

Franciscan Formation

Franciscan formation is based on a personal encounter with the Lord, and begins with the call of God and the individual's decision to walk with Saint Francis in the footsteps of the poor and crucified Christ as His disciple under the action of the Holy Spirit.

Franciscan formation is a continuous process of growth and conversion involving the whole of a person's life, called to develop his or her own particular human, Christian and Franciscan dimensions, radically living the Holy Gospel, in the spirit of prayer and devotion, in fraternity and minority.

The following of Jesus Christ in the manner of St Francis leads us to commit ourselves to the Church and with her to place ourselves at the service of the men and women of our time as messengers of reconciliation and peace.

1. AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF ST FRANCIS

The following of Christ was shaped for St Francis by his encounters with the San Damiano Cross, with the leper, and by his listening to the Gospel. These experiences made St Francis grow in his passionate love of the poor and crucified Christ, until his complete conformity with Him on La Verna. The strong experience of God as Father and the Highest Good characterized the life of St Francis. It moved him to an attitude towards the Creator of gratitude and praise for His wonders and made him a brother to all people and to all creatures.

The gift given to St Francis was that of beginning to do penance. This then involved a process of continuing conversion which changed to sweetness those things which before had seemed bitter. St Francis was in due course led to forsake the mentality and attitudes of this world, to despoil himself of his possessions and of himself in order to pass from a life centered on himself to a gradual conformity with Christ (cf. Test 1.3-4).

The path followed by St Francis is a model for the life and formation of us Franciscans today, for we too are called to walk along the same road until we achieve the full stature of Christ (cf. Eph 4,13).

2. PRINCIPLES OF FRANCISCAN FORMATION

(1) General Principles

The Franciscan, under the grace of the Holy Spirit, is the chief protagonist of his or her own formation, responsible for accepting and making his own all the values of Franciscan life, capable of making his own decisions and exercising personal initiative.

Franciscan formation is a dynamic process of growth in which we open our heart to the Gospel in our daily life and commit ourselves fully to being continually converted so as to follow Jesus Christ ever more faithfully in the spirit of St Francis.

The process of formation respects our unique individuality and the mystery which we bear in ourselves through our particular gifts, encouraging us to grow through knowing ourselves and discovering the will of God. Franciscan formation takes place in our Fraternity and in the real world. It is here that we experience the power of grace, are renewed in mind and heart, and develop our evangelizing vocation. Such Franciscan formation is ever alert to our human, Christian, and Franciscan growth, in order that we may follow Jesus Christ wholeheartedly, after the manner of Francis.

(2) Specific Principles

- Franciscan formation stresses elements of our Franciscan charism (prayerfulness, simplicity, humility, an awe of creation, penitential, and working for social justice and peace).
- Franciscan formation is holistic, that is to say it takes into account our whole person, in order that we may develop harmoniously our physical, mental, moral, and intellectual gifts, and may integrate ourselves positively in social and community life.
- Franciscan formation is a journey during which the fundamental aspects of our consecrated life are cultivated. Hence all formation activities have as their goal growth in the spirit of prayer and contemplation, of brotherhood, minority, service and mission.
- Franciscan formation is experiential, that is to say it is based on the particular life and gifts of each person, and encourages the concrete experience of the particular Franciscan style and values in the daily life of the Fraternity and of the individual.
- Franciscan formation is practical, inasmuch as it aims at transforming into action whatever is learned (cf. Adm 7), especially by means of a constant habit of poverty and work, based on the example of St Francis (cf. Test 24).
- Franciscan formation is enculturated in the conditions of the life, the environment and the time in which it is carried out, while remaining faithful to the Gospel and to the traditions of the Order.
- Franciscan formation is open to new forms of life and service, since it is continually attentive to the present appeals of the world and the Church.
- Franciscan formation is organized in stages which involve the person from the beginning of the vocation process and on throughout life.
- Franciscan formation is organic, gradual and consistent in its various stages, inasmuch as it promotes the development of each person in a harmonious and progressive way, while fully respecting each individual.
- Franciscan formation dedicates adequate time to study, allowing for the particular gifts of each person and without forgetting that learning is not limited to the intellectual dimension of the person, to enable the person to reach an ever fuller knowledge of God and the better to serve everyone.
- Franciscan formation promotes an authentic sense of discipline directed to an honest self-knowledge and self-control, to fraternal life and to service.