

A New Glance at the Formation Process

prepared by Teresa V. Baker, SFO
National Formation Commission Co-chair

The Three Components

There are three components of formation, informational, formational and transformational, that are interwoven with the four stages of formation. There are different agents of formation who share the primary responsibility of each of these components. A layout will make this more understandable. Formation is the work of the entire fraternity, not just the formation director!!

The Informational Component supplies basic information so that the person coming to us in formation is able to make an informed decision concerning his/her vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.

It answers the question: What do I need to know?

Persons primarily responsible for this component of formation are the formation director and the formation team.

Necessary for this component are the numerous and varied formational materials that are available to us, biographies of Francis and Clare and Secular Franciscan saints, the writings of Francis and Clare, and the primary sources.

In Orientation, these questions might be delved into:

- What is the Order?
- Who is Francis in your life? How does he fit?
 - Read three books on Francis; where does his life intercept with yours? If you have nothing in common with Francis, he might not be the best guide for your journey
- Brief intro to the Rule and your life:
 - which three articles will be easy for you to assimilate? Which three will be hard?

In Inquiry, these topics will be discussed:

- the call of the Holy Spirit in our life; how are we to be guided?
- the lives and writings of Francis and Clare
- the history of our Order and how it fits into the history of the Franciscan Family
- the history of our Rule
- the Gospel as our way of life
 - including ways of making it pertinent to our life, ex. Lectio Divina

- Clare's suggestion to Gaze, Consider, Contemplate, Desire to Imitate
- Community as our basis
- Church as our anchor

In Candidacy, we flesh out all these points and focus on:

- aspects of our Secular Franciscan life as found in Chapters Two and Three of our Rule
- focus on the lives and writings of Secular Franciscan saints

In Ongoing Formation, we continue to update and deepen our understanding of all aspects of our Secular Franciscan life.

The Formational Component immerses the prospective member into the living community that is the fraternity.

Article 22 of our Rule reminds us that

the local fraternity . . . is the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan family and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

In Article 23 we are reminded that

the entire community is engaged in this process of growth (formation) by its manner of living.

It answers the question: How do I live this life in community?

Persons primarily responsible for this component of formation are the fraternity members and the fraternity council, and the sponsor during Candidacy.

Necessary for this component are the numerous and varied aspects that make up a healthy fraternal life: its sharing, its apostolates, its socializing, its praying, its learning, its business. All that enables a fraternity to BE and DO. Important guidelines to keep in mind:

- What does the fraternity have to offer me?
- What do I have to offer the fraternity

In Orientation

- the local fraternity is the basic unit of the Order, not the individual member
- we stress that family is the basis of Franciscan life
- Francis in his Testament:

And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel (14).

- Clare in her Testament:

After the most high heavenly Father saw fit in his mercy and grace to enliven my heart, that I should do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed Francis, a short while

after his conversion, I, together with a few sisters whom the Lord had given me after my conversion, willingly promised him obedience. . . (24, 25).

- Our Rule:
 - *the Secular Franciscan Order is divided into fraternities on various levels* (Article 20)

In Inquiry

in initial Formation, we focus on how the persons coming to fraternity are formed by its character and manner of being

These opportunities are to be taken advantage of:

- monthly fraternal gatherings
- social events which include all members of the families
- times of prayer
- opportunities to develop the apostolates

In Candidacy

- continue the various local fraternity happenings and apostolates
- experience formation and other gatherings with nearby local fraternities
- join in the activities of the regional fraternity
- meet members of other branches of the Franciscan Family

In Ongoing Formation

In Ongoing formation, the fraternity is formed by the various interests and concerns of the individual members

- allow individual members to share their manners of living the Franciscan lifestyle
- continue to share in the apostolates of others
- continue and expand the connections made during Candidacy

The Transformational Component supplies the bedrock of our vocation. Here we examine our relationship with God and how this becomes the alpha and omega of our Franciscan life.

It answers the question: How does my relationship with God impact my life and my relationship with others?

Persons primarily responsible for this component of formation are the Holy Spirit, the person in formation, the Spiritual Assistant, and the sponsor for Candidates.

Necessary for this component are the daily prayer life and Scripture reading that is prescribed in our Rule; spiritual writings of various Franciscan saints.

In Orientation, areas that should be explored:

- Identify how you were called?
- How is the Holy Spirit moving in your life?
- How might this life as a Franciscan help you to follow Jesus more closely?
- An introduction to a correct reading of Scripture is encouraged

In Inquiry, focus centers on the Franciscan aspect of our spirituality:

- Exactly, what is Franciscan Spirituality?
- How does it differ from other spiritualities in the Church?
- How does the Franciscan fraternity differ from other groups in the parish?
- How does following Francis and Clare help you draw closer to Jesus?
- Why are they good guides for you?
- Meditate on some of the spiritual writings of Francis, Clare and Bonaventure
- *Lectio Divina* as a prayer form should be explored
- Clare's suggestion to Gaze, Consider, Contemplate, Desire to Imitate
- Day of Recollection should be experienced

In Candidacy, focus centers on the secular nature of our spirituality:

- How is your relationship with Jesus lived out in your secular life?
- How does your vocation reach into your marriage, your home, your neighborhood, your work?
- How is your spirituality different from that of the priests and religious sisters and brothers you know?
- How does Gospel living influence your daily life?
- How do the words of the Gospel act out in your daily life?
- Examine the spiritual writings and lives of various Secular Franciscan saints. What example do they give?
- Overnight or Weekend Retreat, preferably on a Franciscan topic, is encouraged

In Ongoing formation, while continuing to explore our spirituality, inspect your prayer life:

- Is it the same today as it was five years ago?
- How has it changed?
- investigate these prayer forms:
 - Bonaventure's *The Soul's Journey into God*
 - *Office of the Passion*
 - Solitude experiences
 - Prayers of St. Francis
- How does entering into Franciscan prayer forms deepen your relationship with God?
- Continue to examine the spiritual writings and lives of various Secular Franciscan saints. Try to emulate their example.
- Retreats of varying lengths and formats are suggested.