

INTRODUCING THE FRANCISCAN WAY OF LIFE



The Dubuque Franciscans are intentional about spreading the Franciscan Story and Spirit with employees, friends, parishioners, students, and family. This Franciscan Charism is centered in Christ and the Gospels. Some of the core Franciscan values include simple living, humility/minority, contemplation, peacemaking, care of persons who are poor, and care of the earth. We invite people to explore these values with us to discern how God is calling them to live the Franciscan way of life. It is an exciting adventure.

Basic guidelines for a group exploring the Franciscan Way of Life.

The participants will be able to:

- tell the stories of Francis and Clare and how they impacted their times
- live the values of Francis and Clare

Some possible resources to use to meet this goal:

In the Footsteps of Francis and Clare by Rock Niemier OFM

Building with Living Stones: Formation for Franciscan Life and Work

Francis: The Journey and the Dream by Murray Bodo

Clothed with Gladness: The story of St. Clare by Sister M. St. Paul, P.C.C.

Module (sessions available from the Charism team in Dubuque (gallesm@osf.dbq.org))

Clare and Francis of Assisi with DVD

On Francis and Clare with DVD

The participants will be able to incorporate Franciscan Spirituality and Values in daily life

Some possible resources to use to meet this goal:

Living Like Francis Today Marci Blum OSF

The Franciscan journey: A discernment guide for those beginning the Journey in the Franciscan Way of Life

St Francis and the Foolishness of God by Dennis, Nangle, Moe-Lobeda, Taylor

Modules

Joy
Hospitality
Poverty of Spirit
Simplicity
Humility
Conversion
Minority/Humility

Discernment process for continuing to live the Franciscan way of life is included for use after meeting above goals.

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Discernment Process In Living a Franciscan Way of Life

For Initial Inquirers



Why a Discernment Process?

When a person expresses an interest in living a Franciscan way of life, a discernment process assists the inquirer to clarify what she/he is asking for and lays a foundational support to seek a direction in her/his life.

What is Discernment?

Discernment is listening to what God is doing in my life, to where God is leading me. We are to be “discerning listeners” before we make a decision for our lives. Discernment is integral in our turning points in life as well as an ongoing process throughout life. To “discern the spirits” (I Corinthians 12:10) is to know where the Holy Spirit is leading us.

Discernment is a process before making a decision. Discerning is choosing among several good options. When a decision is made after discerning, there is a loss or letting go of a good choice.

Wholistic Approach to Discernment

A wholistic (holistic) approach to discernment involves the whole self: mind, emotions, body, intuition, imagination, values and dreams. A wholistic approach involves the outer authority (wisdom of the faith community and the traditions) and the inner authority (experiences and experience of God) with a balance of mind, heart and intuition.

Discernment Questions in Inquiring About the Franciscan way of life

- The Gospel values of the Franciscan Charism are poverty, humility, contemplation, peace making, care of persons who are poor, and care of the earth. How do you see these Gospel values lived out in your life?
- What are you seeking?
- What are your desires? Your inclinations?
- Have you prayed alone? With others? What did you hear in prayer?
- How have you listened to the Scripture? What did you hear?
- How are you centering your life on the words and actions of Jesus?
- Name your personal experiences in discerning a decision that you called upon your faith community for assistance and support.
- How have you asked trusted friends for their guidance?
- What are your strengths and challenges for yourself in your decision?

Ways to Live a Franciscan Way of Life

To learn more about the Franciscan way of life, a number of opportunities are available:

- Converse with a person living the Franciscan way of life.
- Read books or materials on the life of St. Francis of Assisi and St. Clare of St. Assisi.
- Download information on Franciscans from the Internet.
- Go to the webpage of the Sisters of St. Francis of Dubuque—www.osfdbq.org.
- Join a Franciscan faith-sharing group.

Contact the Franciscan Charism Team, Sisters of St. Francis in Dubuque, Iowa to learn of possible ways to live the Franciscan way of life. Phone: 563-583-9786, Ext. 6166.

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Continuing Discernment

In considering to pursue a Franciscan way of life, further discernment on the ways to live a Franciscan way of life will assist in clarifying life directions.

Franciscan Charism Team
Sisters of St. Francis
Dubuque, Iowa
Phone: 563-583-9786, Ext. 6166

Spirituality Modules

Exploration of the Franciscan Spirituality Charism Intermediate /Advanced Level

Therefore, I first of all invite the reader to groans of prayer...

*Do not think that
reading is sufficient without [fervor],
reflection without devotion,
investigation without admiration,
observation without exultation,
industry without piety,
knowledge without charity,
intelligence without humility,
study without divine grace,
or the reflecting power of a [soul] without the inspiration of divine wisdom.
--St. Bonaventure
The Soul's Journey into God—Pro. 4*

It is believed that delving deeper into the study, reflection, and expression of Franciscan Incarnational Spirituality is led by the Spirit who moves around and through us. The best process for doing this must be determined by the individual according to one's interest, time, and circumstances. Therefore, we ask you to reflect upon what you propose to begin and design your own process. One must keep in mind that the purpose of one's "ruminations" is to grow closer to one's God so as to live the Christian life to the full.

We offer here some suggested questions for you to consider as you plan. The charism team and those on this charism committee are here to assist you if you have questions or concerns. Some of these questions will be best answered by you as you move along the journey. It is important for you to write your answers down to help you establish your commitment. It will help you keep yourself focused on your goal.

It is strongly suggested that you find a traveling companion. It will be easier to clarify your insights, gain understanding, deepen your reflection, and stay on your chosen task if you share with another. Any journey is more meaningful when we have a companion with us. Perhaps you will have to live into these questions before you can answer them for yourself.

Name _____ Date _____

- What has set you on this journey? What is your goal in starting this study/reflection?
- What are the quotes from St Bonaventure saying to you? Which line strikes you the most?
- With whom will you journey?
- Will you meet with others regularly to reflect and discuss? When? How?
- How do you plan to reflect upon your readings? Journalizing, summarizing, scrapbooking, or?
- Can you set a schedule that you will keep with your studying and reflecting? Being regular and definite about it will help you "stay the course."
- Because study has a horizontal, as well as a vertical component, what outreach activity will you incorporate into your exploration? How will you express your new relationship with the Holy One?
- What creative component will you incorporate into your exploration, study, and reflection? It is very important to personalize what you explore, to pull it into your heart.
- As an aid to Bonaventure's invitation to prayer, see the following collection of prayers from Franciscan sources. It is suggested these be used as "bookends" to your study and/or discussions.

*I ask, therefore, that you give
more attention to the intent of the writer than to the work itself,
more to the things said than to the uncultivated language,
more to the truth than to attractiveness,*

*more to the stimulation of affect than to intellectual enrichment.
So that this may happen,
it is important that you not run through these reflections in a hurry,
but that you take time and ruminate over them slowly.*

--St. Bonaventure

The Soul's Journey into God—Pro. 5

Heretofore, let your journey into God begin

PRAYERS

Prayer before the Crucifix

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.

--St. Francis, FAED I, p.40

Prayer and Thanksgiving

All-powerful, most holy,
Almighty and supreme God,
Holy and just Father,
Lord King of heaven and earth
we thank You for Yourself
for through Your holy will
and through Your only Son
with the Holy Spirit
You have created everything
spiritual and corporal
and, after making us
in Your own image and likeness,
You placed us in paradise.

We thank You
for as through Your Son You created me,

so through Your holy love
with which You loved us
You brought about His birth
as true God and true man
by the glorious, ever-virgin,
most blessed, holy Mary
and You will to redeem us captives
through His cross and blood and death.

Therefore, let nothing hinder us,
nothing separate us, nothing come between us.

Wherever we are, in every place,
at every hour, at every time of the day,
every day and continually,
let all of us truly and humbly believe,
hold in our heart and love,
honor, adore, serve, praise and bless,
glorify and exalt, magnify and give thanks,
to the Most High and Supreme Eternal God
Trinity and Unity,

Father, Son and Holy Spirit,
Creator of all, Savior of all
Who believe and hope in Him, and love Him,
Who, without beginning and end
is unchangeable, invisible, indescribable,
ineffable, incomprehensible, unfathomable,
blessed, praiseworthy, glorious, exalted,
sublime, most high, gentle, lovable, delightful,
and totally desirable above all else for ever. Amen.

--The Earlier Rule, XXIII: 1, 3, 10-11 . FAED I, pp,81-86

Praises of God

You are the holy Lord God
Who does wonderful things.
You are strong. You are great.
You are the most high.
You are the almighty king.
You holy Father, King of heaven and earth.
You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;
You are the good, all good, the highest good,
Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity, You are wisdom,
You are humility, You are patience,
You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are security, You are rest,
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope,
You are justice, You are moderation,
You are all our riches to sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are the protector,
You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment,
You are our hope, You are our faith,
You are our charity, You are all our sweetness,
You are our eternal life:
Great and wonder Lord,
Almighty God, Merciful Savior.
--St. Francis, FAED I, p.109

Prayer Inspired by the Our Father

O Our Father most holy:
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Savior:
Holy be Your Name:
May knowledge of You become clearer in us
that we may know
the breadth of Your blessings,
the length of Your promises,
the height of Your majesty,
the depth of Your judgments.

O Our Father most holy;
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Savior:
Your kingdom come:
That You may rule in us through Your grace
And enable us to come to Your kingdom
where there is clear vision of You,
perfect love of You,

blessed companionship with You,
eternal enjoyment of You.

O Our Father most holy:
Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Savior:
Give us this day:
In remembrance, understanding, and reverence
of that love
which [our Lord Jesus Christ] had for us
and of those things that He said and did
and suffered for us.
Our daily Bread:
Your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
-- St. Francis , FAED i, pp. 158-159

Prayer

O loving God, we live in continual expectation of
your coming among us with your saving power and
love. Help us gaze, with Francis and Clare, on the
wonder of this mystery of your incarnation and
accept with gratitude its meaning in our lives. We
ask this in the name of the one you sent, Jesus
Christ, our Lord, who lives and rules with you, in the
unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen

--Franciscan Morning and Evening Prayer, p.121

Prayer

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God,
Give us miserable ones
the grace to do for You alone
what we know you want us to do
and always to desire what please You.
inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened
and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,
may we be able to follow
in the footprints of Your beloved Son,
Our Lord Jesus Christ,
and by Your grace alone,
may we make our way to You,
Most High,
Who live and rule
in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified
God almighty,
forever and ever. Amen.

--St. Francis, A Letter to the Entire Order,
FAED i, pp.120-121

Prayer

Gracious God, nourish us with your words and challenge us with your grace. May we open our hearts and minds to you and surrender to your holy will without reserve. Thus may we follow faithfully in the footprints of Jesus, our brother, who goes before us to our eternal home. We ask this in his name. Amen.

--Franciscan Morning and Evening Prayer, p.320

Prayer

Gracious Creator, God, all life comes from you and returns to you to share your glory. May we, in our daily family and community experiences, recognize your loving grace at work to sustain and sanctify us. May each of us live faithfully the vocation to which we have been called. We ask this in the name of Jesus, who has set us the example of a blessed human life. Amen.

--Franciscan Morning and Evening Prayer, pp. 140-141

**Thoughts St. Clare Shared with St. Agnes
and with Us**

The Lord Jesus Christ,
Whom in loving, You are chaste;
in touching, You become more pure;
in embracing, You are a virgin,
Whose strength is more robust,
Generosity more lofty,
Whose appearance is more handsome,
Love more courteous,
And every kindness more refined,
Whose embrace already holds you....

--LAg 1: 8-10

What you hold, may you hold,
What you do may you do and not stop.
But with swift pace, light step ,
unswerving feet,
so that even your steps stir up no dust,
may you go forward
securely, joyfully, and swiftly
on the path of prudent happiness,
believing nothing,

agreeing with nothing that would
dissuade you from this commitment
or would place a stumbling block
for you on the way,
so that nothing prevent you
from offering your vows
to the Most High
in the perfection to which
the Spirit of the Lord has called you.

--LAg 2: 11-14

Gaze upon [Christ],
consider [Christ],
contemplate [Christ],
desiring to imitate [Christ].

--LAg 2: 20

Place your mind in the mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!
Place your heart in the figure
of the divine substance
and, through contemplation,
transform your entire being into the image
of the Godhead itself...

--LAg 3: 12-13

Cling with [your] whole heart to [Christ]
Whose beauty all the blessed hosts of heaven
unceasingly admire
Whose tenderness touches,
Whose contemplation refreshes,
Whose kindness overflows,
Whose delight overwhelms,
Whose remembrance
delightfully dawns,
Whose fragrance brings the dead to life again,
Whose glorious vision will bring
happiness to all the citizens
of the heavenly Jerusalem,
which [vision],
since [Christ] is the radiance
of eternal glory
is the brightness of eternal light
and the mirror without blemish.

--LAg 4: 9 -14

Prayer of St. Francis

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.

--*The Geste of the Great King*, pp. 41-42
--*Office of the Passion of Francis of Assisi*

The Canticle of the Creatures

Most High, all-powerful, good Lord,
Yours are the praises, the glory,
and 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 whom You give sustenance
to Your creatures.
Praised be You, my Lord,
through Sister Water,
who 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 our Sister Mother Earth,
who sustains and governs us,

and who produces various 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, shall they 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.

--St. Francis, FAED I, pp. 113 – 114

Franciscan Psalm 7

Clap your hands, all you people;
raise to God a shout of exultation and joy.

Because the Lord is the Most High,
the awesome, great King over all the earth.

For the most holy Father of heaven,
our King before all ages,
sent the beloved Son from on high,
who planted salvation
in the center of the earth.

Let heavens rejoice and earth exalt,
let the sea and all that is in it roar,
let fields and everything in them sing for joy.

Sing a new song to the Lord;
all the earth sing to the Lord!

For the Lord is great and worthy of high praise:
worthy of awe above all gods.

Bring to the Lord, families of nations,
bring to the Lord glory and honor;
bring to the Lord the glory due his name.

--*The Geste of the Great King*, Ps. 7, v.1-7, pp. 83-84

INCARNATION SPIRITUALITY: ***A Franciscan Perspective***

Goal

To **investigate the understanding of the mystery of the Incarnation** through the studies of Franciscans St. Bonaventure (1218-1274) and Blessed John Duns Scotus (1266-1308).

To **understand and appreciate God's immense love** as the first and foremost reason for all of creation.

To **realize and respond to the love and humility of Jesus** in choosing to leave his heavenly home and live on earth.

To **reflect with St. Francis and St. Clare on the awesome mystery of the Incarnation.**

Procedure

This is an invitation to read and share *Incarnation Spirituality – A Franciscan Perspective* as if you were on a pilgrimage – a journey of extended time, leisurely savoring God's love along the road of Franciscan history.

Choose like-minded friends with whom to investigate, understand and appreciate, realize and respond, and reflect upon *Incarnation Spirituality – Franciscan Perspective* . Journeying with a community of seekers is beneficial to broaden and deepen the experience.

Contact Persons:

Sr. Mary Assumpta Glaser, osf

Sr. Janet Haverkamp, osf

Mary Ann Koch, Associate

INCARNATION SPIRITUALITY – Franciscan Perspective

Session I

Introduction

The spirituality of the Incarnation is a mystery that persons like St. Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus spent much time and many words trying to explain. Reflecting on this mystery deepens ones relationship with God – the goal of Franciscan spirituality.

To begin, reflect on these thoughts that may seem unrelated. Recall the story heard sometime during early school days. The *Genesis* story of creation – God is introduced as a master builder, building a home for all the creatures to be created in love. God builds a stage of heaven and earth the first day, water the second day, and land and vegetation the third day. God then fills each stage – light in the heavens the fourth day, fish and sea creatures in the water the fifth day and animals and humans on the land the sixth day. The *Genesis* story concludes with, “*God looked at everything and found it very good.*” Hear God exclaim, “Good, very, very good!!! (Gen. 1:31)

Successive stories showed Adam and Eve enjoying the garden, but in time going against God’s wishes. This disobedience (sin) caused them to leave the garden forever. Classes progressed and studies moved from Old Testament stories to the New Testament story of Jesus who came to save us from sin. And now, at the present time, during Holy Saturday Easter Vigil liturgy these words are sung in the *Exultet*, “O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam.” (emphasis added)

“*Is this the way the story of Jesus has always been understood?*” -- that the sin of Adam and Eve brought about the birth of Jesus?

Early Thinking

During the early Christian centuries there were different thoughts and understandings of God’s purpose and reason for the Incarnation – God choosing to send Jesus to our world. In the New Testament, both St. John the Evangelist and St. Paul help us begin to grasp thoughts of a cosmic Christology. In the beginning of his Gospel St. John points to the intrinsic connection between the mystery of creation and the mystery of the Incarnation when he writes, “In the beginning was the Word,” and later he writes, “Through [*Christ*] all things came to be, *not one thing had its beginning but through [Christ].*” (emphasis added) (John 1:1-3) In *A Window to the Divine: Creation Theology*, Zachary Hayes, OFM quotes 3rd century St. Irenaeus as having written, “God creates so as to have someone on whom to confer the gift of goodness.” He is also known to speak of the Incarnation as the completion of the cosmos. In the early 5th century we find St. Augustine echoing similar thoughts when he stated, “Because God is good, we exist.” These writers give a positive focus – seeing the Incarnation as continuing the *good* God began with creation. In *Genesis* we read, “God saw everything that was made, and indeed, it was *very good.*” (Gen. 1:31) Note God saw everything that was made as good, very good. (Thoughts from Ilia Delio, OSF, *The Humility of God*, pp.49-50 and Zachary Hayes, OFM, *A Window to the Divine: Creation Theology*, p.28)

A Change

However, in the 11th century Anselm of Canterbury and others speak of Jesus coming to repay the debt due to sin. This statement turned thinking from the *goodness of God* to the *sins of humanity*. Now the reasoning for the Incarnation changed from the positive message: *Jesus came to share God's love and goodness* to the negative message: *Jesus came because of sin*. (Thoughts from Ilia Delio, OSF *The Humility of God*, pp.49-50)

Suggested Reading

Book of Sirach 42: 15-25

A Window to the Divine, Zachary Hayes, OFM, pp. 17 – 30

The Humility of God, Ilia Delio, OSF, pp. 49 -51

Enter a New Messenger

Enter the 13th century. St. Francis, a poor, humble, wandering layman, speaks of a “way to God” that is open to all – women and men, rich and poor, lay and religious. Francis saw the whole of creation as an expression of God’s love. Many followed Francis and some were drawn into his message seeing it as an ever-challenging mystery. We will visit the thinking of two of these followers -- St. Bonaventure and Blessed John Duns Scotus. They saw the mystery contained in the vision of St. Francis in the way Fr. Richard Rohr describes *mystery --- as inexhaustible, yet an eternally knowable phenomenon!*

Invitations for Reflection

- What has been your understanding of why God created the universe?
- Why do you suppose God would choose to enter our earthly world through the Incarnation?
- What does Incarnation mean to you?
- When did it happen?

Session II

Trinitarian Love –Source of Creation

Following are insights and understandings of Franciscan scholars, the result of many hours spent in study, prayer and contemplation. St. Bonaventure reflected on the Trinity, imaging the Trinity as an overflowing fountain continuously pouring out God's generous love. Using human images and words to describe such a phenomenal spiritual event, think of what was happening among the members of the Trinity prior to creation of the world. There would have been a magnificent exchange of love by each one for each of the other. Love, to be true love, is love that must be shared. It is quite easy to see the plan that would follow if this love was to reach beyond the Trinity. The desire to share their love brought about the plan to create humans who would be able to receive this love and then share this love with all other created creatures. As part of this original plan Jesus was to come to live on earth as a human person so that he would share the love of the Trinity and teach us to do the same. Of course, these creatures would need a home, so following upon their plan God created the universe. This entire movement of the Trinity is described by Sr. Ilia Delio as the *dancing circle of love*. (Ilia Delio, OSF, *The Humility of God*, p. 51)

In this, there is a connection between God's *freedom* that has no limits and God's *love* that has no limits. Realizing creation in this way the following statement of Franciscan Kenan Osborne speaks volumes:

*“Every single aspect of the created universe
exists because of God’s absolute freedom
and because of God’s unlimited love.
All of creation is a gift.
Nothing in creation is necessary.
Everything, in this sense, is grace,
an unmerited gift of God.”*

(Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition*, p. 66)

And to make this even more personal, Franciscan Eric Doyle wrote:

*“In the mystery of Christ it is revealed that we are created.
That is, we have our being
by a most free and holy act of love.
To be a creature is to be loved by the Creator
and have been known for ever in the depths of the divine mind.
There was never an instant
when God did not know us as unique beings.
We exist because we are wanted;
we are because we are loved...
we come from the love of God.”*

(Eric Doyle, OFM & Damian McElrath, “St. Francis of Assisi and the Christocentric Character of Franciscan Life and Doctrine”, Damian McElrath, Ed., *Franciscan Christology*, p.1)

Considering the great humility of this God of love, leads us to reflect on the meaning of the birth of Jesus for each of us. Sr. Ilia Delio explains it this way:

*“...the Incarnation is the profound bow of God
stretching forth the divine arms in a wide embrace of love.
God not only loves creation profoundly
but the “bow” is holy and reverential,
as if God loves us to such an extent
that [God] reverences every aspect of creation.*

*God bends low
 so that God can meet us
 exactly where we, finite, fragile, created human beings,
 creatures and all living things, are.
 God bends low
 because we are small, limited, frail, confused, bewildered, chaotic
 and sometimes just plain infantile.
 God bends low
 because God's arms are much longer than ours,
 and God reaches out for our tiny human hands.
 Imagine a God who is humbly bent low to embrace us in love
 compared to a God who sits high above on a throne
 and keeps score of human sins..."*
 (Ilia Delio, OSF, *The Humility of God*, pp. 51-52)

Invitation for Reflection

- Ponder the fullness of what you have read – “*You exist because you are known, wanted and loved by a God of Love.*” Commune with Jesus abiding within you.
- Reread a quotation aloud letting the words speak to you more deeply.
- “Consider in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for you are formed in the image of God’s likeness”. (St. Francis – Adm. 5:1)
Memorize this quote from St. Francis. Use it to enter into contemplation of this great Mystery.
- Make an act of faith in the reality that YOU are dearly loved by God.
What might “an act of faith” look like in your daily life?
How would anyone around you sense that you realize “YOU are dearly loved by God”?
- Make an act of faith in the reality that God’s tremendous love embraces all peoples and all creation.
How might that “act’ look to those around you?
- Reflect on a recent experience (positive or negative) in which a greater awareness of Jesus’ presence in each person present may have affected the situation.
Who do I need to see with “new eyes”?

Suggested Reading

“The God of Generous Love” in “Franciscan Spirit”, William Short, OFM in Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, Ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, pp. 112 – 116

“Richard of St. Victor and Bonaventure: Living A Trinitarian Life”, Maria Calisi, *The Cord*. Vol. 57: 2, (April/June 2007) pp. 127 – 137

Session III

A Franciscan Poet's Response

This unbelievable act of so humble a God – leaving heaven for a life on earth – resonated deeply in the heart of Franciscan poet, Jacopone da Todi. Allowing these thoughts to reach his finger tips we are now privileged to be inspired by his reflections.

Laud 64 – *A Canticle of the Nativity*

A new canticle I hear,
To dry the tears of the afflicted!

I hear it begin with a piercing tone,
Whence it slowly descends several octaves,
For it celebrates the coming of the Word. Never was heard
A descending scale of such exquisite melody!

The joyous chorus is that of angels
Singing sweet songs around the manger
Before the Christ Child,
The Word Incarnate.

'Glory to God in the highest,' they sing,
'And peace on earth;--
An end to war and to all evils;
Praise and bless the Infant adored!'

The sacred notes, I see,
Are inscribed on parchment, skin of the lamb;
In the Lamb – our penetrating eye discerns –
Is the song, whether solo or choral.

The hand that moves across the page
Is the hand of God,
And it is God in His mercy
Who teaches us to sing.

Laud 65 – *Second Canticle of the Nativity*

In place of Your glorious throne,
A manger and a little straw;
In place of a starry crown,
Poor swaddling clothes
And the warm breath of an ox and an ass;
In place of a glorious court, Mary and Joseph.

Were these the actions of someone drunk, or out of his senses?
How could You abdicate kingdom and riches,
A renunciation that verges on madness?
Did someone promise You other and greater treasures?
O measureless love that would cede
Such glory as Yours for such humble estate!
--taken from *Poverty and Joy*- pp. 50-52
--William Short, OFM

Looking at creation of the universe and the birth of Christ in this way we may say quite simply, the world was really created so Jesus would have a home, a place to live, and persons to share God's love, thus fulfilling the original plan of the Trinity. This clarifies St. John's statement, "Through [Christ] all things came to be, not one thing had its beginning but through [Christ]." (John 1:1-3) This puts Christ at the very center.

Invitation for Reflection

- Go to the lowly manger in Bethlehem. Thank Mary for saying "Yes" to being the Mother of Jesus. As Mary gently places Jesus in your arms, tenderly bring this lowly Babe close to your heart, look into his beautiful eyes and let Jesus speak to you.
- Visualize the exchange Jesus made when he came from heaven to earth. How, in our earthly life, could we come to a somewhat similar experience?
- Write a poem that expresses the mystery of the birth of God-with-us. Find a poem, art piece, or song that speaks of this mystery.
- Share a picture of your personal manger that you use during Christmas. Tell the history behind it and what you like about it. Gather pictures of manger scenes from other cultures or a series of cards that can tell the story.

Suggested Reading

St. Francis at Greccio – Franciscan Sources

"The Manger He Made in Celebration of the Lord's Birthday", 1 Cel XXX: 84-87
FAED I pp. 254 - 257
Life of St. Francis by Julian Speyer, LJS X: 53 – 55, FAED I pp. 405 - 407

The Major Legend of St. Francis, LMj X: 7, FAED II pp. 610 - 611

In a biography of St. Francis read the section telling of the *Christmas celebration at Greccio*.

Session IV

Christ, Absolute Center

Christ is found at the very center of all Franciscan spirituality. All exists because of Christ – without Christ nothing exists! Using the word “Christocentric” we understand Christ as the center of all of the phases of our life and of our very being – our daily activities, our prayer, work, study, relaxation and social life.

Yes, this is true for all persons, but in the Franciscan Tradition this understanding has a strong priority because of this early prayer of St. Francis.

*“Lord King of heaven and earth we thank You for Yourself
for through Your holy will
and through Your only Son with the Holy Spirit
You have created everything spiritual and corporal
and, after making us in Your own image and likeness,
You placed us in paradise.”*

(Earlier Rule 1221, XXIII: 1)

William Short explains Christocentric theology simply, “*Wherever something or someone is, there is Christ. [Christ] is the inescapable, though often unrecognized, meaning behind all things.*” (William Short, OFM, “The Franciscan Spirit” in Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, Ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, p.119)

Josef Raischl helps us further understand the depth of Christocentric thinking and living.

“Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, is at the center of life, and at the center of the whole cosmos. [Christ] is life, as well as the way of life. This means that we should realize that [Christ] is alive, that we are alive in [Christ], that we are saved through [Christ] and that we are at home in [Christ]. [Christ] is the energy of life; [Christ] is the powerful Word spoken by the creativity of a mighty God. Jesus Christ is creativity itself.

*For theologians, “Christocentric” means that all thought, all analysis is focused on Jesus Christ and from there everything else is enlightened and developed. [Christ] is the measure for everything.” (Josef Raischl, SFO & Andre Cirino, OFM, *The Journey into God: A Forty-Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare*, p.279)*

Symbols are often used to help understand, as well as remember, the depth of an important teaching or mystery. St. Bonaventure used the symbol of a circle to speak of God “*as an intelligent sphere whose center is everywhere, and whose circumference is nowhere.*” (Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey into God*, 5:8 – a quotation from Alan of Lille, *Regulae theologicae*, reg.7 – see p.392 & Footnote 22 p.404 in *The Journey into God: A Forty-Day Retreat with Bonaventure, Francis and Clare*, Josef Raischl, SFO & Andre Cirino, OFM)

Franciscan Zachery Hayes, a Bonaventure scholar, writes, “*Working with this symbol, Bonaventure can speak of a center in God. And it is through that center that God reaches out to form the created world. The world with its history, then, moves outward in a circular movement from its origin in God to find its final end in its return to God. This circular movement is mediated by the central person of the Trinity, who becomes incarnate in the form of Jesus of Nazareth, thereby bringing the center of God into union with the center of the world.*” (Zachery Hayes, OFM, *Bonaventure: Mystical Writings*, p. 15)

Invitation for Reflection

- Upon hearing the words: “*You have created everything and You made us in Your image and likeness,*” Francis made an act of faith in this truth of God and lived in that truth. Ask the Spirit of Jesus to imprint these living words upon your heart.
- How will the Incarnation as God’s total gift of love affect your vision of all that surrounds you now and in the future?
- Using your affective senses imagine Jesus and you together - walking, sitting, conversing..... What happens in you as you relate to Jesus as your **Brother**?
- How might circles speak to you of God in your daily life? What circles occur in your daily life? What is their significance?
- If mandalas have been a part of your spirituality you may wish to make or share a mandala with your mentor or group.
- Choose from the suggested readings and share insights with mentor and/or group.

“St. Francis of Assisi and the Christocentric Character of Franciscan Life and Doctrine”, Eric Doyle, OFM and Damian McElrath in Damian McElrath, Ed. *Franciscan Christology*, pp.1 – 13

“The Franciscan Spirit”, William Short, OFM in Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF Ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, pp. 116 – 126.

Session V

Deepening Our Insights

Franciscan Blessed John Duns Scotus continued to reflect on the thoughts of St. Bonaventure. At the same time he found it difficult to totally accept the thinking of his day that said, “Christ came because Adam sinned.” He did accept the fact that Jesus repaired the harm done by our first parents, but he remained unsatisfied and explained it in this way: “It is not likely that the highest good in the whole of creation is something that merely happened by chance, and happened only because of some lesser good.” That is, that the Incarnation, the highest good, the supreme expression of God’s love happened only so the sin of Adam could be repaired. Franciscan, William Short, used this metaphor to explain Duns Scotus’s dilemma. “Why build the Taj Mahal to cover a pothole?” (William Short, OFM, *The Franciscans* p.115)

William Short, in *Poverty and Joy* (p.53) states, “The grandeur of the incarnation cannot be an afterthought on the part of God, decreed as a response to the problem of human sin.” He follows this with a quote from Frederick Faber, popular spiritual writer of the mid-19th century:

“If Christ was decreed after us, and because of us, and only to redeem us, this monstrous consequence follows -- that sin was necessary to his existence.

Indeed, this thought is totally unacceptable!!!!

The following thoughts from Franciscan Kenan Osborne can help us better understand these thoughts of Bonaventure and Duns Scotus.

“...Jesus, in his humanity, indeed sacramentalizes the finality of God’s whole world, a world in which human freedom and mis-freedom (sin) exist. The whole world is sacramentalized, not just the “nice” part of it. The incarnation then begins, one might say, with the very first act of God ad extra---the first creative moment of our world. The incarnation is a process moving through the history of our created world, and with each subsequent step the meaning of the world, the finality of the world, the “why” of the world emerges to some degree in a clearer way. We are finding out more about the incarnation than ever before. It is an ascending experience. Like climbing a mountain, the higher one goes, the wider and broader one’s perspective.

In the Jesus-event, a major revelation of the meaning of creation, the “why” of creation, takes place. This is what the world and its history are all about. But this Jesus-event includes not only his life and death, his preaching and healing, but also his resurrection, his ascension, his sending of the Spirit and his eschatological place at the right hand of God. This is where Jesus was always meant to go. The Church itself is part of this process, since the resurrection of Jesus and our own resurrection are intrinsically one. More strongly put, the Christ at God’s right hand cannot be understood except in and with the mystical body of Christ here on earth.

*...The full meaning of incarnation is not that Jesus has a human and a divine nature, but that Jesus has a human nature and we, all of us, all human beings, are related to it. One might say that the incarnation as a process is still continuing and will continue until the eschaton, until the “why” of God’s free action to create reaches its own fullness. All that is, all that has ever been, is related to incarnation. Only with this understanding can we realize the height and depth, the length and breadth of “why” there is something finite and not nothing at all except God. (Kenan Osborne, “Incarnation, Individuality and Diversity” in Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, Ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment*, p.300)*

Invitation for Reflection

- Have you ever thought to ask “Why” God created the universe and everything in it?
- Sit back and view your surroundings. Do we usually see these as holy – as Gifts of God?
- Notice God’s work of creation is still in process, recognized in the movement of seasons and more easily observed watching the stages of plant life. Take a photo of a favorite place in nature during each of the seasons.
- Move your heart to praise, love and thank God for the Incarnation as being “*the first creation moment of our world.*”
- Find a psalm or song that expresses this wonder of creation.

Suggested Readings

“Creation and the Triune God: The Doctrine of Emanation”
“Incarnation: The Place of Jesus in Creation”
“The Absolute Freedom of God”

“The Humility of the Incarnation”

“The Sacred Book of Creation”

“The Book of Creation in the Vision and Spirituality of St. Francis”

“Creation as Gift of God’s Freedom and Love”

Kenan B. Osborne, OFM , *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components*, pp. 59 – 67.

Session VI

A New Question

And now we ask this important question, “*Would Jesus have come if Adam and Eve had not sinned?*”

William Short, in *Poverty and Joy*, summarizes John Duns Scotus’s thoughts concerning this question by saying, “Christ would not have come *as Redeemer* if the first person had not fallen.” That is not the same as saying “Christ would not have come.” The *mode* of the incarnation was affected by human sin (Christ came also to redeem); but the motive was a free act of love.

Duns Scotus wrote, ...[*humans*] *could have been redeemed in another way, but nevertheless [Christ] in an act of free will chose to redeem them in that way. We are greatly indebted to him...I believe this was done chiefly to draw us into God’s love, and cling more closely to God.(paraphrased)*

At the time of John Dun Scotus’s death in his early 40’s his thinking had not reached a wide audience. Fortunately his work had found a welcome in the Franciscan schools of the 14th century. It was through the work of these schools that Franciscan spirituality received a theological language able to express intuitions that remained incomplete in the writings of Francis and Clare: the incarnation as the greatest expression of love, and Christ’s death as the ultimate, free act of that love. (Thoughts and quotation taken from William Short, OFM, *Poverty and Joy*, p.54)

Suggested Reading

“Christ: the *Haecceitas* of God : The Spirituality of John Duns Scotus’ Doctrine of *Haecceitas* and the Primacy of Christ”, Seamus Mullholland, OFM in Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, pp. 305 – 312.

Francis and Clare – Saints of the Incarnation

*In place of Your throne,
A manger and a little straw;
In place of a starry crown,
Poor swaddling clothes
And the warm breath of an ox and an ass;
In place of a glorious court, Mary and Joseph.*

--Jacopone da Todi

From *Poverty and Joy* – p.51

--William Short, OFM

It is evident that thoughts similar to those of Jacopone da Todi were often a part of the prayer and reflection of St. Francis and St. Clare. Frequently they considered and contemplated this almighty, invisible God who chose to become visible and tangible and willingly accepted the suffering of a poor and unknown servant.

As they grew in understanding and appreciation of this God, who, at the Incarnation, surrenders everything out of an immense love for each and every human person, Francis and Clare are drawn to walk in the footprints of Jesus in an act of total self-emptying. In poverty and humility each chose to walk surrendering to all that this loving God would bring into their life.

They knew Jesus walked on a road that called him to surrender his heavenly home – to the complete giving of his life – the ultimate free act of his love. In gratitude and love St. Francis and St. Clare walked in the footprints of their Incarnate God. The love of this Incarnate God reached deeply into the very heart and soul of both St. Clare and St. Francis affecting their prayer and lived experiences as well as their writing.

We conclude with thoughts from St. Clare's letter to Blessed Agnes of Prague:

*Look, I say, at the border of this mirror, that is, the poverty of Him
Who was placed in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes.*

*O marvelous humility!
O astonishing poverty!
The King of angels,
The Lord of heaven and earth,
Is laid in a manger!
--4 LAg 19 -21*

And St. Francis in *A Letter to the Entire Order*:

*Let everyone be struck with fear,
let the whole world tremble
and let the heavens exult
when Christ, the Son of the living God,
is present on the altar in the hands of a priest!
O wonderful loftiness and stupendous dignity!
O sublime humility!
O humble sublimity!
The Lord of the universe,
God and the Son of God,
so humbles [God's] self
that for our salvation
Christ hides [God's] self
under an ordinary piece of bread!
Brothers, look at the humility of God,
and pour out your hearts before [God]!
Humble yourselves
that you may be exalted by [God]!
Hold back nothing of yourselves for yourselves,
that [God] Who gives [God's] self totally to you
may receive you totally!*

--St. Francis

A Letter to the Entire Order 26-29

FAED Vol. I p.118

Invitation for Reflection

- At the urging of St. Francis and St. Clare: “*pour out your heart before [God]!*” What is the Spirit of Jesus bringing forth from your heart?
- Search the writing of Francis and Clare to find other statements of their awe.
- Francis and Clare were in awe of God’s humility and sublimity. What are you “in awe” of?
- How do you express this awe in your daily life?
- Find examples in the Gospels of how Jesus lived out his humility.

Suggested Reading

“The Franciscan Foundation: The Spirituality and Vision of St. Francis and St. Clare”

“The Humility of the Incarnation”

Kenan B. Osborne, OFM, *The Franciscan Intellectual Tradition: Tracing Its Origins and Identifying Its Central Components*, pp. 32 - 39

Session VII

Summary

Are you feeling you *have* been on a journey – a spiritual journey – maybe even better a spiritual pilgrimage? A pilgrimage – a journey one chooses to make that provides the opportunity to grasp more deeply the spirit of the place associated with a particular person. On pilgrimage, through work, study, prayer and reflection we invite that special person to be our mentor enabling us to benefit by their wisdom and spirituality.

Choosing to study and explore *Incarnation Spirituality – Franciscan Perspective* you chose to mentally enter into an important mystery of our faith –*the unfathomable mystery of God’s love.*

The pilgrimage began recalling early classroom days and what was learned about God and creation. “*God looked at everything...and found it very good.*” (Gen 1:31) The story of Adam and Eve resulted, in time, to these words sung in the *Exultet*, “*O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam.*” (Easter Vigil Liturgy)

You were then taken back to the early days of Christianity to hear how the Apostles and early Church fathers and mothers understood and spoke of the Incarnation. “*Through [Christ] all things came to be, not one thing had its beginning but through [Christ].*” (John 1:1-3) St. Irenaeus, “*God creates so as to have someone on whom to confer the gift of goodness.*” (Zachary Hayes, OFM in *A Window to the Divine: Creation Theology*)

Dipping into the 11th century we heard Anselm of Canterbury and others speak of “Jesus coming to repay the debt due to sin”.

From there we moved to the 13th century to meet St. Francis who teaches by word and example that the whole of creation is an expression of God's love. St. Francis' message of a loving God who creates so this love may be shared attracted many followers desiring to receive this love and to spread the message of God's love. Like Francis they chose to walk in the footprints of the Christ, living according to Christ's Gospel message.

Francis' message and understanding of Christ's message -- the Gospel -- reached deeply into the minds of his followers challenging some to delve even more deeply into the great mystery of God's love and the relationship of the entire created universe to Jesus the Word of God. Bonaventure, one of these followers, "*reflected on Francis' experience and, in a unique and powerful testimony to the experience, produced works of theology which are permeated with the spirit of love, prayer and reverence which overflowed within the heart of Francis. Francis stands as one who began with God and saw all else from there.*" The writings of Bonaventure provide a "*journey which speaks so profoundly of the reality of God within our lives and of the meaning which God alone is able to provide for the concerns of human life – a journey which embraces this world and which emphasizes the dignity and sacredness of all creation.*" (Paul Rout, *Francis and Bonaventure*, p. xii)

Continued prayer and reflection of the love and humility of Jesus leads one to greater understanding and appreciation. Michael Crosby, OFM Cap. reminds us in *Finding Francis, Following Christ*, "*Christ was not just divinity enfleshed; he was the Creator-become Creation.*" Michael Crosby then follows with this quote by Giovanni Iammarrone, "*Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the summit of all creation. God has willed all other creatures for the glory of Christ and ultimately, in and through Christ, for the glory of the most Blessed Trinity. [Christ], the first and absolute, is also the beginning and the end, the center and culmination, the motive for the existence of all creation. [Christ] is its glory and its hope.*" (p.104 – Giovanni Iammarrone, OFM Conv. quote taken from "The Timeliness and Limitations of the Christology of John Duns Scotus for the Development of a Contemporary Theology of Christ", *Greyfriars Review*, 7:2 (1993) pp.235-36)

Our next mentor on this journey, John Duns Scotus, is another follower of Francis whose writings and teachings showed him to be deeply in love with God, the mystery of God's love and all of creation. He helped us understand from a positive view Jesus' reason for coming to live on earth. Seamus Mullholland, OFM gives this summarizing statement. "*The 'motive' for the Incarnation then is God's freely willed, freely given, freely creating love. Scotus's teaching from a spiritual point of view is about the goodness of God, how God sees man (humans) in love in Christ; it is about love and redemption, intimacy and union, acceptance and gratitude, the goodness of creation—and not sin and death, estrangement and loss, rejection and self-pity, and creational dualism*". (Seamus Mullholland, OFM, "Christ: The *Haeceitas* of God -- John Duns Scotus' Doctrine of *Haeceitas* and Primacy of Christ", Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF, Ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*, p.309)

Invitation for Reflection

- How does this Franciscan perspective on the Incarnation, Jesus coming to share God's love, resonate with you? How does it color other theological perspectives that you hold?
- As a final reflection, aware of God within your heart, may you ponder the theological perspectives considered:
Jesus came to save sinful humanity.
Jesus came as the revelation of the love of God.
Which teaching rests more comfortably in your heart?

Francis tried to impress upon each of his followers that he had responded to God's call and encouraged each, in like manner, to listen and respond to their individual call. Today we asked some of these Franciscans to be mentors on our journey. Their response has invited us into the mystery of God – a mystery, inexhaustible, yet eternally knowable – the mystery of our infinite loving God. May we be drawn, as by a powerful magnet, into this mystery through our continued study, prayer, reflection, contemplation and lived experience truly living out Jesus' Gospel message allowing Jesus, the Christ, through us, to walk in our world today.

This journey has allowed us only a few thoughts concerning the mystery of the Incarnation –as if we opened a few doors, scanned each room, took a deep breath and quickly moved on to another. May you venture into these rooms often, stay long allowing yourself to be drawn into the **mystery God is**.

Invitation for Reflection

- Read and reflect upon John1:1-3, Col. 1:12-20 and Eph. 1:3 -14. How do these words of Scripture support the Franciscan perspective? What other Scripture texts can you find that support this perspective?
- What response is welling up in your heart as the Holy Spirit draws you into prayer and contemplation concerning the total love of God in the Incarnation?
- Journal on any of the above questions that move your heart to love, wonder, and awe.
- Dialogue with Jesus about your thoughts.
- Creatively respond to our God of great love as you reflect on any of the above thoughts.
- Create a prayer or guided meditation to share with your mentor group using quotes from the various authors in these articles.

Further Study and Enrichment

- Listen to “Nature as God's Creation in Christ” by William Short, OFM in *The Treasure of a Poor Man: St. Francis of Assisi and Franciscan Spirituality* (Disk 4 – Topic 12) to clarify Christology as understood in Franciscan Spirituality.
- Use materials suggested in the bibliography. You may wish to use bold print articles first.

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