

# PROFESSION and the Secular Franciscan

*Theological and Liturgical Foundations*  
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*Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life  
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,  
which is at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?*

*You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God  
and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel  
together with all people of goodwill.*

*Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation  
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?*

*You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,  
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,  
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.*

*Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church  
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community  
and fulfil its mission among all people?*

**Yes, this is what I want.**

## Contents

I Profession - A Gift of the Spirit .....	3
1) The Grace of Profession.....	4
2) Profession: An Action of the Church.....	5
3) Profession and Fraternity.....	5
4) Ministries in the Celebration of Profession.....	6
5) The Gift of the Spirit in the Celebration of Profession.....	8
6) Profession and the Eucharist.....	9
7) Baptism and Profession.....	9
8) Relationship with the Church .....	10
9) Witnesses and Instruments of the Church's Mission .....	11
II The Commitment of Profession.....	11
10) Consecration.....	11
11) The Value of Profession in the SFO .....	12
12) After the Manner of St. Francis .....	12
13) Gospel Life for Discipleship or "Following Christ" .....	13
14) Christ, Center of Life .....	14
15) The Original Penitential Identity .....	14
16) Secularity.....	15
Points to Reflect upon.....	16

*Somewhere between November 15-22 of 2008 in Hungary, Fr. Felice Cangelosi, the then Vicar General of the Capuchin friars, gave a presentation entitled "Profession in the SFO: Gift and Commitment". He did this at a plenary session of the General Chapter of the SFO. I personally was overwhelmed by what he had to say. Even after working with the Seculars since 1968, I had never before heard anything like this concerning Profession. I was on fire. At that moment, I promised that for the next year or so, whenever I would be asked to address the Seculars, my topic would be the unpacking of Fr. Felice's address. As the General Presidency of the SFO has asked that this topic be a part of the new course of studies for formation in the SFO, we are happy to include this reflection on this important theme in this manual. The subdivisions are taken directly from the Chapter address.*

## I Profession - A Gift of the Spirit

Right from the beginning, we are to convince ourselves of the truth of the fact that this entire idea about vocation to and profession in the SFO is something driven by the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we approach these realities as if everything depended on us ... our knowledge, our input, our time and talent. We miss the point if we do not allow the Spirit to breathe throughout our deliberations and reflections. God gives the call and through the Spirit, will see it through if it is meant to be. Throughout the formative process, the voice of the Spirit will be heard through all the agents of formation and especially through the local Council. Being attentive to that Spirit voice is constitutive of the Secular's understanding of vocation and desire for permanent commitment.

The moment of Profession is a specific moment. It just doesn't happen. It is prepared for and is joyfully anticipated. It is specific so that we know exactly what is happening and why. It is a moment not to be forgotten, whose impact is transformational and dictates all we do and say from the moment of profession on. Fr. Felice says that it is the "foundational moment in the identity of the Professed." This moment changes everything. During this time, the Lord speaks to the Professed and the Professed speaks to the Lord in intimate ways that bind the two together for life.

The very liturgy of Profession gives one the opportunity to make an appropriate response to God – the One who gave the call in the first place. Participation in the Profession Rite, is a "confession of faith – *confessio fidei*" on the part of the one being professed. It says that we believe in such a way, that we are willing to allow our words and actions betray the fact that we are true followers of Jesus Christ and His Gospel.

## 1) The Grace of Profession

At this point, we are given an opportunity to consider the role of *grace* in our lives. Richard Mc Brien would say that grace “is essentially God’s self-communication to us and, secondarily, the effect(s) of that self-communication.”<sup>1</sup> The Church officially teaches that grace is the “... free and undeserved gift that God gives us to respond to our vocation ... As sanctifying grace, God shares his divine life and friendship ... that enables the soul to live with God, to act by his love. By actual grace, God gives us the help to conform our lives to his will. Sacramental grace ... help(s) us live out our Christian vocation.”<sup>2</sup>

God does not allow us to make promises that He is not willing to help us to keep. When spouses take their vows during the sacrament of Matrimony, they receive the necessary graces to persevere in their resolutions. Those making their Baptismal promises receive the same Divine assistance. Those just absolved from their sins, receive the grace necessary to amend their lives. Why should it be any different with Seculars who are promising to be faithful in living out the Rule of the SFO by bringing the Gospel to life and life to the Gospel for the rest of their lives?

The professed Secular Franciscan will need the grace to make good on the promise to “dedicate myself to the service of His Kingdom” – words which are pronounced during the moment of Profession. How can this happen and by whose strength? It is a nice idea to want to serve the Lord and bring about the Kingdom, but we can not do this by our own strength. It cannot happen without God’s grace.

At Profession, one is also graced with the Holy Spirit who has given the vocation in the first place. The call is made and responded to. The Spirit will now see it through if it be the will of God and for the good of the person and of the Order. It would be impossible to serve God and His Kingdom without recognizing the role of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

This is why the Holy Spirit is called down upon those to be professed during the ceremony. Yes, it is the local Minister who calls down the powerful presence of the Spirit upon the assembly. It’s not just a nice, passive hope that the Spirit will grace us with its presence, but a *command* that the Spirit be present at this moment to sanctify and consecrate the person about to be professed in the Order. It is the same type of invocation prayed at Mass upon the gifts of bread and wine so that they be transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> McBrien, Richard; *Catholicism*, Harper Collins Publishers, 1994, page 180

<sup>2</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, United States Catholic Conference, 1997, sections 1996 and 2000; cf. 654

## 2) Profession: An Action of the Church

We know that everything we have comes from God. As God continues to intervene in our lives, He works through Christ. For example, usually our public, liturgical prayers begin by addressing Almighty God and our petition is made *through* Jesus Christ who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as One God. As Franciscans, we see this as the ongoing mystery of the Incarnation – the Word made flesh - operative in our lives. Christ's humanity is the connecting point between God and us. Christ then acts through the Church – Her sacraments, etc.

With this understanding, we can say that the act of Profession is not something accomplished only by the initiative of the person being professed. It is an action of Christ and of the Church ... the Church being the whole body of Christ; head and members. It is to be seen as a communal act; an ecclesial act. But it is not just an action.

Profession is an *event* in the life of the Church. It is part of the saving action of Christ – the ongoing effects of the redemption won for us by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Therefore, Fr. Felice would like to say that Profession is an event in *kairos* time. We are used to *chronos* time. We ask, "What time is it (now ... this very minute)?" Or we say, "It's time to go (now rather than later)." *Chronos* is how we mark time as the day progresses. *Kairos* is more expansive ... it is out there somewhere ... like "Once upon a *time* ..." *Kairos* is God's time ... a more existential type of time. Well, Profession is an event which takes place in *kairos* time. Although it takes place at a specific *time* (Saturday at 10AM, for example) it is an event which takes place in the *history-time* of the Church as part of God's saving plan *in time* for us.

When we always see Profession as something that happened on a certain day at a certain time during a certain year, it is quickly forgotten and is tucked away in our memory. But when we see Profession as something belonging to God's eternal plan, something which exists in the continuum of the Church's time, then it takes on more importance – not only for the Church but also for us. It is quite a significant event in our lives – a transformational event – a life changing event in God's time.

## 3) Profession and Fraternity

We are beginning to speak about Profession as the very important, transformational, ecclesial event that it is. In all of this, we cannot forget the people who will play an important role in the event itself. Grace builds on nature, and nothing happens between God and us which does not require the cooperation of human beings. We need to give meaning to the idea of Church and of the ecclesial event of Profession. We are very fond of reminding ourselves that "we" are the Church. That is a truth. But sometimes we live our lives without regarding ourselves in that light.

How and in whom is the action of Christ and the Church manifested? The answer is the community of brothers and sisters ... the local fraternity of the Order. The members of the local fraternity make the presence and the action of the Church visible. This is such an important fact that Profession should take place in the presence of the fraternity.<sup>3</sup> Cangelosi translates this as “*must* take place in the presence of the fraternity.” The fraternity, especially when gathered for the liturgy of Profession, is a visible sign of the Church. The Rule of 1978 already states that this fraternity is a “privileged place.”<sup>4</sup> It is the whole fraternity assembled and in union with the Spirit celebrating the mystery of salvation revealed and communicated to us in Christ. (Cangelosi) In addition to its being the Church visible, the fraternity is the recipient of a great gift in the persons of the newly Professed. After the Profession formula is said, the local minister says, “...I receive you into this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order. *Your membership in the fraternity is a cause of great joy and hope for the members of this community.*”<sup>5</sup> This should cause us to be careful about the people we approve for Profession. It is true that after Profession, some prove to be problems instead of sources of great joy for the fraternity.

Those to be Professed in the SFO should realize that from now on they will belong to a special family within the Church which will entail not only rights but also obligations and responsibilities. Once again, directors of formation and members of local councils, all agents of formation, should make sure that candidates for the Professed life understand what those obligations and responsibilities are

#### 4) Ministries in the Celebration of Profession

As the visible Church assembles, all have their own ministry in the celebration of Rite of Profession: the candidates, the fraternity and its minister and the presbyter.

a) In the first place, there are the **candidates** themselves. What do they bring to the celebration? What gives them the power and the right to perform the act of Profession? Here we have a good example of why it is important to make sure that candidates for Profession have received all of the Sacraments of Initiation – *Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist*. The candidates are already in our midst as baptized people having been gifted by the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism they are a priestly people conformed to Christ as priest, prophet and king. They now may receive all other sacraments. They come to us as people having been spoken to by God Who gave the call of vocation to the SFO. They are Confirmed in these Baptismal promises and received the seven-fold gifts of the Spirit. This same Holy Spirit then empowered them to be able

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<sup>3</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 5; 3:31

<sup>4</sup> Rule of the SFO; Chapter III #22

<sup>5</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet; *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 24.

to receive our Lord in the sacrament of the Eucharist – His very Body and Blood. They are now able to perform the priestly act of Profession. Why is this a priestly act? Because there is the offering of sacrifice of one's life (oblation) and the transformation of that life by conforming oneself to the life of Christ. This is the dynamic that the candidates bring to the ceremony. Are you beginning to feel that a Profession Ceremony is something not to be missed? Good!

b) In the second place is the ministry of the **fraternity**, whose role was discussed previously but also deputizes the local minister to act on its behalf. The Church is visible through the fraternity and dynamically through the local Minister who receives the Profession in the name of the Church and the fraternity. It will be the minister who will call down the Holy Spirit on to those about to be Professed. Now we will have some very important company at the celebration. Who could ever possibly think of being absent for this? More about this amazing gesture later on.

c) Thirdly is the ministry of the **presbyter** – the priest. Before I go any further, let me ask a couple of questions. Is it possible to have the ceremony of Profession without a priest present? Is it possible to do the rite of Profession without a Mass? The answer to these is yes. The Ritual states, “ In *exceptional* circumstances, when a lack of priests calls for it or makes it necessary, the candidates pronounce their profession before the fraternity.” (emphasis mine) <sup>6</sup> The Ritual also mentions “It is fitting that the profession be made during the celebration of the Eucharist or at least within an appropriate celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.” <sup>7</sup>

There is a way of reading documents from Rome. If something is not explicitly forbidden by name, it is permitted with prudence. If something is termed “exceptional” it means truly, truly rare because of the most dire of circumstances. If it is “fitting” to do something, it is highly, highly suggested ... just short of ordering it done. How many times has a higher fraternity, wishing to respect the principle of subsidiarity, used soft language to persuade a lower fraternity to do something for the good of the Order? In this way, the higher authority appeals to the sense of good and hopes that the other will respect the “spirit” of what is being asked. This is the case with this section of the Ritual regarding the celebration of Profession.

The “spirit” of the norms is that a priest will be present and the Rite will take place within a Mass. My contention being that if Profession is an important day in the life of a fraternity and in the life of the one to be professed, a fraternity would want to prepare for the event *well in advance*. Part of the preparation is obtaining the services of a priest – not 2 weeks before the ceremony, but perhaps 2 months! So what is the priest called to be and to do during the rite of Profession?

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<sup>6</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet, The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 6; 3:35

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*; page 5; 3:31

a) He is the witness of the Church and of the Order. Although Profession is not a Sacrament, it is still *sacramental* in nature. It reminds us of God's interaction in our lives and has a beneficial effect in those lives. For that reason the priest is interested in how Profession will affect a person ... that is, the role of *sanctification*. It is not only important that certain words are spoken and gestures made, but that the candidate appreciate the effect of grace on his/her soul. The priest assures that all has taken place to insure the beginning of the process of sanctification now that a permanent commitment has been made.

b) The priest will vouch for the validity of the event. Even if he is a stranger to the Fraternity, but more ideally, if he is the Spiritual Assistant, the priest knows something of the candidates and their journey to this point in their lives. He sees that all has taken place as it should and vouches that everything possible has been done to make the rite efficacious.

c) He confirms what has indeed taken place because it is he who asks the candidates the questions in the name of the Church. In this way, he is reasonably assured that the candidates know what they are about to do and understand all the implications regarding the professed state.

In short, the priest is **witness** who manifests the action of the Church. He is the **guarantor** and reassures the Church as to the suitability of the candidates. He **ratifies** or conforms the promises made in the name of the Church.

With all of this richness connected to his ministry, it would be foolish to be so irresponsible as to not to want to have the presence of a priest at a Profession.

## 5) The Gift of the Spirit in the Celebration of Profession

Fr. Felice begins his treatment of this theme by saying, "Sanctification is always the work of the Father, but it is channeled through the mediation of Christ and of the Church, and is realized in the Holy Spirit."

Previously, I made mention of an amazing gesture performed by the local minister during the rite of Profession. He or she calls down and invokes the Holy Spirit upon the candidates. This is the same thing done to the gifts of bread and wine at Mass so that they may be transformed into the Eucharist. It is the same calling down of the Spirit upon those about to receive the Sacrament of the Sick ... upon those about to be confirmed ... upon those about to be ordained. When the priest does this at Mass by spreading his hands over the host and chalice, it is called the *epiclesis*. Cangelosi, making the connection with the SFO calls the moment of Profession an *epicletic* moment ... another Pentecost when the Spirit comes to dwell with us in a dramatic moment. The Spirit will assist in the actions of consecration and transformation.



Did you ever think that this was happening at a profession? It makes us wonder why we put up with insipid and banal celebrations of the Rite without practice, good worship aids, good music and a fitting retreat for the candidates before taking this important step in their lives.

## 6) Profession and the Eucharist

This was perhaps the most eloquent part of Fr. Felice's talk. He actually shared with us the theology of the liturgy of Profession thereby giving the best reasons why the rite of Profession should take place within the context of Mass.

Another aspect of the ministry of the priest during the rite is to connect the promises made during Profession with what happens at the Eucharist. Mass emphasizes what takes place at Profession, that is, there is a *sacrificial dimension of self-giving* taking place. Remember me saying that the candidates, as baptized persons, have a priestly/victim nature. Cangelosi puts it this way, " *They, [the candidates] by promising to live the Gospel life, make themselves entirely available to God and place their own bodies (persons) on the altar of Christ's sacrifice, as a holy victim pleasing to God.*" Whew! I don't know about you, but I think that's pretty heady stuff! When was the last time you even thought that that's what you did on your Profession day? The connection between the act/event of Profession and the dynamic of the Eucharist are very clear. These two sacrifices – that of Christ the priest and that of the newly-Professed – are lives offered to God and they are made real at one and the same time. I underlined the phrase – "entirely available to God" because that's where the sacrifice comes in. Day in and day out, both when convenient and inconvenient, in good times and in bad – the Professed Secular Franciscan is to place him/herself at God's disposal.

A life of grace flows from the ritual action and the liturgy gives glory to God. There's a lot going on here. It may do well to stop here for a while to digest what is being said and maybe to reflect on the meaning of it all in your life. Profession, as Fr. Felice says, is a commitment *of life for life*. The ongoing connection of the Eucharist to Profession takes a whole lifetime to appreciate and to act out in one's daily professed life.

## 7) Baptism and Profession

In this section, we are reminded of the connection between Baptism and Profession. The grace of Profession helps one live out his/her baptismal commitment. Remember the effects of Baptism.

It *consecrates* a person. When we use the word consecration, we usually mean that moment within the Mass when the bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood

of Christ. Or we may be speaking of “consecrated” virgins; or in another time, the “consecration” of a bishop. In any case, in our mind, consecration is a big deal. And it is! We are consecrated through Baptism ... the sacrament makes us holy – or at least puts us on the path of attaining holiness. Profession helps us to reach this goal.

Another effect of Baptism is that it configures us to Christ’s passion, death and resurrection. What Christ has endured, so shall we. Profession in the SFO aids us in our faithfulness in being persons made similar to Jesus – configured to Him.

Baptism also makes us living members of the Church ... the People of God. Profession enables us to better understand this status. The liturgical act of Profession makes the connection with Baptism clear.

Cangelosi says, *“Commitment to live out one’s baptism, in principle required of all Christians, arises for Secular Franciscans after profession as a result of a liturgical action and a saving event, which have an impact upon baptism itself. It seems to me, therefore, possible to say that although baptism is “one” and that Profession is not to be seen as a “new” Baptism, it is also true that Profession produces particular effects on the supernatural organism of a Christian, generated by Baptism. The Ritual highlights the specific action of Profession on Baptism by the use of the verbs renew, manifest and activate.”*

Profession memorializes Baptism. I do not mean that it gives us a chance to merely remember the moment when we were baptized, but Profession actually revitalizes our promises and allows us to draw new strength from the baptismal promises made years ago. “Profession acts upon Baptism, impacts upon it, seals and develops it, founds a new entity and produces a new outpouring of the Spirit.” (Cangelosi)

## 8) Relationship with the Church

We are already incorporated into the Church through baptism. Profession relates us to the Church in a new way. Fr. Felice would say, “Profession gives rise to a new relationship with the Church ,, the basic baptismal relationship ... is made “**stronger**” and “**closer**.” He quotes the Rule as saying, *“They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession.”* (Rule 6)

In an earlier place, I mentioned that there questions asked of the candidates so that the Church was assured that the candidates knew what they were doing in asking for Profession. One of those questions which has to do with the strengthening of the relationship with the Church and is found in the rite of Profession is, “You have been made members of the people of God by your baptism, and strengthened in confirmation

by the new gift of the Spirit in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words. *Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church?*<sup>8</sup>

## 9) Witnesses and Instruments of the Church's Mission

The Professed Secular Franciscan shares something unique with St. Francis. That is the call to rebuild the Church. It is as if the Profession ceremony brings us to the foot of the crucifix of San Damiano. This is the way that Franciscans ARE in the Church. We, as a society, are too accustomed to defining ourselves by what we do. This is not so with the SFO. The definition of *who* we are is answered by how we exist in the Church. We exist as rebuilders of the Church ... the “house” of the Church – not the structure, but the heart – the relationships which make up the fabric of the Church. Profession gives the grace to accomplish this. This is where the dynamic of Gospel to life – Life to the Gospel comes in. It is through our everyday life – the give and take – that our Profession is lived out.

At this point, Cangelosi makes an astounding statement, **“The Brothers and Sisters of Penance are asked to offer, constantly and in all the circumstances of life, the supreme proof of their fidelity to God.”** There is no place where the Secular Franciscan is excused from living out the Rule. There is no circumstance where the Secular Franciscan cannot find a way to preach the Gospel by word and deed. In this way, the Secular Franciscan extends the tremendous gift of “hope” to a world in despair.

## II The Commitment of Profession

### 10) Consecration

Once again the word “consecration” is used to speak of the totality of the commitment made at Profession. A definition is offered by Fr. Felice: “... *to dedicate, to reserve something, to destine a person for God and His exclusive service.*” This is quite a statement. There is no doubt here that Profession will be a sacrifice if it is taken seriously. This means that you willingly allow yourself to be “set aside” – all is now ready for the infusion of God’s grace in order for you to be able to fulfill your Profession promises. You have 2 choices. Seek and cooperate with those graces, or continue living your life for yourself and squander those graces.

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<sup>8</sup> Fonck, OFM, Benet, The Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order St. Anthony Messenger Press 1985, page 22

These are the things that should make a Secular Franciscans think twice before absenting themselves from Fraternity gatherings, Regional events, not accepting nominations for various offices, etc. Lest we think that we are left to our own devices in living out the Profession, we should remember that in the act of making those promises, we hold out our hands so that the Lord may take hold of them. We will never be alone on the journey. For that reason, Profession underscores the idea that from that day forward the Professed Secular Franciscan no longer belongs to him/herself, but is at God's total disposal. The graces of Profession allow us to be lead wherever the Lord wishes to take us for whatever reasons He may have. The Professed person becomes God's own property so that s/he may be transformed from within.

You ask how you can live a life of poverty while in the world? Well, if you can let go enough of self so that the life of God may live in you – so that you can truly belong to Him, you will be exercising the highest poverty. You will also be living out the promise of obedience by quieting your own voice enough to be able to hear what the Lord has in store for you.

## 11) The Value of Profession in the SFO

In this part of his talk, Cangelosi speaks about how the Church regards the legislation (Rule, Constitutions, etc) and significance of Profession in the SFO. There is no doubt, that from the earliest times, the Church has regarded the Order of Penitents to be a serious thing. The promise to live the Gospel life was taken so seriously, that one could not leave the Order unless to go to something higher – of “greater intensity.” Profession contains an **obligation contracted before God**. This is both personal and communal – something to which the fraternity the congregation at the Profession rite witness. As we have seen previously, Profession also contains **a commitment to observe a form of life or Rule**. By means of Profession there is also the **definitive incorporation into the Order**. All of this not only suggests but confirms the fact that “ ... Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order has the dignity of a solemn and religious commitment entered into with God and the Church, and it cannot be considered inferior to that of ‘religious’ ...” (Cangelosi)

So you begin to see that Profession is not a reward given to someone who has successfully completed their initial formation. It is not just a nice little ceremony. Profession has TEETH. Formators need to be attentive to the obligations which Profession demands and make sure that those in formation receive the where-with-all to make a good and informed decision to be Professed Secular Franciscans for life.

## 12) After the Manner of St. Francis

At Profession and throughout our lives as Franciscans, we endeavor to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ “after the manner of St. Francis”. What does this mean actually?

Do we constantly have to go through life asking ourselves the question, “What would Francis do?” Do we need to approximate 13<sup>th</sup> century Italy in our daily lives? What about radical, material poverty? Must we empty our bank accounts and walk around in rags? Remember, we become Franciscans NOT to become other Francis’s, but rather to journey toward Christ and eternal life with God. As one speaker so bluntly put it, “Francis is dead!” The audience let out a gasp ... perhaps it was shocking, but a reality nonetheless. His spirit is alive, of course, and that is the basis for living a life in his manner. But to what extent?

The most important thing we should care to know about St. Francis is his relationship to God and his journey to Him. This was made possible through knowledge of the Gospels. Francis’ whole life was based on a radical living out of what he considered to be his calling to be a man of the Gospel. What we need to know is how Francis regarded what he read of the Gospel and what thought processes he went through to make it a reality in his life. There are factors which made Francis do what he did with the Gospel ... geography, temperament, personality, view of religion and of the Church, etc.

He saw poverty – this colored his reading of scripture. He witnessed injustice – this influenced the way he treated people. He saw political and ecclesiastical grasps for earthly power – this helped him to appreciate total dependence on God. He experienced violence and prayed for peace and actually became a peacemaker.

You can see the next question coming. What is our experience of life up against our reading of scripture – especially the Gospels? How will we regard all people as the creatures God has created and loved? How will we depend on God and abhor violence? How will we make Christ accessible to others? How will we see the heart and spirit behind the words of Scripture and allow it to affect our sisters and brothers?

Francis’ approach to the Gospels was radical. His approach was joyful and brought life and light into the world. How will we do that in our own times, in our societies – today in this century? This will be the Franciscan gift to the world.

### 13) Gospel Life for Discipleship or “Following Christ”

For Francis, following Christ meant observing the Gospel – there was no complication about this fact. The Ritual speaks in these terms also. As I mentioned earlier, it was through the Gospels that Francis came to know Christ. What was the truth of the Gospel for him? It certainly was not totally theological as we analyze theology today, but rather the *following of a person*. Fr. Felice outlines some of the ways Francis lived the Gospel: *by following Christ’s poverty; following Christ’s humility; following the life of Christ; following the precepts of Christ; following the doctrine of Christ; following the will*

*of Christ; following the goodness of Christ, following the spirit of the Scriptures; following the Good Shepherd; following the footsteps of Christ.*

All professed Secular Franciscan have to find their own way of doing this. We will not follow everything Jesus did and we will not go where He went. What is important, however, is to “... *structure the whole of one’s life on the set of evangelical demands, sharing in and imitating the action of God, who emptied Himself to the point of dying on the cross for the salvation of the world.*” (Cangelosi)

Francis’ life came together at Alvernia when he most resembled the crucified Jesus. His vocation was to follow Christ to Calvary and to be transformed by the process.

#### **14) Christ, Center of Life**

St. Francis of Assisi “made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.” With this quote from the Rule of the SFO, it is apparent that if this is the major way that Francis desired to go about his relationship to God, then anyone professing the Franciscan life hold the same sentiment. In another section, the Rule also reinforces the fact that Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Light – thereby making Him the center of all things. From the very beginning, the Rule stresses this relationship of Christ to us – to all we are and do in His name. Since the Professed secular Franciscan unites him/herself to Christ, s/he is also united in the desire to do God’s will in all things. He is center stage. *Deus meus et omnia ... My God and my all!*

#### **15) The Original Penitential Identity**

The call to live a life of penance is squarely rooted in the Gospel. We have only to call to mind John the Baptist who called for acts of repentance and conversion as prerequisites for the welcoming of the Messiah. Fr. Felice speaks of earlier Rules and especially Francis’ Letter to the Faithful which serves as a Prologue of the SFO Rule of 1978. He believes that this letter is the basis for the Penitential character of the SFO. It is evident that Francis is calling the people who wish to have a rule of their own to a more radical form of Christianity – a lifestyle which shows the seriousness of wanting to follow Jesus Christ and to be conformed to Him. Through penance, the ways of living in this world with all of its values are completely transformed – radically changed. Francis was aware of the fact that he was going against the tide by the way he was living. He purposefully asked those who wished to follow him to do the same.

This is everyday changing of habits and attitudes which are not life giving. It is a joyful lifestyle. For the Secular Franciscan it is Lent every day – not a drudge, but a joy. In the “turning toward the Lord” we find our joy and peace. He becomes more present to us as we begin to see Him more clearly in all the facets of our lives. Cangelosi closes this section of his talk with this quote from the Rule: *“United by their vocation as brothers and sisters of penance, and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, (should) 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.”* (Rule 7)

## 16) Secularity

The professed Secular lives IN the world and FOR the world. Let’s forget about that pious little phrase ... “We are in the world but not of the world.” There’s no getting away with it ... we are IN the world ... a good world created by God. It is up to Franciscans to show others the good which is in our midst ... remember, the Kingdom of God is among us! The Order has not made you secular ... you were BORN secular. It will be the duty of the Professed to seek out and find the “theological dimensions” to that secularity. Cangelosi make the argument that what we consider to be human and secular – that which we sometimes consider to be unimportant or nothing special, actually does assume a theological significance. Since our desire is to get to heaven, it stands to reason that the way to get there will be through what is familiar to us here on earth – other people, friends, our daily routine, the illnesses we bear, etc. This is the special way given to the Secular Franciscan to realize and to give witness to salvation. There are still a few people who are upset with the term “secular” Franciscan thinking that it denotes something flawed – having come in contact with the wicked world. But this is all we have to work with. Fr. Felice reminded his listeners *that “You can only be a Secular Franciscan in the world ... to wish anything else would be a betrayal of your Profession.”*

## Points to Reflect upon

- What moments in your life could you consider to be life changing? Why?
- Does the way you live your life betray the fact that you are a Christian?

### 1) The Grace of Profession

- Are you aware of grace in your life?
- How does the Holy Spirit keep you faithful to your Profession?

### 2) Profession, an Action of the Church

- Did you ever think yourself so important that God would include you in His plan of salvation?
- How does this understanding of an ecclesial event change your idea of your Profession in the SFO?

### 3) Profession and Fraternity

- What could a fraternity do to insure that all of its members attend Profession Ceremonies?
- What do you consider to be your obligations to God and to the members of your fraternity because of your Professed status?

### 4) Ministries in the Celebration of Profession

- Prior to the Profession ceremony, what should be done to insure that everyone appreciated and knew how to carry out their particular ministry?
- If you asked a priest to represent the Church and the Order during the Rite of Profession and he didn't know what exactly Profession was all about, how would you enlighten him so that he could be the witness he should be?

### 5) The Gift of the Spirit in the Celebration of Profession

- How do you define *epiclesis*?
- What is this *sanctification* which the Holy Spirit is to accomplish in the lives of the Professed?



6) Profession and the Eucharist

- What struck you most in this section? Why?
- What should be our understanding of what is happening at Mass and what is happening to us at all the Masses you will attend as a professed Franciscan?

7) Baptism and Profession

- What do you think of the idea of 'consecration'?
- What does it mean to live out the Paschal mystery of Christ?

8) Relationship With the Church

- The deepening of one's relationship with the Church may be difficult to gauge. How would you see this happening in your life?
- What obligations would a Secular Franciscan have to the local (diocesan) Church?

9) Witness and Instruments of the Church's Mission

- How could a fraternity "build up" the Church?
- How could we assist in the mission of the Church?

10) Consecration

- Does becoming God's property make you feel uneasy? Why? Why not?
- Is the idea of 'consecration' too exalted for you? Explain.

11) The Value of Profession in the SFO

- Why is your Secular Franciscan Profession not inferior to the Profession of the friars and Clares?

12) After the Manner of St. Francis

- How would doing things "after the manner of St. Francis" challenge the way you presently live?
- Give an example of looking at the Gospel as Francis did and how it could be a part of your Franciscan life.

13) Following Christ

- Does the idea of the cross still unsettle you? Why?
- What must you do to arrive at your own “Alvernia”?

14) Christ as the Center of Your Life

- Many things take center stage in our lives: spouses, children, jobs, etc. How can Christ be the center of all you do and are?

15) The Original Penitential Identity

- We know what all Christians are obliged to do because of their common Baptism. How could you live this commitment in a radical way? (radical = from the roots)

16) Secularity

- How do you theologize about the world?
- How does one come to salvation through the world?