

January Lesson Plan: Called to Conversion

Theme: Ongoing Conversion of Life

Franciscan Focus: Meaning of Penance in Franciscan Spirituality

Guiding Source: Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO), Article 7

Key Question: What is God asking me to change this year?

1. Opening

Opening Prayer

- Begin with a moment of silence.
- Pray together:
 “Lord, make my heart small enough for You to fill.”

Reflective Reading

- Read **SFO Rule, Article 7**, aloud:
 “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...”

Invite a brief, quiet pause after the reading.

2. Teaching / Input

A. The Franciscan Meaning of Penance

Explain:

- For St. Francis, *penance meant conversion of heart*, not punishment.
- Penance = a joyful return to God.
- It is **ongoing**, not a one-time event.
- Conversion is expressed through:
 - Living simply
 - Loving generously

- Seeking reconciliation
- Aligning our hearts with Christ's poverty and humility

B. Beginning the Year with a Renewed Commitment

Share:

- January is a natural time to re-examine our lives.
- Ask: *Where is God inviting me to grow, release, or realign?*
- Start small: The Gospel grows through little daily "yeses."

3. Scripture Reflection

Suggested reading: **Mark 1:14–15**

"Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

Reflection prompts:

- What part of my life needs turning back toward God?
- What keeps me from greater freedom in Christ?
- What attachment is weighing me down?

Allow 3 minutes of silence, then brief sharing (optional).

4. Love in Action: Practicing Simplicity of Life

Introduce this month's lived commitment:

A. Choose one area to declutter

Examples:

- Closet
- Pantry
- Work desk
- Digital life
- Social media
- Car

B. Give away one item each week

- A tangible practice of Franciscan poverty
- Focus on giving to someone who needs it more
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C. Daily moment of gratitude

Invite participants to:

- Name one gift, blessing, or grace each day
- Recognize sufficiency before God

Invite discussion:

How do these practices help us grow in freedom?

What might be hard?

5. Contemplative Practice: The Poverty of Christ

Guide participants through this short daily meditation, then practice it together:

Meditation Guide

1. Sit in stillness.
2. Imagine yourself kneeling before the manger.
3. Look upon Christ who “became poor for our sake.”
4. Ask:
“Lord, show me one attachment I can release—not out of guilt, but out of freedom.”
5. End with the prayer:
“Lord, make my heart small enough for You to fill.”

Spend 2–3 minutes practicing in silence.

6. Discussion & Sharing

Guiding questions:

- What part of today’s session resonates most deeply with you?
- Where do you sense Christ inviting you to change this year?
- Which simplicity practice feels most doable right now?
- How might ongoing conversion bring more joy into your life?

7. Closing (5 minutes)

Closing Prayer

Pray Psalm 51:12:

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.”

Monthly Challenge Reminder

- Declutter one area
- Give away one item per week
- Practice daily gratitude
- Try the manger meditation for at least 3 days per week

Invite participants to journal their experience throughout the month.