

## CONFERENCE OF NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS, SFO - OCEANIA

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*Monthly Spiritual Message November 2012*

### TAKING TIME TO PROMOTE ST FRANCIS

We need to promote our founder and our way of life. If we do not do it who will? We have been given an extraordinary gift, as St Clare says at the beginning of her testament – “*our blessed father Francis has shown and taught us[the Way] by word and example*”.

In promoting St Francis and our way of life the secular world reminds us that *Time* is an essential element in the planning, carrying out and assessment of any promotional effort we undertake. We need to be aware of this factor of time, and thank people for their time, their effort and their positive attitude in assisting us in getting it all ready, in carrying it out, and for taking what may seem like extra time, to review the process once it has been completed. The process, planning, action, review should be followed completely; remembering, that review is an essential part of the process, because Promotion is part of the on-going formation of the whole fraternity, and because it is a formational process the principle holds true: “*There should be no action without reflection!*”

Secular society says “*time is money*” and much work is charged by the time it takes to get it done. We are constantly told that our society is “*time poor*” and that there is just not enough time to do all the things **that have to be done** let alone the things **we want to do** - there is a movie about this called “The Bucket List” where two old men with cancer escape from a hospital to follow their list of things to do before they die. So, the world tells us that we need to be very careful that we appreciate the time that people give us, whether it is for the meetings they attend or the specific projects like Promotion Days that they assist us with.

Promoting St Francis and our Franciscan way of life demands that we not only live our way of life, but we are capable of articulating what our way of life means to us. We need to be able to do this so that others can be inspired to take up the invitation to follow our Gospel way of life. So important is the effort and ability to promote our way of life that you might well say that any fraternity which does not do promotion is not a fully mature fraternity. Therefore, we must learn to form our members in such a way, that they are able to reach out to others and invite them to share in our spirituality and our life.

One of the wonderful things about our recent **Formation for Formators Seminar** (2012) held in Sydney was the process that it followed. So many people had input especially when you include the feed-back from group discussions. It is a daunting task to get up and report back from a group discussion, but it was done so well and the exercise was seen to be not so much about accurate content but rather about getting up and doing it, despite wobbly knees or anxiety caused mental confusion. The process was just brilliant, we were forming leaders.

So too, actually doing promotion ministry is about a formational process. It can be daunting, to get up and try and explain the life and spirituality of the Secular Franciscan Order, or what it

means to you, but without this ability to share our vision of Gospel fraternity we are diminished and in danger of folding back on ourselves. Franciscan life is evangelical and therefore life giving. Franciscan evangelization is enshrined in the Franciscan Rule (RB Chapter 12). It is important to realise that the Rule of St Francis was the very first rule of life in the Church to include a missionary impetus and a plan to carry that evangelization out (RNB Chapter 16). For us evangelization is part of our way of life and therefore we should be imbued with a sense of fraternal mission and ready for this new evangelization that everyone is speaking about.

Promotion of our Franciscan way of life is not simply the ministry of one person, the Promotions Officer, but the work of the whole fraternity. Yes, it is important that someone dedicate their time to understanding how to promote or present our way of life and spirituality to others in a manner that it is an invitation to a deeper loving relationship with the Lord. As seculars we can certainly learn from all areas of the advertising industry. In particular today, you might note that the webpages of most Religious Orders focus their attention on Vocational themes and try to give an adequate picture of the way of life of the Order or Institute so as to invite young people especially, to take a more serious look at the charisms of that group.

Another thing that the world demands of workers is that they be *competent*. No one wants an incompetent mechanic tampering with their car or an incompetent technician playing around with their computer. The world wants us to be professional in what we do and say or it will suggest/demand we find another job. Bosses, want the job done and they want it done properly, or you get the sack. So now we have two pressures the world demands of us *efficiency* and *competency*.

PERSPECTIVE: We however need to have a Franciscan view of these elements of life or else we are going to follow the wisdom of the world and make life really tough on the members of our fraternity demanding that they be efficient and competent and ticking them off when they are not.

**For us people come first!** We cannot follow the world's perspective because the foremost virtue of seraphic spirituality is love. We are not primarily running a business. The Secular Franciscan Order is not essentially a Corporation. It is a fraternity. Love and compassion must be its beginning, its process and its end. We do not have to be efficient or competent. We just have to be willing to try. That is what we need to be grateful for and to encourage and praise - the effort. Let us encourage each other to have a go! This Franciscan perspective flows from loving people first, of caring about them. It flows towards becoming more and more capable of being able to articulate the vision. We strive towards being competent and efficient because we love, not because it is demanded of us. Being a Secular Franciscan is not a job and it's not the army, navy or air force. It is being part of a family, the Franciscan family.

Recently, at a funeral one of the sons, a handsome young fellow, but agonizingly shy, got up in front of everyone, determined to say something; he stood there wringing his hands and finally said, "*I only want to say...he was a good Dad...and I shall miss him!*" ... there was complete silence... until someone began clapping .... and then there was a thunderous acclamation. What a beautiful family! I thought it would be good to be part of that family. How much we too need to encourage each other to stand up and express our gratitude to God and to those who invited us to be part of our Franciscan family.

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