

Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis Region

Secular Franciscan Order

Alabama . Georgia . North Carolina . South Carolina . Tennessee

***The following is extracted from the BSSF Regional Formators' Guidelines for Orientation and Initial Formation (p. 39-42)*

The FOUR PILLARS of BSSF Region

(To be given during the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming)

SPIRITUALITY, FORMATION, FRATERNITY, APOSTOLATE

A Trinitarian approach ... by admitting the power of God as Three Persons working in concert, each supporting the other, confirming the other, working with unstinted energy, sacrificing for and with the other for the good, the truth, the peace and wholeness of the community, now in faith we embrace Him as mentor and His way as model. Reflecting how Francis invited the Friars to participate in the mission and ministry ... Using the umbrella of Penance ... self-denial, selflessness, rooting out that which would impede the goal of peace. He invited each one to share the vision and work to achieve its goal.

It is God's inspiration, it is Francis' life and energy as model and mentor ... we move from the divine to the human ... from God to Francis ... whether we be 1st, 2nd or Secular Order ... it is Francis who is the conduit of God's grace ... He, Francis, has shown that it is possible to achieve. He, by virtue of employing the grace given, leads to transformation.

Our region expresses this approach in the Four Pillars, which is a foundation of our Secular Franciscan way of life. These pillars are Spirituality, Formation, Fraternity, and Apostolate. The questions are - what are the pillars; how do they relate to each other; and how do I live them in an authentic Franciscan manner?

The interplay among the Four Pillars addresses the content, the approach, the living, and the sharing of the Secular Franciscan life. The various pieces which constitute the Spirituality Pillar are aimed at providing the materials for a Franciscan identity and mindset; with this material, the Formation Pillar is intended to mold and shape the individual progressively throughout Orientation, Initial Formation, and Ongoing Formation; the Fraternity Pillar is the interactive piece aimed at living the formed spirituality with those who are on the same journey; the Apostolate Pillar has a twofold intent ... working with and for ... working with fellow Franciscans in a cooperative, collaborative, manner respecting the gifts and person of each member of the group ... the service rendered is a Gospel response, in and of itself laudable, yet the added factor is this service is done by a group who is 'of one mind and one heart' ... a seamless garment if you will ... communicating an example of the early Christian community. In fraternity the ideal is to recognize the gifts God provides in sisters and brothers, forging a bond and this community of sisters and brothers simultaneously ministering not only to the needs of others but also witnessing to the Franciscan identity by the manner in which the ministry is dispensed.

The Four Pillars give us developed focus to live authentically *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*.

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel. (The Rule: Article 4)

SPIRITUALITY PILLAR

The Spirituality Pillar is the heart of the Four Pillars. The quality of spiritual growth and the anchoring of a charism demand the interacting of knowledge and a discipline. When one becomes knowledgeable of a particular way, there is the attending need to integrate through measured practice the identifying elements of that spirituality. The practice of the knowledge more deeply roots the elements that transform. Thus, the information seeks to form. With formation in a particular spirituality a recognizable transformation occurs.

Embracing our Franciscan spirituality and its attending Pillars requires an ongoing dynamic attentiveness and application. Being attentive reflects the desire; pursuing the application reflects the fire. Prayer and contemplation must anchor the Spirituality Pillar. It is the means to being attentive and pursuing the application of our Franciscan spirituality on a daily basis. Our quest is to nourish and make strong the Spirit of God within us. We realize this internal quest through the external stimulus of prayer. Prayer, being the lifting of the heart and mind to God, establishes the direction in which we as a whole person are to go. If there is quality and sincerity in private prayer, it extends to communal prayer and there will be life-giving worship. On the other hand, if there is rote recitation lacking spirit and vibrancy, then there is no prayer. Whatever prayer mode we engage - personal, communal, spontaneous or formulary – do it with vibrancy and spirit that truly engages the Almighty.

FORMATION PILLAR

Formation is the vehicle whereby we learn to internalize and integrate the Spirituality, Fraternity, and Apostolate Pillars into every aspect of our lives. It informs, forms, and ultimately helps to transform us. During the formation process, information serves to give insight, to understand, and to practice an authentic Franciscan way of life. This gives way to an internalized and integrated facet of the Franciscan way of life. Ultimately, with time and application, there is a transformation. Formation serves to direct us to identify and utilize our time, our talent, and our resources in this lifelong process.

We will address Orientation, Initial Formation, and Ongoing Formation by way of The Four Pillars. Present formation programs already include the Four Pillars. By identifying the pillars, we can then make them concrete and a visible “game plan” on which to focus our formation. By highlighting the Four Pillars, we hope to give local formation directors a “total plan” that can increase and enrich local formation programs.

The intent of addressing Orientation and Initial formation by the Four Pillars is to promote uniformity and consistency in our formation and unity in our region. Our goal is to promote optimum formation and a firm foundation to live our Secular Franciscan way of life by giving guidance. We seek to move from a time framed consideration to a reality lived mode of formation. When an Orientee or Inquirer along with those responsible for evaluation believe that h/she is ready to move to the next phase of formation then and only then should that individual enter the next phase. They should have acquired and demonstrated a certain level of facility in living the Four Pillars.

Becoming obvious in these last statements, our formation is becoming more personal and individual rather than communal and class. This addresses two realities. Class approaches usually indicate certain and uniform time frames of beginning and ending. Thus, the expectation is to have a designated ending. We know from experience that individual human spirits do not operate on such timetables. For an individual to truly internalize and integrate elements of a way of life that calls for a transformation is to realize that this transformation does not happen on a prescribed timetable.

What is the objective of our formation program? Is not its objective to have the individuals both internalize and integrate the four basic elements of our Franciscan life? Accepting these facts of time and intent we remove the burden of having to “make ready the product” in a prescribed timeframe. The formation director and team are responsible for Initial Formation. Ongoing formation is the domain of the council. Certain individuals are responsible for formation. Yes, but formation is the privilege and responsibility of the entire fraternity or group. We suggest that every member of the fraternity, including Candidates prepare, present, and facilitate Franciscan teachings for Ongoing Formation. Encourage the Inquirers and Candidates to share their formation experiences. This is an opportunity for the fraternity to discern if these individuals can live the Secular Franciscan way of life within this fraternity. In addition, it is an opportunity for the Inquirer or Candidate to discern if the Secular Franciscan way of life is for them.

FRATERNITY PILLAR

Community life! It depends to whom you talk. Each one has his or her idea of community life. However, as a Franciscan and within a Franciscan framework there is clarity as to what is community. It is to pray together, to learn, to serve, and to grow as members within a particular spirituality and lifestyle. Our living life in fraternity calls us to attend to the interpersonal aspects of our life together. We are called to speak the truth in love, i.e., in the love of Christ and the spirit of Francis and Clare. We are encouraged to dialogue and brainstorm regarding each one's expectations, hopes, and vision for the fraternity. We can sift among these pieces to find the common elements for the “good of the fraternity” rather than promoting one's individual agenda.

The Franciscan model for fraternity life is the Trinity. Those who make up a fraternity establish a brotherhood, a community of equals among themselves with the Holy Spirit as their Minister General. Fraternity is the basic cell of the Order where we endeavor to live our lives in today's world by going from gospel to life and life to the gospel, while remaining faithful to the conditions of our secular state. Together we strive to overcome the attachments of our false selves and seek to find our fulfillment in God alone. Respecting and encouraging each other's gifts and uniqueness helps shape a fraternity that builds a more fraternal world and gives witness to the kingdom of God.

APOSTOLATE PILLAR

Keep in mind that our apostolic life and fraternal life are integrally related. As Franciscans, when we minister, we minister to and with our brothers and sisters and we minister to the larger community. It is not only “what we do” but also “how we do it.” As Franciscans, the witness of our spirituality and formation demonstrates how we minister together with our brothers and sisters in fraternity and how we minister to the larger community.

The fraternity apostolate is our privilege and responsibility to go forth as witnesses and instruments of the Holy Spirit and the Church. When we come together in our fraternity gatherings we interact with each other, but the fraternity apostolate gives us the added opportunity to cooperate and minister with each other at a different level.

Our hearts are good and generous, but they need to meet together as a unit. When we choose an apostolate in which all participate, in some manner, we will come to know each other at a deeper level. When we live in relationship, we learn about the other – sharing values, telling one's story, telling about our relationships and working with others. Working with another person reveals the strengths and weaknesses – whether a leader or a follower, whether insistent or compliant – in other words we learn whether we cooperate, share, truly listen, are open to change, respect the other, appreciate the person and the task. A cooperative spirit attentive to those involved and the objective of the task are the basis to pursue the apostolate.

This pursuit is to communicate individuals working as a unit in peace and harmony – to feed, to clothe, to comfort – to make Christ present in the name of Francis. Then and only then will our vocation as Secular Franciscans be realized and the passion for our vocation become alive.

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