

But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”

Our purpose in turning to others is to share God’s goodness and love with them because God first shared his goodness and love with us.

HUMILITY EMBODIED, GIVEN VOICE, AND LIVED OUT IN SFO RULE

Envisioning how WE turn to OTHERS in the SFO Rule

Chapter 2, that portion of the Rule that lays out our Way of Life, contains many examples of how we are to turn to others. They are provided in Articles 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19. There are also two instances given us in Chapter 3, pertaining to others in our life in fraternity, Articles 22, 24.

Article 11 Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother a poor and humble life, even though He valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

Article 12 Witnessing to the good yet to come and obligated to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.

Article 13 As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

Article 14 Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a

more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

Article 15 Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Article 16 Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community. *A partnership with God*

Article 17 In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for His Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Article 18 Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

Article 19 Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Article 22 The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

Article 24 To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. The communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.

Before going on . . .

Meditate on the words of each article.

- Circle the particular word or phrase that speaks to you of how we are called in our Rule to turn to others.?
- What specifics are laid out for us?
- How does humility show itself in our turning to the other?
- Pick out words in the Rule that speak of humility, of our turning toward others

ALLOW TIME FOR DISCUSSION

**HUMILITY: WE turn to OTHERS embodied, given voice,
and acted out in the SFO Rule . . .**

The following are offered as guides to foster communication and discussion.

Article 11 Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother **a poor and humble life**, even though He valued created things **attentively and lovingly**. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a **proper spirit of detachment** from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes, and as **pilgrims and strangers** on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

This article of the Rule calls us to begin where Francis did, trusting in God, for without this trust we can do nothing. Francis chose exactly what Christ chose and nothing more: he chose a poor and humble life. Are we called to give up everything as Francis did? No, but we are to give up our inordinate possession of things. The rich young man, whom Jesus looked upon with love, turned from Jesus because his possessions were many. *Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes [Secular Franciscans] to promote a more just distribution of wealth (GC 15.1). In the Beatitudes "poverty" is the*

virtue of sharing: it calls us to communicate and share both material and spiritual goods, not by coercion but out of love, so that the abundance of some may remedy the needs of others (CCC 2546).

Francis told his brothers to take nothing for the journey, to be pilgrims and strangers. In Francis' time, there was a law for pilgrims and Francis wanted it to be in place for his sons: "to be sheltered under someone else's roof, to travel in peace, and to thirst for their homeland (2C 59)³⁸. How graced our life would be if this were "our rule" our guidance for life in this world. Nothing is ours; all is to be shared.

REFLECTION

- Our Secular Franciscan life calls us to a poverty of detachment; do you own your possessions or do your possessions own you?
- What stands in the way of your spending greater time with God?
- What obstructs your way when it comes to caring for your neighbor?
- Which Beatitude places the greatest challenge before you? Why?

Article 12 Witnessing to the **good** yet to come and obligated to acquire **purity of heart** because of the vocation they have embraced, they should **set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.**

We have already seen that one of the names Bonaventure gives God is "good." Blessed John Duns Scotus, a Franciscan theologian and philosopher of the late thirteenth century, gives us a very basic definition of God. For Scotus, "God is Love." This article of our Rule calls us to be God-like. As God's instruments here on earth, we are to prepare a welcomed place for those whom we encounter. In the Lord's Prayer we pray, "Thy kingdom come." Jesus tells us in the Gospels that the kingdom of God is in our midst. He also warns that we cannot serve both God and mammon. We are to put aside those issues, those possessions, those fears that keep us focused on our self so that we are better able to focus on the other. Here again, Bonaventure's notion of kenosis as self-giving comes to the fore.

REFLECTION

- What holds you bound?

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FA:ED Vol. 2, 286.

- What must you do to set yourself free?
- How do you witness in your own space to the goodness of God in our world?

Article 13 As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit **accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ**. A sense of **community** will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an **equal basis** with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

We cannot find a better model of accepting all people as gifts of God than Francis himself. He valued himself least of all of God's people. He cared for all who came to him as if he were caring for the Son of God himself. Although Bonaventure referred to him as the *Altus Christus*, the other Christ, Francis would never have allowed that title to be used for himself; yet, Francis would look on everyone else as an image of God. Like Francis, we are *to create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They [Secular Franciscans] should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others (GC 13.2).*

REFLECTION

- When a stranger approaches you, is your first reaction one of trepidation or of welcome?
- How do you involve yourself in caring for the less fortunate persons among us?
- In what ways are others images of Christ to you?

Article 14 Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a **more fraternal and evangelical world** so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

Of all the branches of the Franciscan family, we as Secular Franciscans have the greater responsibility of making our world one in which all persons are treated as children of God. Not only from a human perspective but also from a deeper Catholic perspective, we are to seek the best for those who are unable to seek the good for themselves. A careful reading of

Gaudium et Spes, The Dogmatic Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, a document of Vatican II, and subsequent papal writings, *The Development of Peoples* by Paul VI, himself a Secular Franciscan, and *Love in Truth*, a recent letter of Pope Benedict XVI, show the importance of our involvement in temporal affairs. We are further reminded of our duty as citizens of a local community and a global world through the General Constitutions: *Secular Franciscans should always act as a leaven in the environment in which they live through the witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations* (GC 19.1). *In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people* (GC 19.2).

REFLECTION

- How familiar are you with Church documents that call for Catholics to take a stand when the good of peoples are called into question?
- Are you aware of current situations in your neighborhood, or state, that require a Christian voice?
- How can you offer your gifts and talents in service to your neighbors?

Article 15 Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in **promoting justice** by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

Justice for the underprivileged is a hallmark not only of our Franciscan vocation but also of our Catholic baptism. How many times did Jesus seek justice for those who were unjustly accused? How many times did he stand up for the underprivileged who had no one to speak for them? How many times did he condemn a law that was unjust or burdensome for the poor? *Secular Franciscans should "be in the forefront ... in the field of public life." They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances* (GC 22.1). *The fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives . . . they should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice* (GC 22.2). We must always keep in mind that *the renunciation of the use of violence, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. . . the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love* (GC 22.3).

REFLECTION

- Jesus told us to say “yes” when we mean “yes” and “no” when we mean “no.” When you witness an injustice, how bold are you to take a stance in conformity with your faith?
- Take a situation from your local newspaper:
 - In what ways might you be willing to affect a change?
 - In what ways might you not be willing to affect a change?
- What initiatives or projects can your fraternity adopt to make the world in which you live more just?

Article 16 Let them esteem **work** both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

Our Christian tradition has always held that our work is a partnership with God. It is a way for us to use our talents for the care of ourselves and the good of others. *For Francis, work is a gift and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood but also the opportunity to serve God and neighbor as well as a way to develop one's own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane (GC21.1). However, we are cautioned to maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to create meaningful forms of using leisure time (GC 21.2).*

REFLECTION

- How do you define *work*? In what ways do you esteem your work?
- How do you see work as a gift?
- How is your work redemptive and creative?
- How do you allow yourself leisure time, time that does not have an expected outcome?

Article 17 In their **family** they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of **peace, fidelity, and respect for life**, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness

in the world to the love of Christ for His Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Above all, Franciscans herald the family as the basic unit of society. This has been attested to in Church documents especially since Vatican II. *Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death* (GC 24.1). *The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world* (GC 24.2). A Christian home is the bedrock from which children embark on their spiritual and vocational journeys. It is also the foundation from which children learn to embrace themselves and care for others.

REFLECTION

- What are your fondest memories of childhood? Which memories are not so pleasant? Which shaped your life more?
- In what ways can your Secular Franciscan vocation witness to the values of family life?
- In what ways are families invited to participate in your fraternal gatherings?

Article 18 Moreover they should **respect all creatures**, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

We need look no further than the writings of Francis to recognize the great importance he placed on the care of creation. In the *Canticle of Brother Sun* he rightfully called the elements his brothers and sister. We have a Scriptural mandate to care for all of creation from Genesis when God told Adam to have dominion over the earth. Note the Scriptures say *dominion* not *domination*; our human history over the past 20 centuries and longer bears witness to our domination! Francis points out another basic reason for our care of creation, each bears the imprint of the Most High. In his *Itinerarium*, St. Bonaventure tells us that we are blind deaf and dumb if we are not awakened to the presence of God in our midst through his created world.³⁹

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See Bonaventure quote on p.29 of this document.

REFLECTION

- In what ways do you care for Creation?
- What lessons have you learned from Creation?
- How do you encourage others to appreciate Creation?

Article 19 Mindful that they are bearers of **peace** which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of **unity** and fraternal **harmony** through **dialogue**, **trusting** in the **presence of the divine seed in everyone** and in the transforming power of **love** and **pardon**. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring **joy** and **hope** to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Pay heed to the virtues that are laid out before us in this one article of the Rule:

Peace	Unity	Harmony	Dialogue	Trust	Love
	Pardon	Joy	Hope		

As Francis lay dying, he was informed that the bishop and podesta (mayor) were at odds with one another. The bishop excommunicated the podesta, who in turn would not allow anyone to fulfill the bishop's needs. Francis added a new stanza to the *Canticle of Brother Sun* and asked some of his brothers to invite the bishop and podesta to listen. This is the stanza

*Praised be You, my Lord, through those who pardon for Your love
and bear infirmity and tribulation.
Blessed are those who endure in peace
for by You, Most High, they shall be crowned.*

In writing this stanza and sharing it with two men whom he greatly admired, Francis gave us an excellent example of how to live this article of our Rule. He then added the final stanza

*Praised be You, My Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,*

*for the second death shall do them no harm.*⁴⁰

Even in suffering, Francis experienced confidence and joy from:

- ❖ *the experience of the fatherhood of God;*
- ❖ *the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life;*
- ❖ *the experience of being able to meet and praise the Creator in the universal fraternity of all creatures.*

Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans, therefore, affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future (GC 26.1).

REFLECTION

- How do you maintain peace in your heart through difficult situations?
- To whom or in what situation might you be able to offer yourself as an instrument of reconciliation?
- How prepared are you to meet Sister Death?

Article 22 The **local fraternity** is to be established canonically. It becomes the **basic unit** of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the **privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation** and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

We must always keep in mind that the local fraternity is the basic unit of the Order. None of us would be Secular Franciscans without our being professed into a local fraternity. As Scripture tells us, all members are necessary for the body to function; so all members of the local fraternity are necessary to allow the fraternity to function properly. The fraternity serves several needs for the fraternity: prayer, formation, fellowship, encouragement, and business. Note the placement of business in this listing. So should it be in the amount of time given to each. Concerning our time of prayer and Gospel living, Fr. Cantalamessa, OFM Cap., preacher to the Papal household, when speaking to the Franciscans gathered in Rome to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Primitive Rule, offered this caution: At our gatherings, we should set aside time

. . . during the liturgical prayer itself when allowed, to have moments of real spiritual sharing among brothers or sisters. Otherwise there is the danger that

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FA:ED Vol1, 119.

in our communities we share everything except our faith and our experience of Jesus. We talk about anything, except about him.

Remember, we do not come to fraternity to be Franciscan. We come to fraternity to be fed so we can go out into the world and share our Franciscan spirit with others.

REFLECTION

- How does your fraternal life strengthen your vocation?
- What gifts do you offer to your brothers and sisters in fraternity?
- How do you spend time within the fraternal gathering challenging each other to live the Gospel?
- How is your vocation active in the world?

Article 24 To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and **frequent meetings** of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, **especially with youth groups**. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. The **communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them**.

Although the local fraternity is the basic unit of the Order, it is not an island unto itself. While the monthly gatherings are vital to the life of the members, how much more invigorating would times of sharing with other Franciscans be. These shared gatherings are advised especially during the time of initial formation. There are many other occasions when the local fraternities can join together.

Plan a Day of Recollection, a pilgrimage to a local shrine, a time to work at the local soup kitchen, a time to listen to a guest speaker. Attend each other's professions as a sign of solidarity. Take part in the gatherings planned by your regional council. Set aside a time to remember the deceased members of your fraternities. Join with other branches of the Franciscan Family to celebrate some of our Franciscan feasts.

Most importantly, this article of our Rule reminds us that it is necessary to share our charism with those outside the Order especially the youth. The stories of Francis and Clare as young people are ideal conversation starters.

REFLECTION

- Work with some of your fraternity members planning an activity and invite a neighboring fraternity to join you.
 - Think of an innovative way of introducing the youth to Francis and Clare.
 - How do you commemorate the deceased members of your fraternity?
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RECAP

Penitential life is *metanoia*, totally **turning** one's life and will over to the God of merciful and generous love so that we may know our **true identity**, as **spouses** in our faithfulness, **brothers/sisters** when "we do the will of the Father who is in heaven," and **mothers** when we bear Christ in our hearts and give birth to him through our **humble and generous love**.⁴¹

Our penitential life encompasses our ability

- to be detached from the inordinate things of life
- to be free and open to acknowledge God and care for those around us
- to reverence the divine seed in the other
 - to promote
 - Catholic family values
 - peace, justice and ecology as the basis of an egalitarian world
 - work as a cooperation in God's creative activity
 - to encourage youth and young adults
 - in a spirit of perfect joy
 - in fraternal community

EXAMEN

At the beginning of his conversion, Francis embraced the leper. Who is a leper in your life?

To whom might you be a leper?

⁴¹ Magee, O.S.F.,155.

To which stranger did you offer a smile?

In which area of social justice are you actively involved?

Name one positive thing you did to benefit creation?

When was the last time you gave away something that had great meaning for you?

CLOSURE

We call on Francis at the end of our examination of our SFO Rule as we did at the beginning.

INVOCATION

Francis, your wholeness
haunts this broken world.

Centuries ago—
you heard
the windsong of the Spirit
winkle gentle music
through the stillness of your being.

you danced
it's unpatterned rhythms
every moment of your life.
you splashed
your laughter against the summits
of wealth and aristocracy
and with it transparent freshness.

you cleansed the leper,
forgave the robber,
freed the peasant poor.

you torched
a mediocre Church into flame—

seasoned wood caught fire,
and the fire burned,
and the fire spread,

and the fire enveloped the earth.

Today, Francis—

breathe your benediction
on this crumbling clay;
crushed, crippled, wounded,
it desires to dance.

Anoint with peace and goodness
the fragile fragments of peace and justice
struggling to be reborn in this weary world—
it seeks to laugh.

bond your courage
to the stumbling steps of this pilgrim people.

burn the power of your fidelity
into the Potter's clay—
the fire is ready.

---Margaret Halaska, O.S.F.

One day we will comprehend the power of love, and then humanity will have discovered
FIRE for the second time – Teilhard de Chardin