

**DYNAMIC FORMATION FOR CANDIDATES #1**  
**Esther Stewart, OFS Feb. 21, 2019**

Almost all our fraternities have people in Candidacy or approaching Candidacy. This is the real heart of our formation in that the candidates are supposed to be engaged in an intensive study of our Rule in preparation for permanent and life-long commitment to the Secular Franciscan Order. I would like to share a few thoughts about making your candidate formation program a truly dynamic experience. I am including ministers and others on your formation teams who attended the October formation retreat/workshop weekend in this email. Many of these folks are assisting with or actually doing the program for the candidates and need to be included in all methods for formation.

- **Formation sessions for candidates must be 2 hours in length.** There is no way to go deeply into the material in such a way that conversion and life commitment can take place without putting at least 2 hours into each session. This may necessitate some readjusting of schedules, days and times, but this is preparation for a life commitment. Formation needs to take precedence over other activities. (Regional norms)
- Divide each 2-hour session between **a discussion of the material in the chapter** (Franciscan Journey) for the first hour **and discussion of supplementary material** for the second hour.
- **Avoid lecture. Provide for discussion.** Ask leading questions about the content of the chapter. The weakest component in the Franciscan Journey book is the questions at the end of each chapter. I am not alone in this observation. Other professional educators working with the book have come to the same conclusion. If the formation session consists in only answering the questions at the end of the chapter, then your session is academic but very thin on interaction, fraternity building, and challenge for conversion, which is what our Franciscan life is all about.
- **Focus on the article of the Rule that opens each chapter and the articles from our Constitutions that follow the article of the Rule.** The Constitutions tell how we are to live the Rule. Ask what specific words stand out to them in each of these. (They should be underlining or highlighting words, phrases and sentences throughout the text.) Ask why they were moved by what they underlined, why that stood out to them.
- Continue in this **discussion mode for the rest of the pages in the chapter. Let them tell you!!** You need to listen for conversion taking place in their lives. And they need to share with each other. These discussions can be dynamic and challenging.
- At the conclusion of each session, **introduce the next chapter and pass out the supplementary material** (from FUN Manual or other sources) so they have 30 days to read and meditate on the new material. This guarantees lively discussion, challenges, and conversion (or a healthy decision not to continue in formation).
- **Don't be afraid!!!** You aren't in charge of formation. The Holy Spirit is. Don't try to control (however, keep the discussion on track). Allow for discussion and interaction among the candidates. Just be sure that they are understanding our Franciscan theology and spirituality correctly. This necessitates **your own personal preparation long before you meet with them.** If you are using the sections in the FUN Manual, you will not go astray.