

A 30-day Guide for Reflection: Nurturing the Roots of The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans

*The Principles of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans
(with minor revisions for this booklet)
March 2010*

Day One

We covenant together as the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans to observe the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ by following the examples of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of their lives with God and people. (Principle 1, part 1)

Pray for your community.

What first attracted me to Francis? to Clare? What example in their lives inspires me most? What challenges me most?

How do I “observe the gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ”?

What is needed today to put Christ more at the center of my own life?

Day Two

Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel. (Principle 1, part 2)

Ponder again the gospel lesson for today. What in those words affects how I live out this day?

What do you think it means when we say “devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel”?

Is there a special concern I have today that needs a good dose of gospel medicine? Pray for that concern. Seek wisdom from God on how I may address the Good News of Jesus the Christ to that concern.

Day Three

We seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in our brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. (Principle 2)

How can I do this seeking today? Who in the Order seems more of a stranger to me than a sibling today? Call them, or write them and reconnect. It is very difficult if not impossible to recognize Christ in our siblings if we do not know them for who they are.

When someone observes me, does my lifestyle help them to see the “living and active person of Christ” in me? What can I do to improve their perceptions?

What constitutes “liturgical activity” for me? How does that activity help me to encounter the living and active person of Christ?

Day Four

We shall go forth as witnesses and instruments of the Church’s mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by our life and words. (Principle 3, part 1)

What path, or paths, does my mission work take? What does this word MISSION mean for me? Pray for the recipients of your mission endeavors.

Is there a story about my mission work to share with the community? Is there a story I can tell about what is happening, what concerns me, who and what needs our prayers? Would I like others in the Order to join with me in my mission work?

Day Five

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let us devote ourselves energetically to living accountable to our respective denominations and in spiritual fellowship with Christians everywhere. (Principle 3, part 2)

What do I see myself doing to help fulfill St. Francis’ mandate to rebuild the Church? What do I discern about the Church that needs some remodeling?

Does my local parish or fellowship know of my ties to the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans? How does the witness of Saints Francis and Clare affect my relationship and involvement with my local Christian fellowship?

Day Six

As the successors to the original “brothers and sisters of penance” (the original name of the Third Order), and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let us conform our thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls our “Conversion.” Human frailty calls us to strive for this conversion daily. (Principle 4)

How does this statement fit with Romans 12:2 and following?

Our Principles highlight that there is energy with the gospel, clearly insinuating that the gospel of Jesus the Christ is not a sedate meditative reading but a transformative power. How do you experience this in your own living?

How do I experience conversion?

What do I do to transmit this energy into our society? the Church? my own Order?

Day Seven

Following the example of Jesus, let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all we are and do. Let us participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let us join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms in use in the Church. (Principle 5)

How do I pray? How much time do I spend in formal prayer?

How do I understand ‘contemplation’?

Is prayer and contemplation really “the soul of all we are and do”?

Some of us attend denominations that do not formally acknowledge “sacraments” or “the Eucharist.” If this is my experience, how do I interpret this Principle? How do I understand what constitutes “the sacramental life of the Church”?

What liturgical forms of prayer do I use? How do they nurture my faith in Jesus Christ?

Day Eight

The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans shall follow the example of Mary by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently. (Principle 6)

How do I relate to Mary, Jesus’ mother? Is there a particular story from the gospel narratives that draws me to her? What do I think she experienced as a mother raising the boy Jesus?

Could I have gone through what she experienced as she watched her son be crucified? Maybe I already feel I have experienced such trauma.

Does her faith challenge me in any way? What can I do differently today to nurture my faith?

Day Nine

We shall faithfully fulfill the duties proper to our various circumstances of life. (Principle 7, part 1)

What duties must I fulfill routinely? Has my faith ever been challenged by those duties?

Considering Mary's faith, which we pondered yesterday, how does being a follower of Jesus Christ affect how I perform my duties?

In relation to my community, the OEF, how can I better fulfill my responsibilities as a Professed member of the community? Can I donate more financially? Can I serve in some capacity to assist in the general life of the community? Communicate with one of the current servants about how you might become more involved in the general life and witness of the Order.

Day Ten

We shall also follow the poor and crucified Christ and witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions. (Principle 7, part 2)

This statement raises the issue of how obvious our faith is in the eyes of those around us, our co-workers, neighbors, and others in our neighborhoods. Do I live uniquely? Does my lifestyle in Christ set me apart from those who do not profess to believe in him? If so, how? And if not, why not?

Have I ever felt persecuted or harassed because of my faith? What was that like? What did I feel?

What challenges me to dare to follow values different from those who are not Christians?

What does the "poor and crucified Christ" ask of me today?

Day Eleven

Christ chose for himself a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying our own material needs. (Principle 8, part 1)

How do I know that Christ valued created things attentively? What does it mean to value things attentively?

Some elements of Christian discipline teach the concept of mindfulness and awareness of 'things.' A simple exercise in this attentiveness, or mindfulness, is to eat your next meal slowly, chewing each bite conscientiously. Chew that morsel and be aware of its texture, nuances of taste, and with gratefulness for all those who had a hand in bringing that food to your mouth.

Now imagine living each day with such attentiveness. Live today without television and spend time in thought and prayer. Unplug the technological gizmos that fill every waking moment. See what happens.

Examine your lifestyle and ask yourself, "Do I really need this thing?"

Day Twelve

Let us be mindful that according to the gospel we are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. (Principle 8, part 2)

What is the responsibility of a steward, in a biblical sense? Jesus tells a parable about a shrewd steward in Luke 16. What more modern terminology would describe those responsibilities of a steward?

In this new era of increasing awareness about environmental stewardship, more and more people are seeing how the way we live affects everyone else in some way. What can I do differently today to minimize my negative impact on my neighbors?

What grade would I give myself today on being a steward? How can I improve that grade?

Day Thirteen

We shall strive to purify our hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power. (Principle 8, part 3)

Richard Foster, an American Christian writer, wrote a book in the late 1970s that argued that modern society is motivated by one of three energies: money, sex, or power. They are often used in combination. Some argue these forces have been at work in the institutional form of Christianity since Charlemagne made it the state religion in the 300's. What do you think?

What form does this "yearning for possession and power" take in my life?

How do I decide what to buy whenever the urge or need to go shopping strikes?

Some people are motivated to shop because it makes them feel good. Is this ever my motivation?

Is there anything I need to relinquish in order to simplify my life and to reduce the demand for possessions and power? Ask the Servant Lord for insight on this today.

Day Fourteen

As members of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans, with a gentle and courteous spirit, we accept all people as a gift of God and an image of Christ. (Principle 9, part 1)

Reality check: Who in my life challenges me on this principle? Someone once said, "People are put before us for a purpose." Sometimes we do not like that purpose. Who is being used by God to teach you something about being gentle and courteous? Thank God for them and pray for them.

Again, as we pondered in Principle 2, how do I experience the presence of Christ in my siblings, my neighbors, and those who challenge my serenity?

How do I acknowledge others as gifts from God?

Day Fifteen

A sense of community will make us joyful and ready to place ourselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom we shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. (Principle 9, part 2)

How do I relate today to the community of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans?

How do I relate as a Franciscan to my faith community?

How do I relate today as a Christian to my secular community?

What challenges me? What nurtures me in these communities?

What can be done by the OEF to improve the lives of those who seem to live 'below' the standards we would find acceptable for ourselves?

What can we do to better address issues of economic injustice in today's society? Communicate your concerns to the Order by email, through the website or through the newsletter. Help us all to be more aware.

Day Sixteen

We shall individually and collectively be in the forefront of promoting justice by testimony of our human lives and courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, we should make definite choices in harmony with our faith. (Principle 10)

What is one simple thing I could do today to make a difference in promoting justice? When was the last time I voiced my opinion to elected officials of my community or state, my Senator or Representative, or even to the White House?

In the United States, and many other nations, there is often friction between Christians about what is unjust in this world that should be addressed. Values have to be clarified through careful, honest and loving discussion. Have I had such discussions with my siblings in Christ and found myself on opposite sides of the issue? Was the difference resolved in any way?

What concerns me most about social issues? What are examples of injustice I believe we can collectively address as a community?

Day Seventeen

We shall esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community. (Principle 11)

What is the difference between 'work' and 'vocation'?

Am I employed? Am I grateful for the employment? Have I ever been unemployed? What was that experience like?

As this guide is being penned the national unemployment rate in the USA is 10%, a higher rate than at any time since World War 2. Do I know anyone who is currently unemployed?

What can be done to assist those who are unemployed in my area? Is there any chance that my own place of work could hire someone?

Would I be willing to work part-time in order to make room for my company to hire someone currently unemployed?

Day Eighteen

In our families, we shall cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. (Principle 12)

Who constitutes my family? How do they understand my relationship to the Order? Have they ever attended a Chapter/Convocation with me? Were they present at my profession?

How does my family handle conflicts and differences of opinion about values, conduct, matters of faith and so forth?

Is my family involved with other families for social events, holiday celebrations and other special events like baptisms and other Christian rituals? If not, can we as a family begin something like this to welcome others into our expressions of faith?

How does my family participate together for common causes that address issues of justice and peace?

Day Nineteen

We shall respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High." (Principle 13, part 1)

How does one practice respect toward all creatures? Does a biting mosquito or a stinging wasp warrant respect when they inflict pain and discomfort?

And what constitutes an inanimate creature?

How do I express respect for the earth?

What can I do today to minimize pollution, for example? What do I recycle? How do I purchase things out of respect for the earth?

Day Twenty

We shall strive to move from the temptation of exploiting Creation toward the Franciscan concept of universal kinship. (Principle 13, part 2)

How do we eat respectfully and without exploitation?

How do we clothe ourselves, heat our homes, drive our cars and so forth and respect “universal kinship”?

I Corinthians 8 speaks about eating food that might offend some. Does this sort of respect play a role in my understanding of exploitation? Some of us are vegetarians of some sort. Some of us relish a good slab of beef once in a while. Does one seem less exploitative than the other? What about kosher meats where the animal is humanely slaughtered for food? Does that make it any less exploitative or disrespectful?

Romans 12:15 reads, “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (New American Standard Version, 1973). How does this verse help my understanding of the Franciscan concept of universal kinship?

Day Twenty-one

In obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ and the examples of Saints Francis and Clare, we are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly.” (Principle 14, part 1)

How do I bear peace? Where do I carry it?

How is peace built up?

What can the Order do to assist me in building up peace?

What conflicts am I aware of?

What role does my self-gratification with stuff play in building up peace, or tearing it down? What do I know about the conditions behind the creation, distribution and sale of my purchases?

Day Twenty-two

We are compelled to seek out ways of resolving conflict through non-violent means, trusting in the presence of the divine soul in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. (Principle 14, part 2)

Is this frame of mind something I am comfortable with? Are there times when I feel more compelled to act violently, either verbally or physically? What do I do with those feelings?

What do I need to do to nurture a compulsion for peace? What tools do I need? Is there someone in the Order I can discuss this with today, or very soon?

Is there someone I have a hard time forgiving? What do I need to do to overcome the compulsion for spiritual violence and seeking revenge?

Should I pray for transformation? Am I willing to allow the Christ to truly make me a vessel of His peace?

Day Twenty-three

Since we are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let us accept death serenely as an encounter with our God. (Principle 15)

How have I handled the death of loved ones? Did I welcome death as a sister?

Re-read some of the gospel stories about Jesus' last night before his crucifixion and the day of his death. Did Jesus accept death serenely? One can make a good argument that he did not.

Does this principle mean I should not fight for the life of my loved ones, or disallow doctors to do all they can to help me live when my body seems ready to quit?

What about legalized suicide? Does this issue fly in the face of the Franciscan way of welcoming Sister Death? Or does it enhance this attitude?

Day Twenty-four

As members of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans we covenant to draw up and live by a Personal Rule of Life based on the Rule of this Order and falling into these disciplines: Worship, Prayer, Penitence, Work, Lifestyle, Mission, Obedience, and Community. (Principle 16, part 1)

Review your own personal Rule of Life. How am I doing with it? Am I living it?

What may need to be updated or revised?

Does my Rule really help me to express my faith and live out these Principles?

When was the last time I actually discussed my Rule of Life with my spiritual director?

Day Twenty-five

We shall always be under supervision and accountable to an advisor, committed to a continual process of growth and formation. (Principle 16, part 2)

How do I submit to supervision? What do I reveal to my supervisor? Who is/are my supervisor/s?

What is the purpose of supervision?

How am I committed to a continual process of growth and formation?

Where do I get my nurturing for this 'continual process'?

How do I know whether or not I am receiving helpful supervision?

In my accountability to the OEF, do I feel I am receiving supervision when I submit my reports on how I am living out my Personal Rule of Life?

Do I communicate with my formation counselor/assistant chaplain more often than the minimum?
Do I take the initiative to participate in the ongoing process of belonging to a living community of faith, or do I wait for someone else to reach out to me?

Day Twenty-six

The Mission Statement of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans—Celebrating God's presence and grace in everything... (part 1)

How do I celebrate God's presence and grace?

How would I describe to a nonbeliever the grace of God? How have I experienced this grace?

What bible stories and verses in particular illustrate what I understand this grace to be?

Which Church holy-days help me celebrate God's presence and grace?

If I could invent a new 'holy-day' to enhance my celebration of God's presence and grace, what would it be called? What rituals would make it special?

Day Twenty-seven

...following the Poor Christ of the gospels in lives of mutual care and accountability in harmony with the faith and practice of the whole Franciscan family... (part 2)

How do I follow the Poor Christ? Can anybody tell that I am a follower by the way I live?

What have I done lately to demonstrate 'mutual care' in my little Franciscan community?

Am I living and practicing my faith in harmony or dissonance with the 'whole Franciscan family'?

What other Franciscan communities am I familiar with? Are there any I could visit in my area?

If called upon to serve the OEF, can I count on my siblings to help hold me accountable to that task? Who can help me serve well?

How can I help my community develop a better sense of "mutual care and accountability"?

Day Twenty-eight

...we are the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. We seek to grow in the knowledge and love of God... (part 3)

What do I do to 'seek to grow'? What spiritual practices and disciplines help me?

Are there other spiritual practices and disciplines I would like to try? Is there someone in the Order that seems to have their spiritual 'act' together and who might help me with this?

How do I love God? How do I express my devotion? What distracts me from this love? Do I really love God with "all my heart, my strength and my soul"?

Saint Francis and Saint Clare seemed to be totally in love with Jesus the Christ. Can I love my Savior like that?

Day Twenty-nine

...and to serve Jesus Christ in faithfulness to the spirit and example of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi. (part 4)

In the Prelude of the General Rule of the OEF it reads: "Christ calls us to follow this way so that he may send us, like Francis and Clare, to offer all that we have and all that we are. We shall strive to be living witnesses among the nations to the great truth that in Christ 'there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male and female' (Gal. 3:28); that there are no barriers of race or nations in God's family. There is only the All-loving Creator, the Divine Redeemer, the one fellowship in the All-wonderful Creator."

How does the OEF exhibit this philosophy?

What can we do better as a community to demonstrate these powerful words?

What can I do today in my own life to demonstrate these truths?

What makes me a Franciscan? a brown or grey habit? a tau cross, or a San Damiano cross?

Day Thirty

Pope John the 23rd once wrote: "My soul is open before you. Like a blank sheet of paper. Write on it what you will." (Journal of a Soul)

Consider today how to resign yourself to the authority and love of the Savior and Lord, Jesus the Christ. You made a commitment to belong to a Christian community, full of diversity and challenge, flooded with grace and joy.

How can I express my love of the Savior with my siblings in the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans just for today?

Have I made plans to attend Chapter and Convocation this year?

Have I offered lately to serve my brothers and sisters in the community?

Have I invested some of my financial resources in the community so it can fulfill its ministries?

What does God want to write on the blank page of my soul today, what message to carry forth in the example of Francis and Clare to the world hungry for a message from God today?