamp, you must shed light among your fellows, so that, when they see the good you do, they may give praise to your Father in heaven.

Matthew 5:16 (REB)

