

## DISCERNMENT

There once was a story, and it goes like this...

A Parisian was strolling in Paris one fine morning, and as he was strolling past some buildings he heard a curious sound. He would hear a hammer pounding, and then what sounded like rocks falling. He listened intently for a while, and decided to check it out. He climbed the building's steps, following the sounds, and came to a studio. He boldly walked in and found the great sculptor Rodin, working away.

Now you all know the sculptor Rodin...the Kiss, the Thinker...

Well, the man walked up to the sculptor and said, "What are you doing?" Rodin, of course, thinking it was evident, simply said, "I'm sculpting."

The man got all excited and replied, "I have always wanted to sculpt something, how do you do it?" Rodin replied, "Say you wanted to sculpt an elephant." "Oh yes", said the man, "I would love to sculpt an elephant!"

So Rodin began by explaining to the man the steps to sculpt. "First you find a very large piece of stone, then you gather the best chisels and hammers, and then you simply chip away from the stone everything that doesn't look like an elephant!"

Why would I tell you this story? Well, the discernment that we are interested in is quite similar. You take a person who comes seeking to join our way of life, and you help them chip away everything that isn't Franciscan in their lives!

The challenge is that sometimes it is hard to reveal the un-Franciscan elements of their lives, and in some cases, those things we wish to chip away, are the very things that make that person who they are spiritually, and should not be "chipped away".

I will try to present some tools which are available to you as Formation Directors and teams that may be useful with the discernment process, the process we all must journey to become a Professed Secular Franciscan.

## **SIGNS OF A FRANCISCAN VOCATION**

Thanks to the multitude of Franciscans who have come before us with the same questions, we have a multitude of resources at our disposal to study and use in the discernment process.

In your packets, there is a page titled DISCERNMENT OF VOCATIONAL REFERENCES. This is an overview of the resources available in our recommended Formation texts of today.

Of all the references, the simplest, and sometimes the most widely used, comes from Fr. Lester Bach. It is a checklist, if you will, that gives you an overview of the traits and sometimes, the personalities of those called to our way of life, and those not called to our way of life.

As clear-cut as it seems, remember not to judge, nor condemn, the person seeking our way of life. It is a process, a getting-to-know-you time of dialogue and sharing. These “signs” may not be evident in your first few encounters with the person. Give it time, and these traits will become apparent.

Look at #7. There is a definite need to be able to make a commitment to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. ALL 26 ARTICLES! Not just the ones we like. To live in fraternity is another must. We must be able to dialogue with each other, work for the common good with each other, love each other and serve each other. This also encompasses the need to be servant-leaders when called to do so. In fraternity, once professed, we stand on level ground, and we are called to minister to each other out of love.

Fr. Bach taught us years ago, that the discernment process takes place in the phases of Orientation and Inquiry. By the time a person is ready for Candidacy, and thus the Rite of Admission into the Order, they should know this is their spirituality and they should be striving to grow in this vocation.

The SUMMARY OF GIFTS handout shows how certain gifts, given by God, will be used within the fraternity. This may be another useful tool for you to discern which gifts God has bestowed on us and how we can specifically use them for the good of our fraternity and the Order. This is a personal discernment which should take place in the Inquiry phase of formation. In this way, the person called to our way of life, may have definitive outlets in the fraternity to share these gifts.

Not all are called to the Franciscan Order. Seekers and followers are good people, but may not be called. We must become “imitators”. We cannot be so busy adoring and following Christ that we forget to imitate Him. And thus, we cannot hold Francis in such high esteem, that we forget to imitate him, and walk in his footsteps!

## THE CHURCH'S MAIN SIX SPIRITUALITIES

Let me begin by quoting Fr. Zachary from his book *Paths to Renewal*, "I keep in mind that all [spiritualities] share the essential foundations of the Christian life, follow the same Gospel, practice the same virtues, make use of the same Sacraments, and that we are all united in the Church established by Jesus, the Son of God. I try to remember that no spirituality is inherently better than the rest."

In his book, he focuses on what he calls the "Great Six". These are the six spiritualities that are in the Church. Other Orders, movements and reforms throughout the ages since, have produced developments to the basic six spiritualities.

The "Great Six" are: Augustinian, Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan, Ignatian [Jesuit], and Teresean [Carmelite].

How did these six come about? If you look at the history of the Church, it seems when things were distressed and the people needed re-awakened, God would call forth a person, one among the masses, who would renew the Church from within and cause a great revival within the Church, and sometimes in the world.

To learn if you possess a Franciscan Spirituality, you must also learn what spiritualities you are not. By learning about the Great Six's basic modes of prayer, distinct virtues, apostolic work and how all of these fit into the world today, you can see where you are called to respond.

When you do a little research, you may find that you have a few things in common with other spiritualities, but you will have the most number in common with the spirituality that you have been blessed with by the Holy Spirit.

If you look at the paper THE CHURCH'S MAIN SIX SPIRITUALITIES, you can get an overview of the six. The book goes into deeper coverage of the six, and is worth reading, especially if you are the Formation Director or the Formation Team.

By reading the book, you can use the WORKSHEET FOR PROFESSION IN THE SFO, with your Inquirers. This will give them a clearer understanding of their own spirituality. But be prepared, as much as this book, overview and worksheet may help to confirm a Franciscan Spirituality, it may also confirm a non-Franciscan spirituality.

Those who come to us seeking a closer relationship with Jesus deserve our help in finding where they belong. If it is NOT in the Secular Franciscan Order, we still have a responsibility to them as brothers and sisters in Christ to help them find a home in the Church. You may have to help them to find another Lay Order which suits them better.

All of this reading, research, dialogue and discernment MUST be surrounded in prayer! Prayer is the foremost DISCERNMENT process. Without it, all discernment is incomplete. As Saint Augustine stated, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Through the process of discernment, we will find where our heart is being called to rest.

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