

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

As I watch the clouds roll by below the plane on which I am traveling, I am thinking of you. Our region formation director, Ed Wojciechowski, and I are on our way home from the National Formation Directors workshop in Independence, Missouri.

Why did we travel such a distance? Why did we spend one of the last weekends of summer away from family and friends? The simple answer is that we want to serve you better!

Ed is going to tell you about some of what happened at the workshop in his column, but I would like to share a few of my impressions as your Regional Minister and as a National Formation Commission member.

About 30 regional formation directors gathered in FRATERNITY this weekend. Some of us had already met at other times and in other places, but during our time together, we all got to know each other better. We listened to each other, we shared our love of Jesus and Francis, we came to trust one another and we learned from each other. We spent a good portion of our time talking about YOUR NEEDS.

Through our weekend together, we were transformed into a fraternity of formators. We were and are united by our desire to serve the Order by providing all of our members with the best understanding of what it means to be a Secular Franciscan...to help our members "Be who we say we are."

Good formation is the future of our order. Whether we are talking about initial formation for inquirers and candidates or ongoing formation for professed members, the time we spend learning about the Rule, Constitutions and the life we have professed should be very important to us.

When we talk about formation, however, we need to remember that this does not only refer to all the INFORMATION that we gather, listen to, read about, talk about and impart to others. The whole purpose of formation is TRANSFORMATION—that is, actually BECOMING and BEING who we say we are. If we are to grow as followers of Jesus and Francis, everything we learn should only serve as the "fertilizer" that helps us to mature and ripen into beautiful Franciscan plants. What good is quoting from the Rule, or the Gospel for that matter, if we don't put those words into practice? (Isn't this what our Holy Father has been telling us over and over in his homilies and writings?)

Although this can be applied to many areas of our Franciscan lives, right now I want to put emphasis on how we treat one another in community. As I travel around to different parts of our region for Visitation, I am happy to see what beautiful fraternities make up Our Lady of the Angels Region. Many are thriving. Others are on their way back and are attracting new vocations. But, no matter how big or small the fraternity; how healthy or challenged, there is almost always a request from the council or the individual members to learn about conflict resolution—"How do we deal with challenges presented by disagreements among fraternity members?"

How can this be? We are brothers and sisters, right?

Apparently, the same thing that happens in our biological families happens in our Franciscan family. We stop LISTENING to one another with empathy. Our personal agendas and goals overtake all of our good intentions. We pre-judge what another person means without really listening to what he or she has to say. We lose our sense of BALANCE. We are all human beings with a soul given to us by God. This means that every one of us is worthy of respect whether or not we agree with one another. I don't have to agree with you to love you, because it is your God-given soul that I love—not your appearance or your opinions!

Reach out to one another! If you have a serious disagreement with someone in your fraternity, ask *in all humility*, for an impartial mediator to help you get back on track. Pray about it by using the Gospels, our Rule and the Constitutions. Ask the Holy Spirit to inspire you. Many times the answers we seek can be found in those three places if we read them with the eyes of faith and humility in our hearts.

We also find that new councils often forget that former Ministers, Formation Directors or other councilors are excellent resources. We should not “push them aside” just because their time in office has ended. We should not stop listening to and discussing suggestions that come from our former servant leaders. By the same token, former Ministers and Council members need to remember the balance I spoke of—stepping down and stepping back are great acts of humility. Even St. Francis had to step away from his newly formed order. New Ministers and Councils need to be encouraged to learn to fly on their own with everyone supporting their efforts.

Granted, all this is not easy, but it is what we are called to do as Catholics and Franciscans. Take the time to read and meditate on the portions of our Rule and Constitutions that speak about fraternity life. Let those words go deep into your heart, and always remember that we *promised* to live out what they say.

- **Rule: Prologue:** “All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. Mk. 12,30), and *love their neighbors as themselves...*”(cf. Mt. 22,39)
- **Article 2:** “In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, *strive for perfect charity* in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of St. Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.”
- **Article 5:** “Secular Franciscans, therefore, should *seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters,...*”
- **Article 12:** “Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, *they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.*”
- **Article 13:** “...so the *Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.*”
- **Article 19:** “Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should *seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue*, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the *transforming power of love and pardon.*”
- **Article 22:** “It (the local fraternity) *becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love.*”
- **Constitutions: Article 15 #4:** “They should love and *practice purity of heart, the source of true fraternity.*”
- **Article 26: #2:** “*In the fraternity, the brothers and sisters should promote mutual understanding* and they should see to it that the *atmosphere of their meetings is welcoming and that it reflects joy*. They should *encourage one another for the good.*”
- **Article 32: #1:** “They (the ministers and councilors) should, above all, *cherish peace and reconciliation in and around the fraternity.*”
- **Article 42: #4:** “*Profession does not only commit those professed to the fraternity, but also in the same way it commits the fraternity to be concerned with their human and religious well-being.*”

Many blessings to you and to your fraternities,  
Diane