



*The Universal Francis*

## **SFO Workshop for Formation Students and Directors Saturday, January 28, 2006 A Report**

On January 28, 2006, First Order formation students and directors met with Third Order Secular Franciscans at Francis and Clare Friary in Franklin, Wisconsin to explore the relationship between both families.

### **We Are All One Family**

Roch Niemier OFM began by reminding everyone how each Rule of the four Franciscan families begins with the same words. First Order Friars: "The Rule and Life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Second Order Poor Clares: "The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters that blessed Francis established is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Third Order Regular: "The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ." Third Order Secular: "The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi."

This common starting point reflects a fundamental equality among us. We all belong to the same family; we are brothers and sisters together; we have the same vocation, a vocation to Franciscan life. While the concrete expression in each of the families is different and varied, we begin on an equal footing.

# **The Spirit of Secular Franciscan Life**

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First Order friars need to believe that secular Franciscans take their profession and commitment seriously, and strive to live it concretely in their respective settings. It is not a pious society, or a group of individuals simply fascinated by St. Francis. There is a lay vocation to Franciscan life, as they try to make real in secular life the vision and values of the Gospel through the medium of a specific spirituality which we call Franciscan. They profess a Rule of Life and a lifelong commitment, the same as all the others.

### **Secular Franciscans Share Their Life and Vision**

Two Secular Franciscans, Paul Salerno SFO and Ken Beattie SFO, who joined us for the day, have been professed 45 years. They spoke passionately of their love for, and commitment to, Franciscan life, what this has meant for their families, their work settings, their parish life, and their involvement in the structures of society. Many First Order friars think of the SFO as a pious society. Perhaps many Seculars think of themselves as the same. Secular Franciscans, however, embrace their Rule seriously and live very active lives in secular society, moving from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel. It is day-to-day commitment. One student asked what have been some concrete experiences in living out the Rule. The examples of all were significant, including having lost two jobs because of trying to maintain and live Franciscan values.

Daily life of a Secular is expressed in the following areas: prayer, simplicity, social justice/peacemaking, service, joy, civic responsibilities, commitment to parish life, love for creation and the environment, ministry to spouses and families, workplace, reaching out to youth, ecumenism, special outreach to the poor and the aged. Work is a privilege with the challenge to be a moral leader in the work place. Because of legal restrictions the Seculars must learn secular language to minister spiritually in the workplace. The challenges Seculars face are the world's messages of materialism, power and self-centeredness. All of this is expressed differently from First Order Franciscans, but real nonetheless.

An interesting idea surfaced concerning vocations. If someone attracted to First Order life eventually concludes such a lifestyle is not meant for him, perhaps a vocation director could counsel the individual to explore the lay Franciscan vocation as a member of the SFO. Vocation directors, take note!

Tod Laverty OFM came from Detroit to contribute to the day. He is Regional Spiritual Assistant for the Divine Mercy Region and spiritual assistant to three fraternities in Michigan. His well-developed input on the role of Regional Spiritual Assistant and local spiritual assistant brought completeness to the day and helped to integrate all the information shared. He challenged all the formation students present to commit themselves to becoming spiritual assistants to Secular Franciscan fraternities. His own experience has taught him that the need for spiritual assistants is one of the most significant that the SFO has. Many fraternities do not have a spiritual assistant. The fact that someone is a friar does not qualify him. Anyone interested has to go through a definite training process.

The day appeared to be well-received and it is hoped the formation students understand better their relationship and responsibilities towards our secular Franciscan sisters and brothers.

### Workshops Planned for Spiritual Assistants.

Tod Laverty OFM and Roch Niemier OFM are planning collaborative efforts in promoting and nurturing Secular Franciscan life. During 2006 two separate days of input for spiritual assistants are planned. The first such day is scheduled for the Milwaukee, Wisconsin area on Saturday, May 20, 2006 for spiritual assistants from the Assumption BVM Province and others in the La Verna Region. The second is scheduled for the Detroit, Michigan area on Saturday, August 19, 2006. This would be for spiritual assistants in the Detroit area from the Divine Mercy Region. The purpose of the gatherings is to offer a forum for mutual support and to offer continuing formation for the spiritual assistant ministry. More details will be available later in the year.

## FRANCIS: THE BEGGARS OF ROME A Reflection

Numerous references in Franciscan sources speak of Francis's journey to Rome and his experiences with beggars. Many of these take place at or near the Basilica of St. Peter. Thomas of Celano (2<sup>nd</sup> Life, 8) tells us of Francis's pilgrimage to Rome where he changed clothes with a beggar in front of the church of St. Peter, and how he eagerly ate with them, desiring to do this many times except that he felt ashamed if someone knew him.

The beggar image speaks deeply to some crucial aspects of our Franciscan charism. For example, the beggar confronts us with the Gospel. The beggar stance implies



*Francis changes clothes with a beggar at St. Peter's.*

that we have nothing, that we own nothing and appropriate nothing to ourselves. The beggar in each of us invites us to approach life with open hands, willing and ready to receive. Most of all the beggar mind-set gives us the awareness that God alone is the Great Almsgiver. Everything is gift! Everything! As beggars all we can do



*Young beggar girl near St. Peter's.*

is open our arms to receive, from which arises the deepest worship we could ever offer our God, thanksgiving.

Picture Francis in front of St. Peter's exchanging clothes with a beggar, and begging. He did this to know life more fully and discovered joy.

One does not have to become a beggar, but one might try begging, just to see how it feels, just to see what new doors open up inside one's spirit. Or it might be enriching to meet a beggar. Look into his or her eyes and offer food or a coin. Try to converse with the person. This is an excellent way to pick up a sense of the presence and spirit of Francis in Rome. Francis did something at St. Peter's which he was ashamed to do in Assisi. He had to get away from his home town to discover a new treasure.



*The same beggar girl after talking with her.*