

The Third Order
Society of St. Francis
Province of the Americas



Forming the Life of a Franciscan

2016

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Introduction: What is the Third Order, Society of St. Francis, and Who are We?

Francis Foresees His Life as Giving Birth to Many Children of God

[In 1209, Francis and his early companions went to Pope Innocent III to receive approval for their way of life. But the pope and some cardinals were concerned that Francis' life of self-denial and poverty was too hard.]

Before the saint left his presence, the Lord Pope wanted to know whether what had been, and what would be conceded, was according to the Lord's will. And so, he said to him and his companions: "My dear young sons, your life seems to Us exceptionally hard and severe. While we believe there can be no question about your living it because of your great zeal, we must take into consideration those who will come after you lest this way of life seems too burdensome."

[The pope asked Francis to pray about this.]

Once God's saint had prayed as the Lord Pope suggested, the Lord spoke figuratively to him in spirit: "There was a little, poor and beautiful woman in a desert, whose beauty fascinated a great king. He wanted to take her as his wife because he thought that from her, he would have handsome sons. After the marriage was celebrated and consummated, there were many sons born and raised. Their mother spoke to them in this way: 'My sons, do not be ashamed, for you are sons of the king. Therefore, go to his court and he will provide for all your needs.' When they went to see the king, he was struck by their good looks and noticing a resemblance to himself in them, he asked them: 'Whose sons are you?' When they answered that they were the sons of the little poor woman living in the desert, the king embraced them with great joy. 'Do not be afraid,' he said, 'for you are my sons. If strangers are fed at my table, how much more will you, who are my lawful sons.' He then ordered the woman to send to his court all of the children she had borne to be fed."

When these things had been shown to blessed Francis while he was praying, the man of God understood that the poor woman signified him.

After he completed his prayer, he presented himself to the Supreme Pontiff and narrated point-by-point the story that the Lord had revealed to him. "My lord," he said, "I am that little poor woman whom the loving Lord in His mercy

has adorned and through whom He has been pleased to give birth to legitimate sons. The King of kings had told me that He will nourish all the sons born to me because if He feeds strangers, He must provide for His own. For if God gives temporal goods to sinful men out of love for providing for his children, how much more will He give to Gospel men who deserve these things out of merit” (“The Legend of Three Companions,” pp. 96-7).

Francis was a charismatic human being who reflected the love of Christ and truly lived the Gospel. Nearly everyone who met him loved him and wanted to follow his way. Francis quickly saw that people in ordinary walks of life could be called to serve God with totally committed hearts and lives. The Franciscan vocation was not limited to a celibate life of homelessness and poverty. Thus, more than 800 years ago, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance came to be.

The three expressions within the Franciscan vocation, the First, Second and Third Orders, embody a loving trinity of co-equality and mutuality. Within the Anglican Communion, the First Order consists of the Brothers of the Society of St. Francis (SSF) and the Sisters of the Community of St. Francis (CSF); the Second Order comprises the Sisters of the Community of St. Clare (CSCI); the Third Order is the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order (TSSF). The First and Second Orders live together in community, while the Third Order comprises men and women in the ordinary walks of life who live in a community “in dispersion.” The term “Third Order” denotes a religious order that lives under rule and vows, outside a convent, without habits or religious garb, in the ordinary secular walks of life. It is a very specific call. The formation process is a path of discovering who we are and what’s right (or not right) for each of us personally. Sometimes formation results in finding out this is not the right path for us.

How can we be Franciscans and not live in literal poverty, be members of a religious order yet marry and have children and live apart from one another? We are called to a deep response to our Lord’s Gospel, just as Francis was. As the Roman Catholic Secular Franciscan Rule says, “We go from life to the Gospel and from the Gospel to life” (Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, Article 4, <http://www.nafra-sfo.org/OFSrule.html>).

And that is just what Francis did. In all things, we are called to reflect the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ and his unconditional love in whatever place we are called to serve. Living out Gospel values in a materialistic world is a difficult challenge. We are often, as the Christian slogan goes, “the only Gospel some people will ever read.” We remain an “Order of Penitents,” though we call

ourselves “tertiaries,” and our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers call themselves “Secular Franciscans.” The word “penitent” has taken on largely negative connotations today, but for tertiarys, it is closely rooted to the Greek word *metanoia*, which means turning (or re-turning) toward God. That is our primary focus as “penitents”—to be always turning our faces and our interior being again toward our beloved Lord. There is nothing negative about this process at all. We strive for peace and unity in the family of God through Gospel living after the manner of St. Francis. The first focus in this life is to order our own lives, to learn to live the Rule as individuals in a dispersed community. This is a process of internalization, and we find ourselves bringing everything about ourselves into line with the focus our Rule requires. This happens slowly and imperceptibly; over time living the Rule moves from being a conscious effort to becoming an integral part of our being. The Rule becomes our interior core orientation that permeates our actions and words. Forming our spiritual natures by means of living a rule of life under spiritual direction is an ancient tradition. Any rule, Franciscan or otherwise, usually includes practices directed toward getting to know the Lord better (personal prayer and Bible study), getting to know ourselves better (meditation, spiritual direction and self examen), and striving to become whole in Christ (prayer, penitence and self-denial).

Where many of the Religious before Francis’ time denied material creation and tried for all they were worth to negate the world, Francis embraced it for all he was worth, finding it inseparable from its Creator. Rather than locking himself away in a monastery, Francis went out and embraced the entire world with open arms—not unlike his model, the crucified Christ. He based his outreach on the promptings of the Holy Spirit, which he perceived in his deep prayer life and in the Gospels.

He did nothing without first praying, consulting the Gospels, listening and testing what he heard and felt in community. And always, he did all things with great heart and much joy. Prayer leading to action, generosity and joyousness of spirit, careful discernment and close following of the teachings and examples of our Lord, as written in the Gospels, should characterize our way of being in the world just as they did that of Francis.

We are called to community as Francis was, though we usually do not live together. We are called to prayer, study and work for the coming of God’s reign. We are called to conform our lives and values to the Gospel model. We are called to embrace all creation with joy, compassion and a generous heart, recognizing all people and creatures as our brothers and sisters. And we are called to do these

things exactly as we are and in the places we are. It's hard to predict where we will wind up when we respond to God's call with a resounding "Yes!"

Reflection Questions:

1. What changes in your life do you think you will be called to make during your formation journey with Third Order?
2. What aspects of the Third Order described in this chapter draw you towards discerning whether to become a tertiary yourself?

Steps in the Formation Process

Aspirancy. After initial processing of an application by the Formation Director, new aspirants are assigned to an Assistant Formation Director (AFD). The AFD reviews and approves the Rule of Life, and sends instructions for writing the first report. When the AFD receives the first report, if it is acceptable, the aspirant is declared a Postulant. In most cases, the Postulant is then assigned to a formation counselor. Occasionally, the AFD will keep a postulant beyond the first report.

Postulancy. This stage usually lasts six months. During this time, the Postulant is expected to report monthly, either in writing or orally. After six months, the AFD initiates the novice review. Depending on the results of the review, the Postulant may be approved for novicing or asked to extend postulancy. If approved, the AFD will send the Permission to Novice Form to the Postulant. The novicing ceremony marks the beginning of the novice period.

Novitiate. The novitiate typically lasts two years. A mid-novice review is done around the one-year mark, to uncover any impediments to profession in time for corrections to be made. A counselor change is usually made at mid-novice to broaden the Novice's interaction with other tertiaries.

Profession. Generally, after two years as a Novice, the candidate's formation file is reviewed for profession. If approved by the Formation Director, the review paperwork is sent to Chapter members for a vote. If elected to profession, the candidate is not considered professed until the date of the actual ceremony and the mandate is signed by all parties. During the review process until the actual profession day, the Novice continues to report to the formation counselor. This offers continuing support and accountability during the sometimes lengthy review process.

I.1. The Rule of The Third Order and Your Personal Rule

Francis Writes a Simple Rule and Asks the Pope to Approve It

When blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily increasing their numbers, he wrote for himself and his brothers present and future, simply and in few words, a form of life and a rule. He used primarily words of the holy Gospel, longing only for its perfection. He inserted a few other things necessary for the practice of a holy way of life. Then he went to Rome with all his brothers, since he greatly desired that the Lord Pope Innocent the Third confirm for him what he had written. There was in Rome at this time the venerable bishop of Assisi, Guido by name, who honored Saint Francis and all the brothers in everything and revered them with special love. When he saw Saint Francis and his brothers, he reacted strongly at their arrival, as he did not know the reason for it. He feared they wanted to leave their homeland, where the Lord had begun to perform great things through his servants. He greatly rejoiced to have such men in his diocese, for he relied most of all on their life and character. But when he heard the cause and understood their plan, he rejoiced greatly in the Lord and promised to give them advice and to offer his support. Saint Francis also approached the reverend lord bishop of Sabina, named John of Saint Paul, who, among the other princes and great men at the Roman Curia, seemed to look down on the things of earth and love the things of heaven. The bishop received him kindly and charitably and praised highly his wish and plan.

The bishop of Sabina, a far-sighted and discerning man, questioned him about many things, urging him to turn to the monastic or eremitical life. But Saint Francis, as much as he could, humbly refused his urging. He did not despise what was urged on him, but he was intently seeking other things moved by a loftier desire. That lord marveled at his enthusiasm and, fearful that the holy man might fail in such a lofty proposal, he pointed out smoother paths. Finally won over by his perseverance, the bishop agreed to his pleas and from then on strove to promote his interests before the lord pope.

Presiding over God's Church at that time was the lord Pope Innocent the Third, a glorious man, prolific in learning, brilliant in speech, burning with zeal for justice in matters which the cause of Christian faith demanded. When he recognized the wish of the men of God, he first considered the matter and then gave his assent to their request, something he completed by subsequent action. Exhorting and then warning them about many things, he blessed Saint Francis and his brothers and said to them: "Go with the Lord, brothers, and as the Lord

will see fit to inspire you, preach penance to all. When the almighty Lord increases you in numbers and grace, come back to me with joy, and I will grant you more things than these and, with greater confidence, I will entrust you with greater things” (Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, pp. 210-12).

The Rule of the Third Order

The Constitution of the Third Order (which is included as a part of “The Basics”) says: “The Rule of the Third Order is comprised of the *Principles*, the Constitution, and the form of Profession and Renewal of the Third Order... The Rule of the Third Order is the basis of our community life, and it is the expression of our heritage and vision in the Franciscan life. *The Principles*, together with the Personal Rule of Life, are the focus of commitment and renewal for all tertiaries.” All are parts of the Rule, and each is vital. All of these parts together remind us that being a Third Order Franciscan is not just a personal project. It is about being an active and informed part of a community both during our formation and after we are professed.

In the next several chapters, we will consider the various parts of the personal Rule, but here it is worth noting that the personal Rule is only one part of the Rule as a Third Order Franciscan.

Your Personal Rule: A Form on Which to Pattern Your Life

The Personal Rule is an offering of love to God. It presents a balanced form on which to pattern our lives. It is a means to an end, helping us grow into full life in Christ. A rule is intended to help maintain stability. A rule keeps the soul pointed in the right direction when it is under stress, or arid, or not particularly fired up. A rule is an outline of what the soul proposes to do on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis.

One of the tasks of formation is to help the postulant or novice learn to live an individual Franciscan Rule. The content of an individual rule will vary in emphasis with each person. We do not have one rigid rule for all; we have the basic outline of a solid spiritual life which each must adapt to individual circumstances and temperament. In every case, the Rule must never be an end in itself, but rather a tool fitted to the individual that will offer a means of forming a balanced spiritual life.

A challenge that sometimes arises in formation is that postulants or novices may lose sight of their individual identity and needs in all this and, mistaking the true purpose of the Rule, may begin to focus on a rigid, legalistic approach. There is nothing rigid about Franciscan spirituality. Maturity in Christ calls us to freedom, to be joyously open to the new. The moment we become locked into a rigid system, we have lost our way.

An Interior Tuning of the Heart

“Discipline“ comes from the same root word as “discipleship.” It is not a forced external exercise but “an interior tuning of the heart.” This is sometimes hard to realize when we are struggling with the newness of conforming ourselves to a Franciscan discipline. What we must develop as a discipline is turning our hearts toward Christ and a Gospel-centered life, rather than a checklist of offices said or missed, books read or not, etc. This is vital if we are to become the mature Franciscans we are called to be.

How does your life reflect that interior tuning? In what way does your life reflect growth in Christ? Do you try to develop an attitude of reconciliation and peacemaking (and this means toward your own interior conflicts as well as toward others!)? Are you open to the leading of the Spirit? Is Christ’s love channeled and reflected in your life? Is self-denial a matter of humble graciousness or a negative “discipline” of guilt? Are you growing in the Spirit and developing new ways of seeing and being, or are you merely going through the paces of a routine spiritual exercise with clouded vision? Is your Rule a source of spiritual nourishment or a “dead ritual?”

Growing into Your Rule as into a “Seamless Garment”

A novice or postulant may have trouble keeping all the parts of a rule. Not all of us resonate with each of these parts equally. There may be difficulty fitting it all in. Offices sometimes seem dry and may be arduous to keep up; ministries may get so time consuming that prayer is neglected; study may become a drudgery. Some people enjoy the Office, and some never find it an easy part of the Rule to keep. Some are contemplatives who prefer prayer in solitude and find active ministry distracting. Others experience activity *per se* as a form of prayer. Some “read without ceasing” while for others having to read anything at all is challenging.

We strive toward a balance; we all struggle with the “juggling act.” Perhaps

the best gifts the Third Order can give to those in formation are permission to be imperfect and encouragement to become whole in Christ. Francis also struggled with his Rule. Only God can really be “perfect” and we, alas, are poor flawed souls. Even the saints were not perfect. “Saintly” ideals are wonderful, but it is the saintly nitty-gritty of being human we live with day in and day out.

In creating a rule, it is often hard to see where one part leaves off and another begins—something our SSF brothers and sisters refer to the rule as “the seamless garment.” It is one organic whole, which we divide into helpful categories to help us specify how we as individuals intend to live out our Rule. Where does self-denial stop and simplicity begin? Where does prayer leave off and work take over? Does not obedience color the entire thing? Eucharist feeds us. But do not personal prayer, retreat, study and community also nourish us? As the old pop song says, “you can’t have one without the other.” It is an organic whole with no part freestanding from the rest.

Our Rule should become interiorized so that we are keeping it even when we are not aware of it. It is really living the Rule that forms us, defining both our interior lives and our response to the world around us. It helps us to remain centered in Christ and focused on living the Gospel as Francis did.

Your Rule as a Mirror

Each individual rule reflects who each of us is and is called to be in Christ following the footsteps of Francis. It is meant to support each of us in our growth into our full stature in Christ, and to help us be in authentic relationship with God and others. It is not meant to be harmful to us or others. The nine areas of the Rule are aimed at fostering our relationship with God, in community: Eucharist, penitence, personal prayer, self-denial, retreat, study, simplicity, work and obedience. Through living a Rule, we are able to develop, know and live our status as God’s beloved.

To sum up, the Personal Rule is a rough outline that attempts to define not only who we are now and how that fits into a Franciscan way of being, but which will by design help us to become more so. As we grow and change, so must our Rule in order to reflect who we are and to encourage us to stretch our perceptions of that truth. When we follow Francis, we learn to reflect Christ in every aspect of our being. That is, we should fully reflect the light of Christ in the darkness as the moon reflects the light of the sun. The Rule is very much like a mirror, too, reflecting our being and our becoming as living Gospels.

Things to remember about the Personal Rule:

- It should be designed to fit who we are, not Mother Teresa. It should not fit too tightly so as to bind without comfort nor so loosely so as to droop and sag. As we grow in Christ, it will need a tuck here and a slacking there to fit our life.
- Alterations need to be made to suit growth—rapid at some times while imperceptibly slow at other times. Therefore, it should be reviewed and updated at novicing and once a year thereafter to reflect personal growth and changing circumstances (That is one reason why we “renew” yearly.).
- While in formation, any changes to the Rule must be formally approved by the Formation Director or an Assistant Formation Director; and after Profession, by the Area Chaplain.
- It is never an end in itself but only a way to focus our life on the real goal, which is union with Christ.
- It always includes all nine sections of the Order’s Rule while reflecting our specific intentions for incorporating each of the nine points into our life in our own unique ways.
- It should not be so ambitious that we cannot keep it and will feel guilty about falling short, nor should it be so easy we do not need to stretch ourselves a bit to keep it.
- It should have plenty of space in it for the Holy Spirit to work with in and through it.

Reflection Questions:

1. If the idea of living with a Rule of Life is new to you, how do you think your life will change as you begin to do so? What do you see as challenging about living with a Rule? What do you expect the benefits to be?
2. If you have been living with a Rule of Life for a while, how has your life been impacted by your Rule? What parts of your Rule do you find challenging? Do you find the structure of living with a Rule to be constricting? Or liberating? To what extent are the commitments of your Rule becoming natural and habitual for you?

I.2. Holy Eucharist

Francis Reveres the Eucharist as the Corporal Presence of Christ in the World

... the Most High Himself ... says: This is my Body and the Blood of my new covenant [which will be shed for many]; and Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life. It is the Spirit of the Lord, therefore, That lives in Its faithful, That receives the Body and Blood of the Lord....Therefore: children, how long will you be hard of heart? Why do you not know the truth and believe in the Son of God? Behold, each day He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the Virgin's womb; each day He Himself comes to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest.

As He revealed Himself to the holy apostles in true flesh, so He reveals Himself to us now in sacred bread. And as they saw only His flesh by an insight of their flesh, yet believed that He was God as they contemplated Him with their spiritual eyes, let us, as we see bread and wine with our bodily eyes, see and firmly believe that they are His most holy Body and Blood living and true. And in this way the Lord is always with his faithful, as He Himself says: Behold I am with you until the end of the age (Francis of Assisi, "The Undated Writings: The Admonitions," pp. 128-29).

Francis' Fervor for the Eucharist

Toward the sacrament of the Lord's Body [Francis] burned with fervor to his very marrow, marveling with unbounded wonder at that loving condescension and condescending love. He received Communion frequently and so devoutly that he made others devout, for at the sweet taste of the spotless Lamb he was often rapt in ecstasy as if drunk in the Spirit (Bonaventure, p. 598).

The heart of our prayer is the Eucharist, in which we share with other Christians the renewal of our union with our Lord and Savior in his sacrifice, remembering his death and receiving his spiritual food (The Principles, Day 15).

Renewing the Heart of Our Prayer

The very heart of our prayer as tertiaries is the Eucharist. One tertiary described the Eucharist as "love exploding." In the Eucharist, we are drawn

deeply into the mysterious moment of God--more deeply than at almost any other time in our life. It is a moment of exquisite symbolism and magnificent reality, for we are held within that overwhelming love which God is sharing with us through the Eucharistic elements.

In sharing such love with us, God commands us to share this love with others. The story of Jesus feeding the five thousand tired and hungry people illustrates the miraculous power of love, which is at the heart of the Eucharist. It cannot be hoarded, because then love becomes perishable. It must be used; it must be given to be received. This is the open secret of the love Jesus offers us in the Eucharist. Participation in the Eucharist must never be thought of as an individual act; the people of the Church are the body of Christ. In the Eucharist, more than at any other time, we are united in Christ and made one in that body.

Even though the presence of God may be practiced any time because God is with us continually, we often fail to consciously bring ourselves into God's presence. We take for granted things that have become a routine part of our lives. What once was beautiful to us becomes commonplace, what once was miraculous, nothing out of the ordinary. It is through the Eucharist that we have an opportunity to recapture the miracle of God with us. We must guard against allowing the Eucharist to become for us a dead ritual instead of the incredible God-encounter it is intended to be--the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Reflecting Our Life in God

In a very real sense, the main actions of the Eucharist recreate the life of Christ. On another level, they reflect the experience of every communicant, including St. Francis, of deep involvement with God. At the Last Supper, Jesus took bread; gave thanks thereby blessing the bread; broke bread; and offered the bread to his disciples. God took Jesus, gave thanks for him and blessed him, then broke him on the Cross for our sake. Through Jesus, God offered humanity the supreme gift of all time--the knowledge of God's total love for all human beings and the promise that we can continually experience the reality of God's presence.

And what of Francis? God called and tested him. God broke him of his attachment to the world and his search for his own pleasure, pride and glory. God gave thanks for him by blessing his endeavors, giving him vision, companions, and leadership. God continues to use Francis' life as an example for the entire world so that we might be truer followers of Christ, kinder and more perceptive brothers and sisters to one another.

Christ Calls Us

And what of you and me? God calls all of us to “Come follow me!” in different ways. Through intentional living and prayer, we can discern our individual call. All are called, but each according to our own talents and unique form of service. We are called into the body of Christ; we are called into particular secular and religious obligations. Those in formation are testing a call to the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis.

Christ Blesses Us

As Christ gave thanks and blessed the bread, so Christ blesses each of us. Christ blesses our response to God’s call and our willingness to do God’s will. Christ gives thanks for each of us for God’s work is accomplished on earth through each of us. Christ encourages us, strengthens us, gives us insight, helps us to do the work God has given us to do “with gladness and singleness of heart.” In our willingness to accept Christ’s love, we open ourselves to all of God’s gifts.

We Are Broken

How then are we broken? In a sense, it is a breaking with the past, a breaking up of the old life and a conversion to the new. As we grow in Christ, so our awareness grows; our false pride and self-centered living are transformed into humility and a Christ-centered life. Our material values are exchanged for Gospel values. We become open to all the possibilities that exist for us in the freedom of Christ’s unconditional, transforming love.

Sometimes this process is very painful and difficult. Sometimes it is pure grace, freely given. Most usually, it is a little of each. And always, it is a continual process of conversion and renewal. There is no abracadabra, “zap!” to this process. It is a lifetime proposition.

We Offer Ourselves

Finally, we are an offering, given to the world, to do whatever work is asked of us. Because we have freely received, we are enabled to freely give. Because we have opened ourselves to God’s love, we have that love to share, and we become that love at work in the world. The Eucharist represents the entire spectrum of the spiritual life. In the Eucharist, we are drawn fully into the

tangible presence of God. Through the Eucharist, God lives in us, and we live in God, enabling us to carry God's Spirit into the world.

Reflection Questions:

1. Attendance at Holy Eucharist on Sundays and major feast days is the first item in the Rule of Life of every Third Order Franciscan. Is this an easy part of your Rule to follow, or one of the more difficult? How has your Franciscan formation affected your practice of this discipline?
2. Can you detect the fourfold Eucharistic pattern in your own life? Are some of the actions easier to see than others?
3. Why is it important that we celebrate Holy Eucharist in the company of others?

I.3. Penitence

Francis Kisses a Leper

One day, while he was praying enthusiastically to the Lord, he received this response: “Francis, everything you loved carnally and desired to have, you must despise and hate, if you wish to know my will. Because once you begin doing this, what before seemed delightful and sweet will be unbearable and bitter; and what before made you shudder will offer you great sweetness and enormous delight.”

He was overjoyed at this and was comforted by the Lord. One day he was riding his horse near Assisi, when he met a leper. And, even though he usually shuddered at lepers, he made himself dismount, and gave him a coin, kissing his hand as he did so. After he accepted a kiss of peace from him, Francis remounted and continued on his way. He then began to consider himself less and less, until, by God’s grace, he came to complete victory over himself.

After a few days, he moved to a hospice of lepers, taking with him a large sum of money. Calling them all together, as he kissed the hand of each, he gave them alms. When he left there, what before had been bitter, that is, to see and touch lepers, was turned into sweetness. For, as he said, the sight of lepers was so bitter to him, that he refused not only to look at them, but even to approach their dwellings. If he happened to come near their houses or to see them, even though he was moved by piety to give them alms through an intermediary, he always turned away his face and held his nose. With the help of God’s grace, he became such a servant and friend of the lepers, that, as he testified in his Testament, he stayed among them and served them with humility (“The Legend of Three Companions,” p. 74).

Towards Reconciliation, Love and Joy

Many entering formation in the Third Order are surprised to find that our Rule, which begins with Eucharist, next lists penitence, including the expectation for daily self examen and at least annual sacrament of reconciliation. It is only after this that the section on personal prayer is listed. The importance attached to penitence may be cause for concern as to what kind of discipline the Third Order expects or what it means to a person’s spiritual growth.

One reason for such concern is the negative connotation of “penitence”—sin, guilt, sorrow, penance, confession, and mercy. In truth, all of these are components of penitence but none its true focus. The focus we should seek is reconciliation, love and joy. These are the real goals of penitence. Then it no longer becomes something oppressive and painful but rather something to look forward to and value.

Some of the association of pain and unpleasantness comes from society and a system of law that teaches us that wrongdoing deserves judgment and punishment, just as doing good deserves reward. Often we picture God as the judge who punishes either here or in some hereafter. This seems only fair, natural and therefore right to us given the values we have generally learned.

On the other hand, some of us tend to explain away wrongdoing as excusable or unavoidable based on factors over which we have no control. Real personal responsibility is often dismissed. We are, therefore, inclined to enter into the realm of penitence either being assured we aren’t really a bad sort and God should be understanding of our foibles, or we may use it as a guilt trip: I am bad, unworthy and deserving of punishment yet hopeful for mercy. Neither of these attitudes is fitting.

Missing the Mark

Let’s try a different perspective. Some people think of sin as “missing the mark,” or not putting the arrow in the target. Sin may be a failure to make a perfect shot, but in itself is not necessarily more (or less) than that. Sin does not make us unworthy *per se*. Penitence is about noticing when we miss the target, and correcting and improving our aim. And when we do hit the mark, we recognize and celebrate that as well.

A story about a young man learning archery tells that despite hours of careful instruction and weeks of practice, he consistently shot the arrow 3 feet too high. Nothing seemed to help. One day, to the amazement of all, he hit the target dead center. When asked how, the young man sheepishly explained, “I aimed 3 feet lower than the target!” The young man was willing to change, to do something different (even quite absurd) in order to hit the mark. This change is called penitence.

Changing Ourselves and Our Actions

Penitence is turning around, changing what or how we act. This is what we do when we repent. We seek to change ourselves and our actions. We can accept our misses, admit them for what they are, and what they hit instead of the target, and deal with the situation, accepting who we have hurt and how. Then we can look at what needs to be done about it—along with accepting the hurt we have done to ourselves. Through this contrition (sorrow for the hurts we have done), we begin to work out the repentance, the changing. This involves self- and God-awareness instead of self-deceit.

Having recognized our sin and desiring to change, we come to confession. We admit our sins and what they have cost. No longer is it enough just to be sorry for our wrongdoings nor can we evade responsibility since excuses eliminate need for forgiveness. Confession leads us to reconciliation with those we have hurt, including ourselves, and with a loving God.

Again and again we are called to accept fully into ourselves the immense, passionate, continuing love God has for all of creation by learning to surrender our desires, wants, needs—our “all”—into this encompassing love and to know and accept that this same love is fully there for everyone, not just ourselves. It needs to be recognized and lived in our relationship with God, with all others, with all creation.

We may enter into such acceptance only momentarily or on occasion but while we are fully in it we do not miss the mark. When we delude ourselves that we know how to shoot by ourselves, we miss the mark. Misses involve self-determination for independence, power and control, like the insisting two-year old, “me do it myself!” whether we can or not.

Reconnecting with God and All Creation

Reconciliation is re-connection (through love) with God, others and all creation. It is realizing our utter dependence upon God, our ultimate powerlessness and our need to render complete obedience unto God. Far easier are choices for worldly power and control than are choices for something as nebulous as love without possessiveness. Sin appears easier--and more pleasant.

Through love, God forgives our misses (sins). Absolution cannot be earned (even by a “good confession” or much contrition) but is simply the free gift of

forgiveness from God. When we forgive others, we are imitating God in love. God loves infinitely; therefore God forgives without limit, and we are called to forgive as freely. Joy comes into the picture here. We, no longer miserable offenders unworthy of love and forgiveness, should be joyful “sinners”—people who recognize and accept their sinful state but joy-filled because we know God’s love and forgiveness, infinitely. Penitence focuses on accepting ourselves, and all others, as who we truly are right now, God’s beloved. If we do this, how can we not find joy?

The Daily Examen

What does it mean, then, to practice a daily examination if we are not to be preoccupied with our sin, guilt, making confession? How can we be penitent, that is, willing to change, if we don’t know what needs changing?

An elaborate soul searching of each and every thought and act during the day is not necessary, and could lead to undue focus on shame and guilt, which in turn could lead to difficulty accepting forgiveness. Daily self-examination is useful *only* as it provides a checkpoint for sensing when and why we have missed the mark, with *why* being the real concern. It is not useful as a daily laundry list of failures that enforces a sense of rottenness and inability to be lovable. Neither is it an occasion for excusing our deeds or placing the blame elsewhere.

A self examen can be done in innumerable ways using various forms (such as those in the *Devotional Companion*), but it is best to keep the process simple. Perhaps we might consider the following questions: When was I most conscious of God’s love today? When was I least conscious of God’s love? When did I act out of love today? When did I not act out of love? What opportunities for thanksgiving did I miss today?

Each question may bring to mind failures and successes. Conclude by giving grateful thanks for a growing awareness of the failures and for the grace that made the successes possible. By this interweaving of admission and thanksgiving, we can appreciate the love that upholds and guides our aim as well as be conscious of our withdrawal from love, appropriating to ourselves what is not ours. Thanksgiving combined with contrition balances awareness of failure with awareness of God’s loving grace and offers hope that we can indeed turn around.

Daily self-examination helps us to see patterns easily forgotten, avoided or

missed. In a sense, it is like a daily shower. It refreshes us. It does not necessarily prevent our going back into the grime again, but it does help us know where the grime is to be found. Jotting notes or a more intensive examen may periodically be done in order to review and consider the why behind the repetitive misses and what changes we might attempt. This is helpful preparation for the sacrament of reconciliation.

Sacrament of Reconciliation

This practice is a way to deepen our relationship with our loving and forgiving God. It should be clearly understood that the confessions in the Eucharist or Daily Office, which are designed for group use, serve a different purpose than the sacrament of reconciliation, which is designed for individual use. Nor is confession “to the church” and/or through a priest something new. Rather, it is an ancient practice stemming from the New Testament and the early church.

The objective of the sacrament of reconciliation is simply a way of accepting and acknowledging ourselves as sinners and yet beloved. It requires us to articulate clearly what we have already sensed about ourselves, as well as reminding us of a loving God’s wiping out our misses by forgiveness.

Finding a confessor can be problematic, especially in some areas of this Third Order Province. If your spiritual director doesn’t hear confessions and a local priest isn’t available or appropriate, ask the Third Order Area Chaplains (listed in the front of the *Directory*) for help, or members of the local Fellowship. The Episcopal Church BCP allows for a deacon or lay person to serve as confessor. Instead of pronouncing absolution, a deacon or lay person offers assurance of God’s forgiveness and love. No matter who the confessor, s/he is fully bound to confessional confidentiality.

As to the particulars of how to make the sacrament of reconciliation for the first time, arrangements should be made with the potential confessor with regard to time and place, method (i.e., kneeling, sitting, facing the confessor, screened), and other questions that may come up. It is quite common for the penitent to bring written notes (or a written confession to be read) as a certain amount of nervousness is to be expected even after repeated confessions. This nervousness tends to make relying on memory difficult. The confessor may recommend ways to prepare one’s confession but if not, a number of formats are available. Especially recommended is Martin Smith’s book *Reconciliation:*

Preparing for Confession in the Episcopal Church, as well as the “Awareness Exam“ found in our *Devotional Companion*.

At the end of confession the penitent invites the confessor to give advice, counsel and penance. The concept of penance (usually a prayer to say or scripture to read) is to put a closure to the event, not as punishment or payment for the sins confessed (although this idea did exist historically), and is optional. A brief counsel and/or a few suggestions of advice help the penitent to make changes needed to more closely “hit the mark.” Ways for the penitent to reconcile with those hurt or in need of forgiveness may also be recommended.

In the Third Order, the statement from Chapter is that “Normally tertiaries will avail themselves of the Sacrament of Reconciliation at least once a year.” Advent or Lent are common times for the sacrament of reconciliation. Other appropriate times include Franciscide or at the time of making/renewing Third Order vows. The sacrament of reconciliation may be made more frequently, but normally not less than annually, depending upon one’s need to articulate one’s sins and be reassured of God’s forgiveness.

Reflection Questions:

1. If this is your first sacrament of reconciliation, what challenges are you facing in preparing for it?
2. If you have made a sacrament of reconciliation before, what spiritual gifts have you received through the experience?
3. What is one of your life experiences that might be compared to Francis’ aversion to lepers? How might God be inviting you to a conversion of attitudes and behavior?
4. Read and reflect on Jesus’ words in Luke 23:34: “Father forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.” How do these words speak to your experiences, need for forgiveness, and understanding of God’s role in reconciliation.
5. This chapter uses a metaphor to describe sin as missing the mark, much as an arrow falls short of hitting the target. What is another metaphor that makes sense to you to describe sin?

I.4. Personal Prayer

The Brothers Ask Francis to Teach Them How to Pray

When the brothers asked him to teach them to pray, he said: “When you pray, say ‘Our Father...’” and “We adore you, O Christ, in all your churches throughout the whole world, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.” He also taught them to praise God in all and with all creatures, to honor priests with a special reverence, and to believe with certainty and to confess with simplicity the truth of the faith as the holy Roman Church holds and teaches. They observed the Holy Father’s teaching in every detail, and prostrated themselves humbly before every church and crucifix, which they were able to see from a distance, praying the formula he had taught them (Bonaventure, p. 551).

Francis’ Zeal for Prayer

Francis, the servant of Christ, aware that while in the body he was away from the Lord, became totally unaware of earthly desires through love of Christ, and strove to keep his spirit present to God by praying without ceasing lest he be without the consolation of the Beloved. Prayer was a comfort for the contemplative, even now a citizen with the angels in the heavenly mansions, as he sought with burning desire the Beloved from whom only the wall of the flesh separated him. Distrusting his own effort and trusting divine piety, prayer was a fortress to this worker; for in everything he did, he cast his care completely upon the Lord through his perseverance. He firmly claimed that the grace of prayer must be desired above all else by a religious, believing that without it no one could prosper in God’s service. He used whatever means he could to arouse his brothers to be zealous in prayer. For whether walking or sitting, inside or outside, working or resting, he was so focused on prayer that he seemed to have dedicated to it not only whatever was in his heart and body, but also his effort and time (Bonaventure, p. 598).

Tertiaries seek to live in an atmosphere of praise and prayer. We aim to be constantly aware of God’s presence, so that we may indeed pray without ceasing. Our ever-deepening devotion to the indwelling Christ is a source of strength and joy. It is Christ’s love that inspires us to service, and strengthens us for sacrifice (The Principles, Day 14).

Tertiaries recognize the power of intercessory prayer for furthering the purposes of God's kingdom, and therefore seek a deepening communion with God in personal devotion, and constantly intercede for the needs of his church and his world. Those of us who have much time at our disposal give prayer a large part in our daily lives. Those of us with less time must not fail to see the importance of prayer and to guard the time we have allotted to it from interruption. Lastly, we are encouraged to avail ourselves of the sacrament of Reconciliation, through which the burden of past sin and failure is lifted and peace and hope restored (The Principles, Day 16).

Responding to God's Call to Relationship

Prayer is our response to God's invitation to relationship. It begins with a subtle, even unrecognized, desire or ability to see things differently, to reach out to another person or creature, to experience life on a deeper level.

For some of us, these yearnings to deepen our life, this sense that there is someone or something much greater than ourselves, something beyond the tangible, begins in the early years. It may appear as curiosity, awe or wonder, as a tendency to "sit" and "think," or as a direct interest in church and/or things of the Spirit. For others, this yearning begins later, during mid-life or beyond. It may manifest itself slowly or radically with a turning toward something "new" and inviting.

Francis' prayer life began with dreams and visions, urging him to abandon his quest for secular glory and to dedicate his life to God. Eventually, prayer became Francis' very breath. He prayed constantly. He prayed prayers of adoration, such as "My God and My All." He whispered through the night on his knees, and he waited and listened in the caves and hermitages where he spent much of his time. He wrote prayers and then meditated on them. He said the offices of the Church, attended mass, sang and wrote spiritual songs. In short, he lived a life of ceaseless prayer, or as his earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, tells us, "not so much praying as becoming totally prayer" (Thomas of Celano, "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul", p. 310).

While Francis has shown us that his prayer included a variety of types and methods, prayer cannot be limited to these types and methods; it includes all of our thoughts and deeds when they are a response to God. Prayer may be a sudden discovery, an "aha" moment at work, a late afternoon stroll, or an inspiring encounter with nature.

An Ongoing Conversation with God

A form of prayer that naturally weaves itself throughout our day is colloquy, or conversation. It is a wonderful way to be in constant dialogue with God as we move through each day. The fiery Teresa of Avila engaged in constant conversation with God. When she fell in a creek after a hard day, she shouted, “After everything else, now this!” God, her constant companion, responded with disarming humor, “That is how I treat my friends.” “Then no wonder you have so few!” cried the furious Teresa (Martin, p. 98). This is a lively form of prayer that keeps our relationship with God on the forefront, right here, right now. It is a good method for remaining centered in Christ and aware of his constant companionship.

Personal prayer in our Rule stimulates an ongoing conversation with God, and it goes beyond the communal prayer of the Daily Office. It is the foundation of our Personal Rule and requires regular, undisturbed daily time spent with God in intercession, thanksgiving and meditation. Through drinking from the spiritual well of prayer, we are nourished and empowered to live fully. Through prayer we experience God’s direct love, and unique call to us. Therefore, prayer needs to be the priority of our life. In any developing relationship, time spent in intimate conversation and sharing is vital. Prayer is a sharing between lover and beloved, between intimate friends, which means taking regular time to be with our dearest friend, Jesus. Unless we respond to God, we will fail to know God intimately. We will only know someone else’s God and someone else’s answers, which may be very different from our own. “The thought of God’s keeping tryst with us is a winsome thought. When we go to pray, God has already come to the meeting-place. We are never there first. The great thing to remember is that God, being Who He is, is more ready to hear than we to pray, more eager to give than we to receive, more active to find us than we to find Him” (Cady, p. 489).

Christ calls us to come and keep the tryst; we respond with a resounding “Yes!” by keeping a set time and place, each day, for prayer—a time and place that is well guarded from interruptions and distractions.

Types of Prayer

Classically, the principal types of prayer are: adoration, praise, intercession and petition, thanksgiving, penitence (Chapter I.3.) and oblation. We use all these types of prayers, simultaneously or separately, during our lives, and we may use a variety of methods—lectio divina, meditation, contemplation, conversation,

mantra, and others—to engage in them. To help us, we have many spiritual guides, present and past, to instruct us in these methods of prayer. As Franciscans, we need to give ourselves permission to experience all the types of prayer that God calls forth.

Adoration: Adoration is a profound exchange of love with God. We enter into this type of prayer for one reason only: to love God. It is a time to leave all ulterior motivation aside, to come to God empty of ambition, desires, and needs and to bask in God’s love. This prayer form is often used during meditation but may be done anywhere. It is a deep and powerful prayer form, which invites us into a state of loving grace. Empowerment, refreshment and healing often result making us feel we are being cradled in the Lord’s loving arms.

Praise: Praise is the essence of Franciscan spirituality. Like adoration, praise does not seek anything beyond the pleasure of celebrating God. We praise God because God IS. And God loves us passionately and blesses us abundantly. One form of praise is the ejaculatory prayer, a short, sudden utterance, like “Praise the Lord!” or “Thank God!” A meditation of praise may use St. Francis’s “my God and my All!” for a mantra. The Psalms, Hymnal and Book of Common Prayer are full of hymns of praise, and our *Devotional Companion* includes prayers of praise attributed to St. Francis for us to use.

Intercession and Petition: St. Francis meant for us to pray daily and for prayer to be the center of our Franciscan Way. We are called to intercessory prayer for those who request our prayers and for all elements of Creation. Intercession may take many forms, yet all ask that “your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6.10).” Our model is the risen and ascended Jesus, who, in full divinity and humanity, intercedes for the whole human race before God’s throne.

When we place our needs and concerns before God, we invite God’s activity in our lives and in the lives of others. We can do this in different ways. Arrow prayers are short intercessory prayers that address a specific need as the need and our awareness arises--”Lord, comfort the woman just hit,” and “Give guidance and skillful presence to the ambulance.” They are sent straight to the heart of God.

Intercessory lists are invaluable. They remind us for whom to pray and give focus to our prayers. One list we pray from daily is the *Directory and Intercession List*. Keeping a written list helps us to remember the many intercessions we promise to pray. A note-taking app on your smartphone or a simple index card

that you carry at all times are practical intercessory tools (Entering a concern is a good time for sending an arrow prayer.).

Many creative ways to intercede exist. You might offer up a job you have to do, or all that you do in a day as an ongoing prayer for someone in particular need. You might offer to take on someone's pain or fear, and carry it when it becomes too burdensome for that person. Tucking your prayer list into your Bible or prayer book to symbolize an ongoing intercession is another useful method. Participating in the laying on of hands for another at a healing service is a form of intercession. "Praying the newspaper" (offering intercessions as you read or hear the news) is another method. You may be as creative as your imagination will allow. And don't forget to pray for yourself. That is part of intercession, too.

Thanksgiving: *For all things give thanks!* It is relatively easy to give thanks for the good in our lives, but deep gratitude for hardships and suffering can also bring healing and transformation to times of struggle. God created all things and pronounced them good; praying that mystery in times of trouble can be powerful. The life of St. Francis is the epitome of a life lived in thanksgiving. Some people have found it helpful to keep a journal of thanksgiving, recording daily the things they are grateful for.

Oblation and Meditation: Oblation is self-surrender, a giving of one's self fully, body-mind-soul, to God. Oblation prays: "all that I am and all that I have is yours, O Lord. Use me to bear your light and love in all that I say and do and am."

All we do, when consciously offered up to God, is prayer. When we are able to let go of the distractions of the day and our own concerns, we become more accessible to God's speech to us, to our hearts and to the workings of the Holy Spirit within and through us. In order for God to get through, we sometimes have to get out of the way. Often it seems to us that we are doing the least when God is doing the most through us and speaking the most clearly to us in prayer.

The *Devotional Companion* contains more information and many resources for personal prayer. Formation is a good time to explore these resources and share thoughts or questions with your formation counselor. Later in formation, you will be asked to revisit this chapter and describe more about your experiences with prayer and the *Devotional Companion*.

Reflection Questions:

1. Select one or several of the prayers attributed to St. Francis in the *Devotional Companion* to use this month. Reflect on your experience of praying as our founder prayed. What insights, emotions, comforts or discomforts did you experience?
2. Which of the classical types of prayer is easiest or most natural for you? Which is most challenging? Describe your experience with several of the types of prayer.

I.5. Self-Denial

Francis Empties Himself for God Alone

The man of God, the blessed Francis, had been taught not to seek his own salvation, but what he discerned would help the salvation of others. More than anything else he desired to be set free and to be with Christ. Thus his chief object of concern was to live free from all things that are in the world, so that his inner serenity would not be disturbed even for a moment by contact with any of its dust. He made himself insensible to all outside noise, gathering his external senses into his inner being and checking the impetus of his spirit, he emptied himself for God alone.

In the clefts of the rock he would build his nest and in the hollow of the wall his dwelling. With blessed devotion he visited the heavenly mansions; and, totally emptied of himself, he rested for a long time in the wounds of the Savior. That is why he often chose solitary places to focus his heart entirely on God (Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, pp. 243-44).

Francis Abandons His Hut to a Peasant

Blessed Francis gathered with the others in a place called Rivo Torto near the city of Assisi. In this place there was an abandoned hut. Under its cover lived these despisers of great and beautiful houses, protecting themselves from the torrents of rain. As the saint said, “It is easier to get to heaven from a hut than from a palace.” All his sons and brothers were living in that same place with the blessed Father, with great labor and lacking everything. Often they were deprived of the comfort of bread, content with turnips they begged in their need here and there on the plain of Assisi. The place in which they were staying was so narrow that they could barely sit or sleep in it...

One day while they were staying there, a man came leading an ass to the little shelter where the man of God and his companions were staying. To avoid being sent away, the man urged the ass to enter by saying, “Get inside, for we shall do well for this place!” When the holy Francis heard this statement, he took it seriously, since he knew the man’s intention: the man thought that the brothers wanted to stay there to expand the place by joining house to house. Immediately Saint Francis left the place, abandoning it because of what the peasant had said. He moved to another place, not far away, which was called “Portiuncula,” where he had repaired the church of Saint Mary a long time before. He wanted to own

nothing so that he could possess everything more fully in the Lord (Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, pp. 220-22).

Getting Ourselves Out of God’s Way

Self-denial is at the very root of the life in Christ. It is also one of the most frequently misunderstood practices in our Rule. The term itself can evoke images of saints sleeping fitfully on beds of thorns, or of penitents crawling for miles on their knees while practicing self-flagellation. In practice, it can serve as an excuse for avoiding the very things it calls us to address. We can use it to justify things that are really self-indulgent excesses--unhealthy extremes of fasting, self-serving attitudes of false piety, “selfless” overwork to physical and emotional exhaustion. Or we commit to do more than is reasonable, always put the needs of others first or give up everything pleasurable. These things usually turn out to be a form of false pride, self-defeating and bring a debt of fatigue, guilt and resentment that eventually leave us in worse spiritual shape than we were before.

Sometimes we see self-denial expressed in a rule merely as limiting one’s intake of sweets. Though the practice of fasting can be a useful part of it, self-denial is far more demanding than simply saying “no” to a second helping of chocolate mousse or giving up red meat on Fridays. Self-denial asks us to take a hard look at what separates us from the love of God and from others, and to find ways to promote more loving relationships. For example, a person might choose to spend some of their TV time visiting a nursing home; or their internet time writing a letter to someone who depends on “snail mail;” or giving up sarcastic commenting or complaining.

Through our practice of self-denial, we begin to get out of God’s way, to put aside our own limited concept of “self” in order to embrace a more complete self-hood in Christ. It calls us to release our spiritual brakes, to “let go and let God.” It is not the “self” we deny, but the selfish, the self-centered, the self-serving, the self-willed, or the “false self” (Richard Rohr, *Immortal Diamond*).

The Grace of Trusting in God

The difficulty is that *working* for self-denial is not the way to practice it. Self-denial comes by grace. To “let go and let God,” to align the self fully with God, to live “thy will be done,” is not a denial of the self *per se*. It is a denial of what we *think* the self must have and a realization that God knows and gives what the self truly needs.

We try to be constantly mindful of our dependence upon God and of our not “being” God. We try to detach ourselves from all clinging—from those beliefs that “I need” a particular thing or person in order to be happy. Self-denial practices, “My happiness does not depend upon having this or that;” it proclaims, “My God and my all!”

When we practice the discipline of saying “no” to our own needs by putting God first, we learn that self-denial involves our interior life and our relationship with God, others, and ourselves. This does not mean negating the “self” that makes up our individuality and identity as a person. That is neither a useful nor a healthy goal; after all, that self is the very one God created in the first place!

Letting Go of What is Not Truly Us

Positive self-denial calls us to let go of the ideas, attitudes and behaviors that limit our potential for growth in Christ. Paradoxically, this requires us to learn to accept and embrace those very parts of ourselves we feel we need to eliminate before we are able to let go of them.

In practice, self-denial requires more self-acceptance than self-rejection. It could mean learning to receive the gifts of others graciously as well as to give more freely of our own; learning to embrace rather than to renounce; learning to let ourselves enjoy God’s prodigal bounty rather than to reject it; learning to dance when before we have merely allowed ourselves to plod.

Declining to “Play God”

As we explore deeply our relationships to God and others, we discover that self-denial is related to chastity, the practice of honesty, respect and integrity in our personal relationships. In this sense, denying self includes recognizing and overcoming how we “play God” by our often subtle manipulation of others to “get our own way.” (We are often very skillful at hiding this even from ourselves.) It means working toward taking our full, responsible place as brothers and sisters in Christ, while also recognizing that others have an equal place and value in the family of God.

It is also related to humility; eliminating false pride is therefore a major part of self-denial. So is eliminating false humility. In addition, self-denial includes overcoming that part of ourselves that thinks we just might be perfect, if we only

work at it hard enough. It recognizes that it is only by God's grace that we are able to selflessly serve God.

Francis' Example

Francis' way of being in the world teaches us much about Franciscan self-denial: "Who are you, my most dear God, and who am I, a worm and your little servant (Ugolino, p. 455)?" The vocal inflection in this statement can make all the difference. If we hear Francis emphasize "worm," we feel the unworthiness, the self-negation of his cry. Yet, emphasis on "your servant" gives us an entirely different viewpoint. As small and unworthy as Francis knows he is in relationship to the glory of his "God and all," he recognizes that he is called to servanthood, that the Lord loves him and finds him useful and worthy for this unimaginable honor. From that basis, Francis proceeds to serve the Lord. From the other, he might only bewail his uselessness. (He does this, too, often enough, but not to the point of actually becoming useless, which is the real danger in that form of denial.)

In spite of his self-doubts, Francis conformed himself to the image of Christ broken, pouring out a self-giving love more completely than probably any other human being in history has managed to do. He "rose above" his feelings of unworthiness, his prideful spots, his self-interest, and let them go to allow God's transfiguring love and glory to shine through him like a beacon.

We all share some common issues that need to be offered up to the transforming grace of God. The method you use to do this is best worked out with your spiritual director. The results will tell you if you are on the right track. The fruit of true self-denial, like the fruit of the Spirit, is joyous love.

Reflection Questions:

1. What parts of you are ripe for self-acceptance rather than self-rejection?
2. Think about the interconnections between self-denial, chastity and humility. How could you express these connections in your own life?
3. What barriers (pride, hurts, fears, idols, etc.) stand between you and the indescribable joy of serving God?
4. What has been an example of joyous love you experienced when you were able to let go of your "false self" to let God's fullness in?

I.6. Retreats

Francis' Rule for Hermitages, 1217-1221

Let those who wish to stay in hermitages in a religious way be three brothers or, at the most, four; let two of these be "the mother" and have two "sons" or at least one. Let the two who are "mothers" keep the life of Martha and the two "sons" the life of Mary and let one have one enclosure in which each one may have his cell in which he may pray and sleep.

And let them always recite Compline of the day immediately after sunset and strive to maintain silence, recite their Hours, rise for Matins, and seek first the kingdom of God and His justice. And let them recite Prime at the proper hour and, after Terce, they may end their silence, speak with and go to their mothers. And when it pleases them, they can beg alms from them as poor little ones out of love of the Lord God. And afterwards let them recite Sext, None and, at the proper hour, Vespers.

And they may not permit anyone to enter or eat in the enclosure where they dwell. Let those brothers who are the "mothers" strive to stay far from everyone and, because of obedience to their minister, protect their "sons" from everyone so that no one can speak with them. And those "sons" may not talk with anyone except with their "mothers" and with the minister and his custodian when it pleases them to visit with the Lord's blessing.

The "sons," however, may periodically assume the role of the "mothers," taking turns for a time as they have mutually decided. Let them strive to observe conscientiously and eagerly everything mentioned above (Francis of Assisi, "Rule for Hermitages", p. 61).

Time Set Apart to Be Present to God

The vocation to Christian religious life is built around a steadily deepening interior relationship with our Lord Jesus. It is the Lord who calls us, who inspires us with the desire to serve him in a vowed life usually in the company of others. Since we do not live together, and each of us is living in our own home perhaps with family and job and other commitments, and it is imperative that our Rule includes time apart with Jesus. To live the life we feel called to solely on our own strength and wisdom dooms us to failure and frustration.

A retreat is a scheduled time apart from one's normal activities for the express purpose of being present to God. There are many styles of retreats, and no one style is perfect for everyone. Nor need one style be repeated year after year. Our needs, desires, and opportunities for retreats change. With the help of the spiritual director, we can plan retreats that will meet our current spiritual needs.

Types of Retreats

Guided Retreat: The *Guided Retreat* consists of one or more meditations per day offered by a retreat leader, with time in between for retreatants' personal reflection and prayer. Such retreats are usually held in silence, although mealtimes may or may not be included in the silence. The Guided Retreat model is often used for weekend retreats. Some retreat leaders offer time for one-on-one conferences, usually short, in case a retreatant wants to discuss a specific insight.

Directed Retreat: A *Directed Retreat* is traditionally held in strict silence, with retreatants meeting once daily with their assigned director. During these meetings the retreatant will share what has come up for him/her during prayer and reflection. Directed Retreats are usually four to eight days in length, and are rarely taken more than once each year or eighteen months.

Private Retreat: A *Private Retreat* may be taken for any length of time, though some spiritual directors advise against a long private retreat because of the human propensity for self-deception. After two to four days of solitary rest and renewal with the Lord, it is wise to check in with someone experienced in the spiritual life. There are always exceptions to this, of course, but a silent retreat, with its freedom from interruption and distraction, opens us to spiritual levels deeper than we routinely experience in everyday life. Access to a spiritual director or a wise priest or soul-friend is a good idea.

“With Other Tertiaries, When Possible: In all of the above retreats, we can add the element of retreating “with other tertiaries when possible” by choosing to attend a private or directed retreat in the company of another member of TSSF. It is a gift to be able to share the experience of a silent retreat with another person, when possible traveling together to and from the retreat, or perhaps sharing a meal afterwards.

The Time and the Place

The annual retreat requirement, as put forth by Chapter in 1999, specifically calls for a twenty-four-hour period of time. Anything less than that would be more like an extension of a “quiet day.” Quiet Days are excellent in themselves, and such regularly scheduled days enhance our personal life, enriching our daily time of quiet with the Lord. It takes time to quiet our souls, and to let go of the distractions and worries and concerns that fill our lives. A retreat, rather than being an avoidance of life, is a willingness to enter the deep waters of relationship with God. It requires a generosity of spirit, this giving up of time. It requires some sacrifice. A retreat is not a vacation, though we may experience profound rest. Rather it is presenting ourselves before the Lord we have come to know and love, ready to speak honestly to God, and to listen for God’s response, even if it is slow in coming. We must be willing to let life, as we know it, slip away for a time.

This is not to say that a retreat cannot take place at home or at a friend’s house. For those who do not have access to a retreat center, or who are unable to leave home for an overnight because of care-giving responsibilities or other reasons, a twenty-four hour retreat may be done effectively with materials available through a variety of sources that are linked on the tssf.org website. Additional resources can be found with a quick online search for personal retreat guides.

Retreat As a Distinct Time of Silence

A retreat may also be part of a regional TSSF convocation, although the convocation itself, by its very nature, is not a retreat. A convocation is a coming together to talk, have fellowship, and share ideas. It is a horizontal meeting of persons spending time together. A retreat is a vertical meeting, where people (singly or with others) spend uninterrupted time with God. If a retreat is desired as part of the convocation experience, we might think about scheduling an extra twenty-four hours just before or after the convocation for those who wish to take part in a shared retreat experience.

The same might be said for a conference. Unlike a retreat, a conference is a more horizontal model, with participants coming together to study or discuss some aspect of spirituality under the direction of a guest speaker or group leaders. As mentioned above, we might incorporate a retreat into such a weekend by scheduling an overnight of silence at a local inn or motel, or at the conference

center itself, either before or after the conference. What matters here is the intentionality of time alone with the Lord.

As companions of St. Francis, we remember that as much time as he spent wandering the roads as an itinerant preacher, he spent equally as much time in hermitages in communion with his blessed Lord. He always took one or several companions with him, sometimes for company and comfort, and sometimes to simply “check on him” every so often, and to guard his privacy. It was in these times of retreat that Francis received the Rule for the Friars Minor as well as the inspiration for the Third Order, and great spiritual consolations such as his experience of the stigmata. The “retreat” in our Rule is not an afterthought, or something to fit into our busy schedule. Our yearly retreat, with others of the community when possible, is an occasion worthy to anticipate with joy, to plan for, and to sacrifice for. Additionally, it offers us material for ongoing reflection well after the retreat. Entered into intentionally, our yearly retreat will become treasured as a gift of the religious life.

Many churches and other organizations now use the word “retreat” to refer to a time apart that is usually not silent. In TSSF, we continue to use the traditional understanding, which implies silence. Non-silent events even when called retreats do not fulfill the requirement for a retreat in the Rule.

Reflection Questions:

1. If you have never taken a silent retreat, what do you find attractive about the idea? What do you find challenging?
2. If you have taken a silent retreat, share what that experience was like for you.

I.7. Study

Francis' Views About Learned Men Entering the Order

Once, when the brothers asked him whether he was pleased that the learned men, who by that time had been received into the Order were devoting themselves to the study of Sacred Scripture, he replied: "I am indeed pleased, as long as, after the example of Christ, of whom we read that he prayed more than he read, they do not neglect zeal for prayer, and, as long as they study, not to know what they should say, but to practice what they have heard and, once they have put it into practice, propose it to others. I want my brothers," he said, "to be Gospel disciples and so progress in knowledge of the truth that they increase in pure simplicity without separating the simplicity of the dove from the wisdom of the serpent which our eminent Teacher joined together in a statement from his own blessed lips" (Bonaventure, pp. 612-13).

True knowledge is knowledge of God. Tertiaries therefore give priority to devotional study of scripture as one of the chief means of attaining that knowledge of God that leads to eternal life.

As well as the devotional study of Scripture, we all recognize our Christian responsibility to pursue other branches of study, both sacred and secular. In particular, some of us accept the duty of contributing, through research and writing, to a better understanding of the church's mission in the world: the application of Christian principles to the use and distribution of wealth; questions concerning justice and peace; and of all other questions concerning the life of faith. (The Principles, Days 17-18.)

Too often, when we think of study in terms of our Rule, we think only of theological study, but our study actually takes many forms. Though aspirants' proposed rules rarely list anything but "spiritual reading," quite clearly our *Principles* call for something much broader. In fact, the last sentence in the section on Study sounds a bit radical. Well, and so it is. Tertiaries are committed to living the Gospel, and that is a radical document if there ever was one.

What to Study (In Order of Priorities)

The Bible is the basis of all our study, especially the Gospels. At the root of Francis' charism is his singular ability to live out the Gospels in an almost literal way. If we are to follow in the footprints of our Lord after the manner of Francis, we must study the Gospels and apply them to own lives, just as Francis did.

The Principles give us the basic tenets of the Order itself, and these we, by obedience, read and study daily in a monthly cycle, going more deeply into their meaning each time we do so.

The formation materials are an important part of study. They teach the “lore” of the Order, offer tools for spiritual development and explain the Franciscan way of life. Read them, one chapter a month during formation, and periodically once professed.

Biographies of St. Francis and books on Franciscan spirituality are essential to our ongoing formation as Franciscans. From Francis' earliest biographer, Thomas of Celano, to the latest biography, these books are “icons” of the saint, offering us new insights and new visions of the Franciscan ethos. Celano's first biography, written shortly after Francis' death, is the most authentic. Both versions are included in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (The Saint, vol. 1; The Founder, vol. 2; and The Prophet, vol. 3)*. This three-volume work, along with *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, comprises the definitive collection of early documents by and about Francis and Clare currently available in English. We recommend reading several biographies of St. Francis and Clare. Many biographies and other recommended books are listed in the Appendix C at the end of this document.

Francis himself left us a relatively small number of written documents, but these give the truest picture of the man. Oddly enough, the one thing most people think Francis wrote, the “peace prayer,” was not written by Francis at all. Because it expresses St. Francis' spirituality so fully, it is accepted as a “Franciscan” prayer.

The Little Flowers of St. Francis (“Little Flowers”, pp. 566-658), based on the legends of St. Francis, have a fairy tale quality, are often entirely fictional, but convey the essence of what life among the Friars Minor in Francis' day was like—the absolute holiness and single-minded faith of this radical band of Christian believers.

Books on broader subjects relating to the Franciscan life, which discuss anything from physics and astronomy to politics and medicine, include material to help increase our understanding of God's creation, the world we live in, our brothers and sisters who share the earth with us, the dynamics of socioeconomic policy, war and peace, in short, the entire spectrum. Remembering always that we live fully in the secular realm as members of a religious order, anything that increases our understanding of that sphere or enables our ministry in it fulfills the requirement of Franciscan study. Do not overlook the valuable insight and theology contained in fiction, drama and poetry.

Why and How to Study in Formation: Consciousness-raising

Study aspires to knowledge, understanding, comprehension and wisdom. Knowledge comprises the facts and information of a matter, such as who was Francis, and when did he live? Understanding is the assimilation of knowledge for practical application, such as applying one's knowledge of scripture and the life of Francis to write one's personal Rule. Comprehension delves into grasping the meaning of a matter, such as how does living a rule impact my faith walk? Wisdom transcends the "words and application" of study. It is more than study can supply; it is a gift. Wisdom knows God, the unity of all things, and one's humble place in the universe.

The object of our study is consciousness-raising, opening ourselves more fully to God and to our brothers and sisters and to all creation; increasing our good stewardship of planet earth and environs; strengthening our purposeful action as Franciscan witnesses for peace and justice. We strive to learn so that we may act on what we learn.

Study might include learning skills for ministry, lay or ordained. Some find their ministry in the work they are already doing; some decide to change their work entirely. In either case, we must learn about how to help others and our fragile earth more effectively.

The Dangers to a Franciscan in Study

Francis himself did not allow books other than the Bible and a breviary. Since thirteenth century books were costly, handmade items for the rich. Francis also feared that books would be distracting from the true study of coming to know God. After the Order was well established, Brother Anthony of Padua was asked

by the friars to take on the responsibility of teaching the brothers (the first formation director), but before agreeing to do so, he asked Francis' permission. Francis' brief reply to this request was, "I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers providing that, as is contained in the Rule, you 'do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion' during study of this kind" (Francis of Assisi, "A Letter to Brother Anthony of Padua", p. 107).

And so we must take Francis' words to heart. Whatever we study to fulfill this part of our Rule must not "extinguish" our "spirit of prayer and devotion." Francis would not like it if our study of him took precedence over our coming to love and know the Lord more fully. His own humility would probably prevent him from accepting our explanation that learning how he loved the Lord and lived the Gospels helps us do a better job of emulating him.

Study Is More Than Books

Not everyone is an avid reader, and not all study involves the written word. There are retreats and conferences on Franciscan spirituality and other relevant topics; there are films, videos, recorded books, diocesan and parish seminars, discussion groups, Bible or theology classes, or any number of valid means of study beyond reading books. Fellowships often offer study as part of their regular agenda at meetings. Convocations provide opportunities to learn more about the Franciscan life.

Reflection Questions:

1. Educators recognize a wide range of learning styles. Some learn best alone, others in groups. Some prefer hands-on learning, others learn best by reading, or listening, or talking. What is your learning style? How could you incorporate this into your studies?
2. Our *Principles* emphasize the "devotional" study of scripture as part of our approach to learning. How have you experienced devotional study?

I.8. Simplicity

Francis Hears the Gospel Form of Life and Immediately Seeks to Fulfill It

One day while he was devoutly hearing a Mass of the Apostles, the Gospel was read in which Christ sends out his disciples to preach and gives them the Gospel form of life, that they may not keep gold or silver or money in their belts, nor have a wallet for their journey, nor may they have two tunics, nor shoes, nor staff. Hearing, understanding, and committing this to memory, this friend of apostolic poverty was then overwhelmed with an indescribable joy. “This is what I want,” he said, “this is what I desire with all my heart!” Immediately, he took off the shoes from his feet, put down his staff, denounced his wallet and money, and, satisfied with one tunic, threw away his leather belt and put on a piece of rope for a belt. He directed all his heart’s desire to carry out what he had heard and to conform in every way to the rule of right living given to the apostles (Bonaventure, p. 542).

Francis Defends His Poverty to the Bishop of Assisi

The bishop of the city of Assisi, to whom the man of God would frequently go for counsel, receiving him kindly, told him: “It seems to me that your life is very rough and hard, especially, in not possessing anything in this world.” To which the saint said: “Lord, if we had possessions, we would need arms for our protection. For disputes and lawsuits usually arise out of them, and, because of this, love of God and neighbor are greatly impeded. Therefore, we do not want to possess anything in this world.” The man of God’s response greatly pleased the bishop. For Francis scorned all worldly goods, but money most of all; so much so, that in all his rules he most forcefully commended poverty and repeated that the brothers be eager to avoid money (“The Legend of Three Companions”, p. 9).

The first Christians surrendered completely to our Lord and recklessly gave all that they had, offering the world a new vision of a society in which a fresh attitude was taken towards material possessions. This vision was renewed by St. Francis when he chose lady Poverty as his bride, desiring that all barriers set up by privilege based on wealth should be overcome by love. This is the inspiration for the third aim of the Society, to live simply.

Although we possess property and earn money to support ourselves and our families, we show ourselves true followers of Christ and of Saint Francis by our

readiness to live simply and to share with others. We recognize that some of our members may be called to a literal following of Saint Francis in a life of extreme simplicity. All of us, however, accept that we avoid luxury and waste, and regard our possessions as being held in trust for God.

Personal spending is limited to what is necessary for our health and well-being and that of our dependents. We aim to stay free from all attachment to wealth, keeping ourselves constantly aware of the poverty in the world and its claim on us. We are concerned more for the generosity that gives all, rather than the value of poverty in itself. In this way, we reflect in spirit the acceptance of Jesus' challenge to sell all, give to the poor, and follow him (The Principles, Day 10-12).

This is what Francis found in the Gospel when he consulted it to see what the Lord would have him do. He followed it to the letter, as he did every part of the Gospel, and it is very often this aspect of complete emulation of what Francis called “the poverty of Christ” that we assume is the Franciscan way. But that was Francis’ hope for the Friars Minor, and never what he called the Third Order to do. It was that very factor which made the Third Order necessary. If all of us followed Francis in literal keeping of that particular Gospel imperative, the civilized world as we know it would soon cease to be. Somebody has got to stay home and mind the store, though that same somebody might also feel every bit as called to “follow in the footprints of our Lord” as Francis and his “little brothers” did.

A fine balance is demanded between living in the world and being a powerful witness of living Gospel values. Three types of simplicity that impact our lives are simplicity of time, simplicity of material goods, and inner simplicity.

Simplicity of Time

The computer, social networks, phones, agendas, the clock—these are all aspects of the problem. They reflect the pace of our society—instantaneous communication, immediate accessibility, minute-to-minute scheduling, running, meeting, doing. No people in history have lived in a more fast-paced, complex society than we in the western world. The rate of change is exponential; the speed of computers doubles around every six to twelve months, as do seemingly our lives.

The fast tempo of our life disrupts life's natural rhythms. It leaves little time for simple pleasures, such as walking with friends, bird watching, group singing, or recreational reading. Setting reasonable priorities is a crucial part of simplifying our life. The choices are not easy. It is not choosing between bad and good; we have to choose between good and better.

One priority not chosen in our western way of life is the priority of Sabbath rest. Sabbath rest is the fourth commandment. Even God took a day of rest after creating the world. Simplicity accepts that the world can go on without us for a day. Maybe we have to start with just part of a day, but it is essential for each of us to take regular time out from our busy week to rest and recreate, not working on goals or projects but giving time over to quiet, being with family, walking in nature. Turn off the computer, TV, appliances, phone, never mind the mail and the to do's—and just be.

Simplicity of Material Goods

Many cultures, inundated with the message that buying and owning are integral to our health and happiness, make speaking against this seem blasphemous. We are bombarded with advertisements from every angle—television, radio, magazines, billboards, sidebars—that tell us this new car will make us attractive, those Italian leather shoes will make us sophisticated, this stock portfolio will make us secure. We are told, “Money cannot buy happiness, but it sure helps.”

Jesus talked about wealth, poverty and the stewardship of God's gifts consistently. In his inaugural teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, he proclaimed that the Spirit of the Lord had anointed him to bring good news to the poor (Luke 4.18). The beatitudes in Luke's Gospel begin “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6.20). The Gospels are filled with warnings about wealth: Mary's song, the *Magnificat*, in which the hungry are filled and the rich are sent away empty (Luke 1.46-55); the parable of the rich young man, told to sell everything and follow Jesus (Mark 10.17-22); the lilies of the field (Luke 12.22-31); the story of Lazarus (Luke 16.19-31). Other New Testament passages include Acts' call to communal ownership of property (Acts 4.32); James' preaching against honoring the wealthy while disregarding the poor (James 2.1-4); and Paul's memorable, but often ignored, warning that the love of wealth is the root of all evil (1 Tim. 6.10). Jesus and the apostles were not saying that people who are wealthy are bad people. They were saying that having wealth is dangerous, and that having abundant possessions can be a trap.

Consuming items to excess such as food, alcohol, sex, social networking, or material gain is addictive. Some wealthy persons, when asked “how much is enough,” will respond, “a little bit more.” As with addictions, the more we have, the more we want, and the less we are satisfied. Eventually the substance becomes the focus of our life and everything else becomes peripheral. In religious language, we call this idolatry.

Simplicity is a kind of integrity. It means that we adopt Gospel values in place of the values of the marketplace, while living fully *in* the marketplace. It means that we live out the interior attitude of self-denial. It means becoming aware of the poverty of our community and the world, and using the resources we have been given to respond. It means learning to be good stewards of the material goods we have been given. It means sharing what we have with others. It means paying attention to what is going on in the world and the marketplace, so we do not unknowingly support industries and policies that pollute our environment or harass others, or deprive them of their basic human rights. It means not knowingly investing in the oppression of others if we can in any way help it. This might translate as “put your money where your heart is.”

Simplicity means not investing ourselves in acquiring or clinging to our possessions. We learn to hold very lightly to the material goods of this world, and as Francis said, “not think of coin or money having any greater usefulness than stones” (Francis of Assisi, “The Earlier Rule”, pp. 69-70), worthless by comparison to the wealth of the spirit. Acquisition of wealth as a primary goal is not compatible with basic Franciscan values. This does not mean we cannot or do not have possessions. It simply means we do not count them of greater value than people, relationships, God. It means that we recognize all is *gift*. It means that we would not be crushed if our things were lost or broken.

Tertiaries are often responsible for the care and well-being of families. It is important to remember that the other members of our families are not usually called to a Franciscan vocation. Imposing unnecessary austerity on them would not be right. Our vocation is our domain; we must find ways to express Franciscan simplicity in our lives that will not impinge on the needs of our family members. We need to make allowances for things we really need that might not ordinarily be considered “simple.” On the other hand, if we have just purchased a third coat and have not contributed anything toward feeding the hungry or housing the homeless, or making a contribution to the church or TSSF, it may be time to give

our priorities some serious thought. We each have to find the particular practices of simplicity that is right for us.

Simplicity is an alternate way of looking at the world, a way that offers us greater freedom. It calls us to live eucharistically, to have an attitude of thanksgiving about all of life. It is a way of living in gratitude for all of it, knowing we are cared for by God and have the freedom to share with others. This reality frames the heart of Christian simplicity. It is the means of liberation and power to live the kingdom of God without fear and avarice.

Christian simplicity differs from voluntary simplicity in two key ways. First, Christian simplicity is a gift, a God-given grace rather than something achieved by willpower. Second, we maintain simplicity not as an end in itself (yet another idol to be smashed) but because we are so hungry for God, the things of God and the honoring of God-in-the-other that we need to share our sustenance. Like Francis, we so want to follow the Way of Jesus that all else pales in significance and desire.

Inner Simplicity

While those in the Third Order are not called to the literal vow of poverty, we do promise to “live simply.” We reject society’s artificial values and adopt the Gospel values--to share what we have with others who have less; to care for one another in extraordinary ways; to be compassionate, tolerant, and self-giving.

Inner simplicity is the heart of the matter. Outer practices of simplicity are nothing without simplicity of spirit. If we live in a hut in the woods, but do not embody simplicity, we have missed the point. Both self-denial and simplicity in our Rules aim for inner simplicity. While they cannot actually be separated, we might say outward simplicity is the expression of self-denial, while inner simplicity is an attitude, a value, a way to look at the world through a poverty of the Spirit. Inner simplicity, then, is a matter of how we integrate and live out that value and attitude in our own unique way. It includes stewardship of our time and resources as well as the inner emptying of our souls to God.

Since the aim of simplicity incorporates both self-denial and simplicity, it calls for detachment from all sorts of things, exterior and interior, including closely-held ideas and attitudes that prevent tolerance and growth in the spirit. In short, the aim of simplicity seeks complete and integrated *letting go*.

Simplicity is a deeper understanding of our ultimate dependence on God and our interdependence with one another, which we all share but sometimes forget. A sense of honor and the importance of honesty and of keeping one's word have great value in true simplicity, as do a sense of the basic equality of all of humanity (second aim), an awareness of the false values of wealth and pride, and a refusal to exploit or manage the natural world to suit one's own ends. It recognizes the beauty, the sanctity, and the goodness of all creation. It values creation too highly to reject or despise it, for it receives all as the work of God; yet it seeks not to possess anything but to care for everything for God's glory, for the welfare of humanity and the universe itself. These are the qualities of "Lady Poverty" which we, like Francis, hope to gain through the practice of Franciscan simplicity. "Less is more" should become the very basis of our lives. Paul says, "Power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12.10). Yet we are afraid of relinquishing our illusions of strength and power and discovering the true strength of Christ--the only kind of power that the Gospel offers us.

Remember Jesus' temptations in the wilderness. He went to the place of emptiness, fasting for 40 days (Matt. 4.1-11). When Satan offered him success, "right" religiosity and finally power, Jesus rejected each temptation. Jesus' life was not about glory; it was about the cross. Paul reminds us in Philippians:

"Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2.5b-8).

This model of Jesus' self-emptying is for us the true meaning of inner simplicity. We, too, are confronted with the temptation to pursue worldly success and power. Our temptation in the spiritual life is to try to do and be more. If I learn more Bible verses, read more books, say more prayers, give more money to the church, volunteer more time—these things will help me to grow more with God. But inner simplicity tells me that it is what I am willing to give up, what I am willing to surrender to God that opens me to God's grace. Inner simplicity ultimately means surrender—of our self-image as hard workers, of our titles, of our public image, of our excessive material goods, of our need to control, of our need to be right, of our need to be special. It also means letting go of past hurts or successes, and of futures filled with worry.

Self-emptying is scary. It feels like dying because it requires letting go of the world as we have known it. Vulnerability means courage. It means being willing to fall down, knowing God will pick us up. It means being willing to be foolish, knowing God is our wisdom. It means being willing to be emptied, knowing God will fill us. The word “human” comes from the Latin *humus*, which means earth. Being human means acknowledging that we are made from the earth and will return to the earth—as we are reminded on Ash Wednesday every year. It means a living reverence for the integrity of creation.

Tools for self-emptying include silence and liturgy. When in silence, we have only ourselves as we really are. We cannot feed our self-image off of our interactions with others.

Liturgy is a gift from God that fosters simplicity and self-emptying. Unlike personal prayers, which are often agenda-laden, “liturgy is that wonderful waste of time, in which nothing tangible happens, no product is produced, and no achievement is accomplished.” In liturgy we simply are ‘present’ to God, to each other and to creation. And God, who calls us to wait freely and simply, comes to be with us. God comes to help us see in new ways, to relate to God’s world with a new wholeness, and to help us find courage and joy to let God fill us. Only those who have nothing to prove and nothing to protect, those who have in them a space broad enough to embrace every part of their own being, can receive the Christ with freedom to love and serve as Christ loved and served us.

Aim, therefore, to:

- Slow down and enjoy God’s delightful little gifts too often missed by our busyness.
- Discern what is a priority and what is not, what is of transient value and what may be enduring.
- Actively listen when others are speaking.
- Reflect on the task just completed before rushing on to the next one and the one after that.
- Really see the reflection of God’s love in the faces of the people around you.
- Notice the details of an ordinary rock, its subtle designs and colors, one of the Lord’s often ignored masterpieces.
- Really taste what you are eating, so you may begin to understand why Francis found cast-off crusts of bread to be a feast.
- Simply be, bask in the Lord’s astonishing, unconditional love.

Reflection Questions:

1. How are you called to observe simplicity?
2. Who has been a model for you of simplicity? What about that person inspires you towards simplicity of time, goods, or spirit?
3. From what does the spirit of simplicity free you? What does the spirit of simplicity produce in you?

I.9. Work

Francis Encourages Useful Work and Calls the Idle “Brother Fly”

He taught the brothers to flee with all their might from idleness, the cesspool of all evil thoughts, and he demonstrated to them by his own example that they should master their rebellious and lazy flesh by constant discipline and useful work. Therefore he used to call his body Brother Ass, for he felt it should be subjected to heavy labor, beaten frequently with whips, and fed with the poorest food. If he saw someone idle and vagrant, wanting to eat the labors of others, he thought he should be called “Brother Fly,” because he did nothing good himself but poisoned the good done by others and so rendered himself useless and obnoxious to all. On account of this he once said: “I want my brothers to work and be kept busy, so that, given to idleness, they stray into what is forbidden with heart and tongue” (Bonaventure, p. 564).

At His Death, Francis Urges the Brothers to Discern Their Own Call

When he had been brought [to the Portiuncula], he showed by the example of Truth that he had nothing in common with the world. In that grave illness that ended all suffering, he threw himself in fervor of spirit totally naked on the naked ground so that in that final hour, when the enemy could still rage, he might wrestle naked with the naked. Lying like this on the ground stripped of his sackcloth garment, he lifted up his face to heaven in his accustomed way, and wholly intent upon that glory, he covered with his left hand the wound in his right side, so that no one would see it. And he said to his brothers: “I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you yours” (Bonaventure, p. 642).

Jesus took on himself the form of a servant. He came not to be served, but to serve. He went about doing good: healing the sick, preaching good news to the poor, and binding up the broken hearted.

Tertiaries endeavor to serve others in active work. We try to find expression for each of the three aims of the Order in our lives, and whenever possible actively help others engaged in similar work. The chief form of service that we have to offer is to reflect the love of Christ, who, in his beauty and power, is the inspiration and joy of our lives (The Principles, Days 19-20).

How Did Francis “Work”?

Before Francis’ conversion, he worked in his father’s fabric shop. He was an excellent salesman, courtly and charismatic, always dressed in the best fabrics and the latest fashion, a living showcase for the merchandise he had to sell. He had a reputation for style that everyone who was anyone wanted to emulate. He knew what was good; he knew what was going to be hot next season, he knew how to sell the product. He did this in part by outrageous behavior, a terrific PR job accomplished largely by his lifestyle. Francis knew the “rag business” better than he knew himself, helping in no little way to make his father the most successful and prosperous businessman in Assisi.

When Francis responded to the Lord’s call, he carried these same qualities over to “selling” the Gospel message. He did it so well that millions of people are still enthusiastically buying his particular “brand” of Gospel living, more than 800 years after the fact. As in his previous employment, his outrageous behavior and his “holy manner of working” and of living his vocation, got the word around. His enthusiasm and his salesmanship still speak to us today. Francis applied who he was and what his skills and gifts were to his heavenly Father’s business, with even greater enthusiasm than he had given to his earthly father’s.

Francis asked the Lord “what would you have me do?” and he followed the instruction literally, even beyond the letter. He studied the Gospels until he knew them by heart. He prayed without ceasing. He listened, he made sure he verified what he heard by having others he trusted pray for guidance and tell him what they perceived. He held nothing back. But perhaps the most important thing he put into his work was himself, with all his strength and all his vulnerability, all his personal skills of showmanship and salesmanship, all his life experience. He did not become someone else’s idea of what a religious should be; he simply became more and more himself. It was Francis’ gift of himself that made the difference.

How Can You Work “in the Way of Francis”?

Those in formation sometimes find it difficult to know what to do for their Rule of work. This category includes one’s own daily work as well as outreach ministries or missions. The Rule may include both *what* you intend to do and *how* you intend to do it.

Sometimes we feel called to do some specific thing and sometimes not. Sometimes we are already engaged in ministries of which we are not even aware. Those are often the best kind. If you want to choose something special to do, follow Francis' example: make your work an integral part of your prayer and worship life.

First, ask God to show you what you should do. That is not as complicated as it may sound. The secret of discernment is to get yourself out of the way—do not think about it or strain to visualize something; but let it be revealed naturally in the course of your everyday living. In all likelihood, it will be something for which your life experience and training have prepared you. You can be sure that whatever it is, it will call on you to use your own particular individual gifts and skills, just as Francis' work for his father prepared him for what was to be his greatest work. Give some thought to what those are. Where has your life experience been leading you? What have you lived through that has helped prepare you to reach out to others in some special way?

Second, prepare yourself for the work of service. Learn as much as you can about how to live fully in your work as a Christian servant, responding to God's call for the benefit of others. Read, meditate, pray. Take classes and workshops; be in conversation with others seeking to live out the Gospel in their work. Be knowledgeable and wise. Whether you feel called to work with the homeless or as a pharmacist, with people as a spiritual director or alone as a writer, with ordinary people in the workplace or alone as a contemplative praying for others, whatever work calls you, apply the first two ways of service, prayer and study, to grasp all you can about it. Though life experience counts, it takes as much prayer, study and preparation to do charitable works as it does to do paid secular work, and even more so to do secular work charitably.

Third, bring yourself to the work, as Francis did, with discernment and courage. Start with *yourself*. Who are you? What are your gifts? How can you take these into a special ministry? The very best ministries are those in which you can freely give of yourself to another.

Some unexpected things can be wonderful ministries. Alice is a bank executive. She treats her employees fairly, and helps them feel empowered as part of a team in their work together, serving the financial needs of their customers. Fred works at a convenience store. He looks each customer in the eye, greets them pleasantly, helps them find what they are looking for, and sends an arrow prayer for each one as they leave the store. Jim is a stay-at-home dad. His

work is showing Christ-like love to his children and teaching them to love others in their turn. Sheila, who is on medical disability, is at home most of the time. She spends several hours a day in prayer, interceding for the needs of the world, the church, and members of Third Order. She randomly sends e-mail to individuals in the TSSF directory letting them know she prayed for them that day and inviting them to share with her any particular prayer needs.

There are those times when we have done an act of ministry of which we are totally unaware—unless some word or note startles us into realizing we have helped another. Often the little things are our daily work, the extra touch or much needed hug, being nice to the harried clerk who has kept us waiting for ten minutes, smiling at a stranger, giving a mother with cranky children our place in line even if we are running late. The small moments of kindness are the most difficult and yet are a significant way to reach out to a fellow human.

Our work is the stuff of our life. It is not a separate part of the day but occupies all of the day's waking time. "Humility, love and joy...are all God-given graces" (*The Principles*, Day 30). We do not earn these through our work; they are given to us in grace. Our work, as God's servants, expresses humility, love and joy.

Reflection Questions:

1. What have people said to you about your strengths and weaknesses?
2. Whether your work is paid employment or unpaid ministry, how do you reflect your Franciscan values in the work setting?

I.10. Obedience: Introduction

Francis Asks for a Guardian to Obey

Blessed Francis wanted to be humble among his brothers. To preserve greater humility, a few years after his conversion he resigned the office of prelate before all the brothers during a chapter held at Saint Mary of the Portiuncula. “From now on,” he said, “I am dead to you. But here is Brother Peter di Catanio: let us all, you and I, obey him.” Then all the brothers began to cry loudly and weep profusely, but blessed Francis bowed down before Brother Peter and promised him obedience and reverence.

From that time on, until his death, he remained a subject, like one of the other brothers. He wished to be subject to the general minister and the provincial ministers, so that in whatever province he stayed or preached, he obeyed the minister of that province. What is more, a long time before his death, for the sake of greater perfection and humility, he said to the general minister: “I ask you to put one of my companions in your place regarding me, so that I may obey him as I would obey you. For the sake of good example and the virtue of obedience, in life and in death I always want you to be with me.”

From that time until his death, he always had one of his companions as a guardian whom he obeyed in place of the general minister. One time he said to his companions: “Among other favors, the Most High has given me this grace: I would obey a novice who entered our religion today, if he were appointed my guardian, just as readily as I would obey him who is the first and the eldest in the life and religion of the brothers. A subject should not consider his prelate, a human being, but God, for love of Whom he is subject to him.” (“The Assisi Compilation”, p. 125.)

Francis Likens Obedience to a Dead Body

One time, when they asked him who should be judged truly obedient, he suggested as an example the likeness of a dead body. “Take a lifeless corpse,” he said, “and place it wherever you want! You will see that it does not resist being moved, nor complain about location, nor protest if left. Sit it on a throne, and it will look down, not up; dress it in purple, and it looks twice as pale. This,” he said, “is someone truly obedient, who doesn’t argue about why he’s being moved; he doesn’t care where he’s placed; he doesn’t pester you to

transfer him. When raised to an office, he keeps his usual humility; the more he's honored, the more he considers himself unworthy" ("Bonaventure, p. 571).

Obedience is a Celebration?

Obedience celebrates our membership in a religious community. We are not “doing our own thing” but living out our Christian vocation in unity with others who are also struggling to follow Christ in the manner of St. Francis. Religious obedience means living in agreement with the principles and rule of a religious order. Religious obedience is not forced submission but is a willing compliance with a rule we have freely chosen to follow. Obedience to the Third Order therefore means living in compliance with the Order’s Rule (*The Principles, The Constitutions, The Order for Admissions*) and the *Provincial Statutes* of the Third Order, Society of St. Francis. This is why it is important to read all of the material included in the Basics. At the heart of things, obedience to the *Principles* means obedience to the Gospel. The first item in Francis’ “Later Rule,” the Rule which received the Papal seal, states, “The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (Francis of Assisi, “The Later Rule”, p. 100). Living according to the Gospel was the foundation of the Rule which Francis and his brothers kept, as it must be of ours. The authority with which we ultimately comply is the authority of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior.

The next item in the Later Rule states: “Brother Francis promises obedience and reverence to our Lord Pope Honorius and his successors canonically elected and to the Roman Church....” (Francis of Assisi, “The Later Rule”, p. 100). If it had not been for that particular obedience, Franciscans would not be around today. His movement was only one of many attempting to refocus the Church away from external wealth to interior wealth through embracing the poverty of Christ. But unlike most of the others, it did not fall hopelessly into heresy and disappear. Only then does the Later Rule go on to say that the other brothers will be obedient to Francis and his successors, authorities within the Order itself.

It is important to emphasize that we do not require obedience to any particular person, either within the Third Order or outside. Our leaders--including the formation counselors, Fellowship conveners, our spiritual directors, even the Minister Provincial--have been chosen to guide us in the Franciscan life, not to issue orders for us to obey. We choose to trust them and to rely on their guidance. But they have no direct authority to which we are bound.

Our Primary Acts of Obedience

The primary way we manifest this obedience in our daily lives is by following our Personal Rule of Life. The personal Rule states our individual intentions for expressing in our life the Order's three ways of service: prayer, work and study. In the individual Rule, we include the following specific items under the general heading of "Obedience":

- praying Morning and/or Evening Prayer each day;
- saying the Community Obedience daily (described in detail below);
- meeting regularly with our spiritual director (monthly meetings are recommended during formation);
- renewing our religious vows yearly, once noviced;
- reporting regularly to the formation counselor (monthly during postulancy, possibly less frequently during novitiate);
- attending local Fellowship meetings and provincial convocations as circumstances permit;
- obedience to the TSSF Constitution and Provincial Statutes; and
- making an annual financial contribution to TSSF.

These are the concrete areas of obedience listed in every tertiary's Personal Rule of Life in the Province of the Americas. The chapters that follow will discuss the Daily Office, spiritual direction, the local Fellowship, and obedience to the governing bodies of TSSF. The topic of reporting was dealt with in an earlier chapter. We will touch briefly here on the importance of regular recitation of the Community Obedience.

Community Obedience

The Community Obedience consists of a version of the prayer which, according to Francis' Testament, he prayed whenever he entered a church (Francis of Assisi, "The Testament", pp. 124-25): "Both here and in all your churches throughout the whole world, we adore you, O Christ, and we bless you, because by your holy Cross, you have redeemed the world. Amen"; the reading from the *Principles*, assigned by the days of the month; and intercessions for our brothers and sisters found in the *Directory* for the appropriate day of the month. The prayer of thanksgiving for the Third Order and the Collect for the appropriate day of the week may be included. One of the closing blessings concludes the Obedience. The Community Obedience is recited daily by all members of the Third Order. Although the various Franciscan Provinces differ in culture, language, life circumstances, and some disciplines, we affirm our life in community with

Anglican tertiaries throughout the world whenever we say the Community Obedience, which opens with the words of our Father Francis.

Obedience is Not “Blind Obedience”

We may conclude this discussion of obedience by emphasizing that the obedience the Order expects from us is not “blind obedience.” We are not asked to compromise our own basic principles. We are never required to do things that are not morally correct or which violate Gospel principles. Francis himself said, “If anyone of the ministers commands one of the brothers something contrary to our life or to his soul, he is not bound to obey him because obedience is not something in which a fault or sin is committed” (Francis of Assisi, “The Earlier Rule”, p. 67). However, this does not mean never having to do something we may not agree with. If it did, obedience would have little or no meaning. Moral compunction is not the same as opinion.

We ourselves have willingly agreed to follow the Rule of the Order. Our rule of obedience is not something forced on us from an outside agency; it is something we have deliberately chosen for ourselves. If you find yourself consistently at strong and definite odds with the Order’s Rule, the Third Order is probably not compatible with your personal spiritual needs. In this case, after discussing with your spiritual director, you may request to withdraw from Formation by contacting the Formation Director, or request release from vows if professed by contacting the Provincial Chaplain.

Reflection Questions:

1. Our western culture admires independent thinking and consequently does not necessarily admire the concept of obedience. What is the connotation of “obedience” for you? Why is it such an important aspect of a religious community?
2. Why do you suppose that Francis included the assurance that a friar would not be expected to violate his conscience in order to be obedient? Is it important to you to know this?
3. To what authorities were you obedient before entering Franciscan formation?
4. Which of the specific items of obedience do you have difficulty practicing? Which is the easiest for you?

I.11. Obedience: The Daily Office

Francis Establishes the Daily Office in His Rule

The Lord says: This kind of devil cannot come out except through fasting and prayer; and again: When you fast do not become gloomy like the hypocrites. For this reason let all the brothers, whether clerical or lay, recite the Divine Office, the praises and prayers, as is required of them.

Let the clerical brothers recite the Office and say it for the living and the dead according to the custom of clerics. Every day let them say the Have mercy on me, O God with the Our Father for the failings and negligence of the brothers; and let them say the Out of the depths with the Our Father for the deceased brothers. They may have only the books necessary to fulfill their office.

The lay brothers who know how to read the psalter may have one. Those who do not know how to read, however, may not be permitted to have any book. Let the lay brothers say the Creed and twenty-four Our Fathers with the Glory to the Father for Matins; for Lauds, let them say five; for Prime, the Creed and seven Our Fathers with the Glory to the Father; for each of the hours, Terce, Sext and none, seven; for Vespers, twelve; for Compline, the Creed and seven Our Fathers with the Glory to the Father; for the deceased, seven Our Fathers with the Eternal Rest; and for the failings and negligence of the brothers three Our Fathers each day (Francis of Assisi, “The Earlier Rule”, pp. 65-6).

The Daily Office derives from the ancient monastic practice of “saying the Hours,” of bracketing the day’s activities with regularly scheduled pauses for prayer and the reading of scripture and Psalms. In monastic communities, this practice is still followed, though this is now often limited to four basic offices rather than the round-the-clock schedule that was once the norm. The historical hours included: Matins, midnight or cockcrow devotions; Prime, early morning praise; Lauds, public Morning Prayer (these three make up the Anglican Morning Prayer); Terce, mid-morning prayers; Sext, noon prayers; None, simple mid-afternoon prayers (the Anglican Noonday prayers draw from these three); Vespers, public Evensong; Compline, bedtime prayers.

In the early days of Third Order in the Province of the Americas, members were required to say four offices a day, as are still many other Anglican religious communities, for example the Brotherhood or Sisterhood of St. Gregory. This was a major focus of the Third Order's prayer life. In 1968, the office requirement dropped to two.

At present, only the Province of the Americas continues to require its members to say at least one Daily Office; in other Provinces the Daily Office is optional. Our current requirement for saying the Office is "Morning and/or Evening Prayer," under the heading "Obedience" in our Personal Rules.

Mixed feelings exist within the Order, not just in this Province, but worldwide, about requiring the Office as part of our daily discipline. Two extreme responses to the requirement include those who love and thrive on it, and those who find they "have to stop praying to do it." Most of us fall someplace in between. Chapter has carefully listened to the varied responses and in the course of this discussion, has thoughtfully defined what the role of Office in an individual tertiary's rule is, and what constitutes an Office.

The Role of the Daily Office

The Daily Office is only one part of the Rule as a whole. The community Rule should be kept in balance, with no one part given more weight than another, and thus the Office falls into focus as one of the things we do daily, neither more nor less important than any other part of our rule-keeping activities.

The Daily Office is not a substitute for personal prayer. Personal Prayer is one of the nine categories of our Rule, while saying the Office is one of the eight components required under the category of Obedience. The Office is said in addition to personal prayer. We share the Daily Office in symbolic community rather than seeing it as something said in relative isolation. We can be sure that other tertiaries in the Province of the Americas are also saying their Offices as we say ours. This provides a connection with the rest of the Franciscan family that would otherwise be missing in our lives. Furthermore, the Office is the prayer of the Church, and keeps us firmly anchored in the worldwide Church community (past, present and future)—something that Francis insisted on.

Sometimes it is difficult to keep this part of our Rule, either because current circumstances prevent it, or perhaps due to difficulty with the practice itself. If that happens, do the best you can. We try to establish the office as a daily habit,

but we all have times when we cannot say the Daily Office for some reason or another, just as there are times when we miss self examen or neglect our rule of study. Likewise, the ability to unfailingly say the Office is not considered to be a measure of one's Franciscan vocation. All of us fail to say the Office sometimes. It is simply a fact of Third Order life.

Sources for the Daily Office

The Daily Office may be read in a variety of ways: silently, sung, over the phone with a friend, listened to or read on an electronic device or in the car, or even online at <http://tssf.org/resources-links/daily-office-community-obedience/> (complete with music, readings and saints' biographies). If you are off somewhere without a prayer book and want to say the Office, it is perfectly acceptable to include all the elements of the Office, using psalms and scripture you know by heart, to fulfill the requirement. Electronic prayer books are readily available, as are Bibles and lectionaries, making it possible to carry everything you need to say the Daily Office in your pocket. For those who prefer hard copy, *The Daily Office SSF* is a compact, complete, easy-to-carry alternative.

Tertiaries may use a variety of prayer books for the Daily Office. The official statement from Chapter is:

“The current duly authorized editions of the books of common prayer as set forth in the several Anglican provinces that comprise the Third Order Society of St. Francis Province of the Americas, are the standard rites of the Daily Office used by members of the Third Order. Authorized editions of the *Books of Common Prayer* from provinces of the Anglican Communion beyond those within the American Province of the Third Order may be used as alternative rites. In addition, Office books published by Orders within the Society of St. Francis also may be used as alternative rites (1999). The *Lutheran Book of Worship* is approved for use as a book of common prayer” (2001).

Most often we will use the prayer book of our own church or province, but at times we may want to use another prayer book for the Office. We all have different needs. Some folks like the straight-forward *BCP* of the Episcopal Church, others prefer the poetic *New Zealand Prayer Book*, others the simplicity of the *CSF Office Book*, or the variety of the *Daily Office SSF*. Some prefer to say the Office in another language, such as Spanish, Portuguese, or French.

Others enjoy listening to the Office online, using the Mission St. Clare or another website. You are welcome to use the version most suited to you within the parameters designated above.

How to Say the Daily Office

Many people new to this practice and/or to the Order have questions about saying the Offices because they simply do not know how. All of the prayer books of churches of the Province of the Americas contain instructions to help a beginner pray the Offices. These may range from the thorough introduction and directions in *The Book of Alternative Services of The Anglican Church of Canada* to the simple one-line instructions to guide you that are found throughout the Office in many of the prayer books. These instructions are often called rubrics because they often were printed in red. Today they are generally printed in *italics*. If you are new to the Office or using a new prayer book, read the rubrics (instructions) in your prayer book. They will guide you through the service. A hint about the rubrics: if “may” is used, that element is optional; if no “may,” it is essential. The Order’s requirement is for the full Office of either Morning or Evening Prayer. Some prayer books such as *A New Zealand Prayer Book* and The Episcopal Church’s *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) include daily devotions or offices for noon and night (Compline). These are optional observances, but they do not meet the Daily Office requirement for TSSF.

The elements and distinctive pattern of the Office combines order and freedom. It is ordered in its structure, praise, scripture, and prayer, and free in choice of collects and personal intercessions. Some members insert material in the Office from our *Devotional Companion* or other appropriate readings.

These elements vary from prayer book to prayer book and the variations are too many to cover here. Take care familiarizing yourself with your prayer book, how it is structured and all of its options. Here are some of the elements that are commonly found:

- **Special feast days**--Most prayer books have sections at the end with lectionary readings and prayers for special feast days. Be sure to check these sections, as well as the Franciscan calendar in the *Devotional Companion*, so you can observe these days as part of your Daily Office practice.
- **Opening scriptural sentence**--These are optional; you may use one from the suggested list, or may choose to omit this entirely, beginning with the traditional “Lord open our lips.”

- **Confession**--This can be omitted. If it is included at another time of day (Eucharist, Sacrament of Reconciliation, another Office, daily self examen), it should be omitted.
- **Opening canticles**--All prayer books include an opening canticle in both Morning and Evening Prayer. Some provide for variations by liturgical season, especially Easter. If you like to sing, there are many musical settings of these canticles available.
- **Psalms and appointed lectionary readings**--Both Offices include a portion from the Psalms and one or two scripture readings. Some have a limited selection of Psalms and readings for these Offices. A number of the prayer books in our Province, including *The Book of Alternative Services of The Anglican Church of Canada*, The Episcopal Church's *Book of Common Prayer* (1979) and the *Prayer Book of Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil* (Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil) have daily lectionaries covering both the Psalms and scripture readings for the Offices. You may find using one of these enriches your reading of the Office.

The *Devotional Companion* provides both Psalms and scripture readings for a number of special feasts and observance of special days such as those for Clare and Francis.

- **Canticles**--After each Reading a canticle is said. Each prayer book has a selection, and the canticles offered differ from one prayer book to another. The use of different canticles gives you an opportunity to add variation to the Daily Office and to make it more appropriate for the season or day. The Table on page 144 of the *BCP* suggests Canticles for each day or you may choose your own favorites. The *CSF Office Book* has a wonderfully expanded selection of Canticles, some written by our First Order Sisters. Morning Prayer lends to more variety while Evening Prayer generally uses the *Magnificat* or the *Nunc Dimittis* unless two readings are used.
- **Apostles' Creed & Lord's Prayer**--By the rubrics, these are always to be used, in both Offices. In actual practice, the creed is sometimes omitted.

- **Collects**--Each prayer book offers a collect for the day (generally the collect for the previous Sunday), and our *Devotional Companion* provides collects for appropriate Franciscan days of commemoration. *Holy Women, Holy Men* (formerly *Lesser Feasts and Fasts*) and other commemorative lists also provide collects that may be used to supplement those in your prayer book. One or more may be said.
- **Closing blessings**--Use one of the blessings found after the Saturday collect in *Living with the Principles of the Order* for the closing.

Again, read the rubrics/directions of your prayer book carefully. Make yourself familiar with the basic structure of the Office and with all the possibilities and resources available, and then, relax and bask in spending time reading the Word of the Lord (most of the Office is drawn from Scripture, including the canticles, suffrages and versicles).

The Value of the Daily Office

Saying the Daily Office, and keeping one's Rule in general, can be an enriching daily experience. For others, it can be a struggle. Francis himself offers some heartening words: As death approached, he wrote a confession to the entire Order. It began with his asking God, his Minister General and all the brothers for forgiveness for his many sins, "...especially in not observing the Rule that I have promised Him and in not saying the Office as the Rule prescribes" (Francis of Assisi, "A Letter to the Entire Order", p. 119). Knowing Francis could not do it either should ease the pain of your own occasional failure to succeed at this, as well. Just keep trying in humility, love and joy.

The practice of saying the Daily Office is deeply rooted in historic tradition and keeps us firmly in touch with Scripture, the Anglican Church and the religious life. It is a meaningful way to share in the life of the church at large, both with and on behalf of the church since it includes the whole church in its prayers. And it protects against subjectivity. We are a vital part of a long tradition of the religious life, with a particular secular identity. When we say the Office, we are not alone. TSSF members throughout the Province and the world are praying right along with us. It can be inspiring to visualize the universal fellowship of prayer of which you are a part.

Reflection Questions:

1. What joy do you find in praying the Daily Office?
2. If you find the Daily Office difficult, talk with your formation counselor about what makes it difficult for you and how you might be able to make it easier.

I.12. Obedience: Spiritual Direction

Francis Seeks Direction from Saint Clare and Brother Sylvester Whether to be a Preacher or a Hermit

The humble servant of Christ, Saint Francis, a short time after his conversion, having already gathered and received many companions into the Order, was greatly preoccupied and in serious doubt about what he ought to do: whether to dedicate himself solely to prayer, or sometimes to preach; and he greatly desired to know the will of God about this. Since the holy humility in him did not allow him to rely on himself or his own prayers, he decided to seek the divine will with the prayers of others. So he called Brother Masseo and said to him: "Go to Sister Clare and tell her for me that she, with some of her more spiritual companions, should devoutly pray to God that He be pleased to show me what is better: to dedicate myself to preaching or only to prayer. Then go to Brother Sylvester and tell him the same." Now in the world this man had been Sir Sylvester, the one who had seen coming out of the mouth of Saint Francis a golden cross as tall as the sky and as wide as the ends of the earth. And this Brother Sylvester was a man of so much devotion and holiness that whatever he asked and begged of God was granted, and he often spoke with God; and therefore Saint Francis had great devotion toward him.

Brother Masseo went and, following that command of Saint Francis, delivered the message first to Saint Clare, then to Brother Sylvester. And he, as soon as he received the message, knelt down in prayer, and as he prayed he received God's answer. He turned to Brother Masseo and said, "God says this: tell Brother Francis that God did not call him to this state only for himself, but to bear fruit, the fruit of souls, that through him many may be saved." On receiving this response, Brother Masseo returned to Saint Clare to learn what she had received from God. And she replied that she and the other companions had received from God and the same response that Brother Sylvester had received.

At that Brother Masseo returned to Saint Francis, and Saint Francis received him with the greatest charity, washing his feet and preparing him something to eat. After the meal, Saint Francis called Brother Masseo into the forest and there knelt down in front of him and pulled back his capuche, making a cross with his arms, and asked him, "What does my Lord Jesus Christ command me to do?" Brother Masseo replied, "Christ answered both

Brother Sylvester and Sister Clare with the sisters, and revealed that it is His will that you go through the world to preach, because He has not chosen you only for yourself, but rather for the salvation of others.” Then Saint Francis, having heard this answer and knowing Christ’s will by it, got up with great fervor and said, “Let’s go, in the name of God.” And he took as companions Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo, both holy men (“The Little Flowers”, pp. 591-92).

Why Do We Need a Spiritual Director?

Directors are for those of us who hunger for “more” on the spiritual journey than can be outlined in commandments and dogma. Perhaps Moses, coming down from seeing the burning bush (Exod. 3), could have used a director, as could have Peter after he saw his disquieting “kill and eat” vision (Acts 10.9-16). Like Moses and Peter, we are weak; we are human; we fail; we try again. And we are part of a society that doesn’t always share our Christian values. To maintain our Christian values, to accept a demanding Christian discipline, to love God and our neighbors heartily, we need a support, friend, and perspective--restorer--in short, a guide.

Spiritual direction involves our whole life. It is not merely instruction in the prayer life. Our spiritual directors are concerned about our relationships-with each other, in our families, in our communities, and especially in our relationship with God as manifested in prayer and action. A spiritual director helps us see ourselves as God sees us, with our potential, or strengths and weaknesses, and to see the world and our brothers and sisters as God sees them, with physical and spiritual needs.

In the words of Thomas Merton, “A spiritual guide worth his or her salt will conduct a ruthless campaign against all forms of delusion rising out of spiritual ambition and self-complacency, which aim to establish the ego in spiritual glory” (Merton, p. 77).

How Can We Find a Spiritual Director?

For a director, choose someone you can meet with in person, and who can be objective about you. Choose someone whose suggestions you will seriously consider when they conflict with your own. Remember there are many thoughtful and devout lay men and women who can and do serve as spiritual directors; they do not have to be clergy. Your director needs to know what you are trying to do

and what spiritual tools you bring to the task. He or she also needs to know your life situation, the demands made on you, and your responsibilities.

A spiritual director is:

- a support and companion on the way;
- an attentive listener and a sounding board;
- sometimes a catalyst, speeding or slowing reactions, helping to transform us into the person God intends us to be;
- a companion through the dry periods of our spiritual journey;
- sometimes a guide, directing us through the fog of our emotions, our depression, our clouded vision;
- sometimes a touchstone testing our motivations or intentions; and
- sometimes a calming force, restoring us to balance when personal problems or simply the madness of a materialistic world have upset our equilibrium.

To find a director, you might ask for recommendations from others, such as members of your Fellowship, parish clergy, or diocesan staff. You might also check the Spiritual Directors International directory (www.sdiworld.org).

In choosing a spiritual director, remember that he or she:

- must understand your commitment to a radical Christianity in the Franciscan way, a life of disciplined prayer, study and work that is productive of humility, love and joy;
- must be a listener and responder, able to hear within the words said;
- must have both theoretical and practical knowledge of prayer;
- must be concerned about the welfare of all God's creatures and your response to their needs; and
- should also be under spiritual direction.

Do not choose a spiritual director who:

- is a member of your local TSSF Fellowship since it is hard to be objective about our close brothers and sisters;
- is your parish rector since again there are too many cross-relationships to remain objective;
- considers prayer to be one of his or her least pressing duties;
- believes Christianity to be entirely spiritual or other-worldly;
- believes Christianity to be entirely a matter of morals and humanitarianism;

- tries to place you in a preconceived category;
- cannot communicate with you, or you with him/her; and
- encourages dependence on his/her authority or judgment, rather than guiding you into the maturity of freedom in Christ.

Now That You Have a Director, How Often Should You Meet?

The frequency of meeting with your spiritual director depends on your individual circumstances. If you are in formation, you should plan to see your director monthly. The same is true when you are in a particularly fruitful growth period or under particular stress. Once launched with your Rule or at times of “smooth sailing,” quarterly meetings may be sufficient.

When you seem to be dragging your feet about meeting with your spiritual director, it can be a symptom of being spiritually stalled, in a dry period, or of avoiding something. Perhaps you are having difficulty with a challenge your director has given you, or something you have been asked to examine within yourself that you are not ready to address. If this is the case, discuss it with your director. Having trouble getting yourself to see your spiritual director could also mean that your current director is not compatible, and you may need to look for a new one. Whatever the reason, such reluctance to meet with your director should be examined carefully.

To maintain an open and healthy relationship with a spiritual director, a preliminary stated trial period is a good idea as is the occasional “so how do we think we’re doing” conversation.

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you see your relationship with your spiritual director? What is positive about the relationship? What is missing?
2. Describe a situation in which you gained insight from spiritual direction. What is an example of something a spiritual director has helped you understand that prayer or study alone did not fully illuminate?

I.13. Obedience: The Local Fellowship

The Sweet Fellowship Among the Early Followers of Francis

Each day they were conscientious in prayer and working with their hands to avoid all idleness, the enemy of the soul. They rose conscientiously in the middle of the night, and prayed most devoutly with copious tears and sighs. They loved each other deeply, served one another, and took care of each other as a mother for an only and beloved child. Charity burned so ardently in them that it seemed easy for them to give their bodies to death, not only for the love of Christ, but also for the salvation of the soul or the body of their confreres.

One day, when two of the brothers were walking along, they came across a simpleton who began to throw rocks at them. One of them, noticing that stones were being thrown at the other, ran directly in front of him, preferring that the stones strike him rather than his brother. Because of the mutual charity with which they burned, they were prepared to lay down their life in this way, one for the other.

They were so rooted and grounded in humility and love, that one respected the other as father and master, while those who excelled by way of the office of prelate or some grace, seemed humble and more self-effacing than the others...

If it ever happened that one uttered an annoying word to another, his conscience troubled him, so much so that he could not rest until he admitted his fault. He would humbly prostrate himself on the ground, so that his brother would place his foot over his mouth. If the brother who was offended refused to do this, then the brother who offended him, if he were a prelate, would order him to do so. If he were a subject, he would have a prelate give the order. In this way, with the grace of Jesus anticipating and helping them, they strove to banish all ill will and malice from their midst, to preserve among them always perfect love, and to combat, as far as possible, each vice by practicing a corresponding virtue (The Legend of Three Companions, pp. 93-4).

The Communities of Jesus and of Francis

When Jesus began his public ministry, he selected a community of brothers and sisters who became the nucleus of his Church representing his continuing

life among us. These men and women lived closely with Jesus and with each other, sharing their love and their concerns with each other and with the Master.

Francis attracted others to himself as soon as he began to live a life of total dedication to the love of Jesus. Like Jesus, he found brothers and sisters who wanted to walk with him in the Gospel way. Longing often for a life of solitude devoted entirely to prayer, Francis found community a mixed blessing. His brothers and sisters often disappointed him; they brought him both joy and grief.

Joy and Struggle in Community

Such has always been the way of community. In our human families we struggle to find our own identity lest we be crushed by the common mind. When we choose to become part of the Franciscan community, we may struggle to find a common mind with brothers and sisters whose identities vary greatly from our own. We find brothers and sisters who are so close to us in the heart of our Lord Jesus that we want to cry for joy. We also find brothers and sisters who are deep mysteries, in whom we must struggle to see the Christ who is our bond, our head, our Savior and our salvation.

Finding the Christ in our brothers and sisters is part of our Franciscan journey. As Jesus walked in a community of disciples who broke his heart through betrayal, denial and misunderstanding, so we too walk in a community of love with those who will disappoint and puzzle us, but also love us more than we deserve. Jesus defined the relationship that we ought to have with our community: we are to be a servant to all.

Community is a risk. All human creatures have a community of some sort, because we were born in and for community. We cannot escape community. We can, however, go through life jumping in and out of different communities, avoiding responsibility and avoiding commitment.

We who have chosen the Third Order Society of St. Francis have made a commitment not only to a rule and way of life but also to a family. We have chosen to be part of a community that has a common way of life but whose members may or may not appeal to us. It is easy to be deceived about families. We meet a few Franciscans who we think are soul mates, and we assume all the members will be equally appealing. Not so – the Franciscan family consists of all sorts, some of whom take great effort to love.

Consider Jesus' community of followers. How many of them would you have enjoyed spending an afternoon with? The meticulous Judas Iscariot, concerned with his own expectations and whether Jesus would measure up to them (John 12.4-6)? The doubting Thomas, who was prepared to walk with Jesus to death itself but not without many questions first (John 11.16; John 20.24-26)? The headstrong Peter, whose performance was not always up to his bravado (Matt. 14.28-31)? James and John, who were determined to be guaranteed first place (Mark 10.35-37)? Mary Magdalene who had been possessed by seven demons (Luke 8.2)? The fussy Martha who begrudged her sister's choice to sit at Jesus' feet (Luke 10.38-42)? Such persons were chosen by Jesus to be the foundation of his Church.

They were no easier to understand or to tolerate than were Francis (the impractical troubadour), Clare (the relentless), Juniper (the foolish), Leo (the devoted) or Elias (the betrayer). They were no better or worse company for an afternoon than are the brothers and sisters in our local Fellowships, whose peculiarities and foibles we see so clearly; or our brothers and sisters called to a life of solitude and prayer, whose hiddenness may be the most dumbfounding of all.

The Responsibilities of Community

Times will occur for all of us when prayer is our only way to be in community. Regular meetings with our brothers and sisters will prove to be impossible for practical, physical, emotional or spiritual reasons. At those times, we should be most careful to pray with diligence for our community and to keep the Area Chaplain informed of any unusual circumstances.

Community is our obligation as tertiaries, and community is work. The reports we make as novices and as professed are an aspect of community. They serve to make us obedient to one another and to form in each of us the mind of our Lord Jesus. Even tertiaries who are geographically isolated can participate in one of our "Fellowships without Borders" which meet either online or by telephone. Information on these Fellowships is available in the first pages of the *Directory and Intercession List*. Most of us will attend Fellowship meetings in some form, the boring ones as well as the exhilarating ones, the organized as well as the chaotic, the secularized and the oh-so-holy, in order to unite our efforts with those of our brothers and sisters to build the Body of Christ. We who try to follow our Lord Jesus in the way of St. Francis have not chosen an easy way. But we have

chosen a way of joy because it is compatible with our God-given vocation to make our love for one another a witness to the Light and Love of Jesus.

Expressions of Community in the Third Order

The primary local community events that we share are Fellowship meetings, retreats and quiet days, and an occasional “family” outing, picnic or community service. Annually, the Fellowships in a geographical region gather together in a Regional Convocation. Once every five years, the entire Province gathers for a Provincial Convocation. All of these events help to build and strengthen our sense of being in community. The better we get to know each other, the more we share, the closer we become. But our responsibility to the local community does not end with these things. We must reach out to each other, supporting each other in times of grief and of celebration, building up our friendships and our love for each other between events, and always praying for each other.

One very important part of community is being willing to share the hard times as well as the joyful ones. If you are having problems in your life, share them. Let your brothers and sisters help. Too often members of a Fellowship will go through devastating experiences and not tell the rest of us about it until after the fact. Think how much easier it is to carry a heavy load with the help of many hands! This also is an opportunity to discover humility by letting others serve you. Community demands risk-taking, not only in reaching out to one another, but also in allowing others to reach out to us. It may or may not be true that it is more blessed to give than to receive, but receiving is definitely more difficult, and often seems to carry more of a blessing as we are exposed to God’s love as shown to us through other people. Perhaps, too, we must first learn to receive before we can truly learn to give. Allowing the Fellowship family to help in times of need is as important as helping a brother or sister in need.

Aspects of the Local Fellowship

Often, people outside the Order do not or cannot understand what we are trying to do, and it is in the Fellowship that we are able to connect with others who really do understand, who are trying the same approach to God. Being able to come together and communicate with others who do understand is an important function of the Fellowship.

Fellowship meetings are times of being together as a family rather than “meetings” *per se*. We get the sense that whenever we are together, it is a party. Regardless of our purpose for gathering, we tend to primarily joyously celebrate God. We often share Eucharist or the Daily Office, prayer, a common meal; we share in Franciscan-centered discussions or study, and we simply enjoy each other’s company. Franciscans tend to be open to the Holy Spirit’s leading. We try not to be too structured about our meeting formats, while making sure we allocate enough time for prayer, study and fellowship. We allow for the promptings of the Spirit, while providing some organization to keep us on track. We seek a good balance between structure and freedom.

The Fellowship convener is recommended by the Fellowship and appointed by the Fellowship Coordinator after consultation with the Minister Provincial. Conveners are selected yearly from among the professed members of the Fellowship. Novices are typically not allowed to be conveners or co-conveners, although they can serve in this way when extenuating circumstances prevent a professed member from fulfilling this role. There must be consultation between the Fellowship Coordinator and Formation Director before a novice may be recommended.

The convener’s role in the Fellowship is basically to arrange meetings, and to see that necessary news and meeting notices are conveyed to the members. The professed convener also usually conducts the novicings and professions. If the Minister Provincial, Provincial Chaplain, or Area Chaplain are present, they may be asked to preside, as may a professed person requested by the person to be noviced or professed. The convener is in regular contact with the Provincial Fellowship Coordinator, and keeps them informed of any Fellowship issues that may develop. Pastoral care of the local Fellowship is another essential part of the job.

Professed members of the Fellowship have a role in helping to discern vocations of those in formation. They are asked to provide an evaluation of the candidate at the time of a person’s novicing, mid-novice review, and election to profession. The evaluation is usually written by the convener based on discussion and input from all professed members of the Fellowship. All opinions, positive and negative, should be included. If problems or questions arise, the Formation Director and/or the Fellowship Coordinator should be contacted immediately.

All members of the Fellowship have a role in contributing to its well-being and sharing the responsibilities, such as helping to organize retreats and

convocations, helping with Fellowship communications, and most of all, by participating regularly in meetings and events. When a member is often absent due to involvement in “good and important activities,” it may be time for them to explore whether the primary call is to the Third Order Society of St. Francis, or to another path. A responsibility of the Fellowship is to reach out by phone, cards, e-mails and/or visits to those unable to be physically present at gatherings.

Reflection Questions:

1. As you reflect upon other groups who have supported you in your spiritual journey prior to your participation in TSSF, how important is it to you to feel part of a community? What do you gain from being part of a community?
2. What are some of the gifts that you bring to faith groups, which nurture the sense of community among members?
3. How is your Fellowship helping you to become a Franciscan? What changes to your Fellowship and/or to you would make it even more effective?
4. If you cannot participate regularly with a local TSSF Fellowship, how do you or will you experience Franciscan community?

II.14. The Object

Francis Dies to His Former Life

The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body. And afterwards I delayed a little and left the world (Francis of Assisi, “The Testament”, p. 124).

Jesus said, Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

In the example of his own sacrifice, Jesus reveals the secret of bearing fruit. In surrendering himself to death, he becomes the source of new life. Lifted from the earth on a cross, he draws all people to himself. Clinging to life causes life to decay; the life that is freely given is eternal.

Jesus calls those who would serve him to follow his example and choose for themselves the same path of renunciation and sacrifice. To those who hear and obey, he promises union with God. The object of the Society of Saint Francis is to build a community of those who accept Christ as their Lord and Master, and are dedicated to him and to the service of his people. The Third Order of the Society consists of those who, while following the ordinary professions of life, feel called to dedicate their lives under a definite discipline and vows. They may be female or male, married or single, ordained or lay.

When Saint Francis encouraged the formation of the Third Order he recognized that many are called to serve God in the spirit of Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience in everyday life (rather than in a literal acceptance of these principles as in the vows of the Brothers and Sisters of the First and Second Orders). The Rule of the Third Order is intended to enable the duties and conditions of daily living to be carried out in this spirit (The Principles, Days 1-4).

What is Our Calling?

All Christians are called to accept Christ as their Lord and Master. *Many* Christians have looked to St. Francis as a guide along that path. *A small number* of these Franciscans have felt called to build an Anglican community known as the Third Order, Society of St. Francis. What does the Object—”to build a community of those who accept Christ as their Lord and Master, and are dedicated to him and to the service of his people”—means for our tiny cohort? How do we build this community and support its sacred purposes?

A Definite Discipline and Vows

We all live “the ordinary professions of daily life,” which typically means we are not in frequent physical proximity with others in our Franciscan community. This dispersion makes building and maintaining a sense of cohesion challenging; it requires mindfulness and intentional action. The structures we give to that mindfulness and intentionality are our “definite discipline and vows.”

The discipline we freely accept is our rule of life, which is manifested both in our community rule (including *The Principles*) and in our individual rules. These two guideposts “are the focus of commitment and renewal for all tertiaries,” according to *The Constitution of the Third Order*.

When we take our vows, we state a “desire to serve our Lord Jesus Christ...in company with my brothers and sisters” in the Order. As in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), we identify our neighbors (our brothers and sisters) not as those who live close by, but as those we minister to and care for. In other words by joining community, we take responsibility to minister to and care for one another.

How We Minister to and Care for One Another in Community

On a daily basis, we pray with and for one another. The Daily Office and the Community Obedience are our way of uniting our voices before God, remembering one another by name, recalling the *Principles* that bind us together in purpose, and preparing for or closing out the day by recalling the spirit of our founder. Each day, we also live out the other parts of our community and personal rules as we have promised one another we would do.

Less frequently, but as often as we can, we meet face-to-face with other tertiaries. We participate with our local fellowship or if we live too far away or encounter other extenuating circumstances, we seek out virtual fellowships and other ways to connect with community members from a distance. We may engage in ministry, study or recreation together. We attend regional and provincial convocations whenever we can, and prayerfully consider taking on leadership roles within the Order when asked or called. We also participate in the election of officers.

Annually, we renew our pledge to the Order, report to our area chaplain, and make a financial contribution (the latter two may be done more often, if desired).

Supporting One Another As We Pursue the Object

Tertiaries have found that our life in community is worth considerable effort because we need one another's help and encouragement to "serve God in the spirit of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience." These three aims are antithetical to the values that pervade the larger culture and even many of our churches. Without one another in the Order, we may become lost, dispirited or overwhelmed. To draw on another parable, that of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-23), we want to help provide for one another the "good soil" that will allow our fallen grains of wheat to yield thirty-, sixty- or even a hundredfold.

Unless we die to our former selves—the selves that were most likely forged in a worldly context of accumulation, consumption, exploitation and individual self-interest—we cannot bear new fruit. Falling to the ground and dying is a kind of exile from life as we had known it. The Third Order helps ease the loneliness of that exile, and helps guarantee that our grains of wheat do not fall into the middle of the path, on rocky ground, or among thorns.

This process of letting go, of exile, of falling to the ground and dying, is profoundly challenging. We cannot do this through an exercise of will but by abandoning the will. And we cannot do this by ourselves. The only way we can let our lives fall to the ground to grow anew is to abandon ourselves, not into an abstract love of God, but into very concrete encounters with other human beings, through whom we see God. Some of those encounters will be with other tertiaries, who can help us follow Christ as His servants in the way of St. Francis.

The Germ of Abundance Within the Fallen Grain

There is a place of beauty within and beyond the suffering of letting go. The Gospel of John, from which our Object comes, speaks of the extravagant abundance of God's desire for us. At the wedding feast at Cana, Jesus produces not just enough wine, but 150 gallons (John 2.1-11). When he heals on the Sabbath, he overturns not a passing affliction, but one of 38 years (John 5.2-9). When he shares five loaves and two fish with a multitude, there are many baskets of leftovers (John 6.1-13). When Mary anoints Jesus, she rubs his feet not with a bit of ointment, but with a pound (John 12.1-4). "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (John 1.16).

At the end of the Gospel of John, when the resurrected Jesus appeared to the disciples fishing in Galilee, he directed them to collect an extravagantly full net of fish. After they have eaten some of it, Jesus asks Peter repeatedly, "Do you love me?" Jesus' response to Peter's avowals of love is to "Feed my sheep" and "Follow me" (John 21.15-19). By dying to our old ways of life and rising to bear much fruit, we seek to do likewise, to join in the Love that "is come again like wheat that springeth green" (*Hymnal 1982*, #204).

Reflection Questions:

1. How have you experienced God's extravagant abundance in your life?

II.15. The First Aim: To Make Our Lord Known and Loved Everywhere

Francis Shares the Gospel Story of Bethlehem at Greccio

What he did on the birthday of our lord Jesus Christ near the little town called Greccio in the third year before his glorious death should especially be noted and recalled with reverent memory. In that place there was a certain man by the name of John, of good reputation and an even better life, whom blessed Francis loved with a special love, for in the place where he lived he held a noble and honourable position in as much as he had trampled upon the nobility of his birth and pursued nobility of soul.

Blessed Francis sent for this man, as he often did, about fifteen days before the birth of the lord, and he said to him: "If you want us to celebrate the present fast of our lord at Greccio, go with haste and diligently prepare what I tell you. For I wish to do something that will recall to memory the little Child who was born in Bethlehem and set before our bodily eyes in some way the inconveniences of his infant needs, how he lay in a manger, how, with an ox and an ass standing by, he lay upon the hay where he had been placed. "When the good and faithful man heard these things, he ran with haste and prepared in that place all the things the saint had told him.

But the day of joy drew near; the time of great rejoicing came. The brothers were called from their various places. Men and women of that neighbourhood prepared with glad hearts, according to their means, candles and torches to light up that night that has lighted up all the days and years with its gleaming star. At length the saint of God came, and finding all things prepared, he saw it and was glad.

The manger was prepared, the hay had been brought, the ox and ass were led in. There simplicity was honoured, poverty was exalted, humility was commended, and Greccio was made, as it were, a new Bethlehem. The night was lighted up like the day, and it delighted men and beasts. The people came and were filled with new joy over the new mystery. The woods rang with the voices of the crowd and the rocks made answer to their jubilation. The brothers sang, paying their debt of praise to the lord, and the whole night resounded with their rejoicing. The saint of God stood before the manger, uttering sighs, overcome

with love, and filled with a wonderful happiness. The solemnities of the Mass were celebrated over the manger and the priest experienced a new consolation.

The saint of God was clothed with the vestments of the deacon, for he was a deacon, and he sang the holy Gospel in a sonorous voice. And his voice was a strong voice, a sweet voice, a clear voice, a sonorous voice, inviting all to the highest rewards. Then he preached to the people standing about, and he spoke charming words concerning the nativity of the poor king and the little town of Bethlehem.

Frequently too, when he wished to call Christ Jesus, he would call him simply the Child of Bethlehem, aglow with overflowing love for him; and speaking the word Bethlehem, his voice was more like the bleating of a sheep, His mouth was filled more with sweet affection than with words. Besides, when he spoke the name Child of Bethlehem or Jesus, his tongue licked his lips, as it were, relishing and savouring with pleased palate the sweetness of the word.

The gifts of the Almighty were multiplied there, and a wonderful vision was seen by a certain virtuous man. For he saw a little child lying in the manger lifeless, and he saw the holy man of God go up to it and rouse the child as from a deep sleep. This vision was not unfitting, for the Child Jesus had been forgotten in the hearts of many; but, by the working of his grace, he was brought to life again through his servant St. Francis and stamped upon their fervent memory. At length the solemn night celebration was brought to a close, and each one returned to his home with holy joy (Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis", pp. 254-56).

The Order is founded on the conviction that Jesus Christ is the perfect revelation of God; that true life has been made available to us through his Incarnation and Ministry, by his Cross and Resurrection, and by the sending of his Holy Spirit. Our Order believes that it is the commission of the church to make the Gospel known to all and therefore accepts the duty of bringing others to know Christ, and of praying and working for the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The primary aim for us as Tertiaries is therefore to make Christ known. This shapes our lives and attitudes to reflect the obedience of those whom our Lord chose to be with him and sent out as his witnesses. Like them, by word and example, we bear witness to Christ in our own immediate environment and pray and work for the fulfillment of his command to make disciples of all nations (The Principles, Days 5-6).

How Our Aims Express Poverty, Chastity and Obedience

The evangelical counsels, or Gospel ideals of perfection--of poverty, chastity and obedience--are expressed in our *Principles* as the three aims of the Order: “To make our Lord known and loved everywhere” represents obedience; “To spread the spirit of love and harmony within the family of God” represents chastity; “To live simply” represents poverty. The three aims comprise the only area of our TSSF *Principles* that differs from the First Order’s version.

First, Know and Love the Lord Yourself

The question we ask as we approach this charge is not “How?” but “Who?” In order to bring others to the knowledge and love of Christ, we have to know and love Christ ourselves. That means the first person to whom you must make our Lord known and loved is you.

As we grow in our love for Jesus, we could try a paraphrase: “To make my *Friend* known and loved.” That throws an intriguing light on how to approach that challenging phrase. I can make my Friend known and loved, because I know and love my Friend, and can pass some of that on. My relationship with my Friend has deeply affected my life and the way I see others and myself. I have spent a lot of time with my Friend, have cultivated the relationship, shared in good times and bad, have laughed and cried with my Friend. I can truly be “myself,” warts and all, with my Friend, and that Friend will not love me less because I am not perfect. Though my Friend knows my deepest secrets and the darkest recesses of my soul, there is nothing in me or about me that will make my Friend turn away. That is a Friend whose love informs my life and my attitudes toward others. That is the best way I can make my Friend Jesus known and loved.

A real relationship, an authentic friendship with our Lord, is the first step toward fulfilling the first of the Order’s three aims. If you want to make our Lord known and loved by anyone else, you must first know, trust and love him yourself. This kind of relationship with Christ is only possible if you are open to it and willing to cultivate it. If you do, wild horses cannot hinder the friendship.

Companionship with Jesus

Jesus longs for our deep companionship, our true friendship. That is what Francis lived for, what drove him on beyond endurance. That is the reason we are drawn to Francis and the reason he speaks so eloquently to us.

What Francis communicated to us was a deep and abiding companionship with the Lord, which he treasured. His own description of it is touching:

“We are spouses when the faithful soul is united by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers, moreover, when we do the will of His Father Who is in heaven; mothers when we carry Him in our heart and body through love and a pure and sincere conscience; and give Him birth through a holy activity, which must shine before others by example” (Francis of Assisi, “Later Admonition”, p. 49).

It was Francis’ friendship with the Lord that informed his charism. He was in relationship with Jesus the Christ at every moment of his life. Francis embodied the Gospel, expressed it fully in his every thought, word and action. It was in this way that Francis made our Lord, his dearest friend, known and loved. Francis’ bidding to become brothers, sisters, brides and mothers of Jesus recalls the Gospel passage “Who are my mother and brothers?” Answer: “Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother” (Mark 4.33-35). Herein lies the greatest call to obedience, “Not what I want, but what you want” (Mark 14.36).

We cannot stress enough the need to develop a deep, regular and intimate prayer life, to unflinchingly set aside some time each day devoted to enjoying a deep and loving relationship with the Lord.

Passing on Our Love for Jesus

How do we pass it on to others? We do it by our lives, by our having been touched by Christ who leads us to touch others with God’s love, and by our joy, which reflects God’s love in a deep and loving way. We also do it by living out our baptismal promise and mirroring the unconditional love for others; by our “being Christ” for others; by seeing our friend, Jesus, in everyone we meet, day in and day out; by telling others in word and action the Good News of Jesus Christ; by the fruits of a rich interior relationship with the Lord working within us; and by our words and works, shall we, and the Lord, be known.

Reflection Questions:

1. How have you communicated the Good News of Jesus nonverbally or implicitly as Francis did at *Greccio*?
2. If you live in a community of diverse faiths or no faith, how do you make Christ known in an inclusive way that does not alienate or offend?

II.16. The Second Aim: To Spread the Spirit of Love and Harmony

The Wolf of Gubbio

At the time that Saint Francis was staying in the city of Gubbio, in the district of Gubbio there appeared a very big wolf, fearsome and ferocious, which devoured not only animals but even human beings, so that all the citizens were in great fear, because many times he came near the city. All would go armed when they went out of the city as if they were going to combat, yet with all this, those who were alone and encountered him could not defend themselves from him. And out of fear of this wolf it came to the point that no one dared to leave that town.

For this reason Saint Francis had compassion on the people of the town, and decided to go out to this wolf, even though all the citizens advised against it. Making the sign of the most holy cross, he went out of the town, he and his companions, placing all his confidence in God. As the others hesitated to go any further, Saint Francis took the road toward the place where the wolf was. Then that wolf, seeing many citizens who had come to see this miracle, ran toward Saint Francis with his mouth open. Drawing close to him, Saint Francis made the sign of the most holy cross on him and called him to himself and said this: "Come here, Brother Wolf. I command you on behalf of Christ that you do no harm to me or to anyone." An amazing thing to say! Immediately, when Saint Francis had made the sign of the cross, the fearsome wolf closed his mouth and stopped running; and once the command was given, it came meekly as a lamb, and threw itself to lie at the feet of Saint Francis. And Saint Francis spoke to him thus: "Brother Wolf, you do much harm in this area, and you have done great misdeeds, destroying and killing the creatures of God without His permission. And not only have you killed and devoured beasts, but you have dared to kill people, made in the image of God. For this reason you are worthy of the gallows as a thief and the worst of murderers. And all the people cry out and complain against you, and all this town is your enemy. But I, Brother Wolf, want to make peace between you and these people, so that you do not offend them anymore, and they may pardon your every past offense, and so neither the people nor the dogs will persecute you anymore. And after these words were said, the wolf showed that he accepted what Saint Francis said and wanted to observe it, by movement of his body and tail and ears and by bowing his head. Then Saint Francis said, "Brother Wolf, since it pleases you to make this pact of peace and keep it, I promise that I will have food given to you constantly, as long as you live, by the people of this town, so that you will no longer suffer hunger, since I know very

well that you did all this harm because of hunger. But in order for me to obtain this grace for you, I want you, Brother Wolf, to promise me that you will never harm any human person nor any animal. Do you promise me this?" And the wolf, bowing his head, made a clear sign that he promised it. And Saint Francis said this: "Brother Wolf, I want you to guarantee this promise, so that I can truly trust it." Saint Francis reached out his hand to receive his guarantee, the wolf lifted his right paw in front of him, and tamely placed it on top of the hand of Saint Francis, giving the only sign of a guarantee that he was able to make ("The Little Flowers", pp. 601-02).

Francis Makes Peace Between the Bishop and Mayor of Assisi

At that same time when he lay sick, the bishop of the city of Assisi at the time excommunicated the Podestà. In return, the man who was then Podestà was enraged, and had this proclamation announced, loud and clear, throughout the city of Assisi: no one was to sell or buy anything from the bishop, or to draw up any legal document with him. And so they thoroughly hated each other.

Although very ill, blessed Francis was moved by piety for them, especially since there was no one, religious or secular, who was intervening for peace and harmony between them. He said to his companions: "It is a great shame for you, servants of God, that the bishop and the Podestà hate one another in this way, and that there is no one intervening for peace and harmony between them."

*And so, for that reason, he composed one verse for the Praises:
"Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give 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."*

Afterwards he called one of his companions and told him: "Go to the Podestà and, on my behalf, tell him to go to the bishop's residence together with the city's magistrates and bring with him as many others as he can."

And when the brother had gone, he said to two of his other companions: "Go and sing the Canticle of Brother Sun before the bishop, the Podestà, and the others who are with them. I trust in the Lord that He will humble their hearts and they will make peace with each other and return to their earlier friendship and love."

When they had all gathered in the piazza inside the cloister of the bishop's residence, the two brothers rose and one of them said: "In his illness, blessed Francis wrote the Praises of the Lord for His creatures, for His praise and the edification of his neighbor. He asks you, then, to listen to them with great devotion." And so, they began to sing and recite to them. And immediately the Podestà stood up and, folding his arms and hands with great devotion, he listened intently, even with tears, as if to the Gospel of the Lord. For he had a great faith and devotion toward blessed Francis.

When the Praise of the Lord were ended, the Podestà said to everyone: "I tell you the truth, not only do I forgive the lord bishop, whom I must have as my lord, but I would even forgive one who killed my brother or my son." And so he cast himself at the lord bishop's feet, telling him: "Look, I am ready to make amends to you for everything, as it pleases you, for the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his servant, blessed Francis."

Taking him by the hands, the bishop stood up and said to him: "Because of my office humility is expected of me, but because I am naturally prone to anger, you must forgive me." And so, with great kindness and love they embraced and kissed each other.

And the brothers marveled greatly, considering the holiness of blessed Francis, that what he had foretold about peace and harmony between them had been fulfilled, to the letter. All the others who were present and heard it took it for a great miracle, crediting it to the merits of blessed Francis, that he Lord had so quickly visited them, and that without recalling anything that had been said, they returned to such harmony from such scandal ("The Assisi Compilation", pp. 187-88).

The Order sets out, in the name of Christ, to break down barriers between people and to seek equality for all. We accept as our second aim the spreading of a spirit of love and harmony among all people. We are pledged to fight against the ignorance, pride, and prejudice that breed injustice or partiality of any kind.

Members of The Third Order fight against all such injustice in the name of Christ, in whom there can be neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; for in him all are one. Our chief object is to reflect that openness to all which was characteristic of Jesus. This can only be achieved in a spirit of chastity, which sees others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfillment.

As Tertiaries, we are prepared not only to speak out for social justice and international peace, but to put these principles into practice in own lives, cheerfully facing any scorn or persecution to which this may lead (The Principles, Days 7-9).

All Hangs on Love

Jesus said, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matt. 22.37-40). But what does it mean to love?

Understanding Love as Action

To love is to act consciously for the good of another whether we feel like it nor not. Love is not about feelings. We should never mistake a feeling for love. If we do, then we are subject to the whims of our emotions.

Loving others requires self-sacrifice. St. Paul wrote, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (I Cor. 13.4-7). Love therefore means we must put our own needs and wants aside for a time. Love means working to alleviate the pain inflicted on victims of social prejudices, economic inequalities, and legal discrimination. It means working to “make the crooked straight and the rough places plain” so that the poor, the social outcasts, and the strangers among us are treated with equity and granted justice in our society.

We have a biblical imperative to call out injustice wherever we see it – in our governments, in our churches, in our communities, and in our workplaces – and to work to correct these injustices. The prophet Micah reminds us that God “has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6.8)?

Harmony Requires Justice

But what is justice? In God's reign, justice is where the proud and arrogant are humbled in their own hearts, the powerful are brought down, the poor are raised up, the hungry are filled with good things, and the rich are sent away empty (Luke 1.51-53). Justice includes good news preached to the poor, release proclaimed to the captives, recovery of sight given to the blind, and liberty given to those who are oppressed (Luke 4.18).

As Franciscans, we must speak up for the voiceless, but not only for the poor, the stranger, and the sojourner. We must also speak out for all of our smaller brothers and sisters who depend on our good stewardship of God's creation – the animals, plants, and fish which are being decimated by our wasteful, devastating pollution and destruction of their homes. These creatures belong to our family just as much as the homeless people living under a bridge, the refugees who seek asylum, the employees denied wages and safe workplaces, and those who are marginalized in our communities because of race, sexual orientation or religion.

Chastity in Social Relations

But the worst mistake we can make when helping others is to do so because we are satisfying our own needs. When our ego desires are our motivators for helping others, instead of helping we manipulate and use the very people we claim to serve.

This is why the *Principles* tell us that our love for others and our work on their behalf must be based in a spirit of chastity “which sees others as belonging to God and not as a means of self-fulfillment.” It's easy to get hung up on the usual definition of chastity as sexual abstinence and therefore get confused about what the *Principles* mean. Chastity is broader than sexual abstinence.

We can think about the spirit of chastity as honoring boundaries – emotional, physical, and spiritual. Personal boundaries are a key element of personal identity. Physical boundaries describe how close others should come to us. A person with good physical boundaries knows when, where and how to touch someone. A person with good emotional boundaries knows how to honestly determine his or her feelings about any person or situation. A person with good intellectual boundaries can accept new information and evaluate whether that information will become part of his or her intellectual makeup. A

person with good spiritual boundaries respects the integrity and privacy of the others' relationship with God, and prayerfully discerns when there is a call to seek or offer spiritual guidance.

What does this mean in practical terms? Manipulating others to get one's way is a violation of chastity. Seeing others as objects for one's use, as in seeing one's employees as mere tools for acquiring wealth, is a violation of chastity. Prejudging others by race or gender or sexual orientation, or any other criteria is a violation of chastity. Verbal or physical abuse, demanding to get one's way, imposing guilt on others, sulking or self-pity, refusing to forgive another, making oneself look good at another person's expense, passing on gossip and rumors, oppressing or supporting the oppression or dehumanization of others for any reason, supporting or participating in hostility and war, all violate chastity. It is a far broader category than we may first expect it to be.

Chastity calls us to be open, to risk, and to exercise full integrity in all our relationships. It calls for a full response to Christ's commandment to love God and others as we ourselves are loved. It is only in embracing the spirit of chastity that we are fully enabled by God to love.

Reflection Questions:

1. Who are the "wolves" in your life? What steps can you take to begin the process of reconciliation with them?
2. Who are the people who gave you your understanding of love?
3. After reading this chapter, how has your concept of chastity changed? What changes are you being called to make in your interactions with others as a result of this new understanding?

II.17. The Third Aim: To Live Simply

Now that you have progressed further in formation, go back and reread Chapter I.8., Simplicity.

Reflection Questions:

1. Read and meditate on Mark 10:13-31. What does this passage say to you about simplicity?
2. How has your concept of Simplicity changed since you began your journey in the Third Order?
3. What is something you have let go of that has opened up space to be closer to God? What is something that remains to be let go?
4. How is living simply the same or different from living in poverty?

II.18. The First Way of Service: Prayer

Now that you have progressed further in formation, go back and reread Chapter I.4., Personal Prayer.

Reflection questions:

1. In addition to prayers attributed to St. Francis, the *Devotional Companion* contains other traditional prayers, seasonal prayers, prayers that express Franciscan concerns, and various meditations. How have you found any of these prayers to be useful to your prayer during formation?
2. What helps sustain your practice of daily prayer? What hinders you? How do you address these hindrances?
3. Chapter I.4. mentions that we have many spiritual guides, present and past, to help us with different kinds of prayer. Who have been some guides for you, and how have they helped you?
4. Why do you think prayer is considered such a central aspect of the Franciscan life?

II.19. The Second Way of Service: Study

Now that you have progressed further in formation, go back and reread Chapter I.7., Study.

Reflection Questions:

1. Do you feel comfortable with your level of knowledge about Francis' life? What about Franciscan history and theology? If your knowledge of these areas is not what you would like it to be, how might you begin to fill in those gaps?
2. As Francis warned Anthony of Padua, how do you ensure that your study helps you to live out the rest of our Principles, and does "not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion"?

II.20. The Third Way of Service: Work

Now that you have progressed further in formation, go back and reread Chapter I.9., Work.

Reflection Questions:

1. Our Rule emphasizes a balance between prayer and study, and how both lead to action (work). How would you characterize the balance in your life between these elements?
2. Do you feel that your current secular or religious work is a reflection of your vocation? Do you feel your work is an offering to God and uses the gifts God has given you in service to others? If not, do you think God may be calling you to a different line of work?

II.21. The First Note: Humility

Francis' Humility Towards a Peasant

The man of God not only showed himself humble to the great, but also to his peers and to the lowly, more willing to be admonished and corrected than to admonish others. For example, one day he was riding a donkey, since he was too weak and sickly to walk, and he passed through the field of a peasant who was working there. The peasant ran to him and asked anxiously if he were Brother Francis. When the man of God humbly answered that he was, the peasant said: "Try hard to be as good as everyone says you are, because many people put their trust in you. So I'm warning you: don't ever be different from what people expect!" When the man of God, Francis, heard this, he got down from the donkey on to the ground, and prostrate before the peasant, humbly kissed his feet, thanking him for being so kind to admonish him (Thomas of Celano, "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul", p. 339).

Blessed is the servant who endures discipline, accusation, and reprimand from another as patiently as he would from himself. Blessed is the servant who, after being reprimanded, agrees courteously, submits respectfully, admits humbly, and makes amends willingly. Blessed is the servant who is not quick to excuse himself, and endures with humility, shame and reprimand for a sin, when he did not commit the fault (Francis of Assisi, "The Undated Writings: The Admonitions," p. 135).

Humility, love and joy are the three notes that mark the lives of Tertiaries. When these characteristics are evident throughout the Order, its work will be fruitful. Without them, all that it attempts will be in vain.

We always keep before us the example of Christ, who emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, and who, on the last night of his life, humbly washed his disciples' feet. We likewise seek to serve one another with humility.

Humility confesses that we have nothing that we have not received and admits the fact of our insufficiency and our dependence upon God. It is the basis of all Christian virtues. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux said, "No spiritual house can stand for a moment except on the foundation of humility." It is the first condition of a joyful life within any community.

The faults that we see in others are the subject of prayer rather than of criticism. We take care to cast out the beam from our own eye before offering to remove the speck from another's. We are ready to accept the lowest place when asked and volunteer to take it. Nevertheless, when asked to undertake work of which we feel unworthy or incapable we do not shrink from it on the grounds of humility, but confidently attempt it through the power that is made perfect in weakness (The Principles, Days 21-24).

“Notes” as Characteristic Attitudes

The Principles describe three characteristics (notes) of the members of the Third Order and of the community of the Society of St. Francis, namely humility, love and joy. Each of these, humility, love, and joy, are characteristics or attitudes we uphold and try to model.

Attitudes are difficult to define or to describe, except in terms of actions and behaviors that stem from them. But they are the very basis of the Franciscan path. St. Francis sought to follow Jesus in the true sense or meaning of “follow.” He sought to imitate the Jesus described in the Gospels, not just in actions, but in the attitudes behind these actions that gave meaning to the actions. As Franciscans, our intention is to imitate Christ in the manner of Francis. So we, too, must seek to develop those traits that are the background for everything we do. We are to become so imbued with humility, love and joy that these characteristics influence every part of our lives.

The hardest part of imitating Francis and Jesus is the recognition and acknowledgment that humility, love, and joy cannot be acquired, earned or maintained in or by ourselves. They are pure gifts of God’s loving grace, having no relationship to worthiness, and, in fact, we may never even realize we have been given these gifts although they may be a part of us.

Humility vs. Humiliation

Humility, perhaps the least definable of the three gifts that compose the Notes of the Order, must not get mixed up with “humiliation.” Some of Francis’ extreme examples might lead to this misunderstanding. It is not a matter of low self-esteem or of being conscious of our failure to live up to our Christian intentions.

As human beings, we fear “being humble” may result in our being taken advantage of and walked all over. We tend to counteract this fear with self-pride and building self-esteem. But humility does not advocate a “worm theology” of abasement (“poor worm that I am, I deserve no better”). Rather, humility is the ability to accept ourselves simply as we are, without either pride or debasement, as created beings totally dependent on the gifts of our Creator. It is in that acceptance of our full dependence on our Creator that humility begins.

Humility Is a Gift, Not an Achievement

The gift of humility can never be gained by seeking it – the more we pursue it the more distant it becomes. When we accept our dependence on our Creator, and God becomes truly a part of ourselves, then we can begin to imitate Jesus and Francis and develop the characteristic of humility. In humility, the demands of life are just as great as ever but we live with an inner peace that flows from surrender to God.

Our humility develops as a way of living in God’s love, particularly in our service for others. If we are living in love we enter willingly into voluntary service that is offered in hiddenness and desires no recognition, no honor, and even no gratitude. In *The Journey and the Dream*, Murray Bodo offers this story:

Little lizards dart across the walls of Assisi, zigzagging quick patterns of their movements on tawny stone. Their green bodies against the pink and red made the whole wall interesting and alive.

Francis saw himself in these little creatures that shoot back and forth, in and out of the tiny crevices. They loved the geography of their little world and they went about the business of their lives unselfconsciously, totally preoccupied with the humble stone.

It was their movement that fascinated him. Their motion was a pattern scribbled in the air, which disappeared as soon as it was made. There was no permanence in these tiny signatures, no monument to themselves left behind.

That is what he wanted to be: a tiny signature in the air that thrilled someone who saw it, but was as anonymous as a lizard’s zigzagged darting on a pink Assisi wall. His movement would be his poem (Bodo, p. 102).

Serving Without Expectations

Living our lives as an anonymous poem detaches us from the sense of being taken advantage of because we do not insist on being in charge but choose to serve without expectations. Our service being completely voluntary, we give up the right to decide who or when we will serve.

We are simply available and vulnerable in hidden love. We willingly choose to become servants of our Lord and minister to the needs of others, not for reward or gratification but in unconditional gift even as God gifts us. This service can bring great joy and peace as well as help us feel a spirit of identification with the outcasts of the world.

The root of “humility” is the same as “*humus*,” and has to do with “earthiness.” *Humus* is a rich blend of organic materials producing a fertile growing medium. Humility produces a similarly fertile condition for spiritual growth. It produces the “good soil” on which the “seed that bore fruit” fell in the Gospel parable (Matt. 13.1-8). It has much to do with our willingness to see and to fully accept ourselves as we are.

As the *Principles* indicate, sometimes humility means diving in headfirst and doing something that we feel unworthy or incapable of doing, trusting that the Lord will give us strength, courage, wisdom, and grace. Often our hesitancy has to do with a fear of failure and disgrace. Humility gives us new eyes to see ourselves and others in such a way that the standards of the world no longer apply. Living a life of gratitude makes love and service our new standards rather than power, status and money. By this means the fear of failure melts away. This servanthood requires what can be a difficult thing to accept: our willingness to allow others who minister to us to do their work. Letting others serve us graciously and without feeling a need or condition to repay or reciprocate can be hard to swallow. Giving is often far easier than receiving, especially from those in our own Fellowships. Humility includes the willingness to learn from others by seeing Christ in the other.

If we boil humility down to its essence, we find that the practice of humility could be restated in Gospel imperatives: “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt. 21.39). “Do not judge, so that you may not be judged” (Matt. 7.1). “If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also” (Matt. 5.39). “If anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile” (Matt. 5.41). It would seem that to follow the Gospel is to practice humility.

Reflection Questions:

1. What part does humility play in your own Franciscan life?
2. Can you think of a recent example in your life where you have practiced Franciscan humility?
3. How do you see the connection between self-denial, humility, and simplicity?
4. What are some positive qualities of humility that might exist in your life?

II.22. The Second Note: Love

Francis Receives the Stigmata

On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph having six wings, fiery as well as brilliant, descend from the grandeur of heaven. And when in swift flight, it had arrived at a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the likeness of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross. Two of the wings were raised above his head, two were extended for flight, and two covered his whole body. Seeing this, he was overwhelmed and his heart was flooded with a mixture of joy and sorrow. He rejoiced at the gracious way Christ looked upon him under the appearance of the Seraph, but the fact that He was fastened to a cross pierced his soul with a sword of compassionate sorrow...

Immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. His hands and feet seemed to be pierced through the center by nails, with the heads of the nails appearing on the inner side of the hands and the upper side of the feet and their points on the opposite sides. The heads of the nails in his hands and his feet were round and black; their points were oblong and bent as if driven back with a hammer, and they emerged from the flesh and stuck out beyond it. Also his right side, as if pierced with a lance, was marked with a red wound from which his sacred blood often flowed, moistening his tunic and underwear...

After true love of Christ transformed the lover into His image, when the forty days were over that he spent in solitude as he had desired, and the feast of St. Michael the Archangel had also arrived, the angelic man Francis came down from the mountain, bearing with him the likeness of the Crucified, depicted not on tablets of stone or on panels of wood carved by hand, but engraved on parts of his flesh by the finger of the living God (Bonaventure, pp. 632-34).

Jesus said, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). Love is the distinguishing feature of all true disciples of Christ who wish to dedicate themselves to him as his servants.

Therefore, we seek to love all those to whom we are bound by ties of family or friendship. Our love for them increases, as our love for Christ grows deeper. We have a special love and affection for members of the Third Order, praying for each other individually and seeking to grow in that love. We are on our guard against anything that might injure this love, and we seek reconciliation with those from whom we are estranged. We seek the same love for those with whom we have little natural affinity, for this kind of love is not a welling up of emotion, but is a bond founded in our common union with Christ.

The Third Order is a Christian community whose members, although varied in race, education and character, are bound into a living whole through the love they share in Christ. This unity of all who believe in him will become, as our Lord intended, a witness to the world of his divine mission. In our relationship with those outside the Order, we show the same Christ-like love, and gladly give of ourselves, remembering that love is measured by sacrifice (The Principles, Days 25-27).

The Model: Christ's Unconditional Love

The summation of Christ's teaching, healing and proclamation, of his passion, death and resurrection is love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. The love Jesus revealed and which we are to live is God's love for us even while we are sinners. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15.12).

Love has many meanings and usages that reflect reciprocity. The lover often expects the beloved in some way to reward the lover (giving the lover a loving response, pleasure or gratitude). It is very difficult for us in our human experience to conceive of a completely selfless love that is so unconditional it has no need, demand or requirement of response to it. A love that does not have to be returned does not require gratitude or even acceptance or acknowledgment of its existence. A love that is never withheld or denied remains totally a free gift.

This is the unconditional love God bestows and which we, as followers and imitators of Jesus, strive to accept so fully into ourselves that it becomes a characteristic or attitude we reflect to all others--those close to us, acquaintances, strangers, everyone we encounter.

Loving as God loves is to look with God's eyes at every creature, to see everything through the eyes of love. We may not feel an emotion we can call love in ourselves, but that is not important, nor is it required. The love we reflect is God's, and it is found in our union with Christ and our willingness to imitate him. Such love may demand sacrifice of us; like our Lord, we open ourselves and become vulnerable to whatever response (or lack of response) is made. As followers and imitators of Francis and Jesus, we must take that risk, and respond always with love. The life of St. Francis shows us the way of loving God above all else and others as ourselves.

To the end of his life, Francis continued to be both healer and builder. He gave of himself to others constantly. When he embraced and served the lepers, he embraced and served God; when he sought to rebuild the dilapidated church with bricks, stones and mortar, he again embraced God's will. Francis loved others because he first loved God. Love for God, love for God's people and love for God's Church were all one love.

Francis, saint of God, was obedient to love's demands because God for him was All. God, who is All, demanded all love from Francis. In the effort to give all love, Francis found himself building the Church not with bricks and mortar but with human souls. He rebuilt the Church by creating an enduring community of Gospel love. As tertiaries, we are a part of that community. When Francis said "Yes!" to God, he became a healer and a builder in ways he could never have imagined.

The dance of life for Francis was a dance with God. He reached out his hands to include more and more men and women in his dance. He danced with lepers and with merchants, with serfs and with knights, with the poor and the rich, with priests, bishops, the Pope and with non-believers. Francis poured out God's love by welcoming everyone into the dance with God. Francis invites us into the dance as well.

On Mount La Verna, Francis lifted his hands to God in love and received the wounds of love in his hands, feet and side (Bonaventure, pp. 632-34). The little poor man of Assisi continued to dance on wounded feet and to stretch out wounded hands to others. He lay on God's holy ground to embrace Sister Death, as God's will for him. When his own breath failed, the larks sang him home to God (Bonaventure, pp. 640-44).

As Franciscans, we are called to join Francis in God's dance of love, even when we risk dancing on wounded feet and reaching out to others with our wounded hands and hearts. The life of St. Francis shows us the way to live the life of love in our demanding world: seek first God's will (love). Through contemplation, study, spiritual directors, Franciscan fellowship and strangers we will be enabled to see with God's eyes and hear with God's ears. Through strong and healthy bonds of family and friendship, through open and reconciling relationships with our fellow Franciscans and through reaching out to others as partners equally loved by God we will magnify God's love in the world. When we love God first, we will love others and we will become healers and builders in ways we cannot imagine.

God leads the dance of life that is love, and when we learn to risk including everyone in our dance with God, we learn to embrace the will of God who risked the Cross for the sake of our love.

Reflection Questions:

1. Describe a time when you experienced God's overwhelming love for you.
2. How has your experience of God's love evolved over time?
3. How does God's love find outward expression in your life?
4. How have you "danced with God"? Who have you invited to the dance?

II.23. The Third Note: Joy

Francis Explains True and Perfect Joy

...One day at St. Mary's, blessed Francis called Brother Leo and said: "Brother Leo, write." He responded: "Look, I'm ready!" "Write," he said, "what true joy is."

"A messenger arrives and says that all the Masters of Paris have entered the Order. Write: this isn't true joy! Or, that all the prelates, archbishops and bishops beyond the mountains, as well as the King of France and the King of England [have entered the Order]. Write: this isn't true joy! Again, that my brothers have gone to the non-believers and converted all of them to the faith; again, that I have so much grace from God that I heal the sick and perform many miracles. I tell you true joy doesn't consist in any of these things."

"Then what is true joy?"

"I return from Perugia and arrive here in the dead of night. It's winter time, muddy, and so cold that icicles have formed on the edges of my habit and keep striking my legs and blood flows from such wounds. Freezing, covered with mud and ice, I come to the gate and, after I've knocked and called for some time, a brother comes and asks: 'Who are you?' 'Brother Francis,' I answer. 'Go away!' he says. 'This is not a decent hour to be wandering about! You may not come in!' When I insist, he replies: 'Go away! You are simple and stupid! Don't come back to us again! There are many of us here like you—we don't need you!' I stand again at the door and say: 'For the love of God, take me in tonight!' And he replies: 'I will not! Go to the Crosiers' place and ask there!' "I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul, would consist in this" (Francis of Assisi, "The Undated Writings: True and Perfect Joy," pp. 166-67).

Tertiaries, rejoicing in the Lord always, show in our lives the grace and beauty of divine joy. We remember that we follow the Son of Man, who came eating and drinking, who loved the birds and the flowers, who blessed little children, who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, and who sat at the tables of both the rich and the poor. We delight in fun and laughter, rejoicing in God's world, its beauty and its living creatures, calling nothing common or unclean. We mix freely with all people, ready to bind up the broken-hearted, and to bring joy into the lives of others. We carry within us an inner peace and

happiness that others may perceive, even if they do not know its source.

This joy is a divine gift, coming from union with God in Christ. It is still there even in times of darkness and difficulty, giving cheerful courage in the face of disappointment, and an inward serenity and confidence through sickness and suffering. Those who possess it can rejoice in weakness, insults, hardship, and persecutions for Christ's sake; for when they are weak, then they are strong.

The humility, love, and joy, which mark the lives of Tertiaries, are all God-given graces. They can never be obtained by human effort. They are gifts of the Holy Spirit. The purpose of Christ is to work miracles through people who are willing to be emptied of self and to surrender to him. We then become channels of grace through whom his mighty work is done. (The Principles, Days 28-30).

Joy Is Deeper and More Profound

Out of seeking to be immersed deeply with God's love comes the joy of being loved that permeates all things with serenity and inner peace. The joy then becomes a trait or characteristic that is also reflected in our own lives, cutting through pain and suffering with trust as well as being present in times of pleasure and comfort. It also becomes a characteristic underlying all relationships, service and action. Joy is a jewel with many facets: faith and hope, play and laughter, creativity, discovery, compassion, peace and enthusiasm. It sustains us in pain and sorrow, grief and loss, as well as in times of happiness. If we let it, God's love is sufficient to uphold us no matter what our condition.

Joy is far deeper and more profound than career fulfillment, contentment with our lot in life or a gratifying servant ministry. The joy beyond all joys is intimated in John's Gospel. Jesus tells his disciples, "Your pain will turn into joy...I will see you again and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you" (John 16.20-22). And he prays, "I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves" (John 17.13). Clearly, the joy that marks Franciscans is joy in Christ—a joy immeasurable, the joy of total self-giving, the joy of devoted simplicity, the joy of obedient servanthood. Chastity, simplicity and obedience may lead to joy but are not joy. Yet, it is often precisely at those moments when we experience pleasure while following our Rule and while being and doing in the world that the fullness of joy in the God who made us, redeemed us and sanctifies us permeates us.

Joy is the spirit of love that comes to each of us, unhurriedly, as we open ourselves to God, as we relinquish and release our all into God, and as we know God's love ever surrounds us. Joy, then, is the simplest form of gratitude. It is knowing that God is our God and our All.

Our Joy Comes from Appreciating God's Delight in Us

Joy comes with looking inward with love and appreciating God's delight in what God sees in you, and in seeking lovingly to serve and be served by all freely, without attachment or expectation. Francis gave us a definition of perfect joy. He imagined a blustery, snowy night when he was on the road, cold and hungry. He imagined knocking at the door of his friary and being rudely turned away, beaten even. Yet, in spite of his brothers' abusive treatment, Francis was able to love his errant brothers (Francis of Assisi, "The Undated Writings: True and Perfect Joy," pp. 166-67). This is perfect joy because it is humanly impossible to love in such a circumstance; only the Spirit of Jesus enables such love. Joy is being perfected in, by and through Christ. Joy, like love, is unconditional and, like humility, serves without expectation. Perfect joy is perfect union with Christ.

Each of the three Notes is a gift from our Creator God, poured out freely by God's love. It is for us to open the gifts, take them into ourselves and seek to imitate Jesus and Francis by reflecting humility, love and joy in all aspects of our lives.

Reflection Questions:

1. When have you felt great joy in your life?
2. What things in life keep you from experiencing joy?
3. Of the three Notes, which area is most troublesome to you? Which is hardest to understand? Which is hardest to incorporate in your life?

III.24. The Contemplative within the Franciscan Vocation

Bernard is Convinced by Francis' Contemplative Prayer

The first companion of Saint Francis was Brother Bernard of Assisi, who converted in this way. Saint Francis was still in secular clothing, though he had already despised the world, and was going about all despised and mortified by penance, so that many considered him a fool....Sir Bernard of Assisi, who was one of the noblest and richest and wisest people of the city, wisely began to consider Saint Francis; his great scorn for the world; his great patience in injuries. Even after being so despised and scorned by everyone for two years, he always seemed even more constant and patient. He began to think and say to himself: "It cannot be that this Francis does not have great grace from God." And he invited him one evening for supper and lodging; and Saint Francis accepted and dined with him in the evening and lodged there.

Then Sir Bernard decided in his heart to examine his holiness. He had a bed prepared in his own chamber, in which a lamp always burned at night. And Saint Francis, to conceal his holiness, as soon as he entered the chamber jumped into bed and gave the appearance of sleeping. And Sir Bernard also, after a little while, lay down and began to snore loudly, as if he were sleeping very deeply. Then Saint Francis, truly believing that Sir Bernard was sleeping, during the first time of sleep, got up from the bed and set himself to praying, lifting his eyes and his hands to heaven, and with great devotion and fervor said: "My God, My God." Saying this, and sobbing, he remained like this until early morning, constantly repeating, "My God, My God," and nothing else. And Saint Francis said this while contemplating and admiring the excellence of the Divine Majesty, which had kindly come down to the perishing world, and through Francis, His little poor man, had prepared to offer a healing remedy for his own soul and that of others. Enlightened by the Holy Spirit, or through the spirit of prophecy, foreseeing the great things that God would do through him and his Order, and considering his own incapacity and small virtue, he was calling and praying to God that, by His mercy and omnipotence, without which human frailty can do nothing, he should supply, help, and fulfill that which he could not do by himself. As Sir Bernard saw by the light of the lamp the very devout acts of Saint Francis, and considering devoutly the words he said, he was touched and inspired by the Holy Spirit to change his life ("The Little Flowers", pp. 567-68).

Francis is Carried Beyond Himself in Prayer

Many times [Francis] was suspended in such an excess of contemplation, that he was carried away above himself and, experiencing what is beyond human understanding, he was unaware of what went on about him.

For instance, one time when he was traveling through Borgo San Sepolcro, a heavily populated town, and was riding on a donkey because of physical weakness, crowds rushed to meet him out of devotion. He was touched by them, pulled and shoved by them, yet he seemed not to feel any of this, and as if he were a lifeless corpse, did not notice what was going on around him. Long after the contemplator of heaven, as if returning from somewhere else, anxiously asked when they would be reaching Borgo (Bonaventure, p. 606).

Francis Integrated the Contemplative and Active Dimensions

The Franciscan way seeks to follow Jesus faithfully in the manner of St. Francis, who integrated the contemplative and active dimensions of human life, and sought understanding and union with God through solitude. By God's grace, and through wholehearted faith and trust in God, Francis prayed himself into the very experience of God, into the heart of Love. The fruit of this contemplative experience was that Francis actively shared God's love and mercy with others. He saw Jesus in everyone he met and in every circumstance he faced. Francis experienced the presence of God both in solitude and in community. He overcame the boundaries between the contemplative and the active life so that we may refer to the Franciscan vocation as contemplative living or contemplative action, or an offering of the inner life to the workplace.

The terms "*meditation*" and "*contemplation*" are often used interchangeably, but they are not synonymous. Meditation is a form of prayer that involves intentional listening to God. Meditation is practiced in a variety of ways including use of the breath, mantras, devotional rituals, and body disciplines. Contemplation is the state of awareness, normally achieved through meditation that may be described as "intimacy with God" or "being in God's presence."

Contemplative practice may be expressed in community, in solitude, or in the workplace. While a solitary is most likely a contemplative, a contemplative is not necessarily a solitary, even though contemplative prayer requires time spent in solitude in order to reach the place of silence and the opening of the heart. Tertiaries called to a contemplative vocation are not solitaries *per se*, even if they

live alone. Contemplatives in the Third Order live out their call within the context of a community that offers support, accountability and balance.

Contemplation, Prayer and Life

The primary “doing” of contemplatives is prayer, even when they are engaged in active service. For example, a contemplative may serve at a soup kitchen but rather than focusing on the details of the meal and seeing that each person is fed, the contemplative focuses on seeing Christ in each person and praying for that person while serving them. Both modes of being are essential--the active service on behalf of others and the contemplative listening for God through and on behalf of others. The daily life of a contemplative and an active need not necessarily look different; however, their perspectives are distinct. While the active focuses on how to heal our broken world with God’s help, the contemplative listens to the pain of the world and for God’s presence in the midst of it.

The personal Rule of the Third Order prescribes an intentional life of contemplative action. Tertiaries merge prayer with ministry through common prayer (the Daily Office), personal prayer, and work. In our daily life of prayer and work, we try to live into the experience of God by increased awareness of God’s consecration of the world, as we attempt to serve God and reflect God’s love to others. Experiencing God’s passionate love for us just as we are right now leads us to communion with God (contemplation) and love for others (action).

Our *Principles* confirm that prayer is the primary work of some tertiaries, who “give prayer a large part in their daily lives.” Others are called to active work and are challenged to “guard the time we have allotted to it [prayer] from interruption” (*The Principles*, Day 16). While we tend to think of work as an activity in the world, Chapter I.9 describes work as an integral part of our prayer and worship life. It goes on to identify all sorts of work, from the daily job to social ministry to a life of contemplation. “Work” is commonly associated with social and active service, but the work of contemplation is an equal and vital way that tertiaries serve God and others. The balance between contemplation and action, exemplified by Jesus and Francis, is found in the collective work of Third Order Franciscans. Tertiaries are encouraged to remember that ours is not an either/or life, but that each of us over the course of our life is called to alternate periods of long or short duration when either work or contemplative prayer is paramount.

How we live out the contemplative life varies from person to person in the same way that the active life holds unlimited variety. Some may live an almost solitary life style, while others may quietly listen to God as they go about their daily life. For all of us, the contemplative aspect of our vocation means a daily dedication to waiting, listening, and being open to God. It requires discipline, self-emptying and obedience. The contemplative life is sometimes a hidden life since it involves solitude and is not “product-oriented.” Tertiaries called to such a life often experience feelings of loneliness or exclusion. If these feelings dominate, it may signal that the vocation is not a “fit” and the matter should be discussed with a spiritual director. On the other hand, if they are offset by a more profound sense of peace, love and joy, then tertiaries should continue their practice and share with others called to a similar life.

Contemplation Within Our Third Order Community

There are many opportunities within the Third Order, to share contemplative practices with one another:

- reading and submitting articles to the *Franciscan Times*;
- attending a silent retreat with other tertiaries;
- encouraging local Fellowships to discuss individual prayer lives at their meetings;
- encouraging the local Fellowships to engage in silent community prayer at each meeting;
- encouraging Regional Convocations to allocate a set period of silence; and
- finding a local group with which to practice meditation in community for support, accountability and growth.

While some are called to make contemplation their primary work, all tertiaries are mandated to spend time in solitude and silence listening to, abiding with, and ultimately resting in God. During meditation, God affects us at the deepest levels of our being. Through meditation we listen intentionally to a loving Spirit who has already spoken to us. Our hearts open up to God in a continuing prayer over which we have no control and words seem to fade away. We desire God, as God desires us.

Forms of Meditation

Some forms of meditation involve sitting quietly, while other forms incorporate movement. Several resources are available to help with exploring

meditation: books, both modern and ancient, the Internet, speakers and classes, friends and clergy in your home parish. Your spiritual director may be able offer guidance as you experiment with various methods of meditation. Give the Holy Spirit time and space to guide you through this new practice.

Common tools for meditation include:

- **Mantras:** typically a few syllables or words, sung or said over and over, so that the heart quiets and the Spirit speaks over the chanting in a small voice in the depths of the soul. The Jesus Prayer, “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,” is a classic Christian mantra.
- **Prayer images or icons:** an external and internal focus on a visual image. This is a good way to gain insight into scripture and into ourselves. Morton Kelsey’s book, *The Other Side of Silence* is a good resource for this technique.
- **Lectio Divina:** a short reading from the Holy Scriptures that makes God present. This is a way to listen intently to God’s Word. It is done by reading a text of scripture two or three times until a word, phrase or image strikes you; then allowing that word, phrase or image to lead your reflections. The silence that follows allows time for us to engage with the Word so that it sinks into our heart.
- **Movement:** repeated or sustained physical motion to achieve focus. *Tai Chi* and *Yoga* are two popular forms.
- **The Rosary:** using a chain of beads to follow a prescribed order of prayers. The *Devotional Companion* contains a few Rosary forms to explore. Several different rosary styles are available – Benedictine, Franciscan Crown, and Anglican.
- **Journaling:** a good tool for focusing your meditations and prayers, as well as keeping a record of them. A journal allows you to take stock of where you have been, and perhaps where you are going. As a reflective tool, journaling with words, poems, art work, or feelings and impressions can become a focused time for meditation.
- **Activities:** activities that require repetitive action with little managing of thought, like knitting, quilting, gardening, jogging or washing dishes, can be used as a vehicle for meditation, as can creative acts such as painting, dancing or playing a musical instrument.

One Form of Meditation Is Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is one method that incorporates many of the basic steps common to most forms of meditation. It is a simple, easily learned method that

can lead to profound transformation in our lives. As we practice the prayer on a regular basis the shell of our false self is chipped away to reveal our true self, the person God calls us to be. This process of chipping away can sometimes be uncomfortable. But God never leads us anywhere we are not ready to go.

Centering Prayer is rooted in the practice of the early church, the teachings of the desert mothers and fathers, and the writings of Theresa of Avila, John of the Cross and the author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* among others. The prayer in its present form was developed at St. Joseph's Abbey in Spenser, Massachusetts by Cistercian monks Basil Pennington, John Menninger, and Thomas Keating in the hopes of making this ancient practice more accessible to Christians living in today's world.

A session of Centering Prayer follows four steps or guidelines:

1. *Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.*

The sacred word is often a name for God—Father, Abba, Lord, or a more general word with a contemplative feeling—peace, love, silence. The word should be short, one or two syllables, and not too emotionally charged to avoid distraction. The word is not significant in its self. It is sacred because it becomes the symbol of our intention to consent. The sacred word is not a mantra. It is a tool to help detach from thoughts and enter a quiet space. It is repeated only when we become engaged with our thoughts and are pulled away from that quiet space. The sacred word can be changed at the beginning of any prayer period but it is not advisable to change the word during a prayer period. This becomes one more thought or distraction.

2. *Sit comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.*

Most people sit in a chair, backs straight, feet on the floor. Some place their feet on a cushion or block. Other people prefer sitting cross-legged on a cushion or using a prayer bench. Any option that keeps you alert and comfortable will do.

3. *When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.* Thoughts are normal and inevitable; they are not the enemy. Our goal is to detach from the thoughts so that even as we are aware of them passing by we do not become involved with them or distracted from our stated intention to consent to God's presence and action. The flow of finding ourselves drifting

away from our intention and then gently returning is the pattern of Centering Prayer. Each time we return to the sacred word we have once more said yes to God and opened ourselves to a deeper relationship with God.

4. *At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.*

A prayer of Thanksgiving is often prayed at this time.

Do not judge your prayer period. In Centering Prayer we consent to God's action. It is God who does the work in our prayer period. We are not in charge and cannot know what work God has done within us during our prayer time.

It is recommended to practice a minimum of twenty minutes of Centering Prayer twice a day. Some newcomers to the Prayer find it easier to begin with shorter or fewer periods of prayer and work toward the recommended practice time.

More information on Centering Prayer is available at contemplativeoutreach.org and in the writings of Thomas Keating, particularly his book *Open Mind, Open Heart* (Keating).

Reflection Questions:

1. How do you think meditation and contemplation are similar? How are they different?
2. Why would you agree or disagree with the statement that meditation is a form of self-denial?
3. What form of meditation do you use now? What benefit might arise in trying a new form?

III.25. The Active within the Franciscan Vocation

Francis Explains How Action Reveals Truth

While Francis was staying in Siena, someone from the Order of Preachers happened to arrive; he was a spiritual man and a Doctor of Sacred Theology. He visited blessed Francis, and he and the holy man enjoyed a long and sweet conversation about the words of the Lord.

This teacher asked him about the words of Ezekiel: If you do not warn the wicked man about his wickedness, I will hold you responsible for his soul. “I’m acquainted with many people, good father, who live in mortal sin, as I’m aware. But I don’t always warn them about their wickedness. Will I then be held responsible for their souls?”

Blessed Francis then said that he was an unlettered man, and it would be better for him to be taught by the other rather than to answer a question about Scripture. But that humble teacher replied: “Brother, it’s true I have heard these words explained by some wise men; still, I’d be glad to hear how you understand it.” So blessed Francis said to him: “If that passage is supposed to be understood in a universal sense, then I understand it to mean that a servant of God should be burning with life and holiness so brightly, that by the light of example and the tongue of his conduct, he will rebuke all the wicked. In that way, I say, the brightness of his life and the fragrance of his reputation will proclaim their wickedness to all of them.”

That man went away greatly edified, and said to the companions of blessed Francis: “My brothers, the theology of this man, held aloft by purity and contemplation, is a soaring eagle, while our learning crawls on its belly on the ground (“The Assisi Compilation”, pp. 140-41).”

Being in the World is the Vocation of Action

One part of the tertiary’s life of service is contemplation, and the other is action. Both action and contemplation are essential to the Christian life and to the Franciscan vocation.

Being *in* the world is the vocation of action. While action may take *individual* forms, it is above all an expression that every human lives in interdependent *community*. Jesus came to usher in the Reign of God, and he

called upon his disciples to “follow me” (Mark 1.17). He preached and lived a different system of values, those of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7).

When Francis rejected the wealth of his father and chose Lady Poverty, he confronted the system of social privilege. He rejected the knights of the city-states and the Pope’s armies and instead chose fealty to Jesus Christ (“Legend of the Three Companions“, pp. 69-70). Francis also confronted the ways of war. In the midst of the Crusades, he went behind enemy lines, unarmed, to try to convert the Sultan with the message of love rather than violence. Francis discovered in the Sultan another human being who also was distressed by the killing and acts of war. Francis and the Sultan became friends, respecting each other, and both worked for peace building (Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, pp. 229-33).

When we think of other heroes of faith, we remember their exemplary actions, the way they showed Christ to the world by demonstrating Gospel values. We admire folks who gave their lives to the causes of justice and peace. Names that come to mind include Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dorothy Day, Oscar Romero and Dietrich Bonhoeffer; and heroes from our own Province such as H. Baxter Liebler (Apostle to the Navajos); Hugo Muller (Apostle to the Inland Cree in Northern Quebec); and Emmett Jarrett (a leader of our *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation*). But we should not let our awe of these individuals excuse us to ignore our own call to justice in our individual lives. For it is in the daily round of ordinary activity that each of us may show ourselves to be prophetic people of action.

The Cost of a Vocation of Action

Sometimes tertiaries face ridicule and harassment in our communities and workplaces for upholding Gospel values. Too easily we allow ourselves to be overwhelmed by the challenges we face in our world. We think that our small actions won’t make a difference. But the actions of each person do matter, regardless how seemingly small and insignificant.

Some of our members are called to make great sacrifices for the cause of justice. Within our Third Order community there may be a person who goes to the Middle East as a witness for peace and justice; another who works with communities of undocumented immigrants and refugees; still others work toward economic justice or racial reconciliation, or stand in solidarity with low-wage workers. A number of members work for the rights of indigenous

communities of Latin America. Other tertiaries work for the rights of prisoners, or toward the protection of our environment. Tertiaries can be found serving in many peace, justice, and environmental networks in the Anglican Communion (and other denominational bodies as well).

Our Responsibility to Attempt to Understand the Values and Structures of Our Economies

These are complex issues, but it is our responsibility as Franciscans to attempt to understand the underlying values and structures of our economies that can manifest themselves in racism, cultural pride, and oppression of entire human communities. We are blessed in our Province to represent countries from Canada to South America. We consist of industrial societies, rural communities, indigenous cultures and a variety of languages. It is important that we find ways to be in dialogue and community with each other.

One caution: It is very easy to get caught up in intense emotions by doing social justice work. We may be subject to personal attack; anger is a natural response when we witness racism, economic oppression, and other evils, or are targets of these systems. It is at these times that we must be fervent in our prayer life and realize that the Jesus who spoke truth to power guides us in this work, and calls us to love even through our anger and hurt.

How we interact with others in the world day in and day out matters. Do we interact with patience? With honesty (with oneself and with others)? With cooperation and not competition? With welcome, especially toward the stranger? Do we notice who is left out? Or who is having a hard time? Do we seek to give assistance when needed and advocate when necessary, accompanying our brothers and sisters who are being oppressed by unjust systems?

Tertiaries must make it possible for entire communities to work together for justice and environmental sustainability. It is relatively easy for people of means to make individual economic decisions that are more fair or just (purchasing free-range eggs, electric cars, etc.), but we should not forget deeper, systemic solutions that may require more involvement and advocacy. Such solutions range from the local (establishing community gardens and food co-ops, for example) to regional, national and international laws and practices.

Gospel Values are Not the World's Values

Christians are called to live out Gospel values and deny values of self-interest, competition, exploitation, and violence. Clearly Christian witness is not something that can be done in isolation. When we face the challenges, the difficult choices, even the sacrifices that have to be made to live out the values of humility, poverty, self-denial, and peacemaking, then we begin to know the value of community. We need our sisters and brothers not only to support us but also to hold us accountable.

Franciscans have the opportunity to be seeds for transformation in a world that needs healing. Corporate policies that exploit resources without care of our fragile earth and that seek short term profits do so at a high cost.

We can respond by standing in solidarity, by advocating for just environmental policies, encouraging fair trade, and reducing our own consumption. Christians, especially followers in the Way of St. Francis, are challenged to model a new way of being in the world, and speak out against injustice the way that Jesus lived and preached, and which St. Francis emulated.

Food banks and giving money to causes have been the centerpiece of church outreach programs. This is important work, but, it has its place in a continuum towards liberating the poor and oppressed. As told by Luke (4.16-20), Jesus began his public ministry by reading a passage from Isaiah (61.1-2) that speaks proclaiming good news to the poor, recovery of sight to the blind, and setting at liberty those who are captive and oppressed. As Jesus' followers, we are also called to do this.

Charity is important, especially in times of natural disasters. For instance, food banks are crucial where there is hunger and no easy access to food. Most often there is no face-to-face relationship between the giver and receiver in this kind of charity.

Providing direct services, e.g., for meals, are occasions when the "givers" and "receivers" have a chance to meet face-to-face. We hear stories and begin to understand why people are struggling, such as the homeless, hungry, or sick. These reasons are most often not the fault of the victims, but of oppressive systems that make it hard for many people to prosper.

Advocacy for public policy measures can create a more just society. The Third Order is a member of the Franciscan Action Network (FAN), a public policy advocacy ministry based in Washington DC (franciscanaction.org). At the time of this writing, this network is limited to US policy, but the model is adaptable to other countries. Since 1986, Franciscans International (FI) has been a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) at the United Nations (UN) in New York and Geneva, Switzerland. With Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) status at the UN, Franciscans International contributes to the UN's programs and goals, and consults governments on local policies. FI also aims to educate and mobilize Franciscans from all denominational branches of the Franciscan Family tree including our the Third Order on international issues of justice and peace.

Reflection Questions:

1. Examine how contemplation and action function in your life today. How does each one support the other? Do you feel these two are balanced in your Rule? In your life?
2. After reading this chapter, do you feel moved to become more involved in issues of social justice or ecology? What changes do you feel God may be asking you to make in your outward response or internal attitudes toward these issues?
3. If you are able and have opportunity, contact your government representatives to share your opinions on issues that are important to you. Talk about that experience with your formation counselor.

III.26. Francis and Creation

St. Francis Preaches to the Birds

While many were joining the brothers..., the blessed father Francis was travelling through the Spoleto valley. He reached a place near Bevagna, in which a great multitude of birds of different types gathered, including doves, crows, and others commonly called monaclae (magpie). When Francis, the most blessed servant of God, saw them, he ran swiftly toward them, leaving his companions on the road. He was a man of great fervor, feeling much sweetness and tenderness even toward lesser, irrational creatures. When he was already very close, seeing that they awaited him, he greeted them in his usual way [that is, with the greeting, “The Lord give you peace.”] He was quite surprised, however, because the birds did not take flight, as they usually do. Filled with great joy, he humbly requested that they listen to the word of God.

Among many other things, he said to them: “My brother birds, you should greatly praise your Creator, and love Him always. He gave you feathers to wear, wings to fly, and whatever you need. God made you noble among His creatures and gave you a home in the purity of the air, so that though you neither sow nor reap, He nevertheless protects and governs you without your least care.” He himself, and those brothers who were with him, used to say that, at these words, the birds rejoiced in a wonderful way according to their nature. They stretched their necks, spread their wings, opened their beaks and looked at him. He passed through their midst, coming and going, touching their heads and bodies with his tunic. Then he blessed them, and having made the sign of the cross, gave them permission to fly off to another place. The blessed father, however, went with his companions along their way rejoicing and giving thanks to God, Whom all creatures revere by their devout confession.

He was already simple by grace, not by nature. After the birds had listened so reverently to the word of God, he began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to them before. From that day on, he carefully exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator, because daily, invoking the name of the Savior, he observed their obedience in his own experience (Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis”, p. 234).

Intimacy With Creation: A Franciscan Charism

The popular garden statue of St. Francis with a bird perched on his hand celebrates his love of God's creation. And Francis did, in fact, have an intimate relationship with the created world around him. But what many people ignore is the truly radical way he lived out that relationship. This charism of intimacy with creation is one that twenty-first century Franciscans must embrace as an example and impetus to the general population to do the same. The current (and future) ecological, environmental, and health crises that storm the world reflect our loss of reverence for our earth, for the holiness of creation, and for our utter dependence upon it.

Throughout the writings about Francis, we see the interplay between him and the natural world. Francis preached to birds and flowers, cornfields and vineyards, stones and forests (Thomas of Celano, "The Life of Saint Francis", p. 234). He made peace between a wolf and the town of Gubbio ("The Little Flowers", pp. 601-02). A falcon befriended him and served as his alarm clock (Thomas of Celano, "The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul", pp. 355-56). He had his most profound mystical experience, the Stigmata, not in a church building, but on the side of Mount La Verna (Bonaventure, pp. 632-34).

His dying request was that he be laid naked on mother earth as a symbol of his profound love for creation (Bonaventure, p. 642). In his most eloquent writing, the *Canticle of the Creatures*, he expressed this relationship with all God's creatures by calling them members of his family: Brother Sun, Sister Moon, Brother Wind and Air, Sister Water, Brother Fire and Sister Earth (Francis of Assisi, "The Canticle of the Creatures", pp. 113-14).

Francis' passion for God's creation was more than an appreciation of nature; it was a profound living out of what he believed in his heart. He lived during the same period as the Cathari or Albigensian heretical movement. Partly in a reaction to the corruption of the church by greed and lax moral standards, the Cathari offered a dualistic worldview that held that there were two powers, one evil and responsible for the material world, and the other good and the maker of the immaterial world.

The worldview held by people of Francis' time is one we can scarce imagine. Our scientific cause and effect understanding of the world had not yet emerged. Francis lived before the time of the scientific revolution brought about by the ideas and discoveries of Copernicus, Newton, Darwin, and Bacon. His

worldview, which we might call “pre-critical,” was probably similar to the time of Jesus wherein epilepsy, mental illness, leprosy and other dreaded conditions were attributed to spiritual forces rather than to physiology. God was seen as integrally involved with the created order at every level. God caused the sun to rise in the morning and to set in the evening. God caused the plants to grow and the conditions of rain and heat that contributed to their growth. In other words, Francis lived in a world that was intimately involved with nature. Its day-to-day reliance on the natural world was explicit.

Humankind was subject to the elements, unprotected by modern-day concrete, steel and plastic. While trade was well established, the thirteenth century economy primarily relied on local resources. Food was grown locally and buildings were made from indigenous materials.

Intimacy With Creation: A Franciscan Charism in the 21st Century

New scientific understandings after Francis’ time have drastically altered our relationship to creation. The Copernican revolution, initially denied by the church as an affront to its primitive cosmology, turned upside down people’s perception of themselves as the center of the universe. The theories of Darwin continue to challenge how the faithful reconcile the biblical creation myths with scientific data and historical discoveries. The Industrial Revolution’s esteem of progress combined with the Enlightenment’s humanistic ideas fostered a self-serving use of nature that greatly diminished consideration for the needs of our fragile earth. The resultant scientific and mechanized worldview has largely separated God’s hand from the created order.

And we, who are ever increasing in population, have been displaced from the land and urbanized. Far too many of us are encased in artificial worlds with environmental controls which seem to function without earth and sky, pure water or green plants. If it is dark, we turn on lights; if it is dry, we open a faucet; if it is cold, we fire up a heater. Our innate relationship with the earth is fractured, and so we live our lives without regard to demands upon the earth’s resources. Instead, we favor short-term gains with little to no thought about harm to the environment.

“We know that the whole creation has been groaning,” wrote St. Paul to the Romans (8.22). These words are also written to us. Knowing that the hurt creation is suffering, we as Franciscans are called to be a resource to the peoples of the world, to inspire a new reverence for the gifts of creation and to recover the innate

intimacy between God, humans and nature. If, in the face of such all-encompassing degradation, the task seems overwhelming, remember it only takes one person to make a world of difference, and that we are more than individuals; we are part of a community. One way to realize we are responding in community to the environmental crisis is to refer to the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) resources on our website: www.tssf.org/resources-links/jpic-#resources/. Or, have a look at our larger Episcopal Church's community site for the Episcopal Ecological Network: www.eenonline.org, or from South Africa: www.greenanglicans.org.

How to Recover Our Intimacy With Creation

To begin to recover your own intimate relationship with nature, plant and care for something green. During a trip, one of our tertiaries hired a young woman to house-sit. One of her tasks was watering the garden. The pay was better than expected: "I was watering the plants today and realized how relaxing and peaceful that was to do, to tend to plants and take care of them. You may have converted me!" the young woman exclaimed. Indeed, gardening is an effective means to start and stay on the spiritual path. Gardening satisfies many basic human needs from supplying food and beauty, to being a creative outlet and a sure method to engage in our created world.

Ecological breakdown and expanded understandings of God have inspired writers such as Thomas Berry, Nancy Roth, Brian Swimme, Mathew Fox, and Wendell Berry to articulate a renewed vision of the intricate relationships between the Creator and creatures, including human beings. The complex interactions between the plants, the animals and the earth herself, along with the exquisitely balanced relationships between matter and energy are humbling. God is not only the Creator of all that is but is present in the very bonds that hold the universe together. We, humans, are not in control of nature, but can alter its course.

An appreciation of the relationships among all aspects of creation and the Creator reveals the unity and interdependence of all. We are moved beyond our "critical" understanding of matter and energy, our tendency to separate and analyze, to a second naiveté that can once again cherish, with Francis, our relationship to the world around us.

Through an incarnational spirituality that celebrates the God who stepped into time and became flesh in the person of Jesus, we, along with Francis,

recognize our precious relatives--the sun and moon, water and earth. And we celebrate and praise the almighty, omnipotent good Lord who holds together this wondrous diversity of creation in a unity of creative love.

Today, our world has been made smaller by the feverish evolution of technology. We are more aware than ever of environmental issues and called to deal with them in a more holistic way. Regulations need to be “harmonized” throughout the world; we need to pay attention and learn from one another how to regulate industry and how to care for creation. We need to be more conscious of our environment on a daily basis and to seek ways to become a more sustainable world society. We need to insist on finding ways, in industry and personally, to reduce, reuse, and recycle in order to minimize waste and the use of virgin materials. We need to become less indulgent and more thoughtful; we need to concentrate less on comfort and consumption and more on care of our Sister Earth. We need to waste less and share more.

Within our own Rules, especially in the areas of prayer, self-denial, simplicity and work, we can become better stewards of God’s creation by addressing our personal lifestyles. We can:

- make use of the many resources available, especially from our own Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) task force;
- read and reflect on Francis’s *Canticle of the Creatures*;
- grow something, either at home or in a community garden;
- find ways to drive less. Walk, bike, use and support public transportation, carpools, and vehicles that are more environmentally-friendly;
- reduce, reuse, and recycle;
- choose items with less packaging, for example, or provide our own non-disposable shopping bags;
- accumulate less; with open hands, pass on your less-needed possessions to those with greater need;
- support the development of new technologies that reduce fossil fuel usage;
- lower the thermostat in the winter and raise it in the summer;
- pick up trash along roadsides;
- use environmentally-friendly products to clean, such as baking soda and vinegar; and to control pests, such as dish soap, cooking oil and mint;
- work to strengthen environmental and global awareness in our parishes and schools; and

- be aware, look around, notice our impact on creation and realize that changes made individually do make a difference towards preserving its beauty, recovery and integrity.

Francis adored God's creation. He saw it as all good, beautiful, and bountiful. Let us imitate his way by enjoying our modern world while behaving in a holistic manner for a sustainable society.

Reflection Questions:

1. How are you engaging, in concrete ways, in the care of creation?
2. This chapter describes some of the interplay between Francis and his environment. How would you describe your own relationship with the rest of creation?

IV.27. History of the Third Order in the Province of the Americas

Francis Finds the Third Order

He took Brother Masseo and Brother Angelo as his companions, both holy men. He went like a thunderbolt driven in spirit, paying no attention to road or path, until they came to a town called Cannara. There he preached with such fervor, and by a miracle swallows kept silent at his command, so the people of Cannara, men and women, wanted him to leave the town and follow him. However Saint Francis said to them, “Don’t be hasty! I will arrange what you should do for your salvation.” From that time on he thought about making a Third Order for the salvation of everyone everywhere (Ugolino, p. 469).

On April 23, Luchesio and Buonadonna are remembered in our Third Order Calendar. They were a married couple who encountered Francis around 1209 and wanted to follow Christ after his pattern. However, they had already taken marriage vows, and thus needed to remain outside a cloister. In response to their wish and vowed circumstances, Francis implemented the idea he had been mulling over since preaching in Cannara; Francis founded the Third Order.

By founding the Third Order, Francis created a spiritual revolution. Now everyone was recognized as equal in spiritual importance—men and women, married and celibates, kings and paupers, clergy and lay. The Franciscan Third Order in all its manifestations has become the largest religious order in the world.

The Third Order existed in England until, around 1540, Henry VIII abolished all religious Orders in the Anglican Church.

Re-Founding the Third Order (TSF) in the Episcopal Church in the Americas

With the Oxford Movement in the 1830s, the Anglican Church began again to recognize religious Orders. This Anglo-Catholic, Oxford Movement sought to integrate the heritage and liturgies of Christianity prior to the Reformation into the Post-Reformation Anglican Church (Reed).

In 1898, Graymoor Friary in Garrison, New York was the site of the first Franciscan Order in the Episcopal Church, the Society of the Atonement. This Society created the *Week of Prayer for Christian Unity* (1908) still celebrated in our “Third Order Calendar” between January 18th to 25th. However, in their

movement towards Christian unity, this Episcopal Order advocated the primacy of the Pope. Such a position became untenable, and, in 1909, the Order's two friars, five sisters and ten tertiaries left the Episcopal Church to join the Roman Catholic Church (Anson, p. 594).

When the Order of the Atonement left the Episcopal Church, some men and women in New York formed a group to pray for the re-formation of an Episcopal Franciscan Order. Nineteen-year-old Claude Crookston emerged as a leader of this group. Just as Francis made many mistakes and went on many detours as he slowly came to understand God's call to "Rebuild My Church," Crookston also had many false starts, mistakes, and detours as he sought to establish Franciscan Orders in the Episcopal Church.

Eight years later in Cincinnati, while he was Assistant Rector at St. Luke's Church, on February 2, 1917, Crookston dedicated himself to a Franciscan vocation as a First Order brother and took on his religious name, Father Joseph. Three months later in May, three women began living a religious life together at the "House of Our Lady, Help of Christians," which was dedicated on the Feast of the Sacred Heart, June 15, 1917. At this dedication, the men and women who later began the three Orders of St. Francis (OSF) were gathered, and, by the end of the year, 18 had become novices in what was then called the Third Order Secular.

In May 1919, Father Joseph assumed duties as the rector at a church in the Diocese of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. On Holy Cross Day, September 14, 1919, Father Joseph reorganized the Third Order (TSF) as part of the *Poor Brethren of St. Francis of the American Congregation of Franciscans*. Also that day, the bishop received Father Joseph, a second priest, and a Cincinnati tertiary as postulants, thus beginning the life of the First Order.

As early as 1921, Father Joseph began work on the first comprehensive manual for the Third Order, called the *Bundle of Myrrh*. Its Anglo-Catholic character was obvious not only by its process of formation, prayers, and ceremonials, but especially its "Credenda" of eight beliefs to which members all had to ascribe. Only three novices from Cincinnati transitioned to this new stricter Rule. Many dropped out, and a number joined the First and Second Orders.

In 1929, Father Joseph and the First Order brothers moved to Little Portion Friary, Mount Sinai (Long Island), New York which became the motherhouse of the American Congregation of Franciscans. Father Joseph nurtured a loyal and supportive Third Order under the leadership and governance of the First Order. In

turn, the generosity of tertiaries enabled the First and Second Order communities to survive spiritually and financially.

The Third Order (TSF) of the *American Congregation of Franciscans* Merged with The Third Order (TSSF) of the *British Society of St. Francis* in 1967

For 51 years, Fr. Joseph led the American Congregation of Franciscans (OSF brothers, Poor Clares, and TSF) in very Anglo-Catholic traditions. By the mid-1960s, the number of OSF brothers had diminished to the point where they could not be sustained. Realizing changes were necessary; in 1967, Fr. Joseph stepped down; Brother Paul was elected Minister General; and, negotiations began for merging of the British (SSF) and American Congregation of Franciscans.

Members of the American Third Order were not consulted about the merger, and were greatly opposed to it, primarily because many of the Anglo-Catholic practices would have to be abandoned. The American Third Order had had little or no contact with their British counterparts, who had developed with a stronger call to local community life in the manner of Roman Catholic Third Order Franciscan communities. Had the merger of the American and British Franciscan Orders not been achieved as quickly as it was, the strength of the American tertiary opposition might have prevented it (Dunstan, pp. 219-24).

TSF had to give up many things to become TSSF: the wearing of habits, its reliance on the manuals created by Father Joseph, religious names received at profession, a sense of Little Portion Friary as the motherhouse, and the beliefs of the “Credenda“. However, two unique items were retained in our Province: the requirement to pray the Daily Office, and to participate annually in the sacrament of reconciliation.

With the merger, the TSF experience was grafted onto the TSSF *Principles* originally developed in the 1920’s in India. In India a group of Anglo and Indian Christians, married and single, clergy and lay, created a community, *Christa Seva Sangha*—the Community of the Love of Christ. An English priest, Jack Winslow, began this group where members lived together as a family. One of its leaders, Fr. Algy (Third Order Calendar, November 23) became ill and had to return to England whereupon he brought the principles and dreams of *Christa Seva Sangha* to the West.

TSSF in the American Province Moves Towards Autonomy and Independence from the First Order

While the merger was proceeding, there was a movement here in the American Province to make the Third Order more independent of the First Order and self-sustaining. A critical area to work on was the creation of a formation process. Peter Funk became the first Novice Director, writing 22 formation letters outlining different elements of a tertiary's Franciscan life. The current version of *Forming the Life of a Franciscan* is a direct descendant of Peter Funk's work.

We also needed someone to handle the administrative duties that the First Order Brothers had previously performed. The role of Guardian was created, and Chapter elected John Scott (1973-80) to this new role. He brought a passion for peace and justice that has since become a key element of our Franciscan life.

The challenges to the unity of this new Third Order Province were great. A number of issues were dividing the Episcopal Church and the Third Order, including the Philadelphia Eleven, the first Episcopal women ordained as priests in 1974; and the first openly gay woman ordained as an Episcopal priest in 1977. Much sensitivity was required to reconcile the varied theological perspectives in the Province.

TSSF in the Caribbean and South America

Since the 1950s, our Province included members from Canada, but it was not until 1976 that the Order began to include Caribbean members. Jacqueline Richards was the first Trinidadian to be professed (1980), and this was the crowning achievement of five years of growth. Brother Dunstan's work was critical to the success of the Third Order growth in the Caribbean and South America. From Trinidad and Tobago, the Third Order grew to include members in Jamaica and Nevis as well as Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, and Guyana.

Community Life in the Province of the Americas: General Chapters, Provincial Convocations, Regional Convocations, and Fellowships

During the John Scott era, Chapter sponsored General Chapters (now called Provincial Convocations) to which all tertiaries were invited. These General Chapters were, in many cases, the only occasion for tertiaries to gather in groups

outside of local Fellowship meetings. During Denalta (Dee) Dobson's time as Minister Provincial (1981-90), Regional Convocations replaced Provincial Convocations.

Originally there was little attention paid to Fellowships. It wasn't until 1983 that a draft of the *Fellowship Convener's Handbook* was presented to Chapter. Such inattention to the most basic level of Third Order community began to change during Dee Dobson's time as Minister Provincial. The percent of the budget dedicated to the support of Fellowships tripled, and a champion of fellowship interests, Marie Webner, was appointed as the first Fellowship Coordinator.

Inter-Provincial Life in TSSF

At the Interprovincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC) held in June of 1987, a new pattern of autonomous but familial relationships began, with all three Orders becoming separate and self-governing. At this meeting, Robert Pope from the European Province was elected as the first TSSF Minister General. Two members of the Province of the Americas have been TSSF Minister Generals: Alden Whitney (1993-99) and Ken Norian (2011-17).

TSSF Formation Moved Contemporary Franciscanism Beyond The Anglican Communion

In 1980, UCC Minister Dale Trana Carmen petitioned the Province to accept her as a postulant, so that she could learn the spiritual disciplines with guidance. There are now about 60 members of an ecumenical branch of the Franciscan family (Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, or OEF), begun by Dale Trana Carmen in 1983 after she completed our formation program.

Province of the Americas Greatest Expansion, the Order of St. Francis (OSF) in Brazil Enters Into Relationship

In 2003 and 2004, representatives from TSSF explained the formation process and developed a covenant relationship (concordat)/ The Primate of Brazil, Dom Orlando Santos de Oliveira. Dom Orlando signed the concordat and offered ongoing support. Dom Orlando noted that the TSSF's presence was not an U.S. idea, but a response to Brazil's invitation (Pentecost 2004 *Franciscan Times*).

At Francistide 1999, the Primate Bishop of Brazil approved the Rule of Life and Statutes of the Order of Saint Francis (OSF) and canonically authorized OSF as part of the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil. In 2003, a concordat was signed between OSF Brazil and the Province of the Americas, followed by recognition and welcome to OSF into TSSF by the Interprovincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC) in August 2005. Currently, the Brazil Region of the Third Order (TSSF Brazil) functions as a semi-autonomous Region with local leadership under the jurisdiction of the Province of the Americas.

Over the last ten years, we have continued to broaden and expand our membership. There are Episcopal/Anglican professed members, or people in formation, from several Latin American countries. We are actively working to expand our presence in the Hispanic population and to find ways to bridge the language and cultural barriers that divide us.

What you have here is only the childhood and teen years of our history. To learn more about our history, go to our website, Resources and Links, and then to *History of the Province of the Americas*.

Reflection Questions:

1. Given our history, how would you like to see the Order continue to develop?
2. What strains in our history do you value most and hope to see further nurtured in the future of the Order?

IV.28. The Governance of the Order and the Province

The Chapter of Mats

The faithful servant of Christ, Saint Francis, once held a General Chapter at Saint Mary of the Angels, and at that Chapter five thousand brothers gathered. Saint Dominic came there, the head of the foundation of the Order of Brothers Preachers....Also at that Chapter there was a cardinal very devoted to Saint Francis... And that Cardinal experienced great delight and devotion when he came to visit that holy gathering. He saw the brothers sitting on that plain around Saint Mary of the Angels, group by group, forty there, there a hundred, further on eighty together, all busy in speaking of God, in prayer, in works of charity. And they remained in such silence with such modesty that no sound or loud noise could be heard. Marveling over such a crowd gathered as one in such order, he said with tears and great devotion: "This is truly the camp and the army of the knights of God!" In that great multitude no one was heard telling stories or lies, but wherever a group of brothers gathered, they either prayed or said the Office, or wept over their own sins or those of their benefactors or spoke about the salvation of souls. There in that field there were huts of mats and reeds, separated into groups for the brothers of different Provinces. For this reason, that Chapter was called the Chapter of Mats or of Reeds. Their beds were the bare ground and some had a little straw; their pillows were stones or pieces of wood. For this reason there was such devotion toward them among those who heard or saw them, and such was their reputation for holiness that many came from the pope's Court, which was then at Perugia; and from other areas of the Spoleto Valley came many counts, barons, knights and noblemen, common people, cardinals, bishops, abbots and many other clerics, to see such a holy and great and humble gathering of so many holy men together, the likes of which the world had never seen. They came particularly to see the head and most holy father of that holy people, who had robbed the world of such beautiful prey and gathered such a lovely and devout flock to follow the footprints of the true shepherd, Jesus Christ... ("The Little Flowers", pp. 595-96).

In the Beginning It Was Much Simpler

Francis began with a loosely organized band of "little brothers." It was not his intention to have a great organization with a government and rules. But then, they were only a few zealous souls seeking to follow our Lord in a new and radical way. Francis had no idea that the little group would grow from two or

three to five thousand in the space of only five years. When that happened and the need for more structure arose, Francis was frankly horrified. He went into a deep dry period and gave up his own leadership in the Order entirely. As the continuing family of our Father Francis, we too, are sometimes uncomfortable with “government,” but it takes a great deal of work and commitment on the part of many members to keep the Third Order operating and remain true to our Franciscan principles.

Provinces Within Worldwide TSSF

The Province of the Americas, our Province, is one of five TSSF provinces worldwide. The Interprovincial Third Order Chapter (IPTOC) coordinates the activities and practices of the worldwide Order.

The TSSF Minister General (elected by the Interprovincial Third Order Chapter) has oversight of all TSSF Provinces. Every six years, three representatives (Minister Provincial, Provincial Chaplain, and an elected, professed member) from each Province meet to review and coordinate the life and work of all of the Provinces. Each Province has its own Minister Provincial, Chapter (or governing body) and unique character, but we are all members of one Order working together.

The provincial government of the Province of the Americas has three general categories: the Officers, the Pastoral Officers, and the elected members of the Chapter. The officers are the Minister Provincial, Secretary and Bursar. The pastoral officers are the Provincial Chaplain, Formation Director and Fellowship Coordinator. In addition to these officers, there are seven Chapter members-at-large.

How Do Provincial Officers Get to Be Officers?

Our Bishop Protector serves as an adviser, arbitrator and advocate. All members of Chapter serve three-year terms and may serve three consecutive terms. Terms of the officers are staggered to prevent a change in all of the leadership of the Province at one time.

The Minister Provincial is nominated by the professed membership and elected by Chapter. The Minister Provincial with the consent of Chapter appoints all of the other officers. The seven members-at-large are elected by the membership.

To see a description of all of these officers' responsibility and details of how they are elected and appointed, read through the *Provincial Statutes*. Get to know your Order and how it works. The Officers will answer many questions for you and help you to understand how you can actively participate in the life of the Order.

Get to know the people who serve in these positions. They are listed in the front of the *Directory and Intercession List*, which you received as a part of the "Basics," and will receive yearly thereafter. A brief one-line description of most these positions is included in Appendix A at the end of this document. After you review the names of the Officers, turn the page and look at the entire list of "Other Leaders" and "Area Chaplains" and the people who serve in those positions to minister to the members of the Order and to make the life of the community richer. Even this list is not complete. Many tertiaries who serve, including formation counselors, are not listed, but carry out their ministries without fanfare.

The Officers try to make themselves available to all members of the Order by mail, telephone, electronically and in person. They visit as many of the convocations as their budgets and schedules allow. In this way, they also provide links with all parts of the provincial community.

By courtesy, the Ministers Provincial of SSF, CSF and TSSF, and the Mother of the Second Order may attend each other's Chapters in a consultative role, with voice but no vote (a Second Order does not currently exist in the Province of the Americas).

Chapter, The Province's Yearly Time of Making Decisions

Chapter meets once a year at Francistide (around the feast of St. Francis, Oct. 4). Members of the Order may attend, but not participate in Chapter unless they are invited to participate by the Minister Provincial. Non-Chapter members must arrange and pay for their own transportation, food and lodging.

The Standing Committee, consisting of the Minister Provincial, Provincial Chaplain, Formation Director, Provincial Secretary, Fellowship Coordinator, Provincial Bursar and one elected member of Chapter chosen by the elected members of Chapter, deal with current decisions and emergencies between Chapter meetings.

The Statutes are our Province's book of standards. They are designed to define things in a careful but general way, with space for broad interpretation. They provide a minimum definition of the Order's structure in the Province of the Americas. The Statutes grow and change as our Franciscan vision develops. Revisions are common and are made as needed. *The Norms* serve as the collective memory of Chapter. They consist of actions taken by Chapter that are not statutory in nature.

The professed members of the Order elect the members of Chapter. On January 15th of the year in which the terms of the Chapter in office expire, each professed brother and sister has the right to nominate to the Secretary up to five eligible brothers and sisters. The ten names most frequently nominated become the candidates for Chapter. By April 15th, ballots are circulated to all professed. Elections are finalized on August 1st. When you become Professed, one of the important ways you participate in the life of the Order is to get know the candidates and vote for Chapter members.

The items that Chapter addresses come from the Minister Provincial's agenda and from concerns of the membership. The Minister Provincial's agenda generally includes items such as proposals from Chapter members, inter-provincial materials that need ratification, ratification of new Officers, reports from the various Chapter Officers and other concerns.

Several months before Chapter, the Secretary reminds the members of the upcoming meeting and solicits any items that people want brought before Chapter. Each request that Chapter is asked to consider is given careful consideration. Sometimes these requests bring attention to a real need of which Chapter has been unaware. If you think Chapter should include something on its agenda, do not hesitate to send your request to the Provincial Secretary. Participate in provincial community!

As you can see, many people are involved in making the Third Order work. As a Professed member, there will be many ways that you can participate and serve to make TSSF a more faithful community. Even while you are in formation, you can contribute much to the life of TSSF in your local Fellowship, in planning and helping at Regional Convocations and in other ways. Just ask!

Reflection Questions:

1. How does or will the structure and governance of the Order support your life as a Franciscan living in the world?
2. What gifts and talents can you offer the Third Order, Society of St. Francis?

IV.29. Our Provincial Community

Regional and Provincial Convocations

Once a year, each region holds a convocation. Once every five years, the entire Province gathers for convocation. At these events, we get a small glimpse of our wider community, but since our Province covers most of the western hemisphere, few, if any of us, get to experience all of it. It is really several communities, yet we are joined in the TSSF family worldwide.

The Province comprises five distinct areas: Western Canada (centered in British Columbia); Eastern Canada (centered in the Toronto area); the United States of America; Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean/West Indies including Guyana; and Brazil. That the bulk of our provincial membership is in the United States can be a real challenge to the unity of the Province as a whole. USA attitudes and cultural habits can be at odds with those of other parts of the Province, a fact we often overlook. Something that might seem to be a major priority to tertiaries in the USA might have low priority somewhere else, and might even seem very offensive to tertiaries from another culture.

Regional Differences in Our Province of the Americas

Tertiaries in the USA are called Episcopalians, but in most other parts of the Province (and the world) are called Anglicans. Though we are all part of the same worldwide communion, religious attitudes and practices can vary greatly. This can pose challenges when a formation counselor from the USA has one set of experiences and expectations and a novice from Canada or Central America has quite another.

There are even major regional differences within the USA. Some areas tend to be very evangelical or charismatic in flavor, and others are Anglo-Catholic. Some of us are urban, some rural; some wealthy, some poor; some computer-savvy, some without electricity. The Church itself has so many “flavors;” it is almost like many different church denominations sharing one common name. It is easy to imagine that everyone is just like us, but that is not the case at all. In this large Province, we are as varied as the world itself. In spite of our differences, there is a common thread that joins us all, and that is our love of the Lord Jesus Christ and of the Franciscan way.

How to Experience the Breadth of Our Province of the Americas

The best way to experience the breadth of the Third Order Community in the Province of the Americas is to attend the Provincial Convocation held every five years or so. This is usually a five-day event to bring together tertiaries, Associates, Inquirers, and those in formation, from the entire Province of the Americas at one site. A program on a chosen theme is selected and supported by speakers, group breakout sessions, worship services, and opportunities for recreation.

Prayers, study resources, liturgies, music, and leadership from all areas of the Province are incorporated into convocation activities. All tertiaries from the Province of the Americas are welcome. In addition, representatives are invited from the Associates, the First Order brothers and sisters, the Ecumenical Franciscans, Roman Catholic Secular Franciscans, and other Franciscan Orders.

Other ways to develop a wider sense of our provincial and interprovincial family are to:

- Read the *Franciscan Times*. This regular newsletter can be accessed on the tssf.org website, and includes information from Fellowships throughout the Province, occasional materials in Spanish, information about newly professed tertiaries, and news from other Provinces.
- Choose a “pen pal” from the *Directory and Intercessory List* with whom you can exchange e-mails, letters, photographs, and Franciscan practices. Try choosing one in a different country.
- Participate in the various forums and “virtual Fellowships” of the Province.
- Encourage your Fellowship to establish a “sister” relationship with a Fellowship or an isolated tertiary in another part of the Province. You can figure out who is isolated from the *Directory*.
- Attend a Regional Convocation—in your own region and in other regions. Dates and locations for these are published in the *Hot News* early enough to allow planning of vacation time.
- Subscribe to the TSSF publications from other Provinces. You will find a list of provincial secretaries at the end of our annual *Directory and Intercessory List*.
- Participate in activities by the Franciscan Action Network (FAN); Justice, Peace & the Integrity of Creation (JPIC); or sign up for a free online course with Canticle Campus. A resource list can be found at the back of the *Directory and Intercessory List*.

IV.30. Life After Profession

The Brothers Perceive Francis Among Them Even When He is Absent

One night the blessed father Francis was away from them in body. About midnight, some of the brothers were sleeping and others were praying in silence with deep feeling, when a brilliant fiery chariot entered through the little door of the house, and moved here and there through the little house two or three times. On top of it sat a large ball that looked like the sun, and it made the night bright as day. Those who were awake were dumbfounded, while those sleeping woke up in a fright, for they sensed the brightness with their hearts as much as with their bodies. They gathered together and began to ask each other what all this meant. From the strength and grace of such great light, the conscience of each was revealed to the others.

At last they understood, realizing that the soul of the holy father radiated with great brilliance. Thus, thanks to the gift of his outstanding purity and his deep concern for his sons, he merited the blessing of such a gift from the Lord (Thomas of Celano, The Life of Saint Francis, p. 224).

The formation process most often is a fulfilling experience. Over a two- or three-year period you actively share your spiritual life. You begin to see spiritual growth. You develop a real and personal relationship with your formation counselors. When you make your profession, your reporting and sharing with your counselor abruptly stop. This can leave you feeling abandoned and alone. Know that you are not alone. You may take a big gulp and wonder, what do I do next?

In this chapter, we will explore ways of enriching your connections with other Franciscans so that you can stay deeply connected to the Order and to our Lord. Becoming professed is not like “graduating” or completing your Franciscan conversion. You are now a mature tertiary, ready for the next step on the path of Franciscan spirituality. You are committing to a life in community with your sisters and brothers, who will depend on you for mutual encouragement.

Support the Order

The Order can only thrive with the active participation of our members. Now that you are professed, consider taking on new roles within the Order. Many opportunities exist. You can serve as a formation counselor, Fellowship convener, Area Chaplain or member of Chapter. Additionally, you can offer other talents, such as providing music at a convocation, helping maintain the Order's website, moderating the listserv or Facebook pages, offering workshops—if you can imagine it, the Order can probably use whatever gift you wish to share!

The Heart of the Order: Your Local Fellowship

When Francis gathered his little band of brothers, it was for one purpose: to live more like Christ, and to be more effective in making Christ known. Like Francis, we need our community of tertiaries so we can continue to grow into the likeness of Jesus.

The very first place to look is your local Fellowship group. Not all Fellowships are as active as others, but your engagement can help change that. Be creative in moving your Fellowship into a place of sharing and caring. Establish personal relationships with as many members as you can. Do not try to walk alone on the path of faith. The Order, at every level, needs your contributions.

We have members who drive hundreds of miles one-way to attend a Fellowship or a regional meeting. In such situations, they may stay overnight with another tertiary to make a weekend of bonding. At least one of our Fellowships holds a gathering during their diocesan convention; because they already drive halfway across the state to meet, they share some Franciscan time as well. Other Fellowships go on retreat together once a year. Be creative and proactive so that you can get together and make that time worthwhile.

Beyond your geographically nearby sisters and brothers, you are free to build fellowship with those farther away. Scan the directory and look for folks engaged in similar mission. Perhaps you would enjoy e-mailing or talking about your experiences. You might arrange to go to a conference or retreat together. The concept of fellowship can be as broad as your imagination. See the bulleted list of suggestions at the end of Chapter IV.29 for more ideas about how to foster fellowship with other tertiaries, near and far.

Area Chaplains

In the Third Order we have many Area Chaplains who often are an under-used resource for prayer and sharing. The job of an Area Chaplain is to be an active spiritual leader and not just the local Franciscan police who send reminders to report and pledge. If they are not reaching out to you, then reach out to them. Call, write, meet face-to-face if they are close by. These folks are experienced in the faith and traditions of our Order. They can help make a difference in your walk. Again, you are not alone.

Solitary Tertiaries

For those who live in remote areas, we offer the opportunity to participate in Fellowship on-line with other members of the Third Order. Face-to-face interactions on Skype or Google Hangouts are free to those who use them. We also have members who are in regular snail-mail correspondence with others. Strive to do what it takes to deepen your Franciscan connections. Sustaining your connections to others in the Order will reinforce the supportive relationships you began in formation with your counselors. Regular, real and deep sharing opens our hearts and minds to God.

Profession is Not Graduation: Maintaining Your Spiritual Vitality

The period of formation included several requirements, such as regular study and spiritual direction. Profession is not the occasion to drop these helpful practices.

Study: Francis is one of the most written-about figures in western history. Whatever you have done to this point, there is still more to learn. Comprehensive resources for primary Franciscan documents are the three-volume *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Armstrong, Hellmann and Short, and *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents*, edited by Regis Armstrong. Continue your Franciscan conversion by reading more of these primary-source documents of Francis, Clare and the Order of Friars Minor. Keep an eye out for newer works about Francis. *The Franciscan Times* often contains reviews of recent books. The bibliography at the end of this document is another rich source for study materials.

Many study resources are available through Roman Catholic institutions, such as:

- University of St. Francis Online Certificate in Franciscan Studies (<http://www.stfrancis.edu/wp-content/uploads/2008/12/15SO-MS-621.-Franciscan-Cert.-Courses.pdf>) Now You Know Media Franciscan Programs ([#https://www.nowyouknowmedia.com/franciscan.html](https://www.nowyouknowmedia.com/franciscan.html))
- The Center for Action and Contemplation (<https://cac.org/>)

You can also search for retreat centers near you as a source for study, spiritual direction and refreshment.

As Christians with a Franciscan bent, we need to engage in an ongoing conversation about Franciscan spirituality. When people ask what being a Franciscan means to us, we want to be able to share something of the depth of our growing spirituality.

The best place to engage in ongoing Franciscan conversation is with your local Fellowship. This is also the place to explore how to live what you have learned and to make the hard daily choices we are called to discern. Francis and Clare left the world, not by withdrawing from it, but by abandoning its authority and allure. Sustaining that counter-cultural charism takes mindfulness and community.

Spiritual Direction: Some of us get even more serious about spending regular time with our spiritual directors after profession. In a way, it can be like graduate school, building on the foundation of your formation process. Where spiritual growth is concerned, nothing beats going face-to-face with another person to openly and honestly talk about faith and Franciscan ideals. Some spiritual directors are like gurus who can lead you in new directions; others are companions who share the walk you map out. You may want to change spiritual directors after a few years to gain new perspectives. Or you may lose a beloved director because of illness or a move. Life changes and you move on. But don't walk alone. Continue to make the journey with a companion who will ground your spiritual life with integrity.

Expectations of the Professed

After your profession, you should report quarterly for two years, now to your Area Chaplain rather than a formation counselor. These reports are similar to your formation reports, and can be done in writing, by phone or Skype, or in

person. Make this period of guidance useful in helping you live your Rule as a full member of the Order. After the intense connection of the formation period, we don't want you to suddenly feel forgotten.

For as long as you remain a tertiary, the Order has identified four “marks” of profession. All tertiaries are expected to:

- Report annually to your Area Chaplain (after the two years of quarterly reporting).
- Make an annual financial contribution to the Order.
- Renew your vow annually.
- Say the Community Obedience every day.

One good way to remember your annual commitments is to highlight October 4th, which is our observance of St. Francis Day. Chapter normally meets in person around this time. Pray for the work of Chapter. Fellowships and individuals are encouraged to make their annual reports over the summer so that timely information can be provided to Chapter. But if you have not already done so, use St. Francis Day as a reminder to send in your report and financial contribution. There is always the option of reporting and contributing periodically throughout the year as well.

Most of our members renew their vows at a Fellowship meeting or convocation, but if that is not possible, any professed brother or sister, or, if necessary, any available priest, may receive this annual renewal without further mandate.

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Appendix A: Roles and Responsibilities in the Province

Officers

- The Minister Provincial oversees the welfare of this TSSF Province.
- The Secretary assists the Minister Provincial; compiles and publishes the Chapter minutes, directory, records, and other documents.
- The Provincial Bursar collects financial contributions, disburses funds, and keeps the books and works with local bursars in other countries within the Province.

Bishop Protector

- The Bishop Protector, also known as the Bishop Visitor, acts as our arbitrator, advocates for us with the Episcopal Church, and encourages us to be faithful to our Franciscan charism.

Pastoral Officers

- The Provincial Chaplain is the pastoral leader of the Province, and oversees pastoral care and formation and coordinates the work of the Assistant Chaplain and Area Chaplains.
- The Formation Director oversees the formation program, acting for the Chaplain and coordinates the work of the Assistant Formation Directors and Formation Counselors.
- The Fellowship Coordinator oversees and provides resources for Fellowships coordinates the work of Fellowship conveners.

All of the officers listed above are Chapter members with both voice and vote, except for the Bishop Protector who has voice but not vote.

The First Order Visitors act as our liaisons with the First Order friars and sisters, and as resource people. They attend Chapter with voice but not vote.

Other Leaders

- The Assistant Chaplain oversees the Area Chaplains (to whom the Professed report).
- The Area Chaplains receive reports from the Professed, and provide regional pastoral resources.
- The Assistant Formation Directors work under and with the Formation Director to administer the formation program.
- The Formation Counselors provide postulant and novice counseling.
- The Inquirer's Secretary responds to the inquirers and sends out information packets to them.
- The Literature Coordinator sends out Basics packages to new postulants, and other Franciscan publications on request.
- The Editor, *Franciscan Times* edits and publishes the Provincial newsletter, *The Franciscan Times*.
- The Archivist maintains the provincial archives.

Appendix B: Common Abbreviations

AC	Area Chaplain
AFD	Assistant Formation Director
BCP	<i>Book of Common Prayer</i>
CSF	Community of St. Francis
DC	<i>Devotional Companion</i>
EP	Evening Prayer
FD	Formation Director
FRF	Formation Review Form
FT	<i>Franciscan Times</i>
HE	Holy Eucharist
IPTOC	Interprovincial Third Order Chapter
JPIC	Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (TSSF committee with resources)
PC	Provincial Chaplain, or Provincial Convocation
PP	Personal Prayer
MP	Morning Prayer, or Minister Provincial
RC	Roman Catholic
SSF	Society of St. Francis
SD	Spiritual Director, Spiritual Direction
TSSF	Third Order, Society of St. Francis

Appendix C: Recommended Additional Reading

Note: The designation “FT” denotes a book review in the *Franciscan Times*.

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