



Issue no. 24 – August 16, 2022

Message from our Regional Minister

Hello Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis and St. Clare:
The recent visit of Pope Francis to Canada, in my opinion, was a historical event with continuing rippling influence and affect. As a Secular Franciscan, am reflecting deeply upon the Pope's words to the Catholic Church.

At this time of the season of Summer quickly moving into Autumn, Secular Franciscans are planning for the Regional Chapter of Elections. The registrations from fraternities are being received with great joy. Your enthusiasm is contagious!

May the Holy Spirit continue to protect all travellers, overshadow the FCJ Centre, guide the schedule of the eventual weekend, give His Discernment to govern the election and may the Holy Spirit nourish our spirit through the presentations of the Guest Speaker, Bro Michael. Please continue to pray for the Wonder of God to prevail over all of us and for the success of the Regional Chapter of Elections.

"In everything you do, put God first, and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success" (Proverbs 3:6)
It has been my Joy to serve the Secular Franciscans over these past three years. Your shared spirituality, your love for Jesus, your prayer lives, your service to your fraternal brothers and sisters and much more have left a great impression upon me.

May God's Face always shine upon you and His Holy Spirit to guide you in the Journey ahead, and may God fulfill all your dreams.

St. Francis was given a dream by God and, as such, led him to sainthood.

You are Blessed as St. Francis intercedes for all the Secular Franciscans

See you in September in Calgary.....

Peace and JOY
Linda

Upcoming Events

Seasons of Creation Sep 1 – Oct 4, 2022

Resources:

[One-Page Summary](#)

[Launch Video](#)

[Celebration Guide](#)

[Prayer Guide](#)

Vespers and Crown Rosary on Sat. Sept. 3, 7pm BC / 8pm AB / 9pm MB

Join us at ZOOM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86486098310?pwd=R1VOZ3EybWMrG1PTTYxb1p1WllvQT09>

Meeting ID: 864 8609 8310

Passcode: 741246

St. Francis Novena Sep 25 – Oct 3, daily 7pm BC / 8pm AB / 9pm MB

Join us at ZOOM:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86486098310?pwd=R1VOZ3EybWMrG1PTTYxb1p1WllvQT09>

Meeting ID: 864 8609 8310

Passcode: 741246

Message from Our Director of Formation

Are you interested in the National (renamed) formators' course 2022-2023? The course is now open to the National OFS fraternity. Please contact me at ms.999@shaw.ca and I will send you the registration form. This course has reached many seculars throughout Canada over the past 3 years in both English and French. It was formulated by the National Formation Commission and is a wonderful formation for anyone interested in the 'why' and 'how' of initial and ongoing formation. You do not need to be the formation person in your fraternity, rather you have an interest in deepening your understanding of Franciscan formation. There are 6-modules (spread over 8 months) with responses due after reading and reflecting on each module. It is completed online with 3 ZOOM meetings throughout. It is a great way to meet and interact with Secular Franciscans across Canada. It is facilitated by Lynda Black, ofs. The courses run from September through March/April. Registration is open now and closes September 28, 2022 (have extended the registration date). So, think about it!

Peace and all good,
Lynda Black

Message from Our Director of JPIC

Dear Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis and St. Clare,
Peace and all Good!

[Here is the latest news](#) from Laudato Si Movement and includes the prayer for the month of August. May we

continue to spread the message for ecological conversion and be touched by the cry of the poor and be stewards to care for Mother Earth.

Peace and Joy,
Lourdes von Burg

SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT COURSE

The on-line Spiritual Assistant course is called [A Course for Spiritual Assistants](#). It was created by a committee from the OFS region of Trillium - including one of our National Spiritual Assistants Fr. Peter Knaapen OFM Conv. - and supplemented by the instructor, Br. Gerry Clyne OFM. It is primarily designed for those Secular Franciscans aspiring to become Spiritual Assistants for an OFS fraternity (other than their own). But as the course contains much general material on Franciscan spirituality, it is offered to those who may be interested in taking it for their own spiritual advancement.

The course consists of twelve chapters. At the end of each chapter are questions to reflect on and share with the instructor and the other students. Two chapters are scheduled per month. This course is not academic. Those who want to take the course should not feel intimidated. It is offered free of charge. The only thing that is required of the students is to put in a good effort.

The course provides the opportunity for Seculars from across Canada to meet online with each other. The sharing of reflections on their mutual love of serving Christ through the Franciscan charism creates friendships and strengthens the sense of belonging to a national Franciscan community. There will be occasional Zoom meetings as well where students get to see those they have been sharing with.

The course will start on Oct. 29 with responses to the first chapter questions due Nov. 12. Please register with Br. Gerry at gerryclyne@outlook.com

Reflection

Wrestling with God

Saying No to God

Nothing is more harmful to a man than his resistance to Grace. —Archbishop Fulton Sheen

All of us on occasion have denied God's request. Though we are so aware of who we are in Christ and what we are called to do for the kingdom, we still don't hesitate to say no to God. Discernment includes discovering when we actively and deliberately ignore or resist an invitation from God. Let's explore some typical techniques we employ.

1. Denial. The most obvious method is denial. We deliberately ignore the elephant in the room by pretending it's not there. This is cloaked in various attitudes and actions. I get defensive and rationalize or justify an unchristian action by saying, "It's my life, and I have every right to do or say as I please." I ignore the most obvious meaning of a scriptural text. Denial is turning a deaf ear to the God's call.

2. Delay. "I'll do anything, Lord, but not that." I knew exactly where I was being called, but I was dragging my feet in response. We resist responding to God through delay. We procrastinate or deliberately choose paralysis over proceeding. We momentarily fiddle with a request and say, "I'm not sure if this is of God, so I will leave well enough alone," and put it on the back burner. Lest our friends think we are a Goody Two-shoes, we dig in our heels and whisper a firm, "Not now." Control freaks stall because they fear discerning the wrong decision; they are afraid of stepping out in faith—and failing even more.

3. Sabotage. While denial and delay are passive, sabotage is deliberate and intentional. It aggressively connives and works against God's invitation. There are four typical personalities who hijack God's grace and call.

Turtles are saboteurs who take delay to a whole new level by retreating inside their shells and forever mulling over a decision. They subvert God's voracious enthusiasm for the kingdom by choosing paralysis. They do nothing to engage actively and advance the discernment process. They forget that a deep-seated desire or recurring attraction is sometimes the very sign of the God's invitation. Turtles often fear commitment.

Bumblebees hijack the call of God by flitting here and there, getting involved in other people's business, and never taking the time to pause, reflect, and listen to their lives. They are the polar opposite of turtles, because their escape is through activity. Paul calls these people "busybodies" (2 Thess. 3:11).

Similar to a circus barker who tries to drum up people's curiosity for a particular sideshow, *prayer barkers* do all the talking in prayer and never pause to do the deep listening that is critical for discernment.

Bishops, pastors, and people in other ecclesiastical leadership roles sometimes become the fourth kind of saboteur. Being the sole interpreters of God's ways, *know-it-alls* put God in a tightly defined box and claim to know exactly how God acts. They won't entertain anything that doesn't match their image or knowledge of God. They forget that grace is sometimes found outside the box and sometimes destroys the very box that confines our nicely defined theologies of God!

If a person's relationship with God is continually flat, unnuanced, and lacking in emotion, odds are the person is avoiding God's invitation through denial, delay, or sabotage. Spiritual transformation doesn't just happen; it requires deep listening, sometimes struggle, and ongoing conversation with God about our feelings and response. Reflection, dialogue, and prayer will occasionally lead to wrestling with God as we are challenged to let go of control. Surrender and God's grace nourish deeper and deeper forms of spiritual transformation.

4. Rebellion. And that leads to the fourth—and believe it or not, most successful—technique we use to wrestle with God. It's rebellion. We are consciously aware that God is calling us; we know how we are to respond; we are well aware God will get what God wants; we are angry about that and raise a ruckus. I call it the "most successful" technique because it works to God's advantage and our transformation. Any wise spiritual director will tell you: active rebellion is good. It indicates one's relationship with God is dynamic and alive; it also indicates the person is listening at a deep level. The person is wrestling with transformative grace that is both challenging the ego and calling forth a yes that finds expression in deeper forms of trust and surrender.

Denial, delay, sabotage, and rebellion are four typical ways we avoid God or refuse his request. I'm certain there are other ways, because everyone resists and wrestles with God in a personal way. We are limited only by the ego's conniving creativity. That's why the spiritual life requires self-awareness, a reflective lifestyle, and brutal honesty. Trying to self-diagnose resistance is virtually impossible. Even astute and discerning people miss how they are arm wrestling and resisting God's invitation. Good discernment—and the entire spiritual adventure, for that matter—is never done alone. Having a spiritual director or spiritual companion to check in with on a consistent basis and discuss what's going on spiritually is not only a wise decision but also of critical importance for spiritual growth and maturity.

Obstacles to Our Yes

Why do we ignore or resist God? Part of the reason is fear. Creatures of habit, we fear the new, the untried, and the unknown—so we tenaciously cling to the puny and myopic vision of our lives. Change initially forces us to let go of control, and the loss of that security is frightening. We are afraid that God is asking the impossible of us. We fear failure and a subsequent loss of face. We are afraid of the ripple effects some decisions will have on other aspects of our lives. Fear is the feeling that forces us to freeze, dig in our heels, and resist.

[God] tears us from that which we love wrongly, unreasonably or excessively, that which hinders his love.... We cry loudly in our despair and murmur against God.... But he lets us cry and saves us nevertheless.... The things for which we weep would have caused us eternal woe. —François Fénelon

Resistance also arises around the ego's obsession with self-concern, self-image, self-gratification, and self-preservation as well as the emotional need to avoid pain, blame, criticism, disgrace, and loss. God's call and grace challenge us to disengage from the ego and its avoidance techniques. Because we tenaciously cling to the ego and are constantly dodging anything that makes us feel uncomfortable, we are frustrated and anxious.

God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world. —C. S. Lewis

If you try to ignore or resist God, your ego remains front and center. That has its consequences: like the unjust judge in Luke's parable of the widow, you will feel "bothered" and "worn out" (see Lk. 18:4–5). Such forms of frustration are often signs that transformative grace is calling you to surrender and trust.

When anxious or frustrated, ask yourself: *What is being threatened? Why am I fighting against this call from God? Am I overly concerned about what I will look like and what others will say? Am I overly occupied with feeling good or having enough to live on? Am I fighting against pain, avoiding blame, dodging criticism, or fearing disgrace? What fear is being activated? What is God asking of me?* Such questions in times of anxiety and frustration help raise the issue of resistance to a conscious level; you'll then be able to discuss it with a spiritual director.

The Prayer of Lament

Even before you bring the fear or the ego's issue to your spiritual director, bring it to prayer. Rather than avoid the emotion, pray from and through your anger, your fear, your disgust, your sense of abandonment. Don't be afraid to yell at God. Raise a ruckus if you must, and continue to wrestle with God! This rebellion and transparency lead to a more authentic relationship with the divine.

Lord, my God, who am I that you should forsake me? The child of your love—and now become as the most hated one—the one You have thrown away as unwanted—unloved. I call, I cling, I want—and there is no One to answer—no One on Whom I can cling—no, No One.—Alone. The darkness is so dark—and I am alone.—Unwanted, forsaken ... I am told God loves me—and yet the reality of darkness & coldness & emptiness is so great that nothing touches my soul. —Mother Teresa of Calcutta

This prayer of lament and complaint is firmly rooted in the biblical tradition. Over one-third of the Psalms are prayed from physical sickness (see Ps. 6:3), loneliness and alienation (see Ps. 38:12), danger and mistreatment (see Ps. 7:2), and even aging (see Ps. 71:9). The book of Job is written around the question, why do the just suffer? Prophets such as Jeremiah complain to God, “Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Truly, you are to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail” (Jer. 15:18). The entire Book of Lamentations is written from the confusion and suffering felt after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians.

Lamenting reminds us that no emotion is inappropriate to bring before God. Jesus himself turned to it as he prayed Psalm 22 from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). Such a prayer actually sings of a deep—and disappointed—confidence in God. That’s when I discovered again the power of lament and how rebellion, oddly enough, is transformative: by actively resisting God, my attitude had changed.

The Power of Pain

Pain and frustration arising from rebellion can be transformative, because they cause the emotional shift that leads you to respond to God. But you must hit rock bottom first; the pain must become unbearable. That’s why experienced spiritual directors never deny people their pain or ease it with platitudes—what I call “throwing holy water on someone’s suffering.” You do the butterfly no favor if you help it break out of the cocoon; it needs to struggle if you want the butterfly to fly. As the Chinese say, out of the mud the lotus flower emerges.

Luke 22 shows a very human Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. It’s one of the few places in the Gospels where we actually hear his prayer. “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me” (Lk. 22:42). Luke tells us that Jesus’s struggle was so intense that his sweat became like drops of blood falling to the ground (see Lk. 22:44). And yet, in the midst of that struggle, his deeper yes emerges: “Not my will but yours be done” (Lk. 22:42).

It is a paradox in the spiritual life: rebelling and shaking our fists against God in lament prepare the ground and pave the path to deeper faith and trust. Denial, delay, and sabotage may maintain the ego as our life’s operating system, but active rebellion wears down the ego with the ensuing frustration. As God keeps returning, weariness sets in; and then suddenly, out of that mud, the lotus flower emerges—namely, a positive response to the grace of surrender, acceptance, and trust.

The grace of surrender, acceptance, and trust is not easily received. Though our hands are outstretched in times of rebellion and lament, we approach the response of surrender with baby steps, sometimes yelling and kicking and often with fear and trembling. But this shouldn’t discourage us. As with Jesus in his Gethsemane experience, we can gain a deeper understanding of our identity and mission in the crucible of fear and in the desert of doubt. In that crucible and from that desert a flower emerges as we say along with Jesus, “Not my will but yours be done.” And with that yes, we discover in a whole new way our personal role in salvation history.

Excerpts by Fr. Albert Haase, OFM. *Saying Yes: Discovering and Responding to God's Will in Your Life* (pp. 81-92). Paraclete Press. Kindle Edition.