



OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA

GOOD COMMUNICATION AS PART OF OUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Diane F. Menditto, OFS, National Vice Minister

As Catholics and Secular Franciscans, we are called to shape society and our Order's future. We are called to be good communicators and users of the means of communication available to us.

When we hear the word “communication,” the first thing that probably comes to mind is media, that is, forms of communication with an “s.” Pope Francis mentioned this in his statement for the 2014 Communications Day when he said, “...media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. Good communication helps us grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity.” But he goes on to make the following points:

- “The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another.”
- “We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect.”
- “A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive.”

(Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day, June 2014)

All the communications (media) in the world go to waste if we do not communicate who we are to others and seek to understand who they are.

How do we communicate? In the Later Rule, St. Francis inspires us, “*I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; ¹¹but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble (2 Tim 2:14), speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming.*” ([The Later Rule: FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 102](#))

How we communicate makes a big difference, because true communication requires more than words. Start with an open heart. We should not prejudice what another person is going to say. People remember how we handle a situation and, justly or not, assume that the treatment they have seen us give to others in the past will be how we will treat them in the present.

Creating a supportive environment in our fraternities, our families, and our places of work begins with sharing our own story and listening to another person’s story. Once we start to share ourselves with our listeners, they become ready to hear what we say and feel comfortable sharing themselves.

Authentic communication for us as followers of Christ and St. Francis is how **others encounter the person of Jesus through us**. We should ask ourselves, “How would Jesus communicate with us if he were here now? How did he communicate with those he met here on earth? How did he show that he

Communication is Not Only Words

- ❖ Undivided attention and eye contact
- ❖ Body Language
- ❖ Empathy and mutual support
- ❖ Collaboration and sharing of your personal story
- ❖ Invitation and outreach
- ❖ No personal agenda
- ❖ Prayer with and for one another
- ❖ Personal example
- ❖ Relationship and trust

valued the identity of his listeners?” As we read Scripture, we find Jesus communicating with his disciples, with sinners, with those possessed by evil. He listened to everyone with great empathy. Think also about his physical contact with others: helping someone to stand up; touching eyes and ears with his saliva; realizing that healing power has gone out from him—**it’s not always words!**

Today, we are bombarded by media and people **talking at us**. We have stopped listening to each other in many ways, because **communications often drown out communication!** Overcoming this phenomenon should be one of our goals as Secular Franciscans. **But how?**

If we examine many of the difficulties we encounter in fraternity, family, and workplace, we will often find a lack of communication at the outset. Often, the issue is compounded by further misunderstanding because we don’t stop to understand where our brother or sister is coming from. **Every person deserves our respect** because they, like us, are **human beings with the Spirit of God within them**. We may not like what they are saying, but we are called to respect their dignity, so, we don’t demean or tear them down.

In our good communication toolbox, we find an excellent talk given by Fr. Eric Law, who spoke at the 2007 Quinquennial Congress. He used the acronym **RESPECT** to remind us of how we should communicate with one another. **R:** Take **responsibility** for what we say and feel without blaming others. **E:** Use **“empathic listening,”** meaning that we show the speaker that we are in tune with them and that they are valued and respected. **S:** Be **sensitive** to differences in communication styles. **P:** **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak. (Or before you send an email or make a post!) **E:** **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions. **C:** Keep **Confidentiality**.

T: **Trust** ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong. Also, **trust** each other, and develop trust in your fraternity, family, and workplace.



We are called to demonstrate: **simplicity**—without pretense; **poverty**—confidence in the Father; **humility**—the truth of what and who we are before God; **minority**—recognition that we are servants, not superiors; an **abandonment to God**—trusting in God’s unconditional love. (See *FUN Manual: Vocations*; Article 30.2 General Constitutions; and *The Franciscan Journey*)

If these characteristics are present in us, we will be able and willing to **establish trust** with our brothers and sisters. We become better communicators, because our respect for others makes us **approachable**. We are **responsive**; **we keep our promises**; we say what we mean, and **we mean what we say**. We are humble enough to **admit our mistakes** or admit that not everything we say is the last word. Sometimes a lack of flexibility (stubbornness) can lead to a lack of trust and lack of communication.

Once we know who we are and how we can get along well on a personal level, we are ready to share who we are with others through a **good communications plan**. Our **national and regional websites** provide a welcoming environment for our members and those searching to discern a vocation. **We attract vocations** because visitors can tell that we love our Order and one another just by looking at the websites. We know that our **Facebook page** is not a place to argue or say controversial things. We try to share the best of who we are and who Francis and Clare are through quotes, formation pieces, wonderful homilies, and excitement over milestones attained by our fraternities. We use **Twitter as positive outreach** to the public, not to argue or tear down others, but to build up. Among ourselves and publicly, we highlight articles from the **TAU newsletter**, another communications powerhouse. **Local fraternities** should follow the example of the National and Regional fraternities. Examine how you communicate with each other and come up with a local plan to **spread the word**.

You probably have many communications ideas that you would love to share with us. Please do!

We are listening!