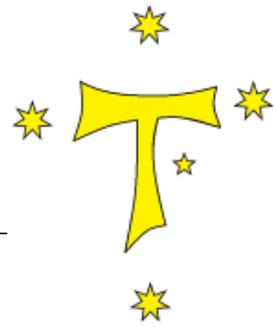


## OFS – Conference of National Spiritual Assistants - Australia

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*Monthly Spiritual Message MARCH 2015*

### **Promotion of the Secular Franciscan Way of Life.**

The first two Spiritual Messages of 2015 focused on the history of promotion of the Secular Franciscan way of life by the popes from Leo XIII to Saint John XXIII.

In 1978, Blessed Pope Paul VI, gave the OFS a new Rule to update the Rule of Pope Leo XIII and set the Secular Franciscans on a 22 year road to renew their General Constitutions. In 1979 Saint Pope John Paul II made St Francis of Assisi “*patron of all those who promote ecology*” and for the World Day of Peace 1990 he wrote the following words:

The poor man of Assisi gives us a striking witness, that when we are at peace with God we are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace with all creation which is inseparable from peace among all peoples.

In 2000 the General Constitutions of the OFS were finally completed and approved by St John Paul II and this set in motion the process of renewing the Statutes – a process which is still continuing in many regions.

Our present pope, Francis, has marked his papacy with the signature of St Francis, who gave us our “**Way**” of fraternal life, as St Clare called it in her Testament. Gospel fraternity is the core of the Franciscan charism; it is the identifying hallmark of our Order. As such, it should shine forth in all our local OFS fraternities. Indeed, it is the quality of our fraternity that should give witness that we are a Franciscan fraternity – part of the Christian community.

No logo can replace this living witness of friendship and sincere charity in promoting our way of life. Yet symbols have their place in the ministry of promotions, because they have a meaning far beyond just being a sign. The Tau Cross, now the sign for the Secular Franciscan Order finds its fullness in the Franciscan habit of the Friars Minor, as St Bonaventure gives testimony in the *Legenda Major* Preface No 2: “...*Signing them with the cross of penance and clothing them in his own habit which was shaped like a cross.*” Through this signature, St Francis teaches us that fraternity demands sacrifice and only comes about when we take up our cross and follow in the footprints of our Lord and his Blessed Mother. Our spirituality of the Gospel, indeed universal fraternity, is alive and well as Pope Francis has hinted that he is presently preparing an encyclical on the environment. No doubt he will take his inspiration from his patron as he develops, his ideas for this teaching as popes before have done. His hinting at it has made us eager to see it in print.

So what should we learn from this history lesson? Well, we need to learn that our Franciscan spirituality with its sense of universal fraternity was and is important to the mission of the Church in the modern world. That the Church has favoured and promoted it as a way of being a leaven for peace through fraternity in an ever more secular world. Remember that this perspective comes from a world where various social “isms” vying for supremacy, have reaped a harvest of millions of dead during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Despite this the Church still sees Gospel Fraternity as the spirituality of the future. It is this spirituality with its capacity to form sincere and authentic Christian people that is our heritage. We must grasp and understand the very formation process that reflecting on the Gospel brings. In reviewing this process perhaps we can actually learn something from the “new wine” of the recent ecclesial movements in the Church. The very heart of their spirituality is also, we must admit, the Gospel life.

What we, as Franciscans must be convinced about is, that if our spirituality does not follow through and give life to the Church and to others it is a truncated spirituality. We are not a sodality; we are not a simple prayer group; or a charismatic prayer group; we are not a committee that simply fosters devotion to St Francis; we are not a new ecclesial community – we are a Lay Order in the church, part of the family of Franciscans whose way of life has been accepted by the church, for the sake of the church that follows the inspiration of a humble saint from the middle ages. If we do not seriously promote this way of life then this charism which has burned so brightly in the church in recent times will fade, as Tolkien would say – into the West.

The formation of our Seculars must move them on from **Contemplation** and **Fraternity** to **Ministry** and **Mission**. If that ministry and mission, two different things, gives witness to the joy of Gospel Fraternity, then it will be an invitation to our way of life. This invitation will be all the more effective if we understand the dynamics of Gospel Fraternity.

Remembering that the seed ground of Gospel Fraternity is in the local fraternity, and it is there that the process of fraternity does its work of formation we must always look at the quality of fraternal life in the local fraternity. Gospel fraternity is dynamic. It is relational. This is the great Christian revelation – the fullness of the truth. It is possible, as Hugh of St Victor postulated in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, that we should have understood fraternity from the very logic of love itself. “Love, infinite love, must have something infinite to love and the process itself must be infinite.” But so impossible does this seem, so infinitely speculative is it, that Jesus Christ himself had to reveal it to us, for us to have ever contemplated it in the first place and so Hugh’s logic of love could not even have been formulated, until the revelation was gifted to us in Christ. Jesus taught us that God in himself is fraternal and that he invites us into this divine relationship, this delightful relationship as it was called by St Bonaventure

Our personal relationship with God must fuel our fraternal life, insist on it, so that our lives become God’s personal invitation to others and a promotion of this beautiful way of life we aspire to, from the deepest desire of our hearts. This recognition of the deep down restless heart inside of every person is so clearly articulated by St Augustine in the beginning of his *Confessions*.

**Promotion** of Gospel Fraternity should be the final goal of our spirituality in giving life to and inviting others to share the Franciscan vision.

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*PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message  
to all MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL OFS FRATERNITY and Spiritual assistants*