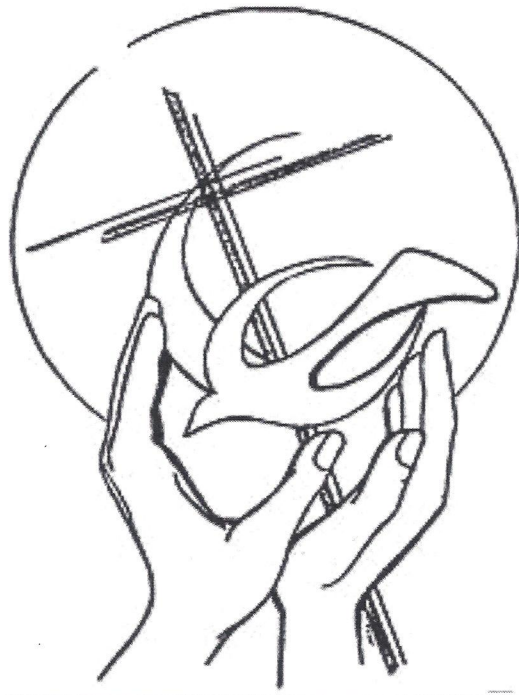


# WHAT IS FORMATION?

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## INTRODUCTION

The basic resource for the material presented here is *The Guidelines for Formation of the SFO*, issued by the Presidency of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, Rome 2001.

As Secular Franciscan formators, you are expected to take this material back to your countries and form other formators. Your greatest challenge will be to create a sense of fraternity for those being formed. You will have to adapt the experiences you have had here in Rome to your culture at home.

I have a few simple suggestions to help you implement what you have learned and experienced.

1. Before you schedule a formation session, gather all your materials and decide what you already know. If you need more information, research the topic or discuss it with someone you consider knowledgeable.
2. Determine your goals and objectives for the formation session and repeat them often and in various ways throughout the session.
3. Observe your participants carefully to determine if your material is being understood. It takes constant attention and awareness. You may have to change your presentation. However, all that matters is that the participants understand the material.
4. Consider differences in age, educational level, and knowledge of the topic before planning a formation session.
5. Arrange and outline your points clearly and systematically so that the main ideas and supporting material relate to your objective.
6. Be thoroughly prepared and know your subject. However, if you don't know an answer to a question, don't be afraid to tell the person that you don't know but that you'll get the information and get back to him or her. Humility and truth are essential elements of Franciscan spirituality.

Our theme today is "What is Formation?" It will be presented in four parts: (1) Identity, Role, and Mission of the Formator; (2) Steps of Formation; (3) Discernment of Formation; and (4) Methodology and Tools to implement at Home what has been Lived and Learned Together.

## I. IDENTITY, ROLE AND MISSION OF A FORMATOR

### GOAL:

- Comprehension of identity, role and mission primarily in the Initial Formation Process

### OBJECTIVES:

This section will assist you:

- To understand and be able to apply the essential human and psychological traits of a formator
- To understand and promote growth in essential Catholic Christian fundamentals
- To understand and to promote growth of essential secular and Franciscan attributes
- To understand the role of the formator
- To understand the mission of the formation
- To facilitate the human, Catholic Christian and Franciscan growth of a prospective member's vocation from the initial encounter through full insertion into the fraternity

## IDENTITY, ROLE AND MISSION OF THE FORMATOR

*The Guidelines for Formation of the SFO* tell us that when considering a person for the ministry of formation, we are to choose psychologically, culturally, and spiritually reliable secular Franciscans.

Psychologically, the formator is to be mature, well-balanced, self-controlled, open to dialogue, of good judgment, and able to apply and express what he or she has learned.

Culturally, the formator is to know doctrine, understand methodology, be able to convey information in a concrete fashion, and possess good communications skills.

Spiritually, the formator is to be committed to personal ongoing conversion through ongoing formation. The formator is to be a good witness, faithful to the Franciscan charism, of good character, and discerning.

This represents the goal and the ideal. It is the essence of what every formator wishes to be. If you have been chosen for the ministry of formation by your national fraternity, then, to some degree, you meet these standards.

In the following material I will put shape and form on these ideals.

## 1.1. IDENTITY OF THE FORMATOR

The identity of the formator has three major components: (a) the human and psychological component; (b) the Catholic Christian component; and (c) the Secular and Franciscan component.

### 1.1.a. Human and Psychological

A formator must possess a certain degree of maturity, balance, and self-control before he or she undertakes the ministry of formation. Because those who come to us are vulnerable to our suggestions and biases, we must provide psychologically sound formators to accept this ministry.

Essential Human and Psychological traits:

- Applies what is learned and passes it on to others
  - Dialogues and shares rather than lectures
  - Is emotionally honest and aware of personal limitations
  - Takes responsibility for personal actions and choices
  - Accepts others wherever they are on the spiritual journey
  - Attempts to understand the meaning behind the words others say
  - Stretches beyond one's comfort zone
  - Admits failures and apologize for mistakes
  - Listens to others without interrupting or offering solutions
  - Understands that growth is possible but perfection belongs to God
  - Add your own:
- 

### 1.1.b. Catholic and Christian

A formator must possess sufficient knowledge of the Catholic faith. However, because actions speak louder than word, a formator must also exhibit Catholic Christian behavior. Both knowledge and personal witness are essential.

Essential Catholic Christian attributes:

- A fully initiated Catholic—having received all the sacraments appropriate to his or her state of life
- A person of both private and liturgical prayer
- A person devoted to meditating on Sacred Scripture, especially the gospels—going from gospel-to-life and life-to-gospel
- A person familiar with the major documents of the Church, especially the Second Vatican Council documents and the Catechism of the Catholic Church
- A person committed to building up the Church using one's God-given talents

- Add your own:
- 

### **1.1.c. Secular and Franciscan**

A formator must internalize the charism of Saint Francis and understand lay spirituality so that his or her very being proclaims the Secular Franciscan way of life.

Essential Secular and Franciscan traits:

- Desire to live the Gospel
    - Following Francis
    - Through conversion to the gospels
    - In fraternity
    - As a member of the Catholic Church
    - Living a secular lifestyle
    - In life-giving union with all members of the Franciscan family
  - Familiar with
    - Sacred Scripture
    - the Rule
    - the General Constitutions
    - International Statutes
    - National Statutes
    - the Ritual
    - the Franciscan charism
    - books and resources on St. Francis, St. Clare, and other Franciscan saints
    - official Church documents
  - Add your own:
- 

Much of what I have said about the identity of the formator also applies to the formator's role and mission.

I will comment on these two elements, but in less detail.

## **1.2. ROLE OF THE FORMATOR**

The role of a formator will not be effective unless she is a person of prayer and relies upon the Holy Spirit to guide her own life.

Specifically, the formator's role consists of:

- Calling prospective members to conversion and accompanying them on their spiritual journey, leading the way whenever necessary
- Giving individual attention to each candidate, especially by being aware of each one's unique circumstances and personality

- Allowing her love of Christ to determine all that she is and all that she does as a formator
- Sharing her gifts and talents with the candidates and the fraternity and expecting nothing in return
- Possessing a vision so vivid that she does not become discouraged
- Formulating plans of action that are reasonable and can be accomplished, yet being willing to evaluate and change direction should they prove ineffective

### 1.3. THE MISSION OF THE FORMATOR

The mission of the formator is simple and scriptural. It is the mission of the apostles, St. Francis, all evangelizers, and you and me. The mission is to “Go therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all of the commands I gave you. And know that I am with you always; yes, to the end of time” (Matthew 18:18-20).

No one can improve on the mission statement Jesus gave his apostles and which Saint Francis adopted as his own. This first section ends with the words of Jesus to formators: “Go and make disciples ...”

You may add your insights if you wish:

## II. STEPS OF FORMATION

### GOAL:

- Knowledge and understanding of the various steps of formation

### OBJECTIVES:

This section will assist you:

- To facilitate sessions and observe prospective members for signs of a vocation
- To introduce and develop an understanding of Saint Francis, Franciscan spirituality, Christology, and theology
- To determine his/her understanding of Church doctrine and provide pertinent ecclesial documents
- To prepare candidates for perpetual commitment to the Secular Franciscan Order
- To provide transition between formal initial formation and insertion into full fraternity life

- Provide material content for each step of formation

## STEPS OF FORMATION

### THE RULE AND CONSTITUTIONS

Article 23 of the Rule states that, “ ... admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule.” Article 37 of the General Constitutions states, “Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the Profession of the Rule.”

These are minimum requirements. Each nation can adapt its process to meet its people’s needs. However, the minimum time frame and these steps cannot be eliminated. You may lengthen the time of initiation and formation but may not shorten them. You may divide the period of initiation into two portions but may not eliminate it.

Formation proceeds in steps in the midst of the fraternity. It requires cooperation with God’s grace and a desire to deepen their faith and conversion through the Secular Franciscan Order.

#### 2.1. PERIOD OF INITIATION

##### 2.1.a. Primary Objectives

- To test the validity of the vocation in its various dimensions
- To introduce Saint Francis and Franciscan Christology-Spirituality
- To determine Catholic Christian comprehension

If your National Statutes allow, the period of initiation may be divided into sub-steps. The United States National Statutes allow two stages of initiation: Orientation followed by Inquiry. The material is more general in Orientation and more specific in Inquiry.

Other presenters have spoken to you of the essence of Secular Franciscan identity. I will speak about your responsibilities as a Secular Franciscan Formator.

##### 2.1.b. Material Content During the Period of Initiation

- Introduce and explain the process of dialogue and sharing
  - Discourage the concept of a formator as lecturer and a prospective member as passive audience
- Explain the meaning of vocation and how it is discerned



- Emphasize at the very beginning that the inquirer is primarily responsible for his formation and that the principle agent of formation is the Holy Spirit
  - Introduce the inquirer to the other agents of formation
  - Explain what will occur during the formation experience and what will be expected of him, especially the life of continual conversion to the gospels
  - Introduce Saints Francis and Clare using biographies
  - Introduce Franciscan prayer and apostolic activity
  - Emphasize the importance of Sacred Scripture in the life of a Secular Franciscan, especially the gospels
  - Determine the inquirer's knowledge of Catholic teaching and tradition
  - Promote knowledge and use of the Catechism of the Catholic Church and Second Vatican Council documents
  - As you progress, expand the inquirer's knowledge and understanding of the lives of Saints Francis and Clare
  - Explain in simple but thorough terms what is meant by secular or lay spirituality
  - Introduce the inquirer to the Liturgy of the Hours
  - Introduce him to the Rule, General Constitutions, International Statutes, Ritual, and your National Statutes
  - Explain briefly the Franciscan family and its history
  - Explain the organizational structure of the Secular Franciscan Order
  - Encourage attendance at a retreat focused on vocation and discernment of vocation to a secular and Franciscan way of life
  - Add your own:
- 

## 2.2. PERIOD OF FORMATION (ALSO CALLED CANDIDACY)

### 2.2.a. Primary Objectives

- To help candidates in their spiritual growth into the Secular Franciscan way of life
- To deepen candidates' understanding of the significance of the choice they are contemplating
- To provide more comprehensive Franciscan and ecclesial resources
- To prepare candidates for perpetual commitment as Secular Franciscans

### 2.2.b. Material Content During the Period of Formation

Continue to reinforce all subject material covered during the time of Initiation so that they will be thoroughly grounded Secular Franciscan spirituality and Secular Franciscan evangelical life

- Preeminent in the 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 Saint Francis), which describes the blessings of penance and the misery of not doing penance
  - Continue to emphasize 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 the apostolic life—peace and justice issues, the protection of the environment, the strengthening the family unit, respect for the worker, etc.
  - Suggest reading original writings of Saints Francis and Clare
  - Introduce other Franciscan saints, especially Secular Franciscan saints
  - Begin a detailed study of the General Constitutions, International Statutes, and your National Statutes
  - Foster desire for lifelong growth in Franciscan spirituality
  - Encourage attendance at a retreat or day of prayer focused 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
  - Add your own:
- 

### 2.3. PERIOD OF TEMPORARY COMMITMENT

*Rule 23* Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years. (Article 42.2 General Constitutions)

#### 2.3.a. Primary Objectives

- To allow the candidate time to attain the age requirement necessary for profession to the Rule
- To reconcile any indecision on the part of the candidate with regard to permanent commitment
- To reconcile any lack of certainty on the part of the fraternity as to the suitability of the candidate for permanent commitment

### **2.3.b. Material Content During Temporary Commitment**

- Continue to reinforce all subject material covered during the time of formation
- Continued study and reflection on Sacred Scripture
- Continued study and reflection on ecclesiology
- Continued study and reflection on Franciscan history and spirituality
- Continued study and reflection on the role of the laity

## **2.4. RITE OF PROFESSION OR PERMANENT COMMITMENT TO THE RULE**

### **2.4.a Before the Rite of Permanent Commitment or Profession, the candidates should have clear understanding of:**

- vocation and how they were called
- crucial teachings of the gospels and how to live them (primacy of Christ)
- Franciscan evangelical life
- Church teaching and adherence to Church teaching
- secular life and mission in the Church as Secular Franciscans

Fr. Felice Cangelosi, OFM Cap., covered permanent commitment thoroughly (see Profession segment by Fr. Richard Trezza OFM in this manual). My only comment is to emphasize that by profession of the Rule, the Candidate publicly states his intention to live as a Secular Franciscan **in** the world and **for** the world as gospel leaven and salt for the earth for the rest of his life.

## **2.5. THE NEWLY PROFESSED**

The 1992 edition of the *Guideline for Initial Formation* describes the newly professed period as one in which the “Formative activity ... takes the form of a journey of faith in the footsteps of Francis in the spirit of the Rule.”

### **2.5.a. Primary Objective:**

- To provide a transitional period of support between formal initial formation and full insertion into the local fraternity

### **2.5.b. The Analogy of Journey**

- The model is Jesus
  - A detailed study of the Franciscan Christology
- The journey of faith

- Emphasize the radical nature of Baptism—insertion into the body of Christ
- The Guide as the Holy Spirit
  - Emphasize the power of the Holy Spirit to lead the newly professed into the will of God
- The emphasis on Saint Francis
  - As Saint Francis did:
    - They, too, are to reflect Jesus in their lives
    - They, too, live lives of faith, hope, and love
    - They, too, rely on the Holy Spirit for guidance

### **2.5.b. Material Content the Newly Professed**

- All material contained in 2.3.b. for a temporary commitment
  - Know that dialogue and sharing are even more important at this step because these people are more mature in their faith and are living the Franciscan charism
  - Rely primarily on Sacred Scripture for meditation, especially the gospels
  - Continue studying, living, and loving the Rule
  - Provide appropriate examples from the life of St. Francis and other Franciscan saints during discussion time
  - If possible, introduce the newly professed to those newly professed in other fraternities
  - Use all the resources mentioned this week, in varying degrees, for the newly professed
  - Understand that more important than material is a positive personal relationship with the formator; the newly professed must never feel lost in the transition process
  - Add your own:
- 

## **2.6. ONGOING FORMATION**

### **2.6.a. Primary Objective**

- “Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and everyone and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society” (General Constitutions, article 44.1).
- Ongoing formation is designed to support and strengthen the commitment made at Profession to live according to the Rule

for the rest of our lives. Ongoing formation is manifested by continual conversion.

### **2.6.b. Material Content Ongoing Formation**

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 growing into the image and likeness of God.

Here are a few of the limitless resources.

- The ongoing formation portion of the regularly scheduled fraternity gathering
  - Retreats, days of prayer, workshops, and seminars
  - Church documents, papal encyclicals, apostolic letters
  - Books, tapes, videos that draw us into deeper personal knowledge of Christ, Saint Francis, Franciscan spirituality, and all other aspects of our way of life.
  - The Rule as a document for meditation and integration into one's life
  - Introduction to Franciscan theology and theologians such as Saint Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus
  - Et cetera!
  - Add your own:
- 

### **III. DISCERNMENT OF VOCATION**

#### **GOAL:**

- Determination of God-given vocation and basic eligibility for permanent commitment

#### **OBJECTIVES:**

This section will assist you:

- To learn the process involved in discerning a vocation
- To teach prospective members how to test the vocational call
- To recognize the obstacles to vocation
- To learn the positive signs of a vocation
- To recognize absence of signs of a vocation

## DISCERNING A SECULAR FRANCISCAN VOCATION

Discerning a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is a two-way street. Both the fraternity and the individual discern the presence or absence of a vocation. It is best to discern a vocation as early as possible, yet we must wait for the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Discernment is not easy and the path is not straight. All concerned must have faith that when a determination is made, it is God's Spirit we are following.

The General Constitutions provide the basic eligibility conditions for becoming a Secular Franciscan.<sup>1</sup> I will speak of the less obvious signs.

Discernment is a process. It is a clear and conscious decision to hear and respond to God's call. To hear God, we must pray. Prayer is essential and our primary tool of discernment.

Rather than giving you many words to sort through, I will try to explain the elusive concept of discernment in simple, concrete terms.

### **To Discern a Vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, Both the Prospective Member and the Fraternity Discerning Body Must:**

- Pray—this is our primary tool
- Listen for the still, small voice of the Spirit or the loud rushing wind of the Spirit
- Empty your hearts and minds of preconceived ideas and biases
- Discern the source of the call
  - You may be surprised to learn that a person may be avoiding the call
  - Discernment is cooperation with grace
  - We hear many voices—those of culture, career, social pressure, self-interest, etc.
  - Your primary objective is to distinguish between God's voice and the other voices
- Tolerate uncertainty for a time because there are no simple rules to follow
  - All must be completely dependent on God to determine and fulfill God's will

While I cannot give you a perfect set of rules to follow, here are some essential elements to look for in a prospective member:

- Evidence of growth in Franciscan spirituality and the ability to make choices in harmony with the Gospels
- Evidence of spiritual maturity and the ability to move beyond the need for certainty—not fully understanding but asking, “God, what is my next step?”
- Evidence of conversion—when hearts turn to God, values change and we change.

There is always the possibility of making a mistake; however, we accept this risk because we know God honors the intentions of our hearts. If we persist in prayer, God blesses our actions and corrects our mistakes.

Just as each person is unique, each call is unique. One person may experience restlessness with life as it is. Another may long for something missing in her life. Hearing God's call is finding one's true identity. The call of the Spirit cannot be analyzed. A true vocation is simply a call to follow God's will for your life. Jesus, as model and example, says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

Again, becoming more specific, there are some attitudes that help us discern God's invitation to an Secular Franciscan vocation.

The primary attitudes are:

1. Trust: The book of Proverbs tells us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not lean on our understanding because God will direct our paths.

To trust we must believe that:

- God is present
- God speaks to us
- God is loving and merciful
- "All things work together for good for those who love God" (Romans 8:28).

2. Listening: God speaks to us through everything—pain and pleasure, emotions, and senses. We must listen with open hearts and open minds, especially to what we do not wish to hear. Listening requires silence. Elijah heard God in a still, small voice—not a rushing wind (1 Kings 19:11-13).
3. Prayer and Waiting: Samuel prayed, "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10). Samuel waited for an answer. The prayer for discernment involves listening with total attention to God. The will of God is found in everything, and if we believe this, our whole life becomes a prayer.
4. Knowledge of Sacred Scripture: Scripture contains a multitude of relationships between God and His people. The more familiar we are with these relationships, the more the Word of God speaks to us and leads us in the right direction.
5. Humility: Humility is based on self-knowledge. A humble person is neither too self-confidence nor too modest. Humility is one of the foundation stones for discernment because a humble heart accepts the limits of human knowledge and is willing to depend on God and others for help.

6. Discipline, Perseverance, Patience, Perspective: These four attributes are essential in discerning a vocation.
- Impulse is controlled by discipline
  - Uncertainty is mastered by perseverance
  - Patience replaces irritation
  - Perspective reminds us it is God's call to which we are responding.
7. Add your own:
- 

We have looked at positive conditions for discernment. Now let us look at impediments or barriers to discerning a vocation.

If unchecked, these items can turn a healthy fraternity into a dysfunctional one. Therefore, it is important to address these factors as soon as they are observed for the good of the fraternity. Take a moment and meditate on Article 22 of our Rule.

The local fraternity is "... 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."

Individualism and competition have no place in a community of love.

These are the major obstacles to healthy fraternal life.

- Individualism and competition
- Self-absorption
- Self-interest
- Ambition
- Self-righteousness
- Need for control
- Difficulty with interpersonal relationships
- Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_

Unfortunately, the list is endless.

If you are uncertain about your ability to discern, remember that Moses, Jeremiah, and Isaiah all believed they were inadequate to carry out God's plan. Fortunately, God convinced them otherwise.

When we discern a vocation, we act on our present understanding, praying that God will correct any misunderstanding.

I will conclude with some positive and negative signs of the presence or absence of a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.



## POSITIVE SIGNS

### **The prospective member:**

- Is aware of the needs of others
- Shows honorable motives for wishing to enter the Order
- Shows attributes of peace and serenity despite possible problems or turmoil in his life
- Radiates joy from deep inside
- Is open and authentic in relationship within the fraternity
- Displays persistence and patience despite obstacles and impediments.
- Is accepted by the fraternity and believes that the fraternity is where he belongs
- Is filled with gratitude and love that does not fade with time
- Undergoes conversion experiences

## NEGATIVE SIGNS OR CAUTIONS

### **The prospective member:**

- Is overextended and exhausted
- Experiences inner turmoil, disturbances, sadness, or depression
- Has pressing previous commitments that demand serious consideration, especially to children and spouse
- Is experiencing anxiety or obsessions and is not in touch with God's presence
- Exhibits attitudes of absolute certainty, arrogance, superiority, vanity, anxiety, irritability, resentment, condemnation, or condescension

It is accepted practice in the United States that when a doubt exists about an individual's readiness to embrace a Secular Franciscan vocation, the fraternity is given the benefit of the doubt.

In conclusion, discernment for both the prospective member and the discerning body is the art of listening to one's inner self in utter humility and dependence on God and being aware of the movement of the Holy Spirit in all circumstances.

## IV. METHODOLOGY AND TOOLS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

### **GOAL:**

- Assimilation of knowledge and skill necessary to be able to implement what is learned and experienced in Rome in your native country

## OBJECTIVES:

This section will assist you:

- To understand why we must accept the person being formed
- To value the positive attributes of each person and be able to name these positive attributes
- To understand why it is necessary to involve those being formed in the process of formation
- To be able to convey ideas and information to a group of people with varying levels of knowledge
- To be able to identify adult formation characteristics
- To learn the positive signs of a vocation
- To recognize absence of signs of a vocation

## METHODOLOGY

Although we belong to the same Order, we come from different cultures. You might have difficulty understanding the material I am presenting because the words I use come from my culture and may not be used in the same way in yours.

You have another challenge. Your responsibility is to take what you have learned and what you have experienced in Rome back to your fraternities at home. This is quite a challenge.

Using the outline in the 2001 International Guidelines, I will discuss **methodology** in four sections: (1) accepting the persons being formed; (2) relying on the positive attributes of each person; (3) involving the prospective members in the formation process; and (4) transmitting ideas and information to a group with varying levels of knowledge.

### (1) ACCEPTING THE PERSONS BEING FORMED

Sacred Scripture tells us that when God calls a person, He calls her by name. This very act of calling us by name makes us unique. Respect for the individual as a child of God is a fundamental consideration for the formator. The dignity of the human person must never be violated.

Formation links the human experience with Scripture and the Franciscan charism, allowing a candidate to explore, interpret, and judge his inner conversion experiences according to the gospels and the Franciscan charism.

If formation takes place in a group, you may have people who approach the formation process in very different ways.

- Some listen until they get the meaning of the material and then make a spontaneous leap on their own. They learn quickly and work well on their own.
- Some will prefer concrete presentations. They like step-by-step directions and personal involvement in activities.

- Some think in symbols. They create their own mental pictures and like well-organized presentations with substance.
- Some will enjoy discussions and unstructured sessions. They like to reflect on material and draw conclusions.

If you have a formation group of diverse personalities, it is best to have a formation team composed of complementary personality types so that everyone's needs are met.

All we ask is that you accept the person as she is at that moment, remembering that she reflects the image of her creator.

## (2) RELYING ON THE POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF EACH PERSON

Formation is person-centered. Although formation may take place in a group, the individuality of each person cannot be ignored. We presume that those who come to us are responsible, somewhat knowledgeable, mature, honest, and trustworthy. We expect that they have a certain amount of self-knowledge and self-acceptance. We honor and respect each person's God-given free will.

Each one has something to offer others, the local fraternity, the church, and the world. Formators help candidates recognize their abilities so that they may be used for the common good. Some examples of willingness to serve others are:

- ministering to the sick
- working with youth groups
- planning prayer services
- extending hospitality
- involvement in the apostolic life, e.g. social action
- Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_

## (3) INVOLVING THOSE BEING FORMED IN THE PROCESS

It is said that dialogue is more important than lecture and sharing is more important than discussion.

Dialogue refers to both listening and speaking. Listening, without giving an answer, may be difficult for some formators for two reasons—first, the formator probably knows the answer, and second, the person wants the formator to provide the answer.

Our role is not simply to pour information into people's heads. Often a formator can redirect a question by asking a similar question and helping the person to think for himself.

If we answer a question that a person might be able to answer himself, we provide our knowledge and skill and miss an opportunity to build self-confidence and help him learn something about his reasons for asking the question.

Sharing is different from discussing in that sharing involves the individual's personal experiences and discussing may simply engage the mind without disclosing anything of a personal nature. I could discuss an issue with you, and you would never know anything about me or what I really believe.

The Holy Spirit is the one who leads a person to the Secular Franciscan Order. The Spirit leads through that person's life experiences. During the formation process, she begins to understand what is happening to her. Who can improve on the methods of the Holy Spirit?

Saint Francis had to grow in understanding and so do we. When Jesus spoke to Francis from the San Damiano crucifix, Francis misunderstood the message. He heard the words "Go, rebuild my house which as you see is falling into ruin" and interpreted them literally. He set about rebuilding churches brick by brick, but eventually he understood his true mission.

Our inquirers and candidates also grow in wisdom and understanding of their vocation as they progress through the various stages of formation.

In the process of formation, we experience fraternal love and acceptance as well as information. Formation gatherings are an experience of fraternity. Today we are experiencing the love and acceptance of fraternity.

#### **(4) TRANSMITTING IDEAS AND INFORMATION TO A GROUP WITH VARYING LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE**

Creativity in formation sessions allows the formator to transmit ideas and information to members of a group with varying levels of knowledge.

Nothing replaces the excitement and satisfaction of finding one's own answers to questions. A gifted formator provides general guidance and then allows those being formed the joy of personal insights and knowledge.

If we use varied resources rather than a single text, we will have a better chance of meeting the needs of diverse people. Always remember, the formator is not solely responsible for the individual's formation.

We have heard many times that the principal agent of formation is the Holy Spirit, and the candidate bears the primary responsibility for his or her formation. However, when we assume the ministry of formation, we may forget that this basic union of Holy Spirit and person is sacred. It is the foundation upon which the formation process rests. The rest of us simply assist the Holy Spirit in the formation process.

It is better to think of a formator as a facilitator rather than a teacher. Skilled facilitators help others learn at their own level and thus build self-confidence. The learner becomes less dependent on the formator, more confident, and more self-sufficient.

Formators who view themselves as teachers often give their opinions to questions too quickly. This weakens the candidate's confidence and ability to think for himself. Sometimes it is better to answer a question with another question, especially when it is a matter of opinion. Rephrase the question and ask the person to search for his own answer. The person will respond from his level of understanding.

Here is a simplified list of adult formation characteristics from a secular Franciscan point of view:

- Adults are made up of their experiences
- Adults use their experiences in evaluating life and in making decisions for future commitments
- Adults are involved in a lifelong search for their identity in God and in the Secular Franciscan Order
- Adults expect to be comfortable in the formation setting
- Adults want clear goals
- Adults respond to positive and respectful relationships that enhance the formation process
- Adults expect their individual strengths and weaknesses to be taken into consideration
- Adults have different learning and communicating styles
- Add your own: \_\_\_\_\_

A way to meet the needs of a group with varying levels of knowledge is to use varied resources such as guest speakers, audio and video tapes, handouts, articles on the subject matter, and activities that allow the individuals to apply what they are learning and experiencing. This allows the individual to grow at her own rate.

In conclusion, if formators think and speak for prospective members and do not allow them to be directly and actively involved in the process, we will have immature secular Franciscans and weak fraternities. When asked to assume leadership, they will have difficulty exercising authority.

The thought I wish to stress here is that we should supply essential information. However, when a personal action or a decision is to be made regarding the formation topic, it is best for the formator to step back and allow the person to think about it and pray about it, using all of her life experience in the process.



The Prayer before the  
Crucifix at San Damiano

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