

Rotating Initial Formation Process



In an article Formation Commission member Fr. Richard Trezza, O.F.M. wrote for TAU-USA, Issue #17, Fall 1997 entitled, “We’re sorry, but you’ll have to wait!” he lamented the situation whereby potential Secular Franciscans come to join our way of life, only to be told that the formation program is already underway and that they would have to wait until a new “class” has begun.

He spoke of a formation process which went in rotation or a cycle. In other words, the bulk of information presented during initial formation would have no beginning or end point – it would be ongoing. Whenever Aspirants/Inquirers present themselves and are deemed ready to begin the formation process, they simply “plug in” to where everyone else is.

Separate sessions could be held for the newcomers. These would deal with issues such as the life of Francis, a quick introduction to the way of life of the O.F.S., Regional particularities or whatever. The person in formation would stay in the cycle for the entire time of Candidacy. When this period of initial formation is ended, the new member experiences formation for the Newly Professed.

[Revised by Deacon Dave & Thérèse Ream, O.F.S., January 2017]

A Local Fraternity’s Actual Experience with this Process

This is an actual example of how the Rotating Initial Formation process worked out for us (Sacred Heart Fraternity in Peoria). We started the class with 4 people on Chapter 1 of *The Franciscan Journey* book. Later, we had 3 more people join the class already in progress and jumped in right where the first 4 were at the time. A while after that 2 more joined...

To give you an idea of how the process unfolded:

4 people started together on Chapter 1

3 people joined us and started on Chapter 8

2 people joined us on Chapter 18

Of the first group (4 people) that started out with chapter 1, one gentleman has continuously been in formation and will be ready for profession in March 2017 if he discerns that to be God’s will and the Council approves. The other 3 have had various interruptions due to work or other matters that delayed their formation. The next group of 3 + 2 will then start back at Chapter 1 once we finish the book in February 2017 and we will go through the materials from Chapter 1 to Chapter 7 and then they (group of 3) will be at their final discernment point for profession. The last 2 people will continue on through Chapter 17. Any new arrivals will be “plugged in” to whatever chapter we are on at the time and that will be their starting point.

The key for the rotating plan is a very good attendance record, as suggested by the Region (thanks!), to be able to note who joined when, what chapter they began with, and then if they show up for the initial formation meetings consistently. Being able to go back to the monthly attendance records and check to see what was missed and the proper way to address that factually has been very helpful.

When we came to chapter 29 out of 33 total, we discussed the remaining timeline/plan for the 1st and 2nd groups to layout the wrapping around of the chapters back to the beginning with #1 and give them the option to finish their formation up in time for our August 2017 elections while still meeting the timeline requirements for initial formation. Candidates generally felt that starting at Chapter 1 and going through the material in order would be their initial preference, but the ability to start initial formation right away rather than waiting for the next class to form outweighed a Chapter 1 start. They also liked being in a larger group so that they could hear all the different perspectives on things and the amount of sharing that takes place. One Candidate mentioned how someone would ask a question on something they were thinking about and it gets answered before they can fully formulate the question themselves. Most were not sure if they would have waited for a whole new class to start if it were the only option.

Additional feedback from the Candidates was to recommend that those starting on later chapters to at least read through the initial few chapters to get some basic foundationally information and questions answered – something like a chapter per week on their own and some follow-up discussion with the Formation Team. Some did this on their own and some did not. The advantage to group #2 was that they also received foundational information through the ongoing formation at the Fraternity Gatherings and are now coming back to the beginning of the material that will solidify the initial information received. The eligible Candidate who started with Chapter 1 decided to continue with group #2 and profess with them several months from now as he enjoyed the formation time together, getting as refresh on the initial material, and wanted to be part of a larger group sharing in their profession day together.

We were very thankful to have people who were called to enter into formation with us. I did not have any reservations with this rotation method back then, because I did not know any better at the time ☺ really, and as we prepare to wrap the cycle to the start of the book again, I am still thankful for the people God sent us ... and not having to tell them to wait any longer! Come and See! Don't delay, Come and See!

Peace,

Matt Eppel O.F.S., Formation Director of Sacred Heart Fraternity, Peoria

[Written by Matt Eppel, O.F.S., Revised 2017]

