The Secular Franciscan Order

A FORMATOR'S HANDBOOK

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PREFACE

If we are to be true Franciscans, then we have to follow Saint Francis' inspiration. He centred his life on the Word of God. Some scholars say that he learnt off by heart all the words that Jesus was reported as saying. He meditated on them at great length and this guided him in forming his ideals as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. Secular Franciscans must learn, first of all, how to be a good follower of St. Francis and to imbibe his spirit. While St. Francis did not write the actual words of the OFS Rule, he was the one who inspired them. To learn how to live the Rule one must have a guide, and this handbook is one of the means we hope will assist Formators to perform that role.

Formation is more than imparting information or following rules. Saint Francis himself repeated what Saint Paul said,"The word kills. It is the Spirit that gives life." We have to go beyond the words of the Rule to see what is the spirit of the Rule. Some people just quote rules and may miss the spirit of the rules. What did Saint Francis intend to tell us in his writings and his reflections?

Clearly, Saint Francis was very fond of the Gospel of Saint John. In fact, that Gospel is deeply theological and often expresses many ideas beyond the written words, revealing his ideas in symbols and theological reflection. For example, when Saint John presents us a story such as the curing of the blind man Bartimaeus, what is he really teaching? It is certainly not just a simple narration of a miracle but it expresses the gradual growth in faith of the blind man, and, at the same time, it implies the blindness of the Pharisees and religious leaders. One comes to faith and is saved while the others are confirmed in their ignorance to their own destruction.

The Formator has the task of bringing the candidates to a deeper appreciation of Saint Francis and his message. It is not simply a matter of "book learning", but must be an infusion of the Franciscan spirit into new members, or the strengthening of professed members in their ongoing formation. Experience is an important element of this. When the Formator has lived this way of life for years the instruction can be more meaningful. Life examples can enlighten the text and help bring a better understanding not only of the Rule and Constitutions but also the why of these important documents.

Formators have a challenging task for they must help candidates discern whether or not they have a true vocation. Of course, the entire local fraternity is also involved with the Formator and candidates in this discernment. To this end, there must be some kind of ongoing evaluation of candidates by the

Formator and the Fraternity Council. It is good that the candidates be informed about this and be encouraged to reflect on how their vocation is developing. Has their formation changed them or not? It is clear that if formation is effective, then some changes must take place in candidates lives, at least in their mental attitude and approach to the way they live their life.

Formators must take particular care to accompany each candidate as they make their journey towards profession; but it is also important that the whole fraternity becomes involved in these journeys. Fraternity members should contribute to the formation of candidates by encouraging them and sharing their own formation experiences with them.

May the Lord strengthen you and walk with you as you carry out this very important role.

Fr. Norbert Pittorino, OFM

INTRODUCTION

Aim of the Handbook

Since the introduction of the OFS Rule of 1978, awareness of the essential role of formation in the spiritual and human development of members of the Secular Franciscan Order has been growing. This increasing emphasis on formation may be seen as a response to living in what has become an increasingly secularised and materialistic society and we need to understand this changing post-modern world.

The Franciscan way of life as set down in the OFS Rule gives us a road-map which guides us to meet this challenge. It is essential that the formation process adopted by local fraternities is clear and consistent with the core beliefs, values and practices that are the foundations of the Franciscan Movement. This has already been intimated by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) in its 'Guidelines for Formation of the OFS' published in 2001.

This Handbook has been developed to help Formators plan sound formation programs. It provides guidelines and criteria that will help them plan programs that suit their fraternity's particular situation and choose books and other resources that will support those programs.

The Central Place of the Word of God in the Life of a Franciscan

Br. Ivan Matic, OFM, Assistant General to the OFS, states:

> The Franciscan movement has assumed the Word of God, lived in fraternity, as its programme for life right from the beginning. Thus, through a Gospel life it influenced the renewal of the Church and cooperated in its mission in the world. But the Holy Spirit continued and still continues to enrich the Church with the new. There are in the Church, for some decades now, new charisms and movements that are the recent gifts of the Holy Spirit for these our times. Pope John Paul II reminds us of it when he says that one of the gifts of the Spirit to our time is certainly the flowering of Church movements that, since the beginning of his papacy, continue to show a motive for hope to the Church and to men.[1]

The central role of the Word of God in all these movements shows us – just as it showed St Francis in his time – that God's word is ever fruitful and can enrich our understanding of Jesus and his message. Each time we meet, the Word of God must have pride of place and we must allow time for reflection on this word as it applies to our lives in our particular situation.

The General Constitutions of the Order remind us:

> The secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and its leaders should foster love for the word of the Gospel and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit.[2]

The Franciscan Family

> There are many spiritual families in the Church with different charisms. Among these families, the Franciscan Family, which in its various branches recognises St Francis of Assisi as its father, inspiration and model, must be included.[3]
>
> The Franciscan Family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God – laity, religious, and priests – who recognise that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms, but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make the charism of their common Seraphic Father present in the life and mission of the Church. The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle.[4]

The Rule and Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order tell us not only what the Franciscan Family is but what role it has in our lives as Franciscans. It follows that it is most important that this be made clear from the beginning of the formation program.

FORMATION

What is "Formation"?

It is important to recognise the distinction between "formation" and "information". Michael Higgins TOR pointed out that many formation programs focus mainly on giving "information" to those in formation for their intellectual development, but it is more important to concentrate on formation which deals with both the spiritual and human development of those in formation at every level and dimension of life. Higgins adds, "It is the process of a gradual unfolding of a person's identity as a child of God made in the image and likeness of Christ, and empowered by the Holy Spirit."[5]

The Presidency Guidelines reinforce this by saying, "formation is to help brothers and sisters to discover the novelty and vitality of their own call as a gift of the Spirit in following Jesus in the manner of St Francis of Assisi."[6] From this one can see that formation is "a process of facilitating the total development of a personality within the context of the Franciscan tradition in the Church. This formation, in its initial stages, comes to a high point or peak experience with permanent commitment, which is called 'profession'"[7]

To learn what Franciscan Formation is about, we must turn to the life of St Francis himself – particularly his 'Conversion experiences' – and there we will see that it was not the knowledge he had, but the Spirit who led him to change his way of life and come to a closer relationship with God. At the beginning, he felt completely lost and begged God to give him light and understanding of what God wanted him to do. We see this reflected in the well-known *Prayer for Conversion:*

> *Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart; give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out your holy and true command.*

Franciscan formation, therefore, is founded on a personal encounter with the Lord. It begins with the call of God and the decision of each one to follow, with St. Francis, the footprints of the poor and crucified Jesus Christ, as his disciple, under the action of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is an essential element in the formation program.

The Process

Br. Ivan Matic stresses the idea of formation as a process by saying:

> Formation is a continuous process of growth and conversion that involves the entire life of the person called to develop his own human, Christian and Franciscan dimension by living the holy Gospel radically.[8]

The role and principal duty of the Franciscan, both religious and lay, is to live and witness to the charism of St. Francis. Secular Franciscans live the Gospel in the world. They go throughout their world announcing the Gospel by their life and words to all whom they meet.

The International Council of the OFS described the goal of formation as "to prepare the candidate to make a permanent commitment towards personal union with the Lord Jesus in the tradition and spirituality of the Franciscan Family, according to the proper role of a secular person in the Church in the light of Vatican II."

This development is only gradual but it should also be systematic. There must be constant growth, continuous discernment, and openness to renewal in order to achieve our purpose in the best possible way. The danger that faces Formators is that they will try to do "too much too soon" which could be destructive for some people.[9]

Whatever is taught must be solidly based on correct Catholic doctrine. The Formator should keep in close touch with inquirers and candidates, paying particular attention to each one's personality and their life story. There must be a continual reference from what is being learnt to the reality of daily life, "going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel." (OFS Rule 4)

We should note the terminology in the General Constitutions Art. 37. It speaks about **"the journey of formation"** which is a beautiful way of describing that period of discovery that an inquirer or candidate experiences when entering a program of formation. Inquirers and candidates are actively engaged in their formation right from the beginning. This is a task that should be explained to them early in this process.

Again, we are reminded that our brothers and sisters in the fraternity also share in this task of formation, helping each other, encouraging and providing a

sharing of experiences. The fraternity becomes the genuine family for the inquirer or candidate where he/she is accepted with warmth and genuine friendship.

The International Meeting of Formators in Rome (2006) noted that:

> "Formation is most of all, the transmission of real life, of true experience of living faith." It stresses this point by saying, "Formation is the transmission of emotions, vital knowledge, vibrations coming from real living experiences which involve our whole 'being'... It will never coincide with the simple reading of a book, or a manual, no matter how good they may be. In formation, a number of essential elements are involved, such as availability of mind and heart of those who are being formed, the vibrating experience of the Formator, his/her real life testimony and, above all, the presence and the action of the Spirit of Life who is God, and the docility of those who must be led and filled by His Grace."

Often people do not understand that the Secular Franciscan Order is *a way of life* where one seeks to follow the example of St Francis in the way that he followed Jesus Christ. We all see that we need to seek to be "holy", a term often misinterpreted. "Holy" simply means coming into a closer relationship with God. The word "holy" itself means "set apart" and we are actually set apart from others in following the call to be a Franciscan.

In a way, we could compare it to a person who enters religious life; but for the Secular Franciscan, it is not as visible to everyone as it would be, for example, by becoming a Friar Minor. People see a friar receive the habit, which he wears as a visible sign of his dedication. On the other hand, a Secular Franciscan may wear some symbol of his/her dedication, such as a tau cross, but it is not as clear a sign as wearing a habit. Nevertheless, both the friar and the Secular Franciscan enter a way of life that is distinctive and which embraces a certain set of values that they seek to live out.

Article 44 of the General Constitutions tells us that our formation is never finished. It continues on after Profession until we reach our fulfilment after we die. We realise that a way of life is lived from day to day in all the situations of our lives. Ongoing formation carries out the task of informing and encouraging the Secular Franciscan to live out his/her vocation.

Who is Responsible for Formation?

The answer to this question is clear: The Formator together with the Council and, ultimately, all the members of the fraternity. However, it is the elected Formator who takes the primary role in formation. The Formator makes the ultimate choice of materials and directs formation as animator or enabler but should listen to the Fraternity Council, in particular the Spiritual Assistant, for advice. In most fraternities, the Formator and Spiritual Assistant may be considered to be the primary formation team.

The General Constitutions, Article 52.3, define the duties of the Formator:

The Formator has the following duties:

a) To co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of the council, the formative activities of the fraternity.
b) To instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initial formation, and the newly professed.
c) To inform the council of the fraternity prior to profession, concerning the suitability of the candidate for a commitment to live according to the Rule.

Taking on the role of the Formator in a fraternity is an important responsibility, not only because one takes on the task of forming new members into the life of a Secular Franciscan but also one has to provide a program for ongoing formation at fraternity meetings. This role demands patience and discernment to understand what new members (candidates) and the professed members need to know for their initial formation or ongoing formation, and how to correct erroneous ideas with kindness and love.

The Formator has to develop a certain kind of personality so that he or she can provide encouragement and have a readiness to guide new members, especially by answering questions but also by leading them towards forming a Franciscan mentality and approach to the world around them. But ultimately, all members of the fraternity must realise that they are co-responsible with the Formator for the formation of the new members of the fraternity.[10]

Desired Attributes of a Formator

It is desirable that a formator can apply the following techniques of adult education:

a. Employ dialogue more than lecturing.
b. Share oneself and one's ideas more than quoting texts.
c. Use many and varied resources more than a single text.
d. Provide concrete solutions and answers more than theoretical ideas.
e. Use felt needs and lived experiences more than just projected situations.
f. Use experiential learning as much as, if not more than, academic instruction.
g. As formator, be a facilitator or enabler of growth and development, rather than just a conveyor of information.[11]

The following attitudes of service are desirable in a formator:

a. Acceptance of the one to be formed — with the person's experience of life, aspirations, interests, points of view and horizons; and with the person's real problems, capabilities and attitudes.

b. Reliance
- on what is good in each person;
- on the real possibilities of growth;
- on the wise use of free time.

c. Encouraging the involvement of those being formed.

d. Transmitting ideas, information and knowledge of practices.

e. Seeking to combine the varying levels of knowledge of those being formed.

THE STAGES OF FORMATION

Terminology:

The terminology used needs to be clarified so that we avoid any confusion in our understanding of what should be done at each stage.

STAGE ONE: PERIOD OF INQUIRY

- Period of orientation (at least 3 months)
- Informal “Come and See” and “Get to Know each other”
- Information provided but no separate formation meetings
- Concludes with acceptance to commence a period of initiation

STAGE TWO: PERIOD OF INITIATION

- Period of discernment (3 to 6 months)
- Formal initiation meetings
- Concludes with Rite of Admission

STAGE THREE: PERIOD OF INITIAL FORMATION

- Preparation for Profession (1 to 2 years which can be extended to another year)
- Concludes with Rite of Profession

STAGE FOUR: ONGOING OR CONTINUING FORMATION

- Lifelong and continuing deepening of the Franciscan vocation.

Formation in our Legislative Documents

Note what is said in the General Constitutions of the OFS and the Statutes of the National Fraternity of Oceania regarding Formation, including the terminology used. (See Appendices 1 & 2)

The Presidency's document *Guidelines for Formation of the OFS*[12] begins by saying:

> The fraternity is the "privileged place[13] for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members. (Rule 22.)". In this context, formation is to help the brothers and sisters discover the novelty and vitality in their own call as a gift of the Spirit, which enables them to follow Jesus in the manner of St Francis of Assisi.
>
> The life of the Secular Franciscan is considered as a way of global growth of the human and Christian person, through listening to God's call and in constant conversion to His project, "going from Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel."[14]

Some Further Terms

> **Vocational discernment**: the process for attaining a clear, conscious and definitive decision concerning the Lord's call.
>
> **Assimilation of the charism**: a formative journey which begins during Initial Formation, when the gifts of the charism are assumed and interiorised at the personal and fraternal levels.
>
> **Ongoing Formation**: as a means to perfect one's own identity and fidelity to one's life commitment. All recognise that this phase needs particular attention.

Francis was a man in permanent formation: "Let us begin, brothers and sisters, to serve the Lord our God..." and he was a master of Gospel life through his example, his Rule and his teachings: "He gave a Rule of life to all and indicated the way of salvation to each one according to his own situation."[15]I

STAGE ONE – THE PERIOD OF INQUIRY

Description of this Stage:

- Period of orientation (at least 3 months)
- Informal “Come and See” and “Get to Know each other”
- Information provided but no separate formation meetings
- Concludes with acceptance to commence a period of initiation

First contact is a time of orientation before the time of formal formation begins. It is intended primarily to be a time to begin discernment of one’s vocation**.**

Firstly, the inquirer might ask: “Would I feel comfortable as a member of this fraternity?” and “Will this help me on my faith journey?”

Secondly, it is a time when both the inquirer and the fraternity come to know each other in open conversation and sharing.

Dealing with Inquirers: First Contact

Our first contact with inquirers is very important as first impressions are often lasting ones. First contact with inquirers can come from many sources: from friends, members of our parish, the internet, through various Franciscan activities, through diocesan web page links to the OFS, or from referrals by other Franciscans or fraternities.

If the inquiry is in writing, it needs to be responded to promptly and, more importantly, assessed and acted upon according to the inquirer’s particular circumstances.

At first contact, our response should be very welcoming and joyful in an informal and friendly atmosphere. Seek to enter into general conversation describing Secular Franciscan life simply.

Willingly answer any questions the inquirer may have. Listen carefully to what is being said and also to the non-verbal expressions that could reveal more about the inquirer. Share one-to-one with the inquirer. Remember this is a two-way street and not a one-sided conversation. Show respect for any confidences that have been shared.

This contact may lead to the inquirer attending fraternity meetings as a visitor (usually for at least three months) which, in turn, may lead to informal discussions with the fraternity's formator, with a view to commencing a formal period of initiation.

First contact is an opportunity to elicit some personal particulars in a gentle and non-intrusive manner. Information regarding approximate age bracket, cultural background, involvement in the life of the Church, professional and family circumstances could be useful.

For someone out of the area, it may be a matter of putting the inquirer in contact with a suitable fraternity. Age and cultural background may be significant in facilitating this.

At this stage, it is important not to overwhelm the inquirer with too much information, but the Formator should try to answer any questions inquirers have and focus on the essence of Franciscan Spirituality – living the Gospel, following Jesus in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, and the relevance that this has to our times today. It needs to be clear also that the OFS is a lay Order within the Church, calls us to a way of life and is a part of the Franciscan Family.

We need to keep the message clear, simple, practical and life-giving. However, we must cut the cloth to suit the inquirer according to his/her capability, experience and need.

We should acknowledge that we are ordinary everyday people, struggling to live our lives in the "real" world just like everyone else, but we don't do it alone. We do it as a part of a family, with the support of our brothers and sisters in the fraternity, in the spirit of Francis and Clare. It is important to emphasise the relevance of Francis and Clare and their message for today, especially their love for God and all creation.

Attendance at Fraternity Meetings

It would be good to invite the inquirer to attend a fraternity meeting, but be sure to let the fraternity know about the invitation beforehand so that they can be prepared.

How the inquirer experiences this first encounter with the fraternity, and any subsequent visits, is vital to the outcome. All fraternity members should feel privileged (and have an obligation) to welcome inquirers and make them feel at home. It is not just the Minister's job, or the Formator's job. If the inquirer has been introduced by a fraternity member, then that member has a particular duty to assist and support the inquirer.

The inquirer's first meetings with the fraternity need to be well-organised and include the components of prayer and scripture reflection, normal fraternity business, some Franciscan study, possibly some personal sharing and conclude with informal fraternity. It is vital that each and every meeting is alive and genuine. The meetings must reflect a true expression of fraternity.

The inquirer needs to be given time to absorb, reflect and discern, with a follow-up during the month for a chat and clarification of any particular issues. A 'gently, gently' approach is usually best, so there is no pressure. The inquirer needs to be encouraged to take home resources from the fraternity library, appropriate to the individual. (See Suitable Resources, p. 19).

Beginning the Discernment Process

Inquirers need to discern their Franciscan vocation at their own pace. By visiting the fraternity they should experience:

- Acceptance just as he/she is.
- Interesting, vital and life-giving fraternity meetings.
- Warm and genuine love and care for each other in the fraternity.
- A sense of joy and fun.

At the same time that the inquirer is assessing his/her vocation, it is beneficial for the fraternity to learn something of the background, personal life and the spiritual journey that led the inquirer to us. This would assist in discerning compatibility and suitability of the person for the Secular Franciscan Order. However, we must remember to act with great sensitivity and respect privacy. But we must be assured that the person is living a good Christian life, has been baptised, confirmed and frequents the sacraments.

The Period of Orientation must guarantee the inquirer an understanding of the seriousness of entry and the freedom of choice regarding moving further towards entry into the Secular Franciscan Order. For some inquirers the Internet is a valuable tool for discovering more about Franciscan living and

spirituality. Some websites are noted in the lists of Suitable Resources provided in this Handbook.
In summary, the purpose of this period of months is for the inquirer to become informed and, at the same time, to examine his/her motives in seeking entrance to this way of life. The inquirer must attend fraternity meetings and be given time to spend with the Formator so that they get to know each other. They will work in harmony with each other and share many experiences together. It is at this time that the fraternity gathers information about the inquirer, including name and the details that are necessary for keeping in contact, such as address, phone, fax and mobile phone numbers. The fraternity council should assess whether or not the inquirer is living a good Christian life and will fit in with the fraternity.

Conclusion of this Stage

This Stage concludes when the inquirer and the fraternity have got to know each other to the point of understanding each other's situation in life. They must make an initial discernment of a vocation and either agree to go forward or to not go forward. If they agree to proceed with formation, the Period of Initiation begins with its formal sessions. Up until this time there have not been any formal sessions but simply answers to questions in an informal way.

Suggested Topics for this Stage:

- A basic knowledge of the lives of Sts. Francis and Clare.
- A basic knowledge of the Franciscan charism (how it differs from other spiritualities).
- A basic knowledge of the OFS as a member of the Franciscan Family.
- Reflect on Franciscan Prayers e.g. *The Peace Prayer of St. Francis*.

Suggestions from CIOFS (OFS Presidency in Rome)

- Introduce and explain the process of dialogue and sharing.
- Explain the meaning of vocation and how it is discerned.
- Introduce the inquirer to the other agents of formation and explain what will occur during the formation experience.

Suitable Resources for this Stage:

BOOKS – INQUIRY AND ORIENTATION		
Name of Book	**Author**	**Notes & Analysis**
We Are the Secular Franciscans	OFS Region of St. Clare	A simple explanation of the OFS
Francis of Assisi – the Song Goes On	Hugh Noonan, OFM & Roy M Gasnick, OFM	A short life of St. Francis.
Francis: The Journey and the Dream	Murray Bodo, OFM	A more advanced life of St. Francis.
Come and See	Lester Bach & Teresa Baker	For the Formator only: Interview Guide on pp. 20-21.
St. Francis of Assisi	G. K. Chesterton	A classical life of St. Francis
The Little Flowers of Saint Francis of Assisi	Various translations available.	A series of legends collected some 200 years after his death.
Through the Year with Francis of Assisi	Murray Bodo, OFM	Daily meditations from the words and life of Saint Francis

Websites:

www.ofsaustralia.org.au	OFS Australia
www.ciofs.org/	International Council
www.franciscans.org.au/OFS	OFS Files
www.franciscanresources.com/	Franciscan Resources

STAGE TWO – THE PERIOD OF INITIATION

Description of this Stage

- Period of discernment (3 months minimum)
- Formal initiation meetings
- Concludes with Rite of Admission

We need to distinguish this time from that of Inquiry. The Period of Inquiry is a time of orientation, to “Come and See” what the OFS is all about. Initiation is a time to study and experience what it means to live the Gospel the Franciscan way. It is also a time of discernment: a time to decide whether or not one is called and ready to take on the responsibilities of becoming a Secular Franciscan. There is no time laid down as to how long this should be except that it would normally be not less than three months (NS 9.2.1). All we can say is that when a person feels ready, then that is the time to be admitted as a “candidate” into the Stage of Initial Formation. Then they begin a more concentrated preparation for Profession into the Order.

Discerning a Vocation

During the Initiation Period, Inquirers should begin the process of discerning whether or not they have a call from God to become a Franciscan. This process of discernment should not be rushed and will continue through the following period of Initial Formation. Inquirers need also to gain the understanding that Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order is a commitment to live the Gospel, as part of a fraternity, for life. Initiation should lead to the Inquirer either finding that they are not called to the Franciscan way of life or that they are attracted to it and would like to be admitted to the fraternity and begin a program of Initial Formation which leads to Profession.

Inquirers should strive to have an active presence within the fraternity so that all the members can form a judgment as to the suitability of the individual.

Seeking answers to the following, without direct questions, and with great sensitivity, will assist in making an evaluation:

- Has the inquirer been baptised and confirmed?
- Is this inquirer actively living out his/her faith – e.g. attending Mass and the sacraments?

- Is this inquirer involved in his/her parish's activities?
- If married – Is the inquirer's spouse happy about involvement with the OFS? Will joining the OFS cause the family trouble?
- Does this inquirer seem at ease with the OFS and its members?
- Does the inquirer feel a 'movement of the heart' and a willingness to explore what it means to be part of the Franciscan Order?

Learning about the Rule and Constitutions

At this stage it is essential that some attention be paid to the Rule and what it implies in the life of the candidate. This needs to be explained in simple and clear everyday language. It does not demand a deep study but a brief consideration should be given to Franciscan values and an outline of how the Rule came about. The General Constitutions of the OFS apply the OFS Rule to today's conditions for the worldwide Order. The application of these General Constitutions to local conditions is written into the National Statutes. These documents are meant to be guides for living out a Franciscan way of life, as a Secular Franciscan. By reflecting on them, one can come to a decision as to whether one wants to be bound by them or to leave this way of life for others to follow. The most important thing to stress is that if we become Franciscans, our life must reflect Gospel values and be guided by the Rule.

One needs to discern if one is ready to take on these responsibilities for life. The questions that inquirers should continue to ask are ones such as: "Is God calling me to serve Him in this way?" or "Am I prepared to do what is asked of a Secular Franciscan?"

It is important to realise that this process of discernment is not what you want, but what God wants**.** This requires prayerful discernment seeking the help of the Holy Spirit.

Here are some suggestions about ways of making the study of the Rule and Constitutions more interesting:

- Study one Rule each month and share with each other at your formation meeting, "How can we apply this Rule to our lives?"
- Have personal meetings with the Formator to discuss and explain the Rule.
- Introduce relevant sections of the Constitutions and Statutes alongside the Rule, and keep the focus on how they help shape our value system so that we can apply them to our daily life.

- Examine the lives of other Secular Franciscans, seeking to follow their example.
- Encourage all fraternity members to share their own personal experiences with inquirers.

The challenge that faces each Secular Franciscan is to pursue the journey towards true conversion that St Francis has shown us. Francis experienced a long search from the time he was imprisoned in Perugia before he came to understand his vocation. We need to encourage a willingness to step out in faith, on what may well be a great learning curve. We need to encourage inquirers to be prepared to search for answers even if it takes some time before they become apparent.

We should reflect on our "God experiences", that is, how God acts in our lives, just as Francis did. Listen to what motivates us. Secular Franciscans are on an inner journey of self-discovery, the beginning of a process that will continue all our lives. Perhaps reflecting on the Peace Prayer of St Francis will help us in our search.

Each of us need to discover how Jesus wants us to live out our lives. How can we be of service to others? Our first duty is to our own family in how we live, love and respond to the Gospel. The words of St. Francis come to mind, "Preach the Gospel at all times. If necessary, use words." Then we can extend this to serving the wider community. For example, is it by helping in a soup kitchen, assisting in the parish, visiting the sick, helping refugees settle into the community, advocating for social justice, promoting sustainable living, or some other work?

Right from the beginning of formation, it is important to be attentive to the type of person the inquirer is, in order to present appropriate material. All the essential elements need to be covered, but in a manner suitable to the individual. Some may seek to read and study in depth, whilst others will be happy with much simpler material. The important thing is that each is accommodated to their particular needs and circumstances.

Suggested Topics for this Stage

- See how God acts in my life – discernment of vocation.
- Short and simple reflections on the OFS Rule.
- Franciscan Values: simplicity, minority, service of others.
- Franciscan Prayer: e.g. "Peace Prayer of St Francis".

- Short reflections on the life of Saints Francis and Clare.

Suggestions from CIOFS (OFS Presidency in Rome)

- Introduce Saints Francis and Clare using biographies.
- Introduce Franciscan Prayer and apostolic activity.
- Emphasise the importance of Sacred Scripture to Secular Franciscans.
- Promote knowledge of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
- Explain the terms “secular” and “lay spirituality” simply but thoroughly.
- Introduce the inquirer to the Liturgy of the Hours.
- Introduce the Rule, Constitutions and Statutes of the Order.
- Explain simply the meaning of the Franciscan Family and its history.
- Explain the organisation and structure of the Order.

Suitable Resources for this Stage:

BOOKS – INITIATION, OFS RULE, CONSTITUTIONS		
Name of Book	**Author**	**Notes and Analysis**
Fully Mature With the Fullness of Christ	Benet Fonck, OFM	Session 1: Vocation to the OFS. Session 2: To Observe the Holy Gospel. Session 3: In the Footsteps of St. Francis.
To Live as Francis Lived	Foley, Weigel & Normile	Reflection 1: Beginning Again. Reflection 2: The Nature and Purpose of the OFS Reflection 3: The Mission of the OFS Reflection 4: Franciscan Spirituality.
Lay Franciscan Spirituality	Norbert Pittorino, OFM	Short reflections on the OFS Rule
Called to Proclaim Christ	Benet Fonck, OFM	Short reflections on the OFS Rule.
Gospel Living Every Day of Our Lives	Teresa Baker, OFS	This book on the OFS Rule is short and clear. The book that replaces it is more thorough but more expensive to buy.
To Set Themselves Free	Teresa Baker, OFS	A good coverage of the Rule for Initial and Ongoing Formation.
OFS: The Rule, Constitutions and Ritual	OFS, Oceania	The OFS Rule, Constitutions and Ritual all in one book. It is essential to have this “Trilogy” available in every fraternity.

STAGE THREE
THE PERIOD OF INITIAL FORMATION

Description of this Stage

- Preparation for Profession (1 to 2 years – which can be extended by another year)
- Concludes with Rite of Profession

Entry into this stage should be properly celebrated by welcoming the new member into the OFS using the Rite of Admission from the OFS Ritual. The celebration, however, is only 'low key' and should not overshadow the greater event for which the candidate is preparing: Profession into the Order.

It is important that the formation be "carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate" (Art. 40.1). It should be well planned and implemented and enjoy the full support of the fraternity.

During formation, the candidates are exposed to the key documents of the Franciscan life: Sacred Scriptures, the writings by and about St. Francis, the Rule and Constitutions of the Order, and the national and regional statutes which have been approved for use in individual countries.

The last line of Article 40.2 is particularly important. Here, the members of the Secular Franciscan Order are invited to see the world and their place "in the world" against the horizon of the Gospel as they move from "Gospel to life and life to the Gospel" as the Rule challenges them to do. Living "in the world in an evangelical way" means living a way of life which is imbued and guided by the Gospel and the personal example of Jesus.

Based on what they have learned, seculars are to *listen*, *meditate*, *reflect*, and *constantly deepen their vocation*. That is, they are to be actively and consciously involved in being formed into active and vibrant children of God. For this to really make a difference in the life of the seculars they must be willing to change – to allow their way of being in the world to be reshaped by the Gospel.

Franciscan life is not an invitation to a personal project of spiritual growth; rather, it is an invitation to relationship and an active involvement in each other's lives.

At the initial stages of formation, it is important to challenge the candidates to embrace a process of authentic discernment. Seculars should be encouraged to closely examine their lives within the context of the many dimensions of the Order. If candidates show the potential to embrace this way of life, they may then move towards their profession. If not, they should be encouraged to discern God's will for them while they continue attending formation sessions. In guiding this process, the role of the Formator (Master of Formation) is essential and must include ongoing consultation with the Council and Spiritual Assistant of the fraternity.

It is also important for fraternities to identify those sisters and brothers who have the aptitude, personality, and dedication for the work of Formators and ensure that they be properly trained.

Equally important is to affirm those who are presently doing this work and to support them. 'Good Franciscans' do not necessarily make good Formators; even in religious life, much damage has been done by well-meaning friars who do not know how to be effective Formators.

Essential Franciscan Values

Fr Michael Higgins, TOR[16], makes some very apt comments on this period of formation. He points out that the key Franciscan Charisms one should seek to develop at this stage are the following:

A Spirit of Poverty

St. Francis understood that everything is from God and the guiding force of his life was to be in right relationship with God. With poverty, one's only wealth is in the Lord. All creation and every possession can then be seen and appreciated in its proper place before the Lord.

For seculars, Franciscan poverty is not the same as it is for the other branches of the Order. Rather than the "most high poverty" embraced by the First Order and Second Order, or the religious poverty embraced by the Third Order Regular, in which all is shared in service to the mission, seculars are invited to have their priorities in the right perspective.

Secular Franciscans should seek a spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs and seeking the spirit of the Beatitudes. Article 18 of the Rule takes this one step further by stating that seculars should "strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation

to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship." Poverty in this sense allows creation to be in proper balance before the Lord.

A Spirit of Minority

Minority, or humility, teaches the brothers and sisters to accept every aspect of their lives and encourages seculars to grow in self-knowledge. This requires a willingness to face the reality of sin and weakness in a positive, straightforward manner and to accept and develop personal gifts and talents.

Too often, humility is presented as the recognition of one's faults, and as a prod to turn to God for mercy and forgiveness. In reality, humility is an invitation to accept the totality of who one is before God. It requires that the sisters and brothers recognize and accept those areas in life which are sinful, broken or deformed and to ask God to help them deal with those areas. However, humility also means that the good and graced aspects of life be accepted and affirmed as well. Our faith teaches us that people are made in the image and likeness of God; that Jesus died so that they may have everlasting life; and that the Holy Spirit is graciously poured out so that men and women might have life in abundance.

When people wholly accept these truths about human identity, they can truly be said to be humble before the Lord and one another. It also leads them to see the Divine image in everyone with whom they come into contact.

Seeking Contemplation

With contemplation, the brothers and sisters grow in an appreciation and love of all aspects of prayer in its personal, fraternal and ecclesial dimensions. These include, but are not limited to, meditation, contemplation, hermitage or retreat days, the Liturgy of the Hours, the Eucharist, Sacrament of Reconciliation, and Franciscan and Catholic devotions such as the Rosary, Franciscan Crown, Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration and Benediction, litanies, and a host of other devotions and prayers.

When seculars grow in contemplation, they begin to *see* things differently. All of creation becomes alive with the presence of God.

Ongoing Conversion

Ongoing conversion challenges the brothers and sisters to recognize that Christian and Franciscan life is a continuous journey of faith. A necessary requirement of this journey is an open and docile spirit.

The secular must be willing to accept that he or she does not have all the answers and be willing to change and develop.

The Franciscan charisms of poverty, minority, contemplation and ongoing conversion encourage seculars to be formed as people of mercy. This means that they grow in a gentle acceptance of the importance of self-growth based on a willingness and ability to change.

As seculars grow in the spiritual life, they are challenged to become ever more sensitive to others – especially to the needy, poor and marginalized, and to recognize and be willing to address the broken conditions of culture and society. Authentic spiritual formation calls the brothers and sisters beyond the narrow concerns of self-development and makes them sensitive to what is around them in their society and the world.

Some Practical Matters

- The meetings with candidates should be held separately from regular fraternity meetings – perhaps in other surroundings.
- It may be necessary for the Formator to have extra sessions with the candidates if this can be arranged, to share personal experiences, seek clarification, etc.
- Don't be afraid to use audio-visual materials for discussions. Younger members are more attracted to this method of information gathering.
- Discuss the "human" side of Francis' life.
- The Formator should be a good 'listener' to both the verbal and non-verbal communications of candidates.
- The Formator should be welcoming, supportive and encouraging; and should keep matters confidential so that candidates can trust him/her.
- Prayer should be part of every meeting with the candidates, even in private interviews.

Preparation for Profession

It is at this stage that we come to consider seriously the preparation for Profession, which could take place within two years, or if circumstances demand it, in three years. It is at this time that a more concerted study of the Rule and Constitutions should be undertaken and their practical application to the daily life of a Secular Franciscan discussed. Attention could be given to how the OFS Rule came about and how it developed into the Pauline Rule of 1978. Bible reflections, paraliturgies, adoration before the Blessed Sacrament and reflection days are good ways of meeting the needs of this period.

It is customary that there be at least a day of reflection or retreat before the profession of candidates. By this, the importance of the event is stressed and the candidate has time to reflect on the implications of his/her profession.

Criteria or Guidelines for Judging Suitability for Profession

The whole process of making this judgment must be in an atmosphere that is open and transparent. The candidate must have a free choice, be well-informed and constantly faithful to the program. Note also that the Spiritual Assistant has an important role besides the Fraternity Council and Formator in making this assessment. Hence, the Spiritual Assistant should come to know the candidate(s) beforehand.

Lester Bach, OFM Cap, suggests a number of guidelines in coming to a decision as to whether or not a candidate has a vocation to the OFS:

Does he/she:

- Show an appreciation of and application to living Gospel values?
- Show a sensitivity to things that diminish or destroy a solid Christian life, e.g., pornography, indifference to the dignity of people, rigid ideas of morality that condemn without compassion, etc?
- Have a realistic awareness of the need for God's help to live a Christian life?
- Avoid influences that create enmity among people for whatever reason?
- Demonstrate the ability to forgive others and oneself?
- Show respect for others? For the earth and its resources?

Bach says that there are positive and negative signs of a vocation:

Positive: A desire to deepen the spiritual life; at least a minimum

knowledge of the lives of Francis and Clare and their way of life; and a healthy psychological and emotional life, e.g. a person with constant trouble and depression cannot be accepted. These issues need to be addressed before joining the Order. Applicants should be honest and have a sense of their need for growth and thus allow the Holy Spirit to work in them.

Negative: A candidate who is rigid in judgments and personality; those who are notorious and show no sign of changing; and people who never listen or always have to be right – they cause dissension in fraternity. Sometimes care is needed if people join after having a "special experience of God" and now want to be super-holy. Offer them time to integrate the experience. Similarly, those who have experienced a grave crisis in their lives need to deal with the consequences of the crisis before joining, e.g. people just divorced.

Bach concludes by saying, "What is perhaps the most important thing to remember is that the OFS is a Way of Life for Life. Such decisions are not made suddenly or without reflection. Both councillors and applicants work together to uncover and reveal whether a vocation is present. Prayerfulness is a part of this process."

We could add the following suggestions in making a judgement as to the suitability of the candidate:

- A candidate's commitment must be demonstrated through his/her behaviour, fidelity and capacity to associate with others in community.
- Their interest must be consistent.
- The candidate needs to show some appreciation of the goodness of God in themselves and in others.
- Normally, the candidate should have a referral from his/her parish priest.

The Candidate's Preparation for Profession

Shortly prior to the day of Profession, adequate time should be given to the study of the Profession formula and its meaning, as this is what a person promises to observe for the rest of their life. The seriousness of the occasion should be stressed and should not be taken lightly. It is a life commitment and not one that can be dismissed like a hobby or an interesting excursion.

The Profession ritual should also be discussed and the meaning of each part explained carefully. The day of Profession is a significant event that should be celebrated by the whole Fraternity and not just by an individual member or the candidates themselves and their families.

Note also that the Profession ceremony should take place during Mass, if possible. See the OFS Ritual for details. The candidates should also be involved in some way in the preparations for Profession.

Some Practicalities

Towards the end of this stage, prior to Profession, candidates should have provided Baptismal and Confirmation Certificates (and Marriage Certificate, if applicable), and a reference from their parish priest. As Profession draws close, candidates should write a letter to the local minister requesting that they make their Profession. This letter can be read out at a fraternity meeting. It is then up to the fraternity council to accept or reject this request (General Constitutions Art. 41.1).

The local fraternity should be involved in the preparations for Profession of its candidates, e.g. notice in the Parish Bulletin, Prayers of the Faithful, etc.

It has been suggested that a significant feast be chosen for Profession Day and invitations be given to family and friends to attend.

It is fitting that a certificate be presented to each candidate as a reminder of their commitment on Profession Day.

After the Profession(s), a celebration meal should be provided by the Fraternity. It is good to involve the parish.

Perhaps it would be good to have recognition of one's Profession annually in fraternity and for all to pray for the member on that day.

The Significance and Importance of Profession

Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., in his article, "Profession in the OFS: A Gift and Commitment" points out some significant elements about Profession in the OFS, which may not be well known to many Franciscans and which should be noted:

- Profession is a **gift from God** to an individual whom God has called to serve Him as a Secular Franciscan.
- Profession **renews the promises of Baptism and Confirmation**. One's first commitment is deepened by this ritual act.
- Profession is **an action of the Church**. Profession takes place because of God's intervention. Profession is simultaneously an act of Christ and of the Church, that is, of the whole Body of Christ: Head and Members. It is the local fraternity which primarily makes the presence and action of the Church present in profession. Therefore, since by its very nature profession is a public and ecclesial act, it should be celebrated in the fraternity's presence.
- Profession **is a significant moment in the life of a Secular Franciscan** and should be celebrated accordingly.
- Profession **produces a special grace,** which sets a person apart for specific tasks for the People of God. It is a response to God in love.

Note Article 42.4 of the General Constitutions, which says:

> Profession does not only commit those professed to the fraternity, but also in the same way it commits the fraternity to be concerned with their human and religious well-being.

Also, Article 42.5, which says:

> The act of profession is registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

Suggested Topics for this Stage

- Topics from previous stages (OFS Rule and General Constitutions, Franciscan Spirituality, Franciscan Prayer, Franciscan history, etc.) should be developed.
- The meaning and significance of OFS Profession.
- Discussion using DVDs or Videos on Saints Francis and Clare.
- Learn about major Franciscan saints and blesseds.
- Participate in Franciscan prayers, liturgies and Family gatherings.
- Participate in fraternity services and apostolates.

Suggestions from CIOFS (OFS Presidency in Rome)

- Continue to reinforce all subject material covered during the time of Initiation so that candidates will be thoroughly grounded in Secular Franciscan spirituality and Secular Franciscan evangelical life.
- Pre-eminent in this period of formation is intensive study of the Secular Franciscan Rule, paying particular attention to signs of the Rule taking root in candidates lives.
- Study the Prologue (written by St. Francis, which describes the blessings of penance and the misery of not doing penance.
- Continue to emphasise the Gospels and their application in daily circumstances.
- Look for participation in the life of the Church and in youth ministry.
- Look for participation in apostolic life, peace and justice issues, the protection of the environment, strengthening the family unit, respect for workers, etc.
- Suggest reading the original writings of Saints Francis and Clare.
- Introduce other Franciscan Saints, especially Secular Franciscans.
- Begin detailed study of the General Constitutions and Statutes.
- Foster the desire for lifelong growth in Franciscan spirituality.
- Encourage attendance at a retreat or day of prayer focussed on commitment and the penitential way of life.
- Prepare candidates for the Rite of Profession by prayerful meditation on the solemnity of this public and perpetual commitment.

Suitable Resources for this Stage:

BOOKS – INITIAL FORMATION (CANDIDACY)		
Name of Book	**Author**	**Notes and Analysis**
Fully Mature With the Fullness of Christ	Benet Fonck, OFM	Formation for Profession: Sessions 1 to 12.
To Live as Francis Lived	Foley, Weigel and Normile	52 topics for reflection and discussion on the way of life for Secular Franciscans.
Catch Me a Rainbow Too	Lester Bach, OFM Cap.	Select from 24 short chapters to fit in with your program.
The Franciscan Journey	Lester Bach, OFM Cap.	For Secular Franciscans: Embracing the Vision.
To Set Themselves Free	Teresa Baker, OFS	A good coverage of the Rule for Initial and Ongoing Formation.
Seeking a Gospel Life	Lester Bach, OFM Cap.	12 topics focus on Trinitarian spirituality and Gospel values.
A Short History of the Franciscan Family	Vorreau & Pembleton	Easy reading. Could be used as spiritual reading and discussed at fraternity meetings.

STAGE FOUR
"ONGOING" OR "CONTINUING" FORMATION

Description of this Stage

— Permanent and continuing deepening of the Franciscan Vocation.

The Franciscan vocation covers all aspects of a member's life. Guidance in the continuing deepening of this vocation is achieved in large part within a fraternity by regular attendance at fraternity meetings. Life in fraternity aims to facilitate the continuing formation of members by enriching and developing their Secular Franciscan vocation. "Ongoing formation should be understood as an aid in the **conversion** of each and every one in fulfilment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.[17]

By the term "conversion", we mean "an interior change" that takes place in a person by listening and reflecting on the Gospel. Here, conversion is taken in the biblical sense of "changing direction", "turning from self towards God", a "change in attitude and behaviour."

"Conversion is a life-long process that needs to be deepened as we respond to God's inspiration. Francis used to say that we need to be converted every day, so as to turn towards the Lord more and more. Each day is a challenge to be faced and an opportunity to come closer to our goal."[18] Conversion also involves a struggle and is part of the process which St. Paul describes in his letter to the Philippians where he speaks of Christ's self-emptying (*kenosis*) of himself:

> Let the same mind be in you as was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited. But emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross. (Phil. 2:5-8)

This passage challenges us to seek conformity with Christ; to be like him in casting out self-centredness; to become open to the Spirit and filled with the same love for the Father that Jesus demonstrated by his death on the cross.

Fr. Michael Higgins[19] makes some important observations:

> Ongoing conversion challenges the brothers and sisters to recognize that Christian and Franciscan life is a continuous journey of faith. A necessary requirement of this journey is an open and docile spirit. The secular must be willing to accept that he or she does not have all the answers and be willing to change and develop.
>
> United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance", and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls "conversion". Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.
>
> On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace. (OFS Rule 7)
>
> The Franciscan charisms of poverty, minority, contemplation, and ongoing conversion encourage seculars to be formed as people of mercy. This means that they grow in a gentle acceptance of the importance of self-growth based on a willingness to change.
>
> As seculars grow in the spiritual life, they are challenged to become ever more sensitive to others – especially to the needy, poor and marginalized, and to recognize and be willing to address the broken conditions of culture and society. Authentic spiritual formation calls the brothers and sisters beyond the narrow concerns of self-development and makes them sensitive to what is around them in their society and the world.

Guidelines:

Preparing programs for a fraternity, including its meetings, is the task of the fraternity council and is discussed in the next section of this Handbook. It is useful though, to base the planning of fraternity life on a clear picture of the characteristics of a secular follower of St. Francis. It is suggested that a Secular Franciscan is a person who:

- Is called to holiness in the Secular Franciscan Order in the footsteps of St. Francis.
- Is prompted by the Holy Spirit to deepen this calling in the context of

fraternity life.

- While living in the world has primary allegiance to family, fraternity and the Church.
- Focuses on the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ as a guide to personal goals in life.
- Becomes familiar with the lives and teachings of Saints Francis and Clare and the other Franciscan saints.
- Becomes familiar with the Rule and other documents of the Secular Franciscan Order, and its rich history and traditions.
- Becomes familiar with the other members of the Franciscan Family.
- Learns and adapts key aspects of Franciscan spirituality to daily living. These include:
  - being people of peace, prayer and penance;
  - being people who instill justice and dignity to all;
  - being people who spread the Gospel message through their witness and their word; being people who live simply and give charitably;
  - being people who reverence Mary, the Mother of God, as their advocate and protectress; being people who are loyal to the Catholic Church.

Ongoing Formation is open to a wide range of topics, but we would like to suggest some criteria or guidelines for choosing material to be used at the fraternity meeting or on the occasion of a day of prayer or a retreat.

- Choose material that is important for the fraternity to consider and adapt it to the capability and interests of members.
- Do not overburden fraternity members with too much material to study. It is better to do less and do it more thoroughly and prayerfully.
- Allow time for socialising and sharing each other's experiences. This is very valuable for building up fraternity.
- Remember that both the mind and heart should be involved in formation and that formation must continually re-animate the fraternity to action in the world in the spirit of St. Francis.
- Be aware of cultural differences and how cultural values affect the women and men who come to the fraternity.
- The goal of ongoing formation is to help members see and judge the world in the light of Jesus' teaching and to be alert to what the Church says to guide us.

Suggested topics for this stage

Ongoing formation materials are unlimited. Gospel living is not simply knowledge, but an attitude and a commitment. In essence, ongoing formation is ongoing conversion, and the objective is to follow the poor and crucified Christ, witnessing to him even in difficulties and persecutions. (Rule 10)
Here are a few of the limitless resources:

- The ongoing formation portion of the regularly scheduled fraternity gatherings.
- Retreats, days of prayer, workshops, and seminars.
- Scripture discussion, especially the Gospels.
- Church documents, papal encyclicals and apostolic letters.
- Books, videos and Internet sites that draw us into deeper personal knowledge of Christ, Saint Francis and Franciscan spirituality.
- Articles on current Church and civic issues.
- The Rule as a document for meditation and integration into one's life.
- The General Constitutions and Statutes of the Order.
- The lives of Franciscan saints including Secular Franciscans.
- The Franciscan Family and its structure today.
- Introductions to Franciscan theology and theologians such as Saint. Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus.

Suitable Resources for this Stage:

BOOKS & DVDs – ONGOING FORMATION		
Name of Book	**Author**	**Notes and Analysis**
Franciscan Formation Program	OFS: National Fraternity of Oceania	A program of 12 sessions which involve Franciscan and Scripture readings and action.
Called to Follow Christ	Benet Fonck, OFM	Commentary on the OFS Rule. This is a longer and fuller version.
Called to Make Present the Charism	Benet Fonck, OFM	Based on the footnotes of the OFS Rule.
Called to Rebuild the Church	Lester Bach, OFM Cap.	A Spiritual Commentary on the General Constitutions of the OFS.
DVD: The World of St. Francis; Past, Present and Future	Franciscan Communications	Three segments totalling 90 minutes.
The Franciscan Story	Maurice Carmody, OFM	History of the Franciscan Movement, including the OFS Rule.
Living the Gospel	Norbert Pittorino, OFM	Part1: The Franciscan Family. Part 2: How the OFS Began. Part 3: The Evolution of the OFS Rule.
Franciscan Lay Spirituality	Norbert Pittorino, OF	Reflections on the OFS Rule.

BOOKS & DVDs – ONGOING FORMATION		
Name of Book	**Author**	**Notes and Analysis**
Pastoral and Fraternal Visitation in the OFS	National Council of Oceania (revised 2008)	Complete instructions for carrying out visitations and elections. For Fraternity Ministers and Formators.
Leadership in the OFS: Guidelines for Secular Franciscan Leaders	National Formation Committee (2004)	For Fraternity Ministers and Councillors .
A Manual for Promoting the Secular Franciscan Vocation	National Promotions Committee (2005)	How to plan and conduct promotion programs.
Ongoing Formation Project (Monthly Dossier on CIOFS website)	Presidency of the OFS International Council	Monthly program of ongoing formation based on the Formation Manual for Initial Formation.
Clare of Assisi: A Heart Full of Love	Sr. Ilia Delio, OSF	The spirituality of Saint Clare.
Clare: A Light in the Garden	Murray Bodo, OFM	A simple life of Saint Clare.
The Franciscan Journey	Lester Bach, OFM Cap	Secular Franciscans: Embracing the Vision.
Contemplation in Action	Richard Rohr and Friends	Nourishment for spiritual seekers.
The “Called To…” series	OFS Resource Library	Various authors published by Franciscan Press.

THE FORMATION PROGRAM

Introduction

Local fraternities differ from one another and so it is the task of the Formator and the local fraternity council to examine the materials they have access to for formation. Do they suit this fraternity? Are they the best ones for the brothers and sisters of this fraternity? How can we best assess them? What criteria have we to guide us in making this assessment? At the same time, recall what was pointed out earlier: that it is our living a Franciscan way of life that will be of greatest value in our formation programs.

The Components of a Formation Program

With the exception of Stage 1: the Period of Inquiry, all Formation programs should contain an appropriate mix of five basic components:

a. **Group Study and Dialogue** with reflections on the OFS Rule, General Constitutions, Sacred Scripture and the writings of St Francis; and an opportunity for personal sharing and for question and answer.
b. **Individual commitment to study**, including personal in-depth investigation of the OFS Rule and related topics.
c. **Prayer** in its personal, communal and liturgical forms.
d. **Program of Action or Apostolic Involvement** to put what is learned into practice and to ground the sharing in the concrete realities of fraternal life.
f. **Liturgical Expressions** (as in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults) to seal and heighten the formation experience and to move the candidate toward permanent commitment through recognizable and graded liturgical signs (rites of passage as it were).[20]

Factors to be Considered when Planning an Initial Formation Program

1. **Psychological factors** to be considered include:
   a. faith in the candidate's capabilities,
   b. trust in the candidate's desire to be formed,
   c. encouragement and affirmation.

2. **Physical Factors** to be considered include:

a. a room conducive to personal sharing,
b. a manageable size group of people
c. an adequate time frame.

Resources for Formation

1. Materials

The materials that can be used by those responsible for planning and conducting a formation program are many and varied but include the following:

a. Specialist OFS Formation Programs;
b. Rule and General Constitutions of the OFS;
c. sacred Scripture;
d. writings of Francis and Clare;
e. documents of Vatican II;
f. biographies of Saints Francis and Clare;
g. books on Franciscan spirituality and theology;
h. other official documents from the Holy See and OFS Presidency;
i. articles and books on societal issues;
j. Franciscan prayers and symbols.

2. Agents:

The Holy Spirit, who calls and prompts the candidate to holiness and to a depth of faith in the Franciscan life, is the primary agent of formation. The human agents of formation are the people involved in the process of preparing candidates for permanent commitment. Many people are involved:

a. The person being formed is responsible for his/her formation and must be actively involved in his/her formation as agent and participant.
b. The fraternity itself is a highly significant agent of formation because it has the responsibility to promote and discern vocations, receive new members into the Order and to sustain commitment. By its example and witness, its fidelity and enthusiasm, the fraternity can affirm and impart enthusiasm to new members.
c. The Formator is essential for formation. He/she should act as a catalyst or facilitator or enabler to move the candidates toward the

personal choice of permanent commitment.

d. **The Spiritual Assistant** through homilies, conferences, advice, personal spiritual direction and sharing, and involvement in the formation program.
e **A Sponsor,** when used, to accompany a newly received member — to "walk with" the new member through the studies and activities of their formation. He/she gives personal attention to the candidate.

How We Might Go About Creating Programs for Our Fraternity

We have noted the following criteria already:

- Personal experience of living a Franciscan life is more important in the formation process than book learning.
- Our aim is, first and foremost, to have a personal encounter with the Lord and to follow his will. We do this through our reflections on the Gospels and prayer.
- The method of teaching must follow the principles of adult education, and include the basic components of a formation program (see page 42).
- Choose material for the formation program that is suitable for the stage being planned. (refer to "Suggested Topics" for each stage).

The International Guidelines of 2001[21] also point out that our education must consider the human, Christian and Franciscan development of the members of the Fraternity. In other words, the whole person (body, heart, mind and spirit) must be in focus in the development of the program. This means that activities and experiences should help in the development of each of these aspects of our life.

When it comes to expressing this in concrete terms, we need to consider the members of our fraternity being formed, their capacity to absorb the information and gain from the experiences that are presented to them. In this area, a great deal is left to the Council, together with the Formator and Spiritual Assistant, to formulate what should be done at each fraternity gathering. It is important that all meetings should be carefully planned ahead of time and not left to the last minute to be put together.

It is good to list the possible activities that could be organised for the particular stage of formation, including time for prayer and reflection (for example, a day of reflection), and time for reading and discussion, or simply for recreation and

enjoying “fraternity” according to the abilities of the members and their age. With regard to ongoing formation, it is important that the fraternity should be consulted as to what direction it would like to take in the design of their meetings. Some regions include a “Family Day” in their annual program where members of the First and Second Orders are invited to attend. Activities are planned for these days which prove helpful in binding the various fraternities in a region together. In doing this, it is good to see that we all belong to the one Franciscan Family.

Suggested procedure for Formulating Programs

The preparation of a formation program is principally the task of the Formator together with the fraternity council including the Spiritual Assistant.

- Firstly, Initial Formation must be considered separately from the Ongoing Formation Program. Sometimes Initial Formation is carried out before the main meeting of the fraternity in a separate place. Experience tells us that a separate day and location is more satisfactory for everyone involved.
- Consider the particular stage of formation and the time span that needs to be planned. For Initial Formation this should be the whole program whereas for Ongoing Formation it might be a period of months to cover a chosen theme.
- Write down the topics to be covered and determine how many sessions will be needed to cover the program.
- Preparation for the presentation of the content should be carried out by the presenters during the weeks prior to the session. The presenters should research and choose suitable resources for their presentations.

Note to Formators:

Normal teaching procedure should be observed taking into account what audio-visual aids and other materials are available to assist the lessons. E.g. begin with a story, a video or DVD to capture the interest of those present.

- Every lesson should have a time for revision and discussion, a question time and reflection time. Prayer is always part of the lesson. Perhaps there could be a short reading from the Gospels with time for reflection. Find the best way to create an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. There should be no pressure to finish. Be alert for reactions and be

sure to give encouragement and praise for good work or ideas presented.

- Do not make the lessons too long but make them long enough to learn about the topic and have some discussion. Formators should decide this according to circumstances. There must be a relaxed atmosphere.
- Give those in formation information about the program and, if possible, how long it will take to cover the material for that stage. Try to engender enthusiasm in them and a sense of discovery and wonder at God's goodness.
- Don't be afraid to have music and singing either by the participants or on tape or CD to enliven the lessons. Invite ideas from those being formed and encourage them to ask questions.

Concluding Remarks

It became very clear during the preparation of this handbook that we are very much subject to the influence of the Holy Spirit in all our formation work. It is the Holy Spirit who inspires a person to join the OFS and it is the Spirit who guides us in our work of formation. It is important, therefore, that we acknowledge this guidance from the Holy Spirit in all that we do. It is in thanksgiving to the Holy Spirit that we conclude our work on this Handbook and ask all who use it to seek his guidance and inspiration. We pray that whoever comes to use this Handbook will benefit from it and bring about a more fruitful and informed program of formation in their fraternity.

APPENDIX 1
WHAT THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS SAY ABOUT FORMATION

Title II ENTRANCE INTO THE ORDER AND FORMATION

Article 37

1. *Rule 23* Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation and the profession of the Rule.
2. The journey of formation, which should develop throughout life, begins with entrance into the fraternity. Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation and always attentive to collaboration with Him, those responsible for formation are the candidates, the entire fraternity, the council with the minister, the master of formation ("formator") and the assistant.
3. The brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord. The fraternity is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer and example.
4. The elaboration and adoption of means of formation, adapted to the local situations and offered as a help to those responsible for formation in the individual fraternities, belong to the national and regional councils in common agreement.

The Time of Initiation

Article 38

1. *Rule 23* The time of initiation is a phase preparatory to the true and proper time of formation and is intended for the discernment of the vocation and for the reciprocal acquaintance between the fraternity and the aspiring member. It should guarantee the freedom and the seriousness of entrance into the OFS.
2. The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development are established by the National Statutes.
3. It belongs to the fraternity council to decide possible exemptions to this time of initiation, keeping in mind the guidelines of the national council.

Admission to the Order

Article 39

1. *Rule 23* The request for admission to the Order is presented by the aspirant to the minister of a local fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.
2. The conditions for admission are to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of vocation.
3. The council of the fraternity decides collegially on the request, gives a formal answer to the aspirant, and communicates this to the fraternity.
4. The Rite of Admission is performed according to the Ritual. The act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

The Time of Formation

Article 40

1. *Rule 23* The time of formation lasts at least one year. The national statutes can establish a longer period. The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of the evangelical life of the fraternity, and a better knowledge of the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with the candidates of other fraternities.
2. The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her teaching. The laity practice living their secular commitment in the world in an evangelical way.
3. Participation in the meetings of the local fraternity is an indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life.
4. A style of teaching which is Franciscan in character and which fits the mentality of the persons concerned should be adopted.

The Profession or Promise of Evangelical Life

Article 41

1. *Rule 23* Having completed the time of Initial Formation, the candidate submits to the minister of the local fraternity a request to make his or her profession. Having heard the master of formation and the assistant, the

fraternity council decides by secret ballot on the admission to profession, gives its reply to the candidate, and informs the fraternity.

2. The conditions for the profession or promise of evangelical life are:
   – attainment of the age established by the national statutes;
   – active participation in the time of formation for at least one year;
   – the consent of the council of the local fraternity.
3. Where it is held to be opportune to lengthen the time of formation, it must not be extended to more than a year beyond the time established by the national statutes.

Articles 42 and 43 (omitted here)

Continuing Formation

Article 44

1. Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuing way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and everyone, and in the fulfilment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.
2. The fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.
3. Ongoing formation – accompanied by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experiences – aims to assist the brothers and sisters:
   - *Rule 4* in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, “going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel.”
   - in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions;
   - in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of Saint Francis, Saint Clare and Franciscan authors.

APPENDIX 2
WHAT THE NATIONAL STATUTES SAY ABOUT FORMATION

CHAPTER 9 — LIFE IN FRATERNITY

9.1 ENTRANCE INTO THE ORDER

The steps of entry and incorporation into the Order are as follows:

a) Time of Initiation (GC 38);
b) Admission to the Order (*cf.* GC 39);
c) Time of Initial Formation (*cf.* GC 40);
d) Profession (*cf.* GC 41).

9.2 TIME OF INITIATION

9.2.1 The time of initiation, being a time of discernment prior to admission to the Order, should continue for a period normally of not less than three months (*cf.* GC 38.1-2);

9.2.2 In exceptional circumstances including:
- a) extended prior association with the OFS, or
- b) prior membership in the Franciscan Family, or
- c) other reasons deemed appropriate by a Local Fraternity Council, the time of initiation may be reduced or even dispensed with (*cf.* GC 38.3).

9.2.3 During the time of initiation, the inquirer shall examine, with the assistance of the fraternity, the Formator and the Spiritual Assistant, the evangelical life and commitment of a Secular Franciscan and shall look for clear signs of vocation to the Order. The inquirer shall attend meetings of the particular Local Fraternity and meet any other requirements determined by the Fraternity Council (*cf.* GC 38.2).

9.3 ADMISSION

9.3.1 Through the Act of Admission, an inquirer is received into the Secular Franciscan Order as a candidate and the time of initial formation begins (*cf.* GC 40.1).

9.3.2 The requirements for admission include:

a) completion of a time of initiation unless otherwise dispensed with;
b) a request, in writing, by the prospective candidate, presented to the Minister of the particular Local Fraternity to which he or she seeks admission (*cf.* GC 39.1);
c) the prospective candidate professes the Catholic faith and is in full communion with the Church;
d) to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of a vocation (GC 39.2).

9.3.3 The form of the ceremony of Admission, conducted by the local Minister or by his or her delegate, shall be taken from the Ritual. It is fitting that the rite of admission takes place within an appropriate celebration of the Word of God (OFS Ritual, Chapter One, 3)

9.3.4 The Act of Admission is to be registered and preserved in the Fraternity Register (*cf.* GC 39.4).

9.4 TIME OF INITIAL FORMATION

9.4.1 The time of initial formation begins with admission and shall continue for a period of between one and two years (*cf.* GC 40.1). This period may be extended, when appropriate, for a further period of one year (*cf.* GC 41.3).

9.4.2 The period of initial formation may be shortened only when the Fraternity Council agrees that impending death warrants such shortening. Should the member survive, the period of initial formation should be completed.

9.5 PROFESSION

9.5.1 Profession fully incorporates the candidate into the Order (*cf.* GC 42.2). It is, by its nature, a perpetual commitment and profession of evangelical life. The requirements of profession include:

a) satisfactory completion of the required time of initial formation;

b) a request, in writing, by the candidate, submitted to the Minister of the particular Local Fraternity;
c) acceptance of such request by the Fraternity Council in secret ballot;
d) attainment of the age of eighteen years (*cf.* GC 41.1-2).

9.5.2 Temporary profession may precede a perpetual profession and may be renewed annually for not more than three years (*cf.* GC 42.2). The conditions for temporary profession shall be the same as for perpetual profession.

9.5.3 It is the function of the Minister of the Local Fraternity or of his or her delegate to accept the profession in the name of the Church and the OFS (*cf.* GC 42.3. This profession is a public and ecclesial act carried out in accordance with the Ritual and, if possible, in conjunction with celebration of the Mass. The Spiritual Assistant is to witness the profession on behalf of the Church and of the religious Franciscan Order to which the spiritual care of the fraternity belongs (Ritual, Preface, n.16).

9.5.4 The act of profession, whether perpetual or temporary, is to be registered and preserved in the Fraternity Register (cf. GC 42.5).

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[1] Ivan Matic, OFM, "The Secular Franciscan Order and the Church Movements in the Formation of Franciscans of the First Order & TOR", *Koinonia* n. 31(2001–3), 1. Refers to a homily given by Pope John Paul II on the vigil of Pentecost, 1996.

[2] General Constitutions of the OFS, Art. 9.2.

[3] Ibid, Art. 1.2.

[4] Rule of the OFS, 1 and 2.

[5] Michael J. Higgins, TOR, "Formation and the OFS", *Koinonia* n. 38 (2003-2), 1-2.

[6] The Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, *Guidelines for Formation of the OFS*, (Rome: 2001), Preliminary Notes.

[7] CIOFS Working Paper on Initial Formation (unpublished).

[8] Ivan Matic, "The Secular Franciscan Order and the Church Movements", 1.

[9] Unfortunately, many programs fail in this aspect by presenting an overpowering amount of information at too early a stage of formation.

[10] General Constitutions, Arts. 30.1 and 37.3.

[11] CIOFS Working Paper on Initial Formation.

[12] *Guidelines for Formation of the OFS,* (Rome 2001), Preliminary Notes.

[13] See Norbert Pittorino, "Fraternity as a 'Privileged Place'".

[14] Rule of the OFS, 4.

[15] 1 Celano, 37, (Francis of Assisi: The Saint, 217).

[16] Higgins, "Formation and the OFS", 2-4.

[17] General Constitutions, Art. 44.1.

[18] Duane V. Lapsanski, *The First Franciscans and the Gospel,* Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 6.

[19] Higgins, "Formation and the OFS", 4.

[20] CIOFS Working Paper on Initial Formation.

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