

LIVING FRATERNITY

Theme: « Love, Study and Live our way of life, it is a treasure »

In the month of October, we are proposing to work together some excerpts from Fr. Peter Knaapen, our National Spiritual Assistant's presentation. This presentation was given during the National Chapter held last May. It gives us an occasion to better know the beginnings of our way of life, our Franciscan vocation.

Recall: A spirit of prayer heralds a good encounter, and a good preparation promotes a communal experience. At the meeting, having a copy of the Holy Scriptures, the Rule and the General Constitutions, will provide clarity and depth for our edification and experience.

Good preparation – Good reflection

OCTOBER 2018 MONTHLY MEETING

Love, Study and live our Rule

These words from Saint Pope John-Paul II make us think– do we love, study and truly live our way of life. Therefore, to better accomplish this, we must know our origins, the history of our way of life. So, we are proposing a review of some excerpts from the presentation by Fr. Peter Knaapen. This will give us an overview of the evolution of our way of life through the years.

Our present Rule

This year we celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Pauline Rule. In 1982, Saint Pope John Paul II, at a meeting with the International Chapter members, exhorted them and all Secular Franciscans to: “Love, study, live your rule, it is a treasure. As one commentator on the rule said: ‘first, we must love its excellence: It is a grace and a precious gift. Second, we must continue to study it with care for it is our way of life. Finally, we must live it. We must practice what we love and study.

Our present Rule, the Pauline Rule is the Fourth Rule. We have the primitive rule of St Francis, the Rule of 1221, the rule of 1289 approved by Pope Nicholas IV, the Leonine Rule of 1889 and the present rule of 1978. The biographer Celano, in his First Life of St. Francis, speaks of men and women from every walk of life running to St. Francis to see and hear this holy man. They all wanted to imitate him. Celano tells us “to all he (Francis) gave a norm of life, and he showed in truth the way to salvation in every walk of life”.

In the early 1900's Sabatier would be the first Historian to recognize “the Letter to all the faithful” as the spiritual testament of St. Francis to his spiritual children living in the world. He also firmly states: “If Saint Francis had ever written a rule for the Third Order, it would be similar to this letter...it indicates what the associations of brothers and sisters of penance were in their origin. (Paul Sabatier, *Vie de Saint*

Francois d'Assise). Esser, a Franciscan historian, states “the first version of the Letter to all the Faithful represents the primitive nucleus of the way of life for the penitents”.

Reflection:

We suggest that the person facilitating use a copy of our Rules and ask one of the participants to read the Prologue as it is the text of the Letter to the Faithful. After the reading, the participants share their thoughts on the similarities with our way of life found in it. (About 15 minutes)

The Ways of life

The earliest copy of a Rule for the Third Order is the Rule of 1221, the *Memoriale Propositae*. Cardinal Hugolino, the future Pope Gregory IX wrote it. He was a friend and admirer of St. Francis. He was also the Protector of the Friars Minor. This rule was made up of eight chapters. ... This first rule was built upon the notion of simply living and fraternal love. The brothers and sisters were bound together by mutual charity. The prohibition to carry lethal arms was a courageous witness of evangelical peace in a quarrelsome society. The rule called for specific apostolic works, namely to visit the sick, and to bury the dead and to pray for them. This was aimed at eradicating poverty and misery. The obligation to make a will was to stop relatives or even family members fighting over a person estate.

Reflection and Sharing:

Allow some time to read the preceding paragraph over and find the links with some articles from our actual Rule. (About 15 minutes)

Reform initiated by Vatican Council II

The 2nd Vatican Council was the turning point for a radical reform of the Order. All religious communities, institutions and third orders were to revise their Rule and Constitutions. This revision was to be centred on three key elements. First, it must be centred on Christ and the Gospels. Second, it must be grounded in the inspiration of the Founder. Third, it must be relevant to the Modern world and must take into count the “signs of the times”.

Research and Sharing:

Do you agree that the 3 elements mentioned in the preceding paragraph are found in our way of life? If you agree, find the articles in question. If not, justify your choice. Continue the reading.

A look on the articles

Amazingly, the Pauline Rule does all this. It is beautifully centred on Christ and his Gospel. Article 4 emphatically points that out. “The Rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and man”.

The Pauline Rule also meets the needs and expectations of the Church.

Look at article 3. It states: “The present Rule adopts the SFO to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times.

Look also at article 6: “They have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.”

Article 7 reads: “United by their vocation as ‘brothers and sisters of penance,’ and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls ‘conversion’. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.”

Reflection:

Read over the three preceding paragraphs and give examples of the relevance of these articles in our actual world. (About 15 minutes), After the sharing is finished, continue the reading.

Responsibilities

It gives a “Way of Life”, and a means for spiritual renewal of the individual, Church and Society. This new rule emphasises formation especially what we have come to call initial formation.

Article 23 states: “Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule.” Though the rule does not explicitly mention ongoing formation it is implied.

Look at Article 24. It (The Council) should adopt appropriate means of growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity

Sharing:

Having read these excerpts on the responsibilities, do you see them as a responsibility of the entire fraternity? Why? Explain your reasons. Continue reading.

Our identity

But first I want to point out that the Pauline Rule gives you a new name. You are **the Secular Franciscan Order**. This was to clarify your identity. Was the order a confraternity, a sodality as Pope Leo calls it, a pious society, or an institute? Where you lay people or religious or something in-between. The first two articles clearly points out that it is secular, part of the Franciscan Family and that it is an Order.

Pause and reading:

With a copy of the Rule, read articles 1 and 2. Then, continue reading.

“In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church. The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle... In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state”.

Biblical Reflection:

Read the Gospel of Sunday or the Gospel of the day.

Share your thoughts on this gospel, using the following questions:

1. To whom does it speak? What does it teach us?
2. How does it reach us personally?
3. Is it a message of hope? Another kind of message? How and why?

Life-Objective

During the month of October, take a moment to love, study and live our way of life, while thinking how our patron Saint Francis of Assisi presented the men and women of his time with a secular way of life ...

Events and information from the Church and the Order

Recall the local and regional meetings and activities.

End of the meeting: (song or prayer chosen by the fraternity)

At home

Take a copy of our Rule, our way of life and read it over again.