

Saint Francis Fraternity

Ongoing Formation

February 2014

Before we embark on our upcoming journey through the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, we will begin with a general discussion of the Rule in February. In preparation for this discussion, please review and meditate on the readings and questions below. In March our journey will start with Rule 1.

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order is like a fine and sturdy home. Within its confines lives a health and dynamic family with its many experiences and expressions. It is built upon a solid foundation. It displays a distinctive architecture. It is situated within the context of a particular "neighborhood" with its complex of other dwellings.

Those who live within this rule of life are the Secular Franciscans around the world. Its foundations are the Sacred Scriptures, in particular the holy Gospels, and the teachings and traditions of the Church. Its architecture is characterized by the legacy of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi and the heritage of the Franciscan sources. Its ambiance is the contemporary ecclesial community which is given particular shape by the documents of Vatican II and the thoughts of the recent Popes and also is given special beauty through its liturgical expression captured in the prayers of the Church.

To fully appreciate a well built and artistic house, more than the building materials need to be examined. In like manner, to understand this rule, it is to be seen not just as an isolated text of beautiful ideas and finely turned phrases, but rather in the situation of its total environment. Because the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, as a way of life or a project for living, is the description of a life experience, the summary of an ideal, and the synthesis of almost eight hundred years of history for a spiritual family in an ecclesial culture, it needs to be studied, loved, and lived within the context of its spiritual roots, its resonance with the Gospel and with the Church, and its ramifications for daily living.

~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, *Called to Build a More Fraternal and Evangelical World*

Thus we find the SFO Rule is not as specific or as secure as the former rules, but perhaps in the long run it is more demanding. It calls for an intense and personal relationship with God and a mature decision to be responsible for one's own actions. It suggests a creative mind to seek out new and better ways of acting and an open-ended stance that says, "Just doing this or that isn't enough for fulfilling the demands of gospel life, my potential is limitless!"

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The assurance of faithfulness to Franciscan living grows out of one's life with God, not merely out of an external conformity to practices and prescriptions. Accordingly, the new rule demands much and promises great things. For this reason our hopes are high that those who live this way of life will truly "renew the face of the earth" and usher in a new era of holiness and Franciscan impact.

~ Benet A. Fonck, OFM, *Called to Proclaim Christ*

Questions for meditation and discussion

- What were your thoughts and feelings the first time you read the SFO Rule?
- Which rule has been the greatest source of grace for you?
- Which rule challenges you the most?
- If you have been in the Order long enough to have been under the previous version of the Rule, what changes have you seen in the Order since the Rule of 1978 was adopted?