

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 by 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.

blumm@osfdbq.org

gallesm@osfdbq.org

heldorferg@osfdbq.org

kalbm@osfdbq.org

nillesg@osfdbq.org

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.

blumm@osfdbq.org;

gallesm@osfdbq.org;

heldorferg@osfdbq.org

kalbm@osfdbq.org

nillesg@osfdbq.org

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



COMING TO KNOW OUR GOD

Goal: This module invites you to read Scripture to find the attributes of God that were appealing to Francis.

After each set of readings you are invited to discuss and/or reflect on your understandings and learnings.



Theology modules

Beginning level:

How did Francis understand, relate to and experience God?

Session one

Prayer:

Most High, all-powerful, all-good Lord,
All praise is Yours, all glory, all honor and all blessings.
To you alone, Most High, do they belong,
and no mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your Name.
(Canticle of Creatures, v 1-2))

Following in the footsteps of Jesus, Francis experienced God as good, loving, merciful and forgiving. When his father took him before the bishop, “without delaying or hesitating, he did not wait for any words nor did he speak any, but immediately took off his clothes and gave them back to his father...He said to his father: ‘Until now I have called you father here on earth, but now I can say without reservation, ‘Our Father who are in heaven,’ since I have placed all my treasure and all my hope in him.” (The Major Legend of Saint Francis, chp 2 Bonaventure)
In this module we will use Scripture to find the attributes of God so loved by Francis, namely goodness, love, mercy and forgiveness.

First reading: **God’s goodness**

Genesis 1. 1-25

I Chronicles 16.34

II Chronicles 5.13

Discussion/reflection

Discuss with another person and/or write a reflection

What do you think the writers mean when they use the phrase, “and God saw that it was good”?

How does this influence your view of creation?

In what ways have you experienced the goodness of God?

Second reading:

Genesis 1. 26-31

This is a story about the creation of humankind and God's gifts of grace-unconditional love and forgiveness

Reflect on grace as God's presence within us, totally as gift, not earned, not deserved.

Compose a prayer thanking God for this gift.

Session two:

Opening prayer:

Let every creature in heaven, on earth, in the sea and in the depths give praise, glory, honor and blessing. To Him Who suffered so much Who has given and will give in the future every good, for He is our power and strength, Who alone is good, Who alone is almighty, Who alone is omnipotent, wonderful, glorious, and Who alone is holy, worthy of praise and blessing through endless ages. Amen (Later Admonitions and Exhortations, #61)

Third readings: **God's love**

Dt. 7.9

Psalm 36

I Jn 4.7-21

Discussion/reflection

Choose one of the readings to reflect on God's love for us and how this invites us to love one another

Fourth readings: **God's mercy**

Micah 7.18-20

I Peter 1.3

Luke 18.9-14

Discussion/reflection

Write or discuss what one or several of these readings tell you about God's mercy.

Fourth readings: **God's forgiveness**

Exodus 34. 1-9

Numbers 14.17-25

2 Chronicles 7.12-19

Luke 23.34

Discussion

Reflect on a time when you needed to be forgiven; a time when you needed to forgive.

What are the challenges of forgiving another person?

How does forgiveness change us, our relationships?

ACTIONS:

Spend some time outdoors, alone or with another and reflect on God's goodness.

Write a letter or email someone expressing your love, your forgiveness or asking for forgiveness.

Module: **READING THE BIBLE (Beginning level)**

Goal: To become familiar with the Bible as a sacred text

To develop an understanding of the historical-critical method of reading Scripture

Session one:

Opening prayer

O Lord Jesus Christ,
open the eyes of my heart,
that I may hear Your word
and understand and do Your will,
for I am a sojourner upon the earth.
Hide not Your commandments from me,
but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your law.
Speak unto me the hidden and secret things
of Your wisdom. (St. John Chrysostom)

Read and reflect:

All Christians regard the Bible as a sacred text, but not all Christians read the Bible the same way. Some read it literally, some read it historically and contextually, and some read it as story.

- Conservative Protestants, particularly those who call themselves "fundamentalists," are the group of Christians most likely to read scripture literally and historically. They consider that the Bible constitutes the total revelation of God's will for humanity: Every word comes directly from God—every word IS the Word of God—and the will of God is revealed ONLY in these words. Each and every word is to be taken at face value, in all social situations and all ages. Thus, Conservative Protestants commonly engage in what is called "proof texting." Proof texting involves lifting one verse out of the Bible and treating it as if it can stand on its own as a complete message or directive in itself.

- Catholics and liberal Protestants generally read the Bible quite differently than do conservative Protestants. They are more likely to understand the Bible as a collection of words about God written by human beings inspired by God—by human beings to whom God revealed or disclosed God's self. Both groups reject the practice of proof texting. Any given verse, they believe, must be read in the context of the passage in which it appears. Just as we cannot extract one sentence from a book or a magazine article in order to grasp the full meaning of the book or article as a whole, so with Bible verses. Each must be considered in relation to the "pericope," or group of surrounding verses having an internal unity, in which the single verse

appears. One must search for the overriding theme and avoid “reading into” a single verse or two an intention that is not actually there.

Second, Catholics and liberal Protestants do not believe that God is revealed or disclosed only within the covers of the Bible. Catholics, in particular, embrace the concept of “sacramentalism,” which means that God is revealed in all of creation—in nature and in relationships—throughout all of history. The Bible is only one medium for receiving God’s messages and discerning God’s will, though many believers would regard it as the most comprehensive or most authoritative medium.

Third, Catholics and liberal Protestants believe that the Bible is best read contextually, rather than literally. In part, this means that they utilize what biblical scholars call the “historical-critical method.” This method emphasizes that different parts of the Bible were written down by different individuals, at different times, in different situations, for different audiences. According to this approach, the original meaning of scriptural passages can best be determined when they are located in the socio-political-religious context of the times in which they were written. Only by knowing this context can present-day readers apprehend the actual message (an exercise called “exegesis”), for the message is embedded in particular cultural assumptions.

So, too, the relevance of a given passage for today can be assessed more accurately by considering historical and cultural norms. Slavery, for example, was an accepted practice in biblical times, but in our society today, it is strenuously rejected as a denial of the worth and dignity of all human beings.

- Other readers approach the Bible primarily from the standpoint of narrative, or story telling. Narrative theologians point out that stories are central in defining who we are as individuals and as a community, as well as who we want to become. Biblical narratives tell us much about the people of God, and about how God desires people to be. Jesus, after all, was the consummate story teller. Stories are not always to be taken literally or factually; much of biblical content is allegorical or metaphorical. The stories were intended to convey wisdom and guidance regarding how to live in just and peaceful relationships. This is the approach commonly taken toward Eastern religions (e.g., Hinduism and Buddhism) and Indigenous religions (e.g., Native American religions) by their followers. It has the benefit of tempering the sometimes extreme rationalism of modernist thinking.

Reflection/discussion:

Journal or discuss with another:

- *What has been your understanding/how have you read Scripture—literally or more historically?*
- *Is there a story from your life that kind of defines you? Could you share this with someone?*

One of Paul’s letters (Colossians) directs wives to “be subject to your husband” and slaves to “obey your earthly master.” (3:18,22) But another letter (Galatians) appears to be contradictory, asserting that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (3:28)

- *Can you think of events or practices in American history that were justified by using one or the other of these passages? Does this constitute an example of proof texting? What is the larger context of these verses?*

Session two:

Opening prayer:

On You do I set my hope, O my God,
that You shall enlighten
my mind and understanding with
the light of Your knowledge,
not only to cherish those things

which are written, but to do them;
that in reading the lives and sayings
of the saints I may not sin,
but that such may serve for my restoration, enlightenment
and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul,
and the inheritance of life everlasting.
For You are the enlightenment of those
who lie in darkness,
and from You comes every good deed
and every gift. (St John Chrysostom)

Read and reflect

Context and the Historical-Critical Method

Since a Catholic reading of the Bible generally emphasizes context and history, a few additional observations about this method are in order.

For one, the research resulting from this approach documented that not only were there multiple authors of the various segments of the Bible, but multiple editors, or “redactors,” as well. Over a period of time, some of the original documents were altered by eliminating certain sections or adding new sections, often for the purpose of conveying the particular emphasis or viewpoint of the redactor. The names of these editors are unknown (as are the names of many of the authors), but close examination of particular passages makes clear that the work of different authors had been patched together.

The Bible as we know it today consists of only a portion of the literature generated by ancient Hebrew and Christian thinkers. During the 200 years or so following Jesus’ death, certain texts achieved more credibility and usage within small Christian communities. When this popular practice of Christianity was superseded by the formation of the institutional church in the fourth century, it fell to church authorities to decide what documents and which versions should be “canonized”—that is, what should be designated officially as Holy Scripture.

While decisions were based in part on what was already common practice, other considerations entered in as well. Since the acknowledged church authorities were all male, it is not surprising that they chose to include material that was more favorable to men than to women. This in itself is an example of the importance of context: The fact that both the religion of Judaism and the cultures of the Romans and Greeks were highly patriarchal, or male-dominated, strongly affected the character of the new religion of Christianity, including the contents of the Bible.

The historical-critical method of reading the Bible was initially developed in the second half of the nineteenth century by Lutheran scholars in Germany who had been influenced by “modernist” thinking. Modernist thinking was more rationally-based and scientifically-oriented than had oft times been the case in earlier centuries. The premise was that an analytical and objective thought process could help sift out what was more or less historically credible, and what was no longer relevant in light of new scientific and technological knowledge.

Individual Catholic scholars were turning to historical-critical study of the Bible in the early decades of the twentieth century. In 1943, Pope Pius XII, in an encyclical titled “Divino Afflante Spiritu,” endorsed this scientific approach to the Bible in opposition to a fundamentalist, that is, literal reading. Use of the historical-critical method was further affirmed by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965), following which the contextual approach to reading the Bible became widespread within Catholic parishes. More recently, arguments for this method were reiterated in the document called “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church,” which was presented to Pope John Paul II by the Pontifical Biblical Commission in 1993.

Reflect/discuss by journaling or discussing with someone:

- *Can you think of a time when a story from your family was presented in different ways? How did you respond when that happened if it was different from your memory?*
- *Discuss how one can accept the historical/critical method of reading Scripture and still believe that Scripture is the inspired word of God.*

Session three

Opening prayer:

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts and minds of the faithful servants, and inflame them with the fire of Thy divine love.

Let us pray: O God, who by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of your faithful servants; grant us in the same Spirit, to discern what is right, and enjoy God's comfort forever, through our Lord Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns, one God, with You and the same Spirit, world without end. Amen.

Read and reflect:

The Bible Library

Scholars are fond of describing the Bible as an entire “library of books.” This library, like any public library, contains a variety of types of literature.

For Christians, the library is first divided into two major sections or “testaments,” known familiarly as the Old Testament and New Testament. What Christians call the “Old Testament” was originally the Holy Scriptures of the Hebrew people, or Jews. It is still today referred to by Jews as the “Hebrew Bible.”

Christians alone regard the New Testament as Holy Scripture. It consists of accounts of Jesus’ ministry and teachings called “gospels” (the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), the book of Acts, and numerous letters or “epistles,” several of which were written by the Apostle Paul to the earliest Christian congregations.

Because Jesus and his earliest followers were themselves Jews, they were familiar with Hebrew scripture and tradition. In their story telling and sermons, they sometimes quoted passages from Hebrew scripture that were then recorded in gospel accounts and so ended up being cited in the New Testament. For Christians, knowledge of the Old Testament is thus helpful in interpreting the New Testament.

The two Testaments contain some of the same themes, the injustice of poverty being prominent among them. The New Testament formulation of the Golden Rule, “Do unto others what you would have others do unto you,” was expressed in the first century BCE by Rabbi Hillel as “What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow creature.” In the gospels, Jesus often is speaking in the prophetic mode of the Old Testament prophets. That is, he is calling to account the religious leaders and government authorities whose rules and policies privileged the elite and oppressed those who were poor, women, ethnic minorities, and people who were sick or disabled.

On the other hand, the tone and ambiance of the New Testament and Old Testament are sometimes quite different. Some portions of the Old Testament, for example, have God directing the Hebrew people to wage war against their enemies. In the New Testament, Jesus offers directives that stress nonviolence, love of neighbor as oneself, and love of one’s enemies. *Context* is all important in understanding these differences.

The Bible contains within it messages that seem disconnected and even contradictory. In part, this is because it includes greatly varied types of literature—wisdom literature, prophetic writings, poetry, history/genealogies, and apocalyptic literature (stories of the end times and judgment). Each type is to be appreciated in its own right; one cannot compare the proverbial apples and oranges.

It should be noted that the Hebrew Bible and Protestant Old Testament contain the same content, but each presents the content in a different order and divides it into different numbers of books. The Roman Catholic version of the Old Testament is longer, as is the

Eastern Orthodox Old Testament, with each of them including books that are not part of either the Hebrew or Protestant canon. After Protestants separated from the Catholic Church (the event of the 1500s known as the “Protestant Reformation”), they decided that some books had been improperly included in the Old Testament canon. These they separated into a section they called the Apocrypha. Catholics, however, continue to treat these books as having canonical status and refer to them as Deuterocanonical books.

Examples of different types of literature include these books:

The Pentateuch (Law)
(For Jews, the Torah)

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Historical Books

Joshua
Judges
1 and 2 Samuel
1 and 2 Kings
1 and 2 Chronicles
and others

Prophetic Writings

Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Hosea
Amos
Micah
and others

Wisdom Literature and Poetry

Job
Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Psalms
The Song of Solomon

Apocalyptic Literature

Daniel
Revelation (NT)

Deuterocanonical Books

Tobit
Judith

(As noted above, these are Additions to the Book of Esther books included in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Bibles, but Baruch not in the Hebrew Bible or Protestant Bibles. Protestants refer to these books as the “Apocrypha.”)

The Wisdom of Solomon
Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)
The Letter of Jeremiah
Azariah and the Song of the Three Young Men
(Azariah and the Three Jews)
Susanna
Bel and the Dragon
1 and 2 Maccabees

Translations of the Bible

The original versions of texts that ended up being included in the Bible no longer exist. For centuries before the printing press was invented—even before different passages or books were canonized—an original text would have been painstakingly copied by hand over and over again, a process that invited both error and editorial revision. Fragments of some of these copies survive.

The first complete version of the Hebrew Bible was written in the Hebrew language. It was subsequently translated from Hebrew into Greek. The Greek translation, called the Septuagint, was the Bible known to the earliest Christians and it, in turn, was subsequently translated into Latin. When the institutional Christian Church split in the 11th century into the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Roman Church continued to use the Latin translation of the Old Testament, while the Eastern Church retained the Greek translation, or Septuagint. Jews continued to use the Hebrew version.

The first complete version of the New Testament was written in Greek. The Roman Catholic Church adopted a subsequent Latin translation, while, again, the Eastern Orthodox Church used the Greek version.

Subsequent Christian translations of the Bible, in whatever language, return to the earliest Hebrew or Greek versions in the case of the Old Testament, and to the Greek or Latin versions of the New Testament.

The Christian Bible in its entirety was first translated from the Latin into English in the 1300s. Not until the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, and the development of the printing press in the same century, however, was there mass production of the Bible in the languages of the common people.

By far the most popular and most enduring Protestant version of the Bible was the King James version, so-called because it was commissioned by James I, King of England, in 1604 and published in 1611. By the 1800s, however, the language of this version had become outmoded, and new updated translations were proposed. A translation called the Revised Version was published in England in the 1880s. In 1901, an American advisory committee published a bible called the American Standard Version. For another half century, however, the King James version continued to be the most popular among American Protestants, prompting yet another effort at translation to be made that in 1952 resulted in what is known as the Revised Standard Version.

With the subsequent retranslating of the Deuterocanonical books and the addition of three more books recognized by Orthodox communions, the way was cleared for an expanded edition of the Revised Standard Version in 1977. This edition was prepared by an ecumenical committee that included both Protestant and Catholic scholars, as well as an Eastern Orthodox scholar and a Jewish scholar. The 1977 edition of the Revised Standard Version was the first to be authorized for use by all of the major Christian Churches: Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Anglican, and Protestant.

However, a version prepared by groups of Catholic scholars a few years earlier (1970), called the New American Bible, was adopted and continues to serve as the official text for Catholic liturgy. Also in the 1970s, evangelical Protestants published two new versions, the New American Standard Bible, and the New International Version.

By the 1980s, older biblical manuscripts in both Hebrew and Greek had been discovered that called for completely new translations of both the Old and New Testaments. One result was the New Jerusalem Bible, published in 1985, which became popular among individual Catholics. Then, the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible was published in 1989. The NRSV is notable for the fact that it represents the first serious effort to be gender inclusive in its language. That same year, the Revised English Bible was published in England by a committee consisting of both Protestant and Catholic scholars.

Over the years, scores of non-authoritative versions of the Bible have been produced by individuals and small groups. An example was the Women's Bible compiled during the women's suffragette movement of the 1800s.

In recent times, multiple editions of the Bible—both the King James version and the New Revised Standard Version—have been published that incorporate commentary sensitive to the contemporary experiences of marginalized peoples. The People's Bible, for example, offers commentaries from African American, Latina, Asian American, and American Indian perspectives that contrast with what have often been oppressive interpretations made by representatives of the dominant culture.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Have you noticed that the Book of Genesis contains two different versions of portions of the creation story? The first chapter, verses 26-27, reads “Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.’” The second chapter, verses 7, and 21-23, reads, “Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being... So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman....” (NRSV)

How and why do you think there came to be these two different versions? How might emphasizing one version over the other influence people's beliefs about the relative worth of men and women?

2. The Old Testament book of Isaiah contains this passage: “The spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners.” (61:1) The New Testament Gospel of Luke has Jesus in the Temple reading this passage from the book of Isaiah, and then declaring, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” (4:16-21)

What do Jesus' actions tell you about how he identified himself? What do they tell you about how Jesus understood his ministry? This passage has been central to the development in the past fifty years of what are called “Liberation Theologies.” What do you know about these theologies?

3. One of Paul's letters (Colossians) directs wives to “be subject to your husband” and slaves to “obey your earthly master.” (3:18,22) But another letter (Galatians) appears to be contradictory, asserting that “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” (3:28)

EXERCISE:

These days, shopping for a Bible in a commercial bookstore can be a truly bewildering experience. You may want to visit your local bookstore to explore how many different versions are available for purchase. It might also be revealing to investigate which versions are held by your local public library. Based on what you find, would you surmise that your community is predominantly Catholic, or liberal Protestant, or evangelical Protestant?

Can you think of events or practices in American history that were justified by using one or the other of these passages? Does this constitute an example of proof texting? What is the larger context of these verses?

References

Holy Bible, The New Revised Standard Version with Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, World Bible Publishers, Inc., 1989.

John B. Gabel, Charles B. Wheeler, and Anthony D. York, *The Bible as Literature: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996.

Walter Brueggemann, William C. Placher, and Brian K. Blount, with Introduction by William Sloane Coffin, *Struggling with Scripture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002.