

## WORKING MY WAY BACK TO YOU, LORD

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I'm writing this reflection on Chapter Two of our Rule, *The Way of Life*, on June 24, 1998. Twenty years ago, on June 24, 1978, the present Secular Franciscan Rule was promulgated. Twenty years ago today, I was a lost soul - embittered, frustrated, convinced that life was meaningless and religion absurd. Through God's mercy, I was hit by a heavenly 2X4 later that year, given an overwhelming experience of His Presence. I began praying again for the first time in years. One of my sincerest prayers went like this: "Lord, you know how distant I've been and how easily I can stray. Now that I know you're really there, help me. If I return as only a Sunday Catholic, you'll lose me again in no time. Help me find a **way of life** that will pull the fragments of my life together into a meaningful whole and serve to keep me close to You."

That prayer was soon answered. At a small, daily evening Mass where everyone sat around in a circle, there was a man my age wearing an odd-looking cross. Someone had cut the top off. Strange. Had to ask him about it. It was, of course, the Tau cross. It was the beginning of my introduction to the Secular Franciscans. It was the beginning of an answer to my earnest prayer for a **way of life**.

Since profession, I've learned that Secular Franciscans enter the order for a number of different reasons. Love for St. Francis is a major reason people join. Deepening their spiritual life through prayer and devotion is key for many. Being a part of the Church as well. Some, like myself, join the SFO because they are searching for Spirit-inspired **way of life** that will help make their lives a seamless garment, all of one piece.

I've tried to capture the essence of this Secular Franciscan **way or life** in a simple mnemonic or memory aid: Secular Franciscans have **one way of life**, following Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis, through the practice of **two** spiritual disciplines – prayer and participation in liturgy; **three** aspects of lifestyle – simple living, life in fraternity and selfless service; and **four** apostolates or commissions – peace and justice, work, family and ecology. While this formula is far from perfect, it has helped keep me focused on our Rule as a **way of life**.

It's so important that **work** is part of our Secular Franciscan **way of life**. Work is such a major part of how we live. Our Rule wouldn't be very good at providing a **way of life** if our productive lives were omitted from the equation. For we spend most of our waking hours working, whether it's work for which we're paid or work in the form of the myriad tasks through which we take care of our own lives or care for others.

So much of our work seems like drudgery and we can be tempted to think that it's spiritually meaningless. If we only had more time to pray we lament! Or we can feel guilty about the type of work we're doing – that it can't be pleasing to God because we're not directly involved in working with the poor. I know I felt that way after moving to an administrative position at a university from having worked with physically disabled adults so that we could afford to start a family. I've found it a great comfort to begin to learn, through reflection on Article 16 of the Rule, that my meager efforts have import in the celestial economy. My work is somehow a factor in the drama of the world's on-going creation and redemption. I've learned that the type of work I'm doing isn't important; what's important is that my work allows me to use God's gifts (my

talents) to serve others and please the Lord. My work, done with the right intention, helps me develop into the person God wants me to become. The Secular Franciscan Rule - what a great *way of life!*

**Dialogue Starter**

1. To what extent is being a Secular Franciscan a *way of life* for you? Does it extend to your work?