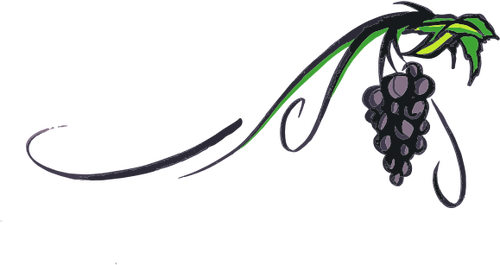
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**Living a Gospel Life:**

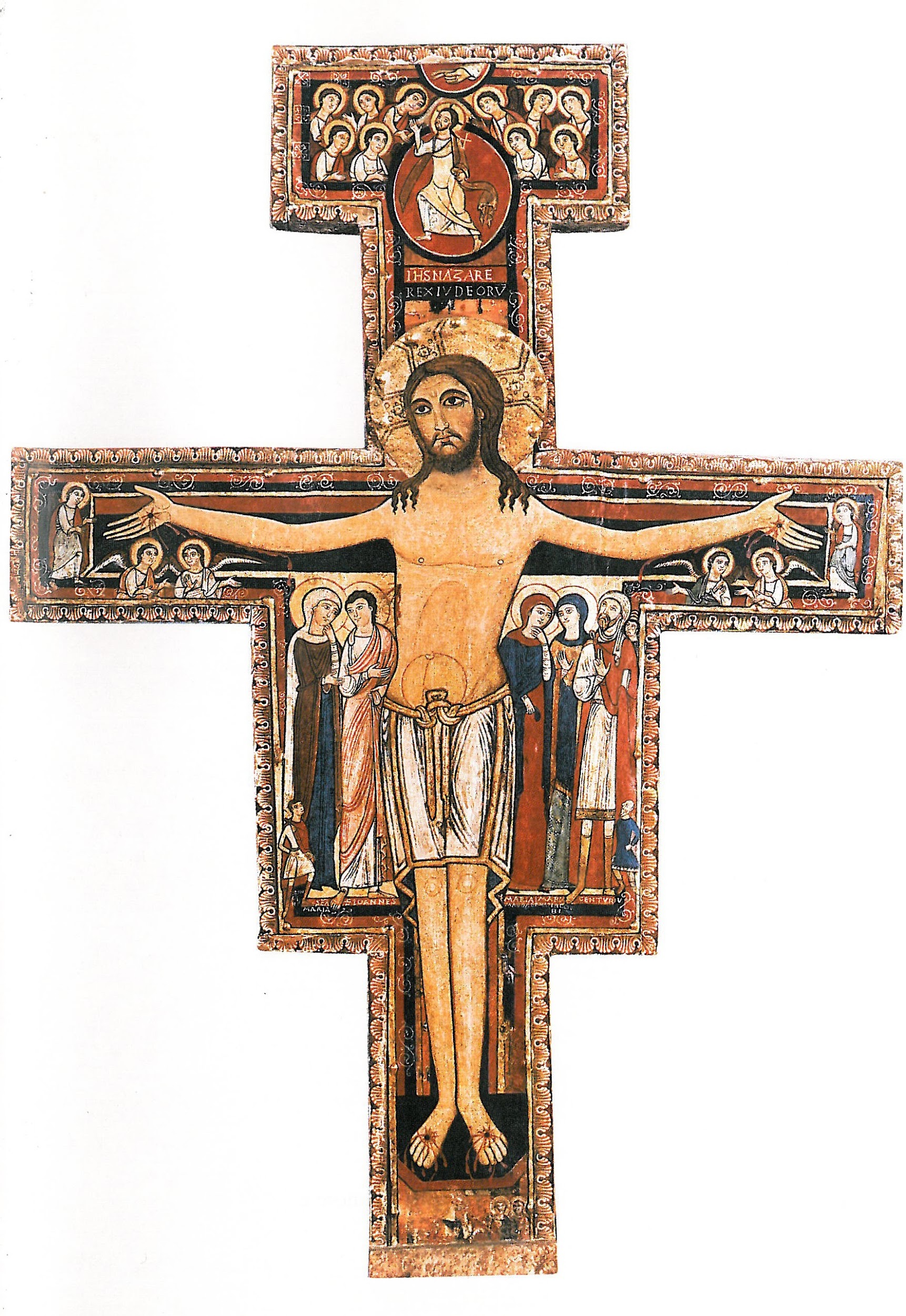
**Walking in the Steps of Jesus and**

**Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi**

**Young adult faith development sessions**

**focusing on articles of**

**The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order**

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by Kathleen Molaro, OFS and Jean D'Onofrio, OFS,

National USA Franciscan Youth and Young Adult commission members, 2020

Dear Younger brothers and sisters,

Our purpose in creating Faith Development Sessions is to cooperate in the mission of our Church and the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in bringing the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ to others, especially the youth and young adults of the United States. (see Franciscan Youth/Young Adult Mission Statement, Appendix A)

Secular Franciscans are inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi, and guided by our Secular Franciscan Rule. We think of this essential document as our “Rule of Life.” Saint Pope John Paul II in 1982 referred to our Rule as “an authentic treasure.” Our desire is to pass this treasure on to you! Therefore, each session is based on a charism of the OFS found in various articles of the Rule.

We envision journeying with you as you discern your purpose in life and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ and with each other. Even as you grow deeper in faith and Franciscan spirituality and more independent in your search, our Secular Franciscan vocation calls us to reach out with encouragement and support.

Before you incorporate these specific sessions, we suggest you spend time together building relationships. Each session involves prayer, sharing, and decision making which invites you to delve deeper in a safe and trusted environment. Getting to know one another will lead you toward that goal, uncover each others’ gifts and talents, and provide friendship and a sense of belonging, all which contribute to successful and meaningful interactions.

As young adults, you face many challenges. You’ve probably experienced transitions from youth into college, work, and/or married life. You are learning to handle your own finances and other household responsibilities and relationships with your family and previous friends have changed. You may live in a new geographic area with its adventures and insecurities. Living as a single person, adapting to life with a spouse, or immersion into parenting are situations that demand a lot of time, energy and determination.

Spiritual growth and a desire for holiness will enhance your life no matter what your situation is. Fellowship with peers and mentors will not only give you strength and guidance, but will provide sustenance and animation for them as well. We walk together in this journey, with love and confidence, Francis, Clare and Jesus on the path with us, as on the road to Emmaus. We accompany each other as brothers and sisters, expanding our horizons with diversity of age, culture, life goals, interests and needs.

The group can decide how to build relationships, depending on where you are located and what the general interests and time commitments are within the membership. Picnics, hikes, movies, dinners, game nights, and Mass or prayer experiences are a few ideas. Consider attending a retreat together or plan a retreat specifically for your group. Serve together in a parish or community. Whatever you do together is meant to enrich and be of benefit in forming bonds and trust.

You will know when it is time to delve into the topics suggested in *Living a Gospel Life: Walking in the Steps of Jesus and Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi!* We don’t intend to dictate what you do at your gatherings. These sessions are meant to give you the themes found in our Rule, and ideas in how to present them. Your imaginations, experiences, and current resources will provide a myriad of supplemental options, and also support your goal to be out in the world working for justice. Hopefully the sessions will encourage you to explore your relationship with Jesus, your Catholic faith and Franciscan spirituality.

In going through this process together, you may realize the joy of community (or what Franciscans call “fraternity”) and that your resolve to live gospel centered lives is strengthened and supported in this way. If so, we invite you to consider forming a YouFra (Youth Fraternity) and will help you in that endeavor.

Whatever you decide and wherever the Lord directs you, we appreciate your efforts to grow toward holiness and pray that your journey is fruitful and filled with joy.

The National Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission, representing the Secular Franciscans in the United States, wish you

Peace and all good,

Kathleen Molaro, OFS and

Jean D’Onofrio, OFS

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**Session One**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the session**

Several participants will be assigned one of the stories of Francis from the group’s chosen biography. (see list in appendix C). Each will come prepared to summarize the story and share insights. Consider the following questions.

**𝛕** What surprised them about Francis when hearing this story?

**𝛕** How was Francis impacted by the events of his day?

**𝛕** In what way can the story be applied to today?

**𝛕** In these stories, what Gospel values do you see in Francis?

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**Opening Prayer**

**Song:** Listen to “Blessed are the Ones,” Audrey Assad

**Leader:** Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of your love.

**All:** Pour forth your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.

**Leader:** A reading from the Gospel of Matthew (5:3-13)

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven.

Thus they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

The Gospel of the Lord

**All: Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.**

**Three minutes of quiet reflection.**

**Discussion talking points:**

**𝛕**  Where do you see yourself in this Gospel? Which beatitude do you most relate to? In his writings, you will recognize that most of his words are from Scripture.

**𝛕**  Francis lived the Good News, always trying to do God’s will and emulate Jesus.

**𝛕** His profound reverence for Scripture led him to seek an understanding of the Word of God.

**𝛕**  Although he was distracted by worldly pursuits in his early young adulthood, he eventually made Christ the inspiration and center of his life.

**Story Summary Presentations**

Those who prepared ahead will share, using the questions found in “Before the Session” as a focus. Group discusses after each has shared.

**Closing Prayer**

**Share prayer intentions.**

**Song:** “Open the Eyes of My Heart” *(*Michael W. Smith)*,* or “We are the Light of the World” (Jean A. Grief).

**Prayers that unite us as Catholics.** Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

**Leader:** St Francis

**All:** Pray for us.

**Leader:** St. Clare

**All:** Pray for us. Amen

**Take Home Reflection/Activity**

Choose a beatitude you feel called to live more intentionally until we gather again. Reflect and plan how you will practice being more Christlike in your corner of the world.

Assign a volunteer to purchase a group Bible to use from now on at the gatherings.

Assign a volunteer to download *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* from the National OFS website (secularfranciscansusa.org) and bring copies for each member to have at gatherings.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Practice looking people in the eyes and seeing Jesus in them. Perform a random act of kindness for a family member, friend, or stranger.

**Session Two**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Set up YouTube of “Make Me A Channel of Your Peace” (such as Sarah McLachian).

Mark the Scripture passage to be read during the opening prayer.

Print copies of “17 Essential Elements”(Appendix B)

**Opening Prayer**

**Sharing:** How has your life been influenced since our last gathering? Did you participate in thetake home reflection or JPIC action?

**Let’s begin with prayer.** (Sign of the Cross)

**All:** (from Geste of the Great King: Office of the Passion of Francis of Assisi)

“Almighty, most holy, most high and supreme God, all good, supreme good, totally good, You who alone are good, may we give back to you all praise, all glory, all grace, all honor, all blessing and all good. So be it. So be it. Amen.”[[1]](#footnote-0)

**Leader:** Read Philippians 2:5-11.

**Three minutes of quiet reflection.**

Then share one word or short phrase from this Scripture that speaks to you.

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝛕** By virtue of our Baptism into the Body of Christ, “we are called to intimacy with Jesus and to love one another.”[[2]](#footnote-1) What does it mean to claim our unique roles in the wider Church? Franciscans are only one of the spiritual families in the Church. What are some of the others?

**𝛕**  There are many choices for involvement in our Church and society. What makes Franciscans different? (Hand out *17 Essential Elements*.) What charisms did Francis hold up as beacons to the world? Think about the stories of Francis that show these charisms.

**𝛕**  Francis went from “Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel.” What does that mean to you? Consider the Gospels as love letters from God.

**Closing Prayer**

**Prayer Intentions.**

**Song: “**Go Light Your World” (Kathy Troccoli) or “We are One Body” (Millenium Three)

**Say the prayers that unite us as Catholics.**

Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

**Leader:** St Francis

**All:** Pray for us.

**Leader:** St. Clare

**All:** Pray for us. Amen

**Take Home Reflection**

Check out various ministries in your parish and community. Perhaps take the time to visit and help out with one that interests you. What gifts do you have to share? How does service help you realize your place in the family of the body of Christ?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Consider gathering together to fill “Blessing Bags” for distribution in a local homeless shelter. Items such as soap, toothpaste, combs, shower gels, wrapped granola bars, fresh wipe packets, etc. can be donated by all your members.

**Session Three**

**Franciscans…**



**Before the Session**

Make copies of the Rule (can be downloaded from <https://secularfranciscansusa.org>)

one for each participant. Prepare a copy of 2 Celano #208, found in *Francis of Assisi, The Founder; Early Documents II*)

**Opening Prayer**

**Sharing:** How has your life been influenced since our last gathering? Did you participate in thetake home reflection or JPIC action?

**Let’s begin with prayer.** (Sign of the Cross)

**Song: “**Open the Eyes of My Heart”(Michael W. Smith)

**Introduction to reading:**

In a footnote we are told “Since the sixteenth century, chapter 17 in John’s Gospel has been called the “high priestly prayer” of Jesus. He speaks as intercessor, with words addressed directly to the Father and not to the disciples, who supposedly only overhear. Yet the prayer is one of petition, for immediate and future disciples. Jesus wishes them (and us) to be with him in union with the Father.” [[3]](#footnote-2) What is John telling us about how to be one with the Lord?

**Read:** John 17: 11-24

**Three minutes of quiet reflection.**

Then share one word or short phrase from this Scripture that speaks to you.

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝛕** If you continue someday in the Franciscan journey, you will delve deeper into the Rule, or what Francis referred to (according to Thomas of Celano) as the “book of life, the hope of salvation, the marrow of the Gospel, the way of perfection, the key to paradise, the agreement of a perpetual covenant.” [[4]](#footnote-3)

**𝛕** The passage from John 17, our Rule, and the excerpt from Thomas Celano all speak of “perfection.” What is the definition of perfection in these writings? (unconditional love, forgiveness, mercy, following God’s will, etc.)

The Catholic Catechism reminds us that we find perfection "in seeking and loving what is true and good." [[5]](#footnote-4)

Do we sometimes mistakenly confuse God’s definition of perfection with social expectations? (grades, job, body image, achievements, etc.) Share a time when you may have fallen into the trap of forgetting you are a loved child of God due to outside pressure to be perfect.

**𝛕**  The Rule is drawn from Francis’ desire to live “life to Gospel and Gospel to life.” How does this relate to the terms in the Celano excerpt? How can living a Gospel life lead us toward perfection, paradise, salvation, and covenant?

**Closing Prayer**

Share prayer intentions.

**Song:** “You Say,” Lauren Daigle

**Say the prayers that unite us as Catholics:**

Sign of the Cross, Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be.

Leader: St Francis

All: Pray for us.

Leader: St. Clare

All: Pray for us.

**Take Home Reflection**

What would be some ways to seek a way to perfection? (sacraments, scripture study, prayer, etc.) Reflect on your fidelity to these practices. How can you improve?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Tell someone this week in words (written or spoken) or through an action that they are loved by God, that God sees through their imperfections to the core of who they are.

**Session Four**

**Franciscans…**

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**Opening Prayer**

**Sharing:** How has your life been influenced since our last gathering? Did you participate in thetake home reflection or JPIC action?

**Let’s begin with prayer**. (Sign of the Cross)

**Leader:** Read Rule, Art. 13 slowly. Read again slowly.

**Three minutes of quiet reflection.**

Then share one word or short phrase from this Article that speaks to you.

**Discussion**

Below are listed five ways to develop the virtue of charity. Divide into five groups. Each group will be assigned one of the five ways, discuss, and be ready to share thoughts and ideas with the main group.

**Group A. Study the life of Jesus and the saints.**

Share stories you've heard from Scripture and the saints that show different aspects of charity. What are some ways to be charitable, as you've learned in the stories. How have the acts of charity changed the person giving? The person receiving? Do you think it helps you learn about various ways to show charity toward others by studying holy people?

**Group B. Build Community.**

Why would building community help you develop a more charitable attitude? Re-read the last paragraph of Article 13. How do you feel about being on an equal basis with all people? Is it difficult to let go of our need to be right, wanting to have our own way rather than compromise, and our desire to be better than others? Does belonging to a group help, challenge, frustrate, enliven us? How should we develop more of a sense of community in our group?

**Group C.** **Love and respect ourselves.**

What do you see when you look in the mirror? Do you have trouble accepting the way God made you? Are there changes you long for? Are you remembering to see Jesus in yourself, as you are asked to see Jesus in others? What is Jesus seeing when he looks at you? When you are preparing for the day, do you spend as much time on spiritual preparation as you do on physical?

**Group D.** **Practice humility.**

Catch ourselves when we are thinking we're better than others. Is there anything wrong with being confident and proud of our endeavors? What are some symptoms or behaviors that might indicate we're off track? Are we giving glory to God, knowing all is done through him?

**Group E. Pray to show greater charity.**

Read “Prayer for Charity.” (below)

Keep me, O God, from pettiness; let me be large in thought, in word, in deed. Let me be done with fault-finding and self-seeking. May I put away all pretense and meet everyone face to face without self-pity and without prejudice. May I never be hasty in judgment and always be generous. Let me take time for all things. Make me grow calm, serene and gentle. Teach me to put into action my better impulses, straightforward and unafraid. Grant that I may realize it is the little things of life that create differences and that in the big things of life we are one. And, O Lord God, let me not forget to be kind. Amen [[6]](#footnote-5)

**Discussion Points**

**𝝉** What personal qualities (from the Prayer for Charity above) do we need in order to be charitable?

**𝝉** What are the negative vices—name the virtues that would help change those uncharitable attitudes.

**𝝉** Discuss which virtues do you find easiest and which are more difficult. Do you see the connection between the virtues, their negative counterparts, and how strengthening the virtues can help eliminate the vices?

**𝝉** Choose someone to read the prayer during the closing.

**Closing Prayer**

Scripture One-Liners (participants take turns reading one of the lines slowly, with time to reflect between each)

“Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” (Romans 12: 6)

“For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’” (Matthew 25: 35)

“If you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom will become like midday.” (Isaiah 58: 10)

“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Cor. 16:13)

“One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, And He will repay him for his good deed.” (Prov. 19:17)

“When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Luke 18:22)

“Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:6)

“But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17)

“And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

“In whatever you do, don’t let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble, and honor others more than yourselves. Don’t be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too.” (Philippians 2:3-4)

**Someone from Group E reads “Prayer for Charity.”**

**Take Home Reflection**

When did you experience a time when someone was particularly charitable to you? How did that impact your life?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Practice “random acts of kindness.” See how this habit develops a deeper awareness of the needs of others and makes a difference in the way you respond.

**Session Five**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Five large sheets of flip chart (or other) paper, with the letters of the alphabet written down the sides.

**Opening Prayer**

**Listen to:** “Breathe Peace,” by Robbie Seay Band

**Quiet reflection:** World peace begins within. What is causing disharmony and tension in my life? What can I do to counteract the stress in order to be a calm presence for others?

**Sharing:** How has your life been influenced since our last gathering? Did you participate in thetake home reflection or JPIC action?

**Let’s begin with prayer**. (Sign of the Cross)

**Discussion Talking Points**

The following suggested discussion points were inspired by an article on Franciscanmedia.org, “How to Be a Peacemaker,” by Martin Pable, OFM Cap [[7]](#footnote-6)

What does the following quote imply about being peacemakers?

“Brothers. We have been called to heal wounds, to unite what has fallen apart, and to bring home those who have lost their way.” (St. Francis of Assisi)

All of us have the capacity to develop simple, ordinary ways of carrying a spirit of unity, peace and reconciliation into all our relationships. Here are just a few ways to become better peacemakers:

**1. Through the Power of Speech**

How do put downs, cynicism, sarcasm, negativity, racial slurs, insults, hostility, offensive language, etc. contribute to the erosion of human dignity?

Paul tells the Ephesians, to avoid evil talk. Everything we say should “impart grace to those who hear.” (Eph. 4:29)

When we have to speak truthful, difficult words to another we need to speak in a caring, gentle manner so our words are helpful not harmful.

**2. When We Are the Injured**

Life has a way of hurting us, and we all carry wounds. How do we deal with this pain? Low-grade resentment, anger, desire for revenge, holding grudges?

Psychology and Scripture tells us that the way to healing is through forgiveness. This can be a long process, sometimes requiring help and prayer.

Forgiveness is an act of choice, an act of decision that goes beyond feelings.

**3. When We Inflict the Injury**

Sometimes we are called to embrace a humble, sincere act of apology when we have hurt someone. Regardless of whose fault or if the hurt was unintentional, an apology can restore a relationship.

Fear of a lawsuit might keep us from admitting our fault. This fact should be an even more important reason to witness an alternative way to restore peace.

**4. Breaking the Barriers**

There are many divisions in our world, but particularly sad are those between racial and religious groups. St. Pope John Paul II says the lack of Christian unity “openly contradicts the will of Christ and is a cause of scandal to the world.” The same can be said of racial disunity.

“Promise Keepers” teaches that if a person is willing to meet often to talk and listen with someone not of his/her kind, the person will be encountered at the core of his/her humanity.

**Community Building Activity**

Divide into teams of 3 or 4. Each team has a sheet of paper with the alphabet written down the sides. Set a timer for 3 minutes. Try to find a word (or short phrase) that begins with each letter of the alphabet that indicates a way to practice peace and non-violence. Share and compare just for fun.

**Closing Prayer**

Dear Lord. Our desire is to be people of peace...to stand for what is right and good, and to serve those who need our help the most. Help us to understand that being responsible for our everyday words and actions is the most important first step. Knowing that is your desire for us too, we ask for your help in confidence.

**Response:** Our response is Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!

**All: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!**

That all men and women of good will actively pursue peace in their families, their work, their communities and their world. We pray...

**All: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!**

That leaders make every effort to promote a peace based on dialogue, negotiation, and respect for the needs of all humanity. We pray...

**All: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!**

That all those in the world in need of humanitarian assistance will be granted what they need for the alleviation of their suffering. We pray...

**All: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!**

For what else shall we pray? (Pause) We pray...

**All: Mary Queen of Peace, pray for us!**

**All:**

God our Father, you reveal that those who work for peace

will be called your sons and daughters.

Help us to work without ceasing

for that justice which brings true and lasting peace.

Help us to do no harm, and rather, only do good.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

**Take Home Reflection**

After this session you may be aware of ways you have contributed to a lack of peace and harmony. What TV shows do you watch that might perpetuate a desensitivity to this lack?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Watch “The Hundred Foot Journey”with a group of friends and open a discussion about culture clashes. Who in your life do you avoid because of differences? How can you bridge the gap and build relationships with those that are different?

**Session Six**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Prepare a table with a bottle of holy water, Franciscan symbols (candle, Rule, tau, San Damiano cross etc.). Prepare five posters ahead of time. See descriptions below.

**Opening Prayer**

**Leader:** In order to follow Christ, we must be willing to accept continual conversion as our norm. Every decision we make, word we say, action we take must be based on “what does God want me to do?” One way to practice this is to exercise the beautiful virtues, especially faith, hope, and charity.

Living a virtuous life is not easy, but is a necessary part of being Christlike. We imagine it wasn't easy for Francis to live the counter-culture life to which he was called. To strengthen his resolve, he prayed before the crucifix in the little church in San Damiano in the early days of his conversion. Our Baptism gives us grace and strength for this task, but we are also gifted with the beautiful “Prayer Before the Crucifix.”

**All:** Read together slowly.

Most High,

glorious God,

enlighten the darkness of my heart

and give me

true faith,

certain hope,

and perfect charity,

sense and knowledge, Lord,

that I may carry out

Your holy and true command. [[8]](#footnote-7)

**Discussion**

Read the story of Francis and the San Damiano cross/and or a description of the symbolism found in the artwork within the cross. This story happens at the very beginning of Francis' conversion process.

**Five Small Groups**

Reflect in small groups or as individuals, then work on posters together. Each is given one of the following lines from the prayer and the accompanying Scripture passage. Ask yourselves if Francis speaks for you too. Is this something you desire? What do you need to do in order to attain these qualities?

**1. Enlighten the darkness of my heart**.

**“**For you were once darkness, but now in the Lord, you are light.” (Eph. 5:8)

Have you ever experienced a dark period in your life? These times are often like being in a dark tunnel with seemingly no way out. Where or from whom did you find the light to help you through it?

Your poster says, “There's a light at the end of the tunnel,” and has a large tunnel in the center. What represents the tunnel for you? As a group, list “tunnel” words or draw pictures that come to mind on the left side of the tunnel. What represents the light? Draw or write on the opposite side of the tunnel.

**2. Give me true faith...**

**“**Courage! It is I. Do not be afraid.” (Matt. 14:28)

Your poster says, “Keep the faith,” (an old 1960's expression!) and has a group of uplifted hands at the bottom. On the top half of your poster, above the hands, draw or write words that represent what challenges your faith? These problems are being offered up in prayer by the hands. What helps you strengthen or hold on to your faith? On the hands draw what you need, use, or desire to help you in your faith life.

**3. Certain hope...**

**“**Your salvation lay in conversion and tranquility, your strength in complete trust.” (Isaiah 30: 15)

Your poster has a picture of someone kneeling with a pile of rocks on his shoulders. On the rocks, write what it is that burdens us, and makes us feel hopeless. Now each person can choose a symbol of something that can lift the rock (use your imagination) and on that symbol write actions or words that can help give hope to others.

**4. Perfect charity...**

**“**There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts off fear.” (1 John 4: 18)

On your poster is a large heart. On the heart, draw or write pictures that show who needs our charity. Around the outside of the heart, draw around each of your hands as if they are reaching toward the heart. On the hands, draw or write what to you represents charitable acts.

**5. Sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out your holy and true command.**

“As for Mary, she treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart.” (Luke 2: 19)

Your poster says “Do what is yours to do.” (a quote from Francis at his death) In the center of the poster there are question marks. On the question marks, write some of the things you are trying to figure out...where do I want to go to school, what do I want to study, how can I serve, do I want to pursue a religious vocation?

How can we discern what it is God wants us to do? After discussing ideas on ways to discover God's plan for us, draw or write words on the poster that represent these ideas.

**Whole Group Sharing**

Come back together as a group and share your posters. Discuss what we can do when we fail? Miss the mark? Need improvement? Life is about daily conversion, and the willingness to do what it takes to move us toward holiness.

**Closing Prayer**

Listen to quiet music as we bless the hands of the person next to us with the Holy Water using words such as “Bless you in your journey toward holiness.” Plan a time when the whole group can attend Reconciliation together.

**Take Home Reflection**

Study the list of vices and the virtues that counteract them. Choose one in particular to work on. If you are willing, be ready at our next gathering to share your challenges and successes in strengthening the virtue you picked. (info taken from dowym.com/discover/vices-virtue)

**1. Pride versus humility**

Pride is a denial of the superiority of the Creator and an inflation of our ego.

Humility is a recognition that we are creatures and in need of God.

**2. Greed versus generosity**

Greed is hoarding what we have, and striving for more at the expense of others.

Generosity is paying attention to the needs of others and being willing to share.

**3. Wrath versus Meekness**

Wrath is a state of displeasure, annoyance, or hostility.

Meekness is self-control, which allows us to master emotions when wronged.

**4. Sloth versus Diligence**

Sloth is laziness that prevents us from doing what we can achieve and should do. Diligence is a readiness to always do what is needed, no matter how difficult.

**5. Gluttony versus Temperance**

Gluttony is a disordered love for food and drink usually for pleasure only, not health.

Temperance is a right use of food and drink for nourishment and pleasure. It leads to self-control in many other areas.

**6. Lust versus Chastity**

Lust is a craving for selfish and sensual pleasure (generally sexual).

Chastity is a proper use of our sexuality.

**7. Envy versus gratitude**

Envy is disappointment that we don’t have all the gifts and possessions we want.

Generosity is being aware of and appreciating all God’s gifts to us.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Reflect on how your virtues and vices affect others. Start a “Franciscan moments” tradition. Each time you get together, share moments you were able during your time apart to use your Franciscan charism/virtues. Sharing these stories will build an awareness of your growing Franciscan charisms

**Session Seven**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Set up a table with various images of Mary and a Franciscan Crown Rosary.

Invite young people to bring their favorite statues and pictures of Mary.

**Opening Prayer**

**Share the story of the Crown Rosary**

In 1422, a young man who used to adorn a statue of Mary with a wreath of flowers every day was upset that he was unable to do so now that he had entered the friary. The story says that Mary appeared to him and asked him to give her a crown of flowers in the form of reciting seven decades of Hail Marys in honor of her seven joys: the Annunciation, the visit to Elizabeth, the Nativity, the adoration of the Magi, finding Jesus in the Temple, experiencing the Risen Jesus on Easter, and her Assumption. Soon this devotion spread through the Franciscan family. [[9]](#footnote-8)

**Sing or listen** to one of the Mary songs--Gentle Woman, Immaculate Mary, etc.

**Read:** Matthew 12: 48-50 (“Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”)

**Say the Crown Rosary** using the reflections below.

Start on the first mystery without any introductory prayers. One Our Father, ten Hail Mary’s, and one Glory Be for each decade.

1. Annunciation--Do we say YES to the inner promptings of the Spirit?
2. Visitation--Do we go to others, or look to find ways to assist those in need?
3. Nativity--How are we each bearers of Christ, bringing Christ into our daily lives and situations, making real the Gospel?
4. Adoration of the Magi--What gifts do you have to offer our Lord?
5. Finding Jesus in the Temple--Jesus was with the teachers, learning and sharing knowledge. Do we continue our own adult religious education?
6. The risen Savior appears to the BVM on Easter--Death is conquered! Do we live our lives such that others see our faith in action?
7. The assumption of the BVM into heaven and her coronation as Queen of the Universe--Reflect on the life of Mary. (unmarried pregnant teenager, displaced, difficult travel, an immigrant, single parent when Joseph dies, innocent son facing an ignoble death). Where can you relate to her story?

Conclude with adding two Hail Marys in honor of the seventy-two years that tradition holds that our Mother lived here on earth, and one Our Father, Hail Mary, and Glory be for the intentions of the Holy Father.

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝛕**  Which of Mary’s titles, devotions, or artwork do you most relate to?

**𝛕** Who has mothered you? Has your relationship with your mother grown, or is it strained? What women are special in your life?

**Closing Prayer**

**The Salutation of the BVM** (Francis of Assisi--The Saint)

**All:** “Hail, O Lady, Holy Queen, Mary, Mother of God,

who are the Virgin made Church,

chosen by the Most Holy Father in heaven

whom he consecrated with his most holy beloved Son

and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,

in whom there was and is all fullness of grace and every good!

Hail His Palace! Hail, His Tabernacle! Hail, His dwelling!

Hail, His Robe! Hail, His Servant! Hail, His Mother! Amen [[10]](#footnote-9)

**Take Home Reflection**

Our history is filled with many examples of learned Friars who helped illuminate the Doctrines of the Church regarding Mary. You may like to further explore St. Maximillian Kolbe or John Duns Scotus.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Make a commitment to pray the rosary for the intentions of the poor and marginalized, especially for unwed mothers. Place a small picture of Mary on your refrigerator, and every time you open it for something to eat, pray for unwed or otherwise struggling mothers, especially immigrants.

**Session Eight**

**Franciscans…**

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**Opening Prayer**

**Sing: “**Canticle of the Sun” (Marty Haugen)

**Read:** Jeremiah 15:16 (“When I found your words, I devoured them; they became my joy and the happiness of my heart, because I bore your name, O Lord, God of hosts.”)

**Read:** “A True and Perfect Joy” from the Secular Franciscan Ritual. (Or see also 2Celano 125 and 145)

**Three Minutes Reflection** while listening to **“**Peace Prayer” (David Haas), “Cry of the Poor”(John Foley)

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝛕** Tell the following joke (or another): Lost on a rainy night, a nun stumbles across a monastery and requests shelter there. Fortunately, she’s just in time for dinner and is treated to the best fish and chips she’s ever had. After dinner, she goes into the kitchen to thank the chefs. She is met by two brothers. “Hello, I’m Brother Michael, and this is Brother Charles.” The nun answered, “I’m pleased to meet you. Thank you for the wonderful dinner. Who cooked what?” Brother Michael replied, “Well, I’m the fish Friar.” She turns to the other Brother. “So you must be…?” “Yes, I am the chip Monk.”

**𝛕** Jokes do make us laugh. But what we’re talking about is inner joy. How does Francis describe joy?

**𝛕**  What gets in the way of your inner joy?

**𝛕** How can we be messengers of perfect joy in all circumstances? What about when you’ve failed an exam, are diagnosed with a disease, lost your job, or suffered a natural disaster?

**Closing Prayer**

Intercessory prayer

Leader: Loving Father, we come to you today baring the holes in our hearts and asking for the grace to know deep within just how loved and special we are to you. We pray for the grace to know that when asked “who are you,” we can say that we are sons and daughters of the Great King. Pour forth your Spirit that we may know our dignity and worth in your eyes and live the Gospel throughout the good and the bad times of our lives. Help us to always believe we are preciously held in the palm of your hand.

**Sing or listen to: “**How Can I Keep From Singing” (Chris Tomlin)

**Take Home Reflection**

In Franciscan Journey, Lester Bach says “Joy goes far beyond the ability to laugh. Joy is connected to a peaceful spirit. It allows us to perceive God at work in our lives. There is a sense that we are cared for and loved. We are ‘somebody’ to God and God loves us no matter how poorly we respond to God’s love. There is an inner sense of peacefulness that is a partner with joy.”

Find a place indoor or out that can become your sanctuary...a place for prayer, and to find peace. Pray especially that you can be intimately held close to the heart of our God.

Arrange a movie night to show the 1973 film, “Godspell**.”** The musical presents the Gospel in a unique way with parable storytelling, relationships, and the Crucifixion story. Sharing the symbolism of transformation of people into clown whiteface (dying to self) and markings of resurrection (new in Christ) after their Baptism in Central Park’s fountain, might motivate young people to start a clown troupe or drama club in order to reenact the Gospel stories for younger students or in hospitals or rest homes. The movie night might serve as a parish event, fundraiser or kick off for a new drama ministry.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Find a local soup kitchen and volunteer to help set-up, cook, serve, and visit with the guests or clean up afterwards. Take note. Is joy contagious?

Perhaps some members might like to start a Clown Ministry troupe and spread some Gospel joy to those living in an assisted living home, rehab center or group homes. A good resource is *Send in His Clowns* (Jim Spata).

**Session Nine**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Prepare ahead of time statistics about other countries and their possessions.

Be ready to share the story of an incident where people lose everything in a natural disaster of some kind. One example would be when the whole town of Paradise, California was burned to the ground in November of 2018. Almost everyone lost all of their possessions, escaping with only the clothes they were wearing. Stories and quotes from that fire illustrating the lesson many of the victims learned regarding the loss of possessions versus the loss of life might serve as a good introduction to the topic.

Many natural disasters may also serve as a lead-in to a discussion on global climate change and its impact on the environment and ultimately our lives.

**Opening Prayer**

**Listen to YouTube, “Let Go” (Elevation Worship, live)**

**Opening Activity**

Each person is handed a piece of paper on which is written the name of a particular room in their house. (living room, dining room, kitchen, bedroom, bathroom, office, attic, basement, garage, yard, nursery, child's room, TV room, etc.) You have five minutes to make a list of everything you can think of that **might be** in that room. You may not necessarily have that item, or even that room, so use your imagination. Work in teams if your group is large. GO...

Gather together. Mark your lists with one color at a time.

1. Check anything that is decorative only. (red)

2. Check anything that you use for entertainment only. (blue)

3. Check anything that gives you physical comfort, but may not be essential. (green)

4. Check anything that gives you emotional comfort, but may not be essential. (purple)

5. Check anything that perhaps only one or two people in the family would use. (black)

6. Check anything that although you enjoy having it, you might only use a few times a year. (orange)

7. Check anything that you consider part of a hobby or collection.(yellow)

8. Check anything that you consider irreplaceable as a family keepsake (brown)

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝛕**  Now that we've run out of colors, let's take a look. Count, and add up each color as a group. Compare.

**𝛕** What is left on your list? Go around the room and share which items have not been marked.

**𝛕**  What do you think this experiment has shown us about possessions?

**Found Object Prayer**

Place a number of small ordinary objects on a tray. (comb, band aid, pencil, paperclip, envelope, etc.) Make sure there will be one for every person plus some extra.

**Leader:** Sometimes our possessions, the lack of and subsequent coveting, or our pursuit of more things gets in the way of our relationship with God, or our mindfulness of the needs of others. Jesus often used objects or nature in parables to teach us a lesson. The prayer is meant to help us be more aware of God in our lives. We'll each take one of these everyday possessions and let it become a parable. What is the item telling us about God?

**Take Home Reflection**

Today’s activity might have made you aware of unused items in your home. Spend some time reflecting on what you can detach yourself from, and to whom it would most benefit.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Choose something common at your home that you use on a regular basis. Compose a little prayer that is relevant, so every time you use it you will be reminded to pray for your special intention.

**Session Ten**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Download and copy the “Two Feet of Justice” posters found on the USCCB website.

Prepare Closing Prayer (need eight rocks etc.)

Reflection: We like to think that our holiness is thwarted by our situation. Look at the example of our saints and you will discover that holiness thrives anywhere. To achieve holiness, we all need: the support of a community; to take up the practice of prayer, fasting and almsgiving; a close relationship with God in Jesus and the Holy Spirit; self discipline and a willingness to serve others.

**Opening Prayer**

Read Matthew 25: 35-36

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝝉** Who are the words directed to? Discuss examples of charitable acts you have experienced toward you, witnessed, or you have offered to another. Now examine the two feet of justice and discuss.

**𝝉** Name some examples of charity vs justice.

**𝝉** Why are both feet needed?

**Closing Prayer**

**Prayer for Perfect Charity**

**Leader:**

We also celebrate the feast day of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, the patron saint of the OFS, on November 17. St. Elizabeth’s dedication to the poor, the sick and the homeless so closely exemplifies the work of our Order, this prayer would be appropriate to use on her feast day. As Secular Franciscans, we can look to St. Elizabeth in fulfilling our Rule, article 15—to “be in the forefront in promoting justice,” and article19, in striving “to bring joy and hope to others.”

There are many Franciscan saints! Perhaps each member can research one of the saints and prepare a short presentation, emphasizing how the saint strove for holiness in their life. Share with each other, then consider sharing with a parish confirmation class. Although they are not Franciscan, including such saints as St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Andrew Kim Taegon, St. Paul Chong Hasang, St. Martin de Porres, St. Andrew Dung-Lac and companions, will add a multicultural dimension to the topic. Sister Mary Thea Bowman is not a saint, but in 2018 was declared a Servant of God which is the first step in sainthood. She spoke elequently about the particular needs of black Americans, and allowed us to walk on her journey toward death, saying we should continue to work until we die. You can find parts of her speeches on YouTube.

**Opening Song**

**Scripture One-Liners** (hand out a strip of paper with one line of Scripture ahead of time. Participants read one at a time, with a little pause between.)

**Responsorial Prayer for Charity in Truth**

**Leader:** This prayer is based on Pope Benedict XVI's 2009 encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate, Charity in Truth.* Our Response is: Invite us in, Lord, where you live in perfect charity.

**(All)** Invite us in, Lord, where you live in perfect charity.

Guide us to seek the truth of the human person. Teach us the way to love because you are Love.

**(All)** Invite us in, Lord, where you live in perfect charity.

Jesus, you embody Love and Truth. Help us to recognize your face in the poor.

Enable us to live out our vocation to bring love and justice to your people.

**(All)** Invite us in, Lord, where you live in perfect charity.

Holy Spirit, you inspire us to transform our world. Empower us to seek the common good for all persons. Give us a spirit of solidarity and make us one human family.

**(All)** Invite us in, Lord, where you live in perfect charity.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Ceremony of the Spirit** (need 8 rocks, 8 people to carry up, and a reader. Rocks may have gift of the spirit written on it.)

**Leader:** We can do nothing without the help of the Holy Spirit. The apostle Paul says: “the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:19-21). We must take the spiritual gifts for our own, and use them to continue our charitable work.

(Each reader speaks their line, then places their rock on a little table in front of the altar.)

**Reader 1:** I bring the spirit of **Love,** which is service and sacrifice.

**Reader 2:** I bring the spirit of **Joy,** which gives inner assurance, balance, and abiding contentment.

**Reader 3:** I bring the spirit of **Peace,** which is felt as tranquility, emotional balance and harmony.

**Reader 4:** I bring the spirit of **Kindness,** which we recognize as respect for human dignity, courtesy and courageous attentiveness toward other people.

**Reader 5:** I bring the spirit of **Generosity;** it is largeness of soul, a giving and forgiving nature.

**Reader 6:** I bring the spirit of **Faithfulness,** because it means authenticity, friendship, trust, security, and promises kept.

**Reader 7:** I bring the spirit of **Gentleness,** which is quiet self-control, strength, and confidence.

**Reader 8:** I bring the spirit of **Self-control,** respect for the self and the other, the essence of civility and humanness, the practice of moderation, and living generously.

**Leader:** We thank you Lord for the many blessings and gifts that allow us to serve you.

**Closing Prayer:** “Prayer for Charity”

**All:**  Keep me, O God, from pettiness; let me be large in thought, in word, in deed. Let me be done with fault-finding and self-seeking. May I put away all pretense and meet everyone face to face without self-pity and without prejudice. May I never be hasty in judgment and always generous. Let me take time for all things. Make me grow calm, serene and gentle. Teach me to put into action my better impulses, straightforward and unafraid. Grant that I may realize it is the little things of life that create differences and that in the big things of life we are one. And, O Lord God, let me not forget to be kind!

Amen

**Closing Song:** *In Perfect Charity, (*Randall DeBruyn version on YouTube)

**One line Scripture Passages:**

1. “Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, *each of us is to exercise them accordingly.” (Romans 12: 6)*

2. “For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’” (Matthew 25: 35)

3. And if you give yourself to the hungry, and satisfy the desire of the afflicted. Then your light will rise in darkness, and your gloom *will become* like midday. (Isaiah 58: 10)

4. “Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love.” (1 Cor. 16:13)

5. “One who is gracious to a poor man lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his good deed.” (Prov. 19:17)

6. “When Jesus heard this, He said to him, "One thing you still lack; sell all that you possess and distribute it to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me." (Luke 18:22)

7. “Now this I say, he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. Each one must do just as he has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor. 9:6)

8. “But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?” (1 John 3:17)

9. “And I have been a constant example of how you can help those in need by working hard. You should remember the words of the Lord Jesus: It is more blessed to give than to receive.” (Acts 20:35)

10. “In whatever you do, don’t let selfishness or pride be your guide. Be humble, and honor others more than yourselves. Don’t be interested only in your own life, but care about the lives of others too.” (Philippians 2:3-4)

**Take Home Reflection**

Many saints confronted issues of injustice in a radical way. St. Elizabeth of Hungary, St. Martin de Porres, St. Damien, leper of Molokai, St. Katherine Drexel, St. Vincent de Paul, are all examples of people who stepped out of their own comfort zone in order to minister to those in need. Read and reflect about how these saints not only changed the lives of those they served, but their actions led to societal changes.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

What areas of injustice do you see and/or experience in your community or neighborhood? Pray about God’s will for you in these areas. How can you help? Is there a situation that you can help with as a fraternity?

**Remember**--there are many, many ways to work toward a more just world. We all have different talents, experiences, opportunities and interests. It is good to invite others to join us in our actions, but inappropriate to force someone to get involved in our cause. We need to freely choose and resist putting others down if they aren’t comfortable or don’t feel called to join us.

**Session Eleven**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Invite members to bring business cards, pictures, or fliers about where they work--or their home/family if a stay at home parent; school if they are a student, etc.

Print “Ten Ways to Live Your Faith at Work,” by Kevin Lowry.

**Opening Prayer**

Read Col. 3:17, 23-25

**Listen to or sing**

“This is Holy Ground”(Christopher Beatty)

**Three minute silent reflection:**

How does your work give glory to God and/or reflect His love?

**Participants share what their work is.**

What do you like about your job, and what don’t you like?

**Read Together**

Article from Our Sunday Visitor*,* “10 Ways to Live your Faith at Work*,*” by Kevin Lowry.

Posted June 17, 2015 on *Our Sunday Visitor* website**. Highlights of the article are below.**

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝝉** In what way(s) do you see your work as a gift? For yourself? For others?

**𝝉** Are you happy/content in your work? If not, what would you need to change?

**𝝉** What else are you passionate about? Could that lead to a work goal?

**𝝉** Has anyone ever brought to your attention a gift/talent you weren’t aware of?

**Closing Prayer**

Intercessory prayer for each other, in trying to live our faith out in the world.

End with an Our Father, Hail mary, and Glory Be

**Take Home Reflection**

Consider buying Kevin Lowry’s book, *Faith at work: Finding Purpose Behind the Paycheck.* Discuss beginning a book loaning system for your group.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Who helped you gain the skills and attitude necessary to be a good worker?

Is there something you’d consider doing--tutoring, becoming a “big brother or sister,” volunteering to coach--to help a younger person gain skills or confidence?

**Points from** “*Ten Ways to Live Your Faith at Work,”* Kevin Lowry

Kevin Lowry asks, “Do you take your faith to work? Or does the mere thought evoke a nervous flutter in your stomach? Be not afraid. As Catholics, there are countless ways to live out our faith in the workplace in ways that aren’t offensive to others, and actually make us better at doing our jobs. Don’t believe me?”

Lowry suggests that given how much time we spend at work, what happens there is critical for our spiritual growth. Here are a few of his ideas. After reading and discussing, see if your group can add to the list.

1. Be joyful

Joy transcends emotion. Joy is rooted in the hope we have in Christ and the knowledge that his faithfulness is constant and enduring. Joy is a choice, not dependent on feelings of happiness. Joy relieves anxiety and stress and helps us live in the moment.

2. Strive for excellence

Who do you work for? Ultimately, it’s not a boss or company to whom we are accountable. We all work for the Lord. So that carries with it a responsibility — we should always do our best in human terms, giving our best effort. The Lord will bless and sanctify our work.

### 3. Support others

Your work involves other human beings, some of whom might be experiencing difficulties. We can’t fix everything, but we can often be a source of support with an understanding smile or words of encouragement.

### 4. Be an ally

Don’t we all need allies at work? Regardless of our role in an organization, why not strive to be someone else’s ally, supplying mutual support and help, even when they don’t ask for it? This helps us to remember that it’s not all about us.

### 5. Forgive

Forgiveness is frequently necessary in the workplace, and as Catholics we need to ask for it and receive it. The words “I’m sorry” are among the most powerful we can use, and when it’s our turn to forgive, we’re called to do it from the heart.

### 6. Embrace failure

There’s no better impetus to success than failure. Even in the small workplace failures we experience we can learn, grow and do better next time. With perseverance and willingness to own our failures, the path to success is never easy, but it is attainable.

### 7. Be a friend

When there are difficult relationships we face at work, it’s often a challenge to see Christ within others. Yet if we accept this as a challenge, pray for the other individual and commit to treating him or her with courtesy and respect, even the most difficult relationships can come around. Time, patience, handwritten notes, a well-placed gift card and a couple of apologies, can serve as the elixir necessary to restore a friendly atmosphere.

### 8. Be grateful

Gratitude is a powerful aspect of our faith. Express gratitude willingly and often. Speak positively about your spouse and children. Become aware of all that you are grateful for, and don’t be afraid to share. An attitude of gratitude inspires yourself and others to put things into perspective.

9. Be humble

Humility in the workplace is powerful. Recognize and acknowledge the strengths of others, rather than their weaknesses. Accept the fact that it isn’t all about you! Being openly vulnerable and imperfect and letting others shine builds trust and cohesiveness.

10. Pray

Perhaps the best thing we can do is pray for others we encounter in our work. Our Catholic faith abounds with tools (the sacraments, prayers, devotions, the Rosary, Mass, etc.), we can always pray for others and know the Lord hears us.[[11]](#footnote-10)

**Session Twelve**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Ask each member to bring a picture of their family. This can mean their birth family if they’re single, current family if they have a spouse, or maybe they consider roommates family. Bring a picture of the sponsoring fraternity, who is also your family!

Choose from one of the many good Catholic Social Teaching (CST) podcasts available regarding the dignity of life to show to the group. (From Catholicsocialteaching.org there are several)

Collect Pro-Life materials to distribute. Remember, “pro-life” doesn’t just mean being anti-abortion. Catholics respect the dignity of all life, which encompasses many more issues than abortion. (Copy for each, “A Fresh Perspective on Being Pro-Life,” by Mark P. Shea, *St. Anthony Messenger*, Vol.127/No.8, January 2020.)

**Opening Prayer**

**A Prayer for Life** (from Holy Trinity Region in Texas)

Father and Maker of all,

You adorn all creation with splendor and beauty,

and fashion human lives in your image and likeness.

Awaken in every heart reverence for the work of your hands.

Renew among your people a readiness to nurture and sustain

your precious gift of life.

Grant this through our Lord

Jesus Christ, your Son,

who lives and reigns with you

in the unity of the Holy Spirit,

God forever and ever.

Amen

**Discussion Talking Points**

This Article of the Rule includes three important aspects of healthy family life. We’ll take each one separately. Peace, fidelity, and respect for life. Describe your family life. Are you single? Have roommates? Have a spouse and/or children? This fraternity or your sponsoring fraternity?

**𝝉 Peace:** In your family situation, what contributes to a lack of peace? What could be done to move toward a more harmonious existence with one another?

**𝝉 Fidelity:** A general definition of fidelity is faithfulness to a person, cause or belief. To what or whom must you remain faithful in your circumstance?

**𝝉** **Respect for Life:** After watching the CST Pro-Life podcast and sharing points from the St. Anthony Messenger article, has your view of respect for life changed?

**𝝉** There are many areas in life that are affected by our respect for life, human dignity for all, where do you see the lack of this in your community?

**Closing Prayer**

Place all the family pictures on your prayer table.

Read Matthew 5:23-24

Response: Lord, have mercy…

For the ways I have not been life-giving to my family…

For the ways I have brought conflict and division to my family…

For the ways I have not appreciated the unique charisms of my family members…

For the times I did not act charitably to members of my family…

For the times I did not simplify my own material needs...

For the times I have not cultivated a spirit of peace, fidelity and respect for life in my family...

For the times I have not been life-giving to my family…

(taken from “A Litany and Examination of Conscience” based on the Rule of the OFS, by Judith W. Tyrell, OFS)

**Leader reads:**

Father, thank you for bringing us together here as a family and for our family that awaits us at home. We ask for your graces to help us live in our families as instruments of your peace, being faith-filled men and women of the Gospel. Help us to grow in your love and joy. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

(Turn to the person next to you and place your hands on their shoulder. Leader speaks the St. Francis Blessing (from [Numbers 6:24-26](http://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?t=niv&q=nu+6:24-26)), line by line as others repeat. After the prayer, bless that person on the forehead with a cross. Switch giver and receiver and repeat ritual.)

"May the Lord bless you and keep you;

May He make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you;

May He turn his face toward you and give you His peace." Amen

**Sing:**Play “The Blessing” (YouTube: Kari Jobe and Cody Carnes, Live from Elevation Worship) while the group raises their arms over each other in blessing. Turn to the ones around you and draw a cross on each other’s foreheads.

**Take Home Reflection**

In light of what causes disunity and stress in your family, reflect on your role in this problem. Receiving the Sacrament of Reconciliation will give you the grace to make changes. Perhaps this can be a group/family event.

It’s important to begin understanding human dignity and respect from others very early in life. If you have a family or youngsters you have contact with, is there something you can do to help them learn about the dignity of all? What changes do you need to make to be a good example of this? Have a family discussion and decide what actions to take.

Keep a family gratitude journal in a prominent place. Invite members of the family to write or draw noting things they are grateful for. This will not be a confidential journal, as others should be encouraged to read entries and become more aware of how much we have to be grateful for.

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Your “family” at this point in your life may be room- mates, colleagues at work, extended relatives, and even this group. What can you do to help your “family” gain better understanding, or to promote respect for life? Is there an action your Franciscan Youth Fraternity can take? Perhaps letter writing, an apostolic action, or sponsor a movie night showing a film that touches on the topic of respect for life.

Evaluate how your daily habits have an impact (negative or positive) globally. Decide on a new practice to undertake.

Does anyone have a family member suffering from a debilitating illness such as ALS, MS, Diabetes, Cancer, or a mental illness? Perhaps the group would like to do a walk/bike/run to help raise awareness in honor of the family member.

**Session Thirteen**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Download the article “In Praise of All Creation*,”* by Charles Spencer. Provide copies for all participants.(secularfranciscansusa.org→Resources→Formation and Spirituality→Initial Formation→Miscellaneous Documents→Come and See Digests→ “In Praise of All Creation”

**Opening Prayer**

Pass out article. Divide group into side one and side two, and read the Canticle prayer, each side taking turns with the stanzas.

**Discussion Talking Points**

Examine the five definitions of “ecology” found in *Laudato Si’, On Care for Our Common Home,* the encyclical letter written by Pope Francis.

1. Environmental, Economic, and Social Ecology:

#138 All living things in our environment are interconnected.

#139 Humans are part of nature, and solutions must consider the interaction of people (our social system) and nature (ecosystems) as a whole.

#140 We must learn how “sustainable use” of all these systems affect each other and have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness.

1. Cultural Ecology:

#143 Ecology also involves protecting the cultural treasures of humanity. It gives us our identity and passes on the wisdom and creativity of the past.

#145 Environment exploitation can destroy ecosystems and social systems at the same time.

1. Ecology of Daily Life:

#147 Finding ways of improving the quality of life must include respect of our environment as well as our social systems. We all want safe, peaceful, healthy communities.

#148 Humans are adaptive and find ways to nourish each other in community, a network of solidarity and belonging.

1. Principle of the Common Good:

#156 Human ecology is inseparable from “the common good,” how individuals find their fulfillment through relationships with others in community.

#157 The individual person is respected, has basic rights, and is part of a larger society. The common good is peace, security via order and justice.[[12]](#footnote-11)

After discussing the above quotes, ask yourselves these questions.

**𝝉** What do you consider the purpose of life?

**𝝉** Is this related to the dignity of all people?

**𝝉** How does your behavior respect or disrespect other people’s ability to seek ?

**𝝉** What are some examples of the “common good” that has been affected in your community?

**Closing Prayer**

Create your own, or use *“*Liturgy of Creation*,”*Composed by Edward Shirley, OFS Adapted for Bl.John XXIII OFS Fraternity, October, 2011 by Jean D’Onofrio, OFS. Found in *Canticle of the Sun: High School and Young Adult Program (YouFra website)*

**Sing:“**The Canticle Song,” Marty Haugen

**Take Home Reflection**

Read and reflect on the article *“*In Praise of All Creation*.”*

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Divide the stanzas of “The Canticle of the Creatures” among the members of your fraternity. Each member will spend some time in nature taking pictures that illustrate their stanza. Ask a volunteer to collect the photos and create a slideshow or powerpoint to share with another group of youth, in order to introduce them to this particular charism of St. Francis.

**Session Fourteen**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session prepare copies of the following pledge for all members. (found on Franciscan Action Network--FAN--website)**

**Commitment to Civility in Discourse. We commit to:**

**F**acilitate a forum for difficult discourse and acknowledge that dialogue can lead to new insight and mutual understanding

**R**espect the dignity of all people, especially the dignity of those who hold an opposing view

**A**udit myself and utilize terms or a vocabulary of faith to unite or reconcile rather than divide conflicting positions

**N**eutralize inflamed conversations by presuming that those with whom we differ are acting in good faith

**C**ollaborate with others and recognize that all human engagement is an opportunity to promote peace

**I**dentify common ground such as similar values or concerns and utilize this as a foundation to build upon

**S**upport efforts to clean up provocative language by calling policy makers to their sense of personal integrity.

**Opening Prayer**

Where and how do you feel walls have been built in your family/community/World?

Read: Ephesians 2: 14-18

Listen to YouTube, “Come and Tear Down the Walls” (David and Nicole Binion/Live, Revere)

**Discussion Talking Points**

Using pgs. 78-79 from *The Handbook for Spiritual Assistance* (2012 edition), discuss the difference between debate and dialogue.

What is the goal of a debate? (to win an argument)

What is the goal of dialogue? (to come to understand different perspectives)

What attitudes must you have to engage in a healthy dialogue? (attentive listening; respectful demeanor; non-judgemental; sincerity; good eye contact; non-emotional; respond not react etc.)

**Discussion**

Share a time when you had a hard time in dialogue. Looking back, what were some of the road blocks that contributed to that difficulty? What have you learned about yourself that will help you the next time you are in a challenging conversation?

**Closing Prayer**

**Leader:** Learning to listen to God’s voice is central to learning good dialogue techniques. We ask the Holy Spirit for grace and wisdom before we begin a difficult discussion.

**Listen to**: “I’m Listening” by Chris McClarney

**Read together:**

Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.

Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance.

Where there is poverty with joy there is neither greed nor avarice.

Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness.

Where there is fear of the Lord to guard an entrance, there the enemy cannot have a place to enter.

Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment, there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.[[13]](#footnote-12)

*(Admonition XXVII--Francis of Assisi)*

**Take Home Reflection**

Reflect on the above admonition.

Listen to Waymaker (Darlene Zschech and William McDowell--Revele official live video) and reflect on God’s miracles in your life. How has God helped you change? Given you the graces to be a better person?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Invite a friend into a purposeful conversation--perhaps one of your Franciscan friends who is also trying to improve this skill. Choose a topic to discuss and practice. Set a timer and spend time when the conversation is over to evaluate how you both did in speaking with a Franciscan voice.

**Session Fifteen**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Session based on *Misericordiae Vultus* (*The Face of Mercy*) [[14]](#footnote-13), by Pope Francis. Members should download the document and read ahead of time.

Have a copy of lyrics of “Forgiveness” (Matthew West) available to read.

Arrange for a priest to be available if possible for Reconciliation or assign a few persons to create a prayer service reflecting a desire to seek repentance and turn back to God.

**Opening Prayer**

Listen to Matt West's song “Forgiveness” (on YouTube)

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝝉** Can you relate to this song? Can anger and hate be overcome by forgiveness? Have you had any experiences with forgiveness given to you, or with forgiveness having been withheld from you? How did you feel?

**𝝉** The phrase, “setting the prisoner free” can mean many things? Is there someone who needs freedom? From what? Could it be you? What would it be like to set the prisoner within you free?

**𝝉** What do you think is the correlation between mercy and forgiveness? What is the difference between the two?

**Closing Prayer**

Spend quiet time using a good Examination of Conscience to evaluate how you are doing. For what do you need to ask forgiveness? Participate in Reconciliation if your group has managed to arrange, if not, use the created prayer service to ask God for the grace to help you overcome the sin.

**Take Home Reflection**

Reflect on these words. Share with someone your ideas about forgiveness based on your reflection:

For**GIVE**ness

**Give** Mercy

**Give** compassion

**Give** Love

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Is there someone in your community or family who perhaps needs your forgiveness, or you need theirs? Maybe an act of kindness, a card, or even a private journal entry can help you make a much needed step toward healing.

**Session Sixteen**

**Franciscans…**

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**Before the Session**

Download a copy of the Transitus of St. Francis to distribute to participants. Bring special bread to share during the closing prayer.

**Opening Prayer**

**Sing:** “I Have Loved You” by Michael Joncas

**Read:** John 13:1-20, 33-35

**Sacred Sharing:** Where/Who are you in this Gospel passage? What was Jesus' legacy? What is your legacy?

**Discussion Talking Points**

**𝝉** What are your experiences of death?

**𝝉** Have you actively participated at a wake or funeral Mass? In what way did the event touch you?

**Closing Prayer**

Read the story of St. Francis’ death. It is traditional for Franciscans to commemorate St. Francis’ passing into Eternal life on the evening of Oct. 3. Pray the service, called a Transitus, as a group. Share bread at the close of the prayer.

**Take Home Reflection**

At this point in your life, what would you consider for your headstone? What do you want people to remember about you?

Plan to make a will. This is a blessing for those who will be responsible for settling your accounts. If you don’t feel you own any important assets, use the exercise as a way to evaluate what is important to you, and who you would want to leave your special items to. What “values” do you hold dear?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Brainstorm with your group ideas of how you can help those going through facing end of life issues. Discuss what you can do to help.

Offer to host a reception for a funeral or cook dinner for a family who is in mourning.

Research Global Health Justice Partnership (GHJP) which advocates for health justice around the world. Is there a way your group can get involved.

**Session Seventeen**

**Franciscans…**

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**Opening Prayer**

Song: “We are Many Parts, We are All One Body, by Marty Haugen

Read: 1 Corinthians 12:1-13, 27-28 and 13:4-7, 13

**Three minute silent reflection:**

What are your gifts and talents? How do you share them with this group? What gifts do you recognize in the friends surrounding you? In what ways have you grown through this process of “fraternity?”

**Discussion Talking Points**

Franciscans are a Trinitarian Order. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the loving and intimate relationship we try to emulate. This fraternity has the opportunity to be a strong “family” also.

**𝝉** How do you build relationships in your group? Are you allowing a little social time at each gathering? Do you meet outside the group to work or play together?

**𝝉** In what ways can you improve relationships within the group?

You are here at this time and place together after many months of sharing stories, your lives, your joys and sorrows with each other. You’ve lived through discussions, planning, disagreements--just like a second family. Even as you try in fraternity to love one another, like any group this one is imperfect. The important thing to remember is that you are following Christ through the steps of Sts. Francis and Clare, and as a result are a beautiful witness of the Good News.

**Closing Prayer**

Intercessory Prayer

Call upon the Holy Spirit to help you continue your journey!

**Song:** “Let the Fire Fall” (John Michael Talbot. George Mesulia version is lively.)

**Take Home Reflection**

How have you grown during this time with your group?What do you want the next steps to be? Have you considered making the Promise?

**Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Connection**

Plan an eco-friendly event to celebrate your time together. Celebrate the diversity of the group by sharing ethnic dishes. Invite your sponsoring fraternity to join you as a thank you for their support and to build relationships with them.

In your planning, be sure to include a nice prayer service and consider a bonding activity such as designing a banner you can display whenever you gather.

**Appendix A:**

**MISSION STATEMENT**

**of the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FY/YA) Commission of the**

**Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) of the United States of America**

Inspired by the life of St. Francis of Assisi and guided by our OFS Rule (Art. 24) and General Constitutions (Art. 96 & 97), our mission is to bring the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ to the youth and young adults of the United States of America. We are called to share this Franciscan way of life through prayer, formation, and social justice action with all youth whom we encounter.

We envision journeying with youth and young adults as they discern their purpose in life and develop a relationship with Jesus Christ. After experiencing Franciscan fraternal life, these young people may desire to form a FY/YA community, and the OFS at all levels commits to support them.

**GOALS**

**The FY/YA Commission will:**

 Provide the necessary training and resources to aid OFS fraternities in their outreach to youth and young adults and in the formation of FY/YA groups, being sensitive to differences in culture, settings, and environments.

 Provide networking opportunities between the National Executive Council, the FY/YA Commission, the OFS regional and local fraternities, and the FY/YA groups within the United States and YOUFRA worldwide.

The FY/YA Commission will encourage and assist regional and local fraternities to:

 Recognize the importance of our responsibility to youth and young adults and to understand the significant impact their presence has on the Franciscan family.

 Introduce Catholic and other interested young people of the United States to St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi.

 Share with young people the connection between the Gospel of Jesus and the Franciscan spirituality and way of life.

*Approved by the OFS-USA National Executive Council September, 2019.*

Permission to photocopy granted.

**Appendix B:**

**17 Essential Elements of Franciscan Spirituality**

* 1. **To live the gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis (Articles 1, 4, 5, 14)**
  2. **To be converted continually (Articles 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 12, 16)**
  3. **To live as sisters and brothers of all people and of all creation (Articles 13, 18)**
  4. **To live in communion with Christ (Articles 1, 4, 5, 14)**
  5. **To follow the poor and crucified Christ (Articles 10)**
  6. **To share in the life and mission of the Church (Article 6)**
  7. **To share in the love of the Father (Articles 4, 12)**
  8. **To be instruments of peace (Article 19)**
  9. **To have a life of prayer that is personal, communal & liturgical (Article 8)**
  10. **To live in joy (Article 19:2)**
  11. **To have a spirituality of a secular nature (Articles 3 ,6, 8, 11, 13, 14)**
  12. **To be pilgrims on the way toward the Father (Article 11:2)**
  13. **To participate in the apostolate of the laity (Article 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 24)**
  14. **To be at the service of the less fortunate (Article 13, 14, 15)**
  15. **To be loyal to the Church in an attitude of dialogue and collaboration with her minister (Article 6:2)**
  16. **To be open to the action of the Holy Spirit (Article 1, 4:2)**
  17. **To live in simplicity, humility and minority (Article 11:1)**

**Appendix C:**

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**Appendix D:**

**Franciscan Prayers**

**Prayer Before the Crucifix**

Most high, glorious God,

Enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me, Lord

Correct faith, certain hope, and perfect charity,

Sense and knowledge

So that I may carry out your holy and true command.

**Peace Prayer of St. Francis**

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace

Where there is hatred, let me sow love

Where there is injury, pardon

Where there is doubt, faith

Where there is despair, hope

Where there is darkness, light

And where there is sadness, joy

O Divine Master, grant that I may

Not so much seek to be consoled as to console

To be understood, as to understand

To be loved, as to love

For it is in giving that we receive

And it is in pardoning that we are pardoned

And it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.

**Amen**

**(Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order, pg. 36)**

Let us pray,

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God:

Grant us in our misery that we may do for your sake alone

What we know you want us to do, And always want what pleases you;

So that, cleansed and enlightened interiorly

And fired with the flame of the Holy Spirit,

We may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ,

And so make our way to you, Most High, by your grace alone,

You who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,

And are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever.

**Amen**

**The Canticle of Brother Sun** (Circa 1226, by St. Francis of Assisi)i

Most high, all powerful, good Lord,

Yours are the praises, the glory, the honor, and all blessing.

To you alone, most high, do they belong,

And no human is worthy to mention your name.

Praised be you, my Lord, with all your creatures,

Especially Sir Brother Sun,

Who is the day and through whom you give us light.

And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor,

And bears a likeness of you, most high one.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars,

In Heaven you formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Wind,

And through the air, cloudy and serene,

And every kind of weather,

Through which you give sustenance to your creatures.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Water,

Which is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Brother Fire,

Through whom you light the night,

And he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.

Praised be you, my Lord, through Sister Mother Earth,

Who sustains and governs us,

And who produces varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

Praised be you, my Lord,

Through those who give pardon for your love

And bear infirmity and tribulation.

Blessed are those who endure in peace,

For by you, most high, they shall be crowned.

Praised be you, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,

From whom no one living can escape.

Woe to those who die in mortal sin.

Blessed are those whom death will find in your most holy will,

For the second death shall do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give him thanks

And serve Him with great humility.

**From Francis’ Office of the Passion: (can be sung also)**

Let us bless the Lord, the living and true God.

Let us always give back to God,

Praise, glory, honor, blessing and every good.

So be it, so be it, Amen Amen

**Blessing of Francis to Leo** (taken from the Book of Numbers 6:24-26. Prayer is written on a scrap of paper and preserved today in Assisi!)

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

May his face shine upon us and be gracious to us.

May he look upon us with kindness and give us his peace. Amen

**There are many more prayers available. A few favorite sources are:**

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