

# Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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### **POSITIVE OPPOSITES**

There are certain basic elements or components of growth that have to work in harmony if there is to be development. Many of these elements are pairs of opposites that are all in themselves positive. Here is a sample of four pairs of positive opposites:

formal	informal
permanent	variable
structured	flexible
traditional	up to date

These opposites don't contradict each other. Rather, they complement each other. Together, they contribute towards growth and fullness of life. But they need to be harmonized, and that involves an inescapable tension and constant readjustments to maintain the balance. This kind of tension is healthy. It contributes to development.

Let's consider the left-hand side of the list of opposites. If you have a person who embodies only these qualities and who upholds only these values to the exclusion of their opposites, that person could be described as inflexible and closed to change.

Then, how would we describe someone who embodies only the qualities on the right-hand side of the opposites, to the exclusion of any on the left-hand side? Possibly, undisciplined and unstable.

I've asked how we would describe a person because it's easier to imagine a person. But how would we describe a community of persons, such as a Secular Franciscan Local Fraternity, who adopt only one set of positive values and none of their positive opposites? The results would be the same, but intensified in a group of like-minded persons of either persuasion.

All of those opposites are positive in themselves, but when we isolate one side of the pair, the result is negative. All those positive values, without the balance of their positive opposites, end up as destructive of growth and life.

What we say about persons or groups of people on the left-hand side can also be said often of individuals and groups on the right-hand side, but for a different reason.

A group of people who are exclusively uniform and traditional are also confused and insecure when confronted with innovation and change.

A group of people who are exclusively innovative and diverse is also unapproachable and inflexible in the face of opposition. When there is too much uncontrolled growth, the group will exhaust itself. It will even die out.

So, it is an insight, to realize that whatever is wrong with one exclusive side is also wrong with the other exclusive side, but for a different reason.

There is no sound growth in either side by itself. This is important to realize because it means that in a fraternity, we need both types of people. We don't need extreme ones from either side, although a well-balanced large enough group can support them.

But what we need are people who integrate both positive sides. We are going to have some who are more conservative and others who are more innovative. If our fraternity is going to grow, we need to have both.

So, those who are passive and receptive need to join with active persons and to accept them, listen to them and support them if they are going to grow together and develop into a flourishing fraternity. Likewise, persons who are spontaneous need others in their fraternity who are structured and orderly, to help them to grow personally and together as integral members of the group.

In our fraternity, when we are inclined to feel that this one is a pain in the neck and this other one is a wipe-off, we have to look to these members and appreciate their positive values and affirm them. They and their values are necessary for our growth. We need to affirm what is positive in every member because that is the value for growth that he or she has to offer to the fraternity.

So, both types of person are needed, preferably those who have the balance of opposite positive values within themselves. This calls for a solid programme of ongoing formation catering for human, Christian and Franciscan development.

But is anyone of us ideally balanced? Only Jesus, the Risen Lord, is perfect. None of us is fully mature until our resurrection.

We all face the task of combining persons who embody opposite positive qualities into one fraternity. They are held together by a vision and values that all hold in common.

Our common vision is the Christ-vision, Jesus Christ's view of God, of man, of the world, of life. As Franciscans, our Christ-vision is coloured by St Francis's spirituality and vision. Our common consent to that all-over vision, Christlike and Franciscan, will hold us together.

So, the values that we need to share are at least the gospel values of the beatitudes and the counsels. The members will support one another mutually if they are held together by their faith enriched by love. Not just intellectual faith but loving faith, committed to practising and promoting the Christian and Franciscan vision.

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***Please distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to all members of your Fraternity, including isolated members.***