

A METHOD FOR THE FORMATION OF THE NEWLY PROFESSED

The RCIA process in the Catholic Church has a post initiation phase known as Mystagogia. The purpose of this phase is to encourage the newly initiated to become more familiar with the mysteries of our Faith and to motivate them to participate more fully in the Sacraments while they continue to grow in spiritual maturity.

The *General Constitutions of the SFO* (article #44.2) and the *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States* (Chapter III, F.2.a, page 28) advocate a Mystagogia-type phase for the newly professed so that they may have the opportunity to delve more deeply into the mysteries of Franciscan spirituality and to make the conversion process an integral part of their daily lives. The format which follows is offered with the hope that it will stimulate the newly professed to become spiritually mature Secular Franciscans.

The method is as follows:

1. A theme such as poverty or humility is selected.
2. An article from the *SFO Rule* which reinforces the theme is identified.
3. A short passage from Sacred Scripture relevant to the theme is chosen.
4. Participants reflect in silence on what the Rule and the Scripture passage are saying to them. This time of meditation is important to the process of surrender. Participants need this quiet time in order to listen to God's Word and to learn what Jesus is personally asking of each of them.
5. A member of the Formation Team then offers a short presentation which integrates and clarifies the theme in light of the Rule and the biblical reference.
6. Another period of reflective silence follows allowing the participants to interiorize what they have learned from the presentation.
7. The presenter or one of the participants reads a short, theme-related selection about St. Francis which illustrates how Francis lived out this theme in light of his relationship with Christ.
8. Journaling comes next in which the participants are asked to reflect upon and write about what this experience of St. Francis means to them.
9. The participants are then invited to imagine a situation that any of them might encounter on their spiritual journey in which St. Francis directly accompanies them.
10. Participants then write a letter to Jesus telling Him about their experience with St. Francis at their side (e.g., How did they feel knowing that Francis was a part of their experience? What did he say to them? How did he encourage them?).

11. A period of sharing follows. Sharing is important in the growth of Fraternity members. We learn from one other as well as learning to hear what Christ has to say through another person.

12. The process ends with the communal praying of one of the prayers of St. Francis.

Here is a sample session on the theme of Humility:

THE SFO RULE: Chapter 2, Article # 11.

BIBLICAL REFERENCE: Philippians 2:3-11.

REFLECTIVE SILENCE: Quiet reflection on the passages as presented.

PRESENTATION: A short presentation on Franciscan humility is offered.

REFLECTIVE SILENCE: Quiet reflection on the presentation.

FRANCIS' EXPERIENCE: 1 Celano 17

JOURNALING: "Write about what St. Francis' experience of humility means to you."

GUIDED IMAGERY: "Imagine yourself volunteering at a soup kitchen for the homeless or at an AIDS hospice with Francis at your side."

LETTER WRITING: "Write a letter to Jesus about your experience at the soup kitchen or hospice with St. Francis at your side."

SHARING:

PRAYER: Communal praying of one of the prayers of St. Francis.

*Please note that you can choose any Franciscan theme to explore using this method. The short Franciscan story for the Experience portion of the process may be selected from any reliable Franciscan source.

(Adapted from Nancy Lippert, S.F.O., a member of the St. Francis Regional Formation Commission. She graciously gave the National Formation Commission her permission and her blessing for the use of this format, 2005)