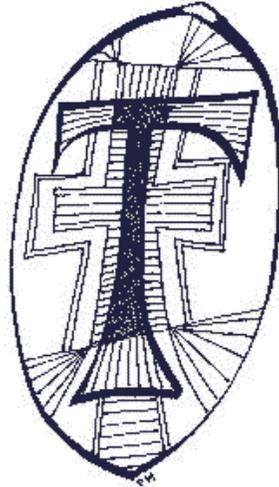


## Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order



Formation is the broad term we use when we speak of the process of fostering the overall spiritual growth and development of the vocation of potential members and professed members of the Secular Franciscan Order. Especially as it is understood from the Franciscan perspective, formation is an encounter with the Lord. It begins with the call of God and the response of the individual person in answering that call with a decision to walk with Saint Francis in the footsteps of the poor and crucified Christ as His disciple under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a continuous process of growth and conversion involving the whole of a person's life in the radical living of the Gospel within the context of fraternity. It is a dynamic process of growth in which the person opens their heart to the Gospel in their daily life and opens themselves to full conversion in following Jesus Christ.

The formation of Secular Franciscans can be spoken of in terms of initial formation and on-going formation. **Initial formation** deals with the process of becoming a Secular Franciscan while **on-going formation** refers to the continuing process of spiritual support for professed members. Formation is a life-long process for Secular Franciscans.

Formation, whether initial or on-going, concerns itself with the overall development of the Franciscan person. We can speak of formation in terms three dimensions: **the human, the Christian and the Franciscan**. All three of these dimensions should be present and reflected in a balanced and well-planned fraternity formation process.

The human dimension is reflected in relation to the individual, the community and to the world. As regards the individual, this dimension of formation consists in coming to know oneself and accepting oneself, through growth in freedom and responsibility, in developing oneself physically, psychologically, morally, spiritually and socially. It includes development of balance emotionally and affectively, it involves sexual integration and growth, honesty and loyalty, joyfulness and a sense of humor. As regards the human dimension of community, formation leads the individual to be able to relate well with others, the ability to communicate and deal with conflict, develop a spirit of cooperation and to develop the sense of openness and flexibility. In terms of the human dimension in relation to the world, formation should lead the individual to

develop the ability to “read the signs of the times” and develop a sense of solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

The Christian dimension of formation is reflected both in relation to God and in relation to the Church and the world. Formation should develop one’s sense of gratitude to God, one’s on-going conversion and one’s life of faith and hope. It should promote growth in unconditional love and the seeking of the will of God in all things. With regard to one’s relation to the Church and the world, formation should develop one’s sense of God’s presence in the world, it should promote a knowledge of the Catholic faith, and a love for the Catholic Church. It should promote a missionary and ecumenical spirit and the pursuit of justice and peace.

With regard to the Franciscan dimension of formation, in relationship with God, formation should promote the following of the poor and humble Christ through a radical living of the Gospel, by means of a life of penance and lived in the spirit of prayer and devotion. With reference to the fraternity, Franciscan formation should develop a love for the brotherhood/sisterhood and a love and understanding for each brother and sister, it should call one to fraternal service especially to the elderly and sick members. It should promote fraternal obedience to one another through the overcoming of one’s egoism, one’s own will and the forces which block the building up of the fraternity. It should develop a willingness to work with one’s own hands and promote participation in community prayer and liturgy. Finally, in relation to the Church and the world, the Franciscan dimension of formation should promote a love for the Church and for loving obedience to the Church’s ministers, a desire for evangelization and mission, a prophetic spirit, an embrace of the option for the poor, a commitment to reconciliation and forgiveness and respect for nature and the environment.

Initial formation is a process, not a program. That is to say, there should be no rigidly definite time frames but instead should be somewhat fluid. The process should be adjusted to the needs of the individual in formation. Broadly, it should respect a gradual process experienced in several stages which mark a person’s growth and gradual entrance into the fraternity. Broadly defined, these periods are:

- **Orientation**—a period of 2-3 months followed by:  
*Ritual of Welcoming*
- **Inquiry**—a period lasting up to six months followed by:  
*Ritual of Acceptance into Candidacy*
- **Candidacy**—a period lasting at least 18 months followed by:  
*Ritual of Commitment* (which is of a permanent nature)

(Optionally, depending on a person’s readiness, Temporary Commitment may be made for one year and renewed up to three times after which Permanent Commitment is made.)

During these periods of formation, the individual follows a curriculum which introduces him or her to the history, theology and spirituality of Franciscanism. They follow a personal daily regimen of prayer and study and meet regularly with a group of fellow candidates for study, dialogue and prayer. Franciscan ministerial/apostolic experiences should also be a part of initial formation which gives the individual a sense of the Franciscan apostolate and an opportunity for group sharing discussion and dialogue.

The individual in formation is the most important agent in this entire process. They themselves, are responsible for their own growth as adults within the overall formation process. In addition, the fraternity spiritual assistant, the fraternity director of formation, the fraternity council and its professed membership all have a role to play in the formation process. Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who is the Agent *par excellence*, of the journey of formation, a journey leading to commitment to the Franciscan way of life.

On-going (or permanent) formation is that period of formation which follows initial formation and permanent commitment to the Rule and Life of the Secular Franciscan Order. Its purpose is to continue the development of the Franciscan vocation in the life of the individual Secular Franciscan. Franciscanism is a life journey, it is not an individual achievement and cannot be marked by “an arrival.” We are always on a pilgrimage to the Father following the way of the Lord Jesus in the manner of St Francis. This journey requires a continuous process of support in the movement towards full maturity in Christ and commitment to the Gospel way. It needs continuous nurture of a critical consciousness—the Franciscan vision. It demands regular and constant updating-- a continuous rediscovery of the poor and crucified Christ in the daily experiences of one’s life through prayerful reflection, dialogue and support in fraternity.

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