

Elected in December, not yet "installed", having served for 6 months,  
let me share my experience:

First my confession:

I fall short.  
I fall short of the expectations of some.  
I fall short of my own good intentions.  
I may fall short of my calling from God,  
-- though God does not speak with the same  
hard-etched clarity as you and I -- .  
We sometimes demand more of ourselves and others than God does.

Before you, I pledge to listen more deeply for what is mine to do.

I ask God to strengthen me  
in my willingness to serve and  
in my ability to listen, to care and to share.  
I ask God to keep my heart soft and my mind open,  
to rekindle joy,  
to renew hope,  
to spark creativity.

Now my experience:

By nature, I am drawn to more simple and quiet ways.

Early on, a member described the Order to me in this way:

"We come together once a year  
to worship, to pray, to break bread together,  
to wash one another's feet.

We lay our rules on the altar.

Throughout the year, we live our rules. We pray for one another.

-- This is our way of being faithful.

Four times a year, we report to another on the following of our rule.

-- This is our way of being accountable."

I see value in the simplicity and steadiness  
of that commitment, lived day by day, year upon year.  
I do not see it as a slight thing.

I would do well in that Order. I might do better in that Order.

But this Order no longer feels so simple  
and straightforward as that Order. Change happens.

I remain committed.  
I am especially committed to listening together  
for God's call, for God's will,  
for God's wildest dream  
and deepest desire  
for this little Order.

Some say with delight: "We are so diverse!"  
Recognizing the challenges, some say with more reserve

and with some concern: "We are so diverse."

I am not concerned about our diversity.

Our diversity is a beautiful thing.

I am concerned about our divisions.

Diversity respects, enriches, and enlivens.

Divisions separate, tear down and destroy.

We own a mix of diversities and divisions.

A mix that includes, and is not limited to:

- \* the nature and mission of our Order
- \* the goals and implications of being an ecumenical Order
- \* leadership expectations
- \* our communal celebration of the Eucharist
- \* the vesting of habits
- \* the quarterly reporting on our rules.

We are not blessed with sufficient face-to-face time to come

-- if not to agreement -- at least to deep, respectful understanding

in the areas that threaten to divide us.

From what I see, phones and facebook, skype and email  
can both help and hinder.

From my admittedly limited engagement of such,  
in cases of disagreement, division and conflict,  
I see more hinder than help -- and often marked hindrance.

There is a troubling interpersonal "dis-ease"  
among some, that at times, has felt close to venom.

Within the Order, communication, particularly regarding conflicts,  
too often travels underground from person to person to person,  
-- spreading and growing in intensity --  
rather than the communication traveling above-ground,  
directly and honestly to the one who needs to hear it in truth and in love.  
This pattern persists beyond a person or two or a situation or two.  
The danger is that this becomes "the way we handle things",  
"the way we address discord, disagreement and conflict."

As an Order, we deal poorly with conflict.

As an Order, we too often resist the hard, slow work of reconciliation.

We are creating a legacy of wearing down our servants  
-- particularly our ministers and our chaplains.

Your present co-ministers and your interim minister have felt this.

As did the previous minister, and the one before him.

As did the previous chaplain, and the one before him.

We need to put our pointing fingers back into our pockets and ask:

"Is this what we want? Why is this happening?"

We need to pray deeply to find a better way

-- a healthier way, a sustainable way,

a more forgiving way that allows us to begin again

-- and again and again --

A way that does not lock anyone in the past.

None of this is unique to our Order.

But our dispersed-ness closes off to us

some ways that have helped others.

We cannot sit around the table and talk it out. Or even yell it out.

We cannot sit in a circle and pray it out. Or cry it out.

We cannot kneel shoulder-to-shoulder in repentance

before the One who forgives it out.

We can too easily be tricked into seeing only the offense,

into assuming: "Of course they meant it."

"Of course they see it."

"Of course they intend to keep doing it."

Our insides churn and fume and we forget that

there is more to every story, and more to every person.

We forget we are all -- yes, each and all -- a mix and a mess.

"We must be kinder than necessary,

for everyone we meet

is fighting an unseen battle

of which we know nothing."

\* We need to hold this truth close.\*

No one comes to this Order without passion, without fervor,

without a deep desire to follow Jesus,

without a strong conviction to live a different way,

and to choose a different path.

Deep down, we all want the same things:

We want to be free.

We want to be faithful.

We want to be true.

We want to be Christ's Love in this world.

Why else would we join an Order?

We also want to be known and loved.

We want to be whole.

We want to belong.

We want to matter.

Maybe we want the Order to give us that too.

And maybe it will -- in fits and starts. In spurts.

But over the long haul, I don't know . . .

Over the long haul,

I think the Order is more likely to give us a proving ground

for forgiveness -- 70 x 7 --

and for reconciliation -- with all the reckoning that requires.  
This Order is more likely to yield a path that weaves through  
the universal pattern of passion -- death -- and resurrection.  
This Order is more likely to become a playscape  
for the rugged reality of Incarnation:  
kissing the leper,  
rebuilding the church,  
discovering what is mine to do -- and doing it.

This Order is rich with examples of Sisters and Brothers  
taking strong stands for peace and justice.  
It is rich, too, with more quiet examples of Brothers and Sisters  
simply living the love of God.

There is strength in each one of us.  
And there is fragility.

We are -- each one of us -- a mix and a mess,  
-- just like our Nation  
-- just like our World  
-- just like Ferguson  
-- just like Charleston  
-- just like the recent reactions to the  
    Supreme Court Ruling on Marriage Equality  
-- just like our churches  
-- just like our families  
-- just like our Servant Team  
-- just like me and just like you.

May we seek the Lord of all hopefulness.  
May we pray for one another.

In Christ's Love for Each and All, Shoshanah Kay, Co-Minister  
Order of Ecumenical Franciscans  
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