

Four Pillars of the Secular Franciscan Order

Spirituality

Formation

Fraternity

Apostolate

Mnemonic to remember the Four Pillars:

St Francis oF Assisi

Spirituality

Formation

Fraternity

Apostolate

Charism

A **charism** is a special gift of the Holy Spirit.

The charism of the founder (in our case St. Francis) is a gift particularly granted by God to a believer which leads to the foundation of an Institute or religious movement and which includes a specific way of being through the specific spiritual experiences that God grants to him.

Franciscans receive the particular grace of vocation to follow this life experience in some way, to be associated with the Founder, St Francis. The charism of St Francis has been transmitted to the members of the Franciscan Family, including us, *directly* from Francis. It is a **continuation** in the followers of a founder's charism by the action of the Holy Spirit through **Profession**.

Some aspects of the charism of St Francis:

- a strong and radical son-like experience manifested in joyful, loving, and trustful attitude of readiness to do the will of the heavenly Father.
- a mirror of the God's humility, emptying and total giving of Self, with the intention to enter into a lover/beloved relationship with mankind.
- deep respect for all creatures animate and inanimate, which are, through God's creation, our brothers and sisters.
- in a sense, Francis became Christ-like to a degree no one else has ever reached.

This is the gift. This is the *Charism*.

The First Pillar - Spirituality

From the living charism of St Francis we have come to understand certain practices and behaviors, specific ways of being and of relating to God, i.e., a spirituality, that we call Franciscan. This spirituality is characterized especially by:

- a very intense **Eucharistic life** (contemplation of God's *kenosis*, self-giving)
- **poverty** (a consequence of *kenosis*)
- **minority** – humility (a consequence of *kenosis*)

- **simplicity**
- **obedience** (to conform to the eternal project of the Father)
- **chastity** (in conformity with our state in life)
- **fraternity**, also in its universal and cosmic implications, to be lived with special intensity.
- the Franciscan **evangelical radicality**, from gospel to life and from life to gospel.

All of us, as children of Francis are called to participate in his exceptional gift (charism) and to continue his mission.

F.U.N. Manual, "Vocation, Charism, and Mission," pages 6-10 (unnumbered)

Franciscan Spirituality in Seven Steps

1. God is absolute love, being and creativity. Creation is dependent upon God to exist.
2. God has freely chosen incarnation (taking on human form) before the human choice for sin.
3. Christmas is of primary importance to us.
4. Christ is the perfect image of who God is for creation.
5. Every creature is unique, gifted, and living in relationship.
6. Nothing humans have the ability to do has the capacity to make God do something.
7. Mercy, forgiveness, and justification are God's actions.

F.U.N. Manual, "Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality," pages 16-17 of 30

The Second Pillar - Formation

Form / oxforddictionaries.com

Middle English: from Old French *forme* (noun), *fo(u)rmer* (verb, from Latin *formare* 'to form'), both based on Latin *forma* 'a mold or form'.

Form / dictionary.com

Philosophy.

- the structure, pattern, organization, or essential nature of anything.
- **structure or pattern as distinguished from matter.**
- (initial capital letter) Platonism. idea (def 7c).
- Aristotelianism. that which places a thing in its particular species or kind.

Matter and form / Aquinas

On Aquinas's account, there are certain levels of matter/form composition. On one level we can think of the matter of a statue as being the marble whereas we can think of the shape of the statue as signifying the form.

For the human person, we might think of matter as the atoms and molecules that make up the human body. These enter the body through nutrition, and leave our body as various individual cells die off. Thus over time, the matter that makes up our bodies is completely different. Imagine you could take your body as a young child and place it side by side with

your body of today. How can we say that these are the same person? The answer is your **soul**. Thus the body is matter, and the soul is form. When we speak of formation, we are describing the process of molding the soul. Franciscan formation is molding the soul to take on the charism of St Francis.

Elements of Franciscan Formation / NAFRA website

- The vocation, the charism, the mission of Secular Franciscans
- Profession in the OFS
- The nature of the Secular Franciscan Order
- History of the OFS and of its Rule
- Francis of Assisi and his approach to divinity
- Conversion - penance and further elements on conversion
- Fraternity and Saint Francis
- What is formation? - and elements of learning

<http://nafraformation.org/2010%20Formation%20Project%20-%20Chapter%20printer%20friendly.pdf>

The Third Pillar - Fraternity

Word Origin

Middle English: from Old French *fraternite*, from Latin *fraternitas*, from *fratern* 'brother'.

Synonyms

brotherhood, fellowship, kinship, friendship, (mutual) support, solidarity, community, union, togetherness

The word '**fraternity**' is related to the word '**friar**' – the word Francis used for his followers. Indeed, Francis called all of Creation his 'brother' and 'sister.'

OFS Rule Article 14:

Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

Christ is the center of the Franciscan call. Around that heart is fraternity. According to *1 John 4:8*, "God is love." That love manifests itself in the relationship among the three persons of the Trinity. Thus the Father as God is not alone; Christ as God is not alone; and the Holy Spirit as God is not alone. Thus the Trinity reveals a unity in community that shows what fraternity should look like.

Matthew 18:19-20 "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Like Christ, Francis gathered together friars, his fraternity. In his Rule of 1223 (the Later Rule) Francis wrote: "Wherever the friars ["Little Brothers"] meet one another, they should show that they are members of the same family. And they should have no hesitation in making known their needs to one another. For if a mother loves and cares for her child in the flesh, a friar should certainly love and care for his spiritual brother all the more tenderly."

Pope John Paul II, addressing the OFS: "present yourself to the world as a 'community of love.'"

In the words of the "Canticle of the Creatures," Francis showed that he considered all creation as brothers and sisters.

Fraternity contributes to the growth of interactive relationships and Franciscan personality, character, and attitudes. In addition to making our needs known, we are to care for the sick among us, to teach one another, to correct one another humbly and charitably and not remember faults, to provide support and encouragement, to pray together. Each fraternity has a council, that animates and guides it -- organizing its meetings so that members grow on a doctrinal, spiritual, psychological, and social level. It must be a community of love, ongoing conversion, and support for living the Gospel in the world.

Characteristics of fraternity:

- a gift to be discovered and lived out, dependent upon the grace and the demands of God.
- based upon a free and responsible acceptance of a call -- togetherness because of personal self-giving, willful decision, and obligation flowing from intimacy.
- reflects the Father's intense love for us -- he chooses us and sends the Holy Spirit to restore all things in Christ.
- recognizes the dignity of every person to be a chosen child of God, redeemed by Christ, to have potential to respond to the Spirit's urging, and to embody a unique blend of characteristics and talents.

The earliest Franciscans, freed from all selfish love, poured all their affection into the heart of the fraternity so that Fraternal love would display unity for the world to see.

Sacramental marks of fraternity:

- an effective support system for evangelical growth
- a productive experience of group spiritual direction
- a context of stability for grounding and maturing Gospel values and practice
- a concrete, human manifestation of a deeper spiritual reality
- a sign of the justice, peace, and reconciliation of the Reign of God

The Fourth Pillar - Apostolate

Word Origin

Late Latin *apostolātus* the office of an apostle, equivalent to Late Latin *apostol(us)* apostle + *-ātus* –ate. The word *apostolate*, then, is related to the word *apostle* – and describes the mission of an apostle of Christ.

The work of an apostle, not only of the first followers of Christ but of all the faithful who carry on the original mission entrusted by the Savior to the twelve to "make disciples of all nations" (*Matthew 28:19*). The purpose of an apostolate is not temporal welfare, however noble, but to bring people to the knowledge and love of Christ and, through obedience to his teaching, help them attain life everlasting.

Franciscan Mission

From Bonaventure's *Major Legend of St Francis*, Chapter 2:

One day when Francis went out to meditate in the fields, he walked near the church of San Damiano which was threatening to collapse because of age. Impelled by the Spirit, he went inside to pray. Prostrate before an image of the Crucified, he was filled with no little consolation as he prayed. While his tear-filled eyes were gazing at the Lord's cross, he heard with his bodily ears a voice coming from that cross, telling him three times: "Francis, go and repair my house which, as you see, is all being destroyed."

This became the mission of Francis and eventually became the mission of the whole Franciscan family.

We Secular Franciscans are to make ourselves available, like Francis, every time the Church calls, every time there is something to repair. There are reconciliations to promote, sufferings to alleviate, solitudes to fill, despair to console, marginalization to fight, material and spiritual poverties to heal, respect for life and nature. These are the places where Secular Franciscans need to be found! There are no limits! (*FUN Manual*)

OFS Rule related to the Apostolate

Witness to Gospel Life

"going from gospel to life and life to gospel." (*Article 4*)

"They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; 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 6*)

Ecumenism

"Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a

man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service." (*Article 14*)

Peace and Justice

"Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives." (*Article 15*)

"Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others." (*Article 19*)

Family

"In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ." (*Article 17*)

Examples of Apostolate from Bonaventure's Major Life of Francis

- Work with the lepers
- Joyful witness to the Gospel
- Austere toward himself, considerate toward others
- Peacemaker – e.g., meeting with the Sultan, the wolf of Gubbio

Integration of Fraternity and Apostolate Pillars

Our apostolic life and fraternal life are integrally related. As Franciscans, when we minister, we minister to and with our brothers and sisters and we minister to the larger community. It is not only "what we do" but also "how we do it."

The fraternity apostolate is our privilege and responsibility to go forth as witnesses and instruments of the Holy Spirit and the Church. When we come together in our fraternity gatherings we interact with each other, but the fraternity apostolate gives us the added opportunity to cooperate and minister with each other at a different level. Our hearts are good and generous, but they need to meet together as a unit. When we choose an apostolate in which all participate, in some manner, we will come to know each other at a deeper level. When we live in relationship, we learn about the other – sharing values, telling one's story, telling about our relationships, and working with others. A cooperative spirit attentive to those involved and the objective of the task are the basis to pursue the apostolate. This pursuit is to communicate individuals working as a unit in peace and harmony – to feed, to clothe, to comfort – to make Christ present in the name of Francis. Then and only then will our vocation as Secular Franciscans be realized and the passion of our vocation become alive.