

INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

A Franciscan Resource Book for Justice,
Peace and Integrity of Creation

- Part 2: Specific Themes of Special Interest
 - 4. Life



Order of Friars Minor
Office of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation
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PART TWO

THEMES OF SPECIFIC INTEREST

As we said in the introduction to this section, this second part is composed of seven specific themes of great social and ecclesiastical importance at the present time. They could have been more but, not being able to make the book longer, we have selected these as the most apt and of greatest interest for living out our charism.

Each theme has a brief theoretical development that does not claim to be exhaustive but rather makes a presentation of the theme to stimulate reflection and action. This theoretical development of each theme is completed with the experiences and testimonies of friars from all over the world.

The theoretical part of each theme, having been written by a different author, can throw up some repetitions. However, we wanted to leave it this way because this section is not to be read at one sitting but rather each chapter should be consulted and worked on separately.

At the end of each theme or chapter a long questionnaire can be found. The reason, in effect, is to be found in its instrumental character. If these chapters are to be used for meetings on formation, both initial and on-going, or even in meetings of reflection with the laity, the long list of questions will better facilitate the group that is going to reflect.

Themes:

1. Option for the Poor
2. Peacemaking
3. Integrity of Creation / Environmental Justice
4. Life
5. Human Rights: Individual and Collective
6. Women and the Charisms of Francis and Clare
7. Dialogue: Ecumenical, Interreligious and Intercultural

4. Life



OFM General Constitutions, Art. 96,2

Since many human beings are still victims of dehumanizing poverty, injustice and oppression, the brothers should devote themselves, with all people of good will, to restoring the social order, so that it can be based on justice, liberation and peace in the risen Christ. After weighing the causes of the injustice in each situation, the brothers should participate in activities that build up charity, justice and international solidarity.

From the life of Francis ...

Because Francis referred all creation back to the Creator (2Cel 165), the Poor Man of Assisi was fundamentally joyful. Only sin should cause sadness but even then the friars were not to become angry at another's sin (RegB c.7). Contrary to Albigensians who considered spirit as good and matter as evil, Francis saw all creation as blessed by God. Thus Francis urged people to frequent the sacraments, visible signs of God's love and grace (EpFid). The Poverello sometimes sang in French and once used two sticks to represent a violin and its bow (2Cel 127).

Since Francis first lived what he preached, he could preach confidently, moving hearts previously hardened to repentance and restoring health to souls and bodies (LM 12:8). Celano's *Treatise on the Miracles of St. Francis* (3Cel) records only a few of the many miracles worked by Francis or attributed to his intercession. Francis always treated sick people compassionately.

He urged the friars “to let it be seen that they are happy in God, cheerful and courteous, as is expected of the, and be careful not to appear gloomy or depressed like hypocrites”

(RegNB c.7). Toward the end of his life Francis said, "Let us begin, brothers, to serve the Lord God, for up to now we have made little or no progress" (1Cel 103). Francis wrote to the minister having difficulty with certain friars: "There should be no friar in the whole world who has fallen into sin, no matter how far he has fallen, who will ever fail to find your forgiveness for the asking, if he will only look into your eyes. And if he does not ask forgiveness, you should ask him if he wants it" (EpMin). Forgiveness, penitence and works of compassion kept Francis' love for life very fresh.

Franciscan Perspectives

The British author G. K. Chesterton has observed that part of the genius of Francis of Assisi was the way he focused on the particular person in front of him. It was a mark of his courtesy that Francis never ignored one person for another but gave to each - from the leper to the Sultan, from the Lady Jacoba to the beggar - his attention and concern. In his famous *Canticle of the Creatures*, Francis showed that his attention and respect was directed not only to humans but to all aspects of creation. And the reason for Francis's attitude towards others was precisely that God had created them and through them God could be glorified.

Francis's poetic intuition and creative insight were picked up by other man of genius in the Franciscan tradition. Bonaventure relies upon Francis's spiritual experience in the formulation of the philosophical and theological foundations of his thought. An image of creation which remained throughout Bonaventure's life was taken from the Book of Ecclesiastes 1:7, where a small spring gives rise to a river which flows through the land and then returns to its point of origin. For Bonaventure, all of life comes from one divine source, goes out from God to bear fruit and then returns to God. In Bonaventure's framework the created many are given existence by the Uncreated One (emanation); creatures give witness to their Creator (exemplarity); and are led back to the Creator (consummation). As such all of creation--especially animate creation--is to be understood as being of value since all of creation is of God, the highest value, or as Francis would pray, the "most High" and "supreme Good."

Duns Scotus, so different in method and content from Bonaventure, nonetheless has the inspiration of Francis in common with the Seraphic Doctor. As is known well, it is not sin but goodness which dominates the vision of creation in Scotus. Because God is free, creation has no reason to be except for the divine favor of God. God's love is manifested in creation and this most clearly in the Incarnation. All that is need not be, but that something exists is due solely to God's loving it into existence. There is an importance and dignity to what exists, therefore, and salvation history is the story of how God freely enters into conversation with particular persons in concrete times and places. The individual creature in the uniqueness of its historical situation is part of the story of God's active presence. While the incarnation is, of course, the highpoint of creation, it also serves to affirm the value of the created world. Flesh, bodiliness, materiality the historically contingent - this is not to be shunned but accepted as God accepts it. Scotus's emphasis here is given expression by the term *haecceitas*, the thisness of a thing. *Haecceitas*, what makes something singular and different from others who share its nature, underlines the value of contingent, particular reality since each being possesses something it alone can reveal.

Threats to and Denials of the Value of Created Life

With its stress on the inherent dignity and value of each creature, the Franciscan vision of life stands in sharp contrast with many other visions evident in our modern world. Some of these alternative visions are in direct contrast to the Franciscan vision; others are distortions or exaggerations of visions which properly understood can serve life. Every vision proposes, either implicitly or explicitly, a hierarchy of values. Human actions will ordinarily reflect the operative values a person or culture adopts. Important to grasp is that one must look at the operative (not professed) values since many people will in theory endorse a Christian, even specifically Franciscan set of values. But the moral practice of a person or the actual value enshrined in a culture may differ considerably from those professed. This is not just a matter of hypocrisy (saying one thing and doing another) or moral weakness (not living up to one's commitments) but moral blindness (not being self-critical enough to realize there is a discrepancy between beliefs and actions). The remedy is not to scold or condemn but to assist people in uncovering in their own lives and in their society the forces which truly direct and motivate behavior. A comment on some of the more problematic visions at work in our world follows.

Perfectionism

This vision of life places great weight on the value of life insofar as it lacks obstacles or setbacks to success, popularity, or autonomy. Faced with the imperfections of the human condition, this worldview cannot continue to accept the essential goodness and dignity of the created order. Thus, infirmity or illness is seen as robbing people of their dignity, marginalizing their role in social life, making them unworthy of our attention or concern. Treatment of the sick, especially the dying, often reflects an unease that people experience when confronted with the diminishment of strength and health. Movements in many societies for physician-assisted suicide or right-to-die legislation can be a reflection of an inability to countenance a life that is worth living despite pain and suffering. In the minds of some people, life is only worth living if a person can be in control of their body and not experience physical limitations.

So often in modern cultures the importance of image leads to exorbitant expenses and efforts at achieving or maintaining physical beauty. We may relegate those who are disfigured or unappealing to the periphery of our lives; it can be far easier to minister to the people who meet the culture's standards of beauty or attractiveness. So often the young are captivated by a dream of attaining ageless beauty and tend to evaluate others (especially peers) on the basis of physical appearance alone. With regard to nature there is the temptation to the "Disney-fication" of the environment. That is, a persistent drive to make nature "pretty" by ridding it of all that is not harmonious, pleasing and convenient to the urban tourist. Many poor nations are trying to appeal to foreign visitors by eliminating or remaking elements of their natural environments which are not appealing to outsiders. Insects, wild animals, steep hills and mountains, changing shorelines, indigenous folkways and diets can all be sacrificed for the goal of a humanly-imposed homogeneity, which is familial and comforting to recreational travelers.

A moral perfectionism can prevent us from respecting and loving those who have succumbed to addictions, embraced a problematic lifestyle or committed evil deeds. It is easy to transform judgments on behavior into condemnations of persons. Such condemnations may then be extended to denying the rights of the condemned, i.e., unjust imprisonment, repression and stigmatizing, torture and capital punishment. In all our

dealings with persons, even those not ready to seek conversion, we must remember the maxim to hate the sin but never the sinner.

Franciscans, who are aware of their own fragility and weakness and yet know they are loved by God, must be ready to extend love toward all the rest of life even when it is encountered in those forms which exhibit the unfulfilled promise and hope which God promises to bring to completion in the future.

Instrumental Rationality

In an age of wondrous scientific achievement and when marvels of engineering have been accomplished in a variety of fields, there is the risk that a mode of thinking apposite to one dimension of life will be extended into areas where it is less appropriate. There is a legitimate sense in which elements of the created order can be used as means to attaining a higher good. But if we only see others from the perspective of how they serve our purposes, then we can miss the richness and beauty of people and things in themselves.

A constant risk in the moral life is that we shall place ourselves at the center of existence. The human ego may surprise us by its ingenuity in asserting itself in various guises throughout our life. Precisely because Franciscans embrace a Christocentric view of the world, we should be able to resist more effectively the persistent drive of the ego to place ourselves at the center of things. This means that an instrumental rationality which judges all things from the vantage of how it is useful to me ought not be the dominant mode of thought. Yet instrumental rationality is prevalent in both individual and corporate expressions.

Genuine friendship is one of the relationships which can be at risk in a life dominated by instrumental reasoning. In many societies today successful individuals are those who are able to “network” well with others. Whether it be in business, civil service, the arts or the professions, there is great weight given to the creation of a range of contacts or associates who can be called upon for assistance. Friendship takes delight and rejoices in the existence of the other as a presence in one’s life. But instrumental thinking sees the other as a means for achieving some purpose; once the purpose has been achieved the relationship is altered since the basis of the relationship was never the mutual care and joy that accompanies friendship. It is not that instrumental reasoning is simply wrong. When it becomes the dominant mode of thinking, it can distort fundamental relationships which ought to operate on another foundation.

Expressed corporately, instrumental rationality is evident in an anthropocentric attitude which sees the human as the only measure of value in creation. All else is to serve the human without regard for matters of the intrinsic worth of creation apart from human use. An ecology of stewardship can be corrupted by anthropocentrism when the environment is not cared for because it is God’s but simply because it serves human well-being to preserve some natural resource. Too often the language of stewardship simply calls upon us to act with an eye towards our long-term self-interest, to use the goods of the earth prudently so as not to run into problems in the future, e.g. pollution, depletion of oil deposits or timber reserves. Looked at this way, it is still possible to think of the environment only as it is of use to humans. But a Christocentric vision calls us beyond instrumental rationality to see the created order as having an intrinsic worth because it is God’s creation, part of the larger plan of the Creator and not just the raw materials for stewards to use as they wish.

Market Logic

Perhaps no ideology has become so over-generalized, i.e., extended into realms for which it was not meant, than that of the free market. As John Paul II has suggested, a properly regulated but free market can be an effective means of producing and distributing goods and services that promote well-being. Markets can encourage creativity, entrepreneurship, diversity and prosperity. Without proper constraints markets can also lead to harmful inequalities, ecological damage, ruinous competition and exploitation of the weak.

While not denying the benefits and risks of the market for economic life, there is another aspect of market thinking which Franciscans must recognize: the extension of the market's logic into realms other than economic. The result is a reductionism that sees the human as simply *Homo economicus* and the rest of life as having value only as a commodity. As one critic has said, "The market knows the price of everything but the value of nothing." There is a danger with market thinking that society will put a financial value on things that ought not to be bought and sold. The political and civil liberties of citizens, the fundamental social and economic goods necessary for human dignity, bonds of affection in families and friendships, honor, truthfulness and respect among people-- these should not be for sale.

Market logic can erase an aesthetic sensibility, which delights in beauty for its own sake. Reducing the value of a painting, the pleasure of music, the sight of a sunset over the water, the rhythm of a poem, to what it will sell for in the market hinders an appreciation of things for their own intrinsic worth. One of the gifts of contemplation is that it fosters within the subject an ability to take aspects of creation on terms other than market utility. Prayer has a value in itself irrespective of what the market says. There is much else within the Franciscan vision that is cherished and respected not because it is worth money but because it gives glory to God and enhances our appreciation of what God has done by giving life to all creatures in their diverse splendor.

Ken Himes OFM

Examples from the lives of the friars ...

Celebrating the life and the dignity of each individual has been an integral part of the Franciscan vision since the time of St. Francis. In one sense today there is a greater awareness of the human rights of the individual, as seen through the many pressure groups, non-governmental organizations and pro-life movements. On the other hand, our consumer society is increasingly dominated by an alternative value system, which emphasizes money, beauty, success and self-gratification above all else. It is easy to find examples of friars working in different countries to promote a "culture of life" among the most deprived sectors of society. It is harder to identify the patient efforts by friars to encourage a new enthusiasm for life amongst the more mundane events of everyday lives. Writers, artists or musicians communicate this zest for life through their work, gifted preachers pass it on to members of their congregations, teachers help young people to develop a healthy and positive outlook on life.

At Merchants Quay in a depressed area of Dublin, **Ireland**, SEAN CASSIN is working to promote this “culture of life” among those suffering from HIV and AIDS. Sean was first struck by the impact of drug addiction when he was a young student in Rome. The daily encounters with the many drug addicts who sleep on Rome's streets at night worried him so much that he had difficulty keeping up with his study programs. Inspired by the words of Matthew's Gospel 25:35-6, Sean began to reach out to the “street people” of Rome. Upon returning to Ireland, he focused his efforts on the heroin addicts who often congregated in the neighborhood surrounding Merchants Quay. Sean became increasingly convinced that traditional drug treatment programs could only have limited success because they do not deal with the broader social challenges facing so many of Ireland's young people today. The staff at Merchants Quay started to examine new ways of responding to these needs; for example, it was useless to discuss “the pain of joblessness” without vocational programs to provide addicts with new marketable skills; the diminished self-esteem of drug users needed to be countered by group therapy and counseling; HIV transmission could be stemmed by providing clean needles - a solution which often meet with the disapproval of outside observers. Many longtime friends of Merchants Quay are still dismayed by the centers expanded commitment to social justice work among the destitute. For Sean, there is no more important ministry since he sees the changes the center has been able to make in so many peoples' lives.

In **The Netherlands** too, many young people who come to Amsterdam to study are drawn into drug addiction; prostitution is often seen as the only way they can support that habit. The combination of unclean needles and unsafe sex leads inevitably to HIV infection and AIDS. By working among Amsterdam's “forgotten youth,” LOUIS BOTHE has been able to offer support and provide practical opportunities for some of those people who manage to conquer their addiction and move on to a new life.

Working in one of the poorest slum areas around Karachi in **Pakistan**, KEN VIEGAS meets many people who have lost all hope of a better life. Some three-quarters of the people in his parish have no running water, very few have a regular income, many have little or no sense of their own worth. Sickness, unemployment, usury and drug abuse are the harsh facts of life for most families there. That is why justice and peace work is so important for Viegas. “It's not just a hobby,” he says, “this is a real passion that I feel so strongly about. And when you suffer and hunger for justice, you begin to see Jesus' passion more clearly.” As he visits the most needy and deprived homes, he tries to encourage people to rediscover a sense of their own unique worth and talents. “I try to visit five houses a day and I tell people I do not come just to eat or drink with them, so they must not go running around to buy food and prepare it for me. When they realize that you come just to listen to them and not to see what they have to offer, then you can get very close to them.”

Another friar, YOUNIS WALTER, works with mentally handicapped children in Karachi trying to combat the deep-seated prejudices and superstitions that compound the problem in this part of the world. Many families believe that a handicapped child is a sign of punishment from God. In the center he has helped to establish, the focus is not only on quality care for the children but also on education and prevention - teaching parents about the connections between handicap and poverty, poor health and the frequent custom of marriage within the same family. The center is open to Christians and Muslims alike, in a country where converting to Christianity is seen as a capital crime. Many families from the two faiths come to share a new understanding by

cooking, eating and caring for their children together.

In **India** JESU IRUDAYAM is also helping children to enjoy a better life. He works especially with street children in Madras through various projects which he has been developing since 1991. In January of that year he founded an NGO known as SEEDS - Street Elfin Education and Development Society - although locally the organization is better known as *Nesakkaram*, a Tamil term which means "Friendly Hands." Some children are helped through home placement programs, other are referred to institutions, others still receive food, medical advice and other services through reach-out posts located at a local railway station in Madras.

In **Brazil** bullets and death threats have failed to frighten MARIANO GIJSEN away from his work with the street children of Belo Horizonte. In 1989 while working in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Mariano was shot and very seriously wounded by one of the boys, acting on orders by his "owner" to kill the friar or he would be killed himself. Mariano's work is seen as a serious threat to the pimps and other crime bosses who use street children for the sex trade and for drug running. After recovering from his injuries, Mariano moved from Rio to Belo Horizonte in 1990 to continue his work with street children there. In Brazil there are tens of thousands of abandoned or runaway youngsters - some of them with children of their own - who survive on the streets by stealing and sniffing glue to keep their hunger at bay. Working patiently over the years, Mariano has befriended hundreds of these street children and helped many to make the difficult transition into homes where they have a better chance of survival. No child is pressured into leaving the streets and each one is respected as an individual.

In many countries of the world from Korea to **Vietnam** to Guinea Bissau, friars are caring for those suffering from leprosy - following as closely as they can in the footsteps of Francis himself. In the United States, friars work in the leprosarium in Louisiana - the only hospital in the country specializing in Hansen's Disease, as it is also known. In Vietnam it is the children of parents with leprosy who are benefiting from the dedicated work of FIDELIS LE TRONG NHUNG on the outskirts of Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City as it's now called. Though the activities of the friars in Vietnam are restricted by the government, the Order is highly respected by the people because of its decision not to flee the country during the civil war and the takeover of South Vietnam by the communists in 1975. Prior to the war the friars were running two leprosariums, one in Nha Trang and the other in the Mekong Delta. Because those centers were confiscated by the new government, in 1983 Fidelis had to start again with a small medicine dispensary. Gradually his work has grown to include catechism classes and reading, writing and sewing lessons for up to 120 children. Since the friars are not officially allowed to run schools, these lessons are referred to as "compassion classes" for lepers and their children, who are not allowed to attend the public schools or have any contact with people who still live in fear of the disease.

A licensed acupuncturist and advocate of traditional medicines, DIEGO KIM first began to discern his vocation on behalf of the marginalized while providing support to patients at the Sacred Heart Lepers' Village run by the Korean friars. Like Francis, Diego's contact with the lepers led to a conversion of heart and a deeper understanding of the need for justice. When the Order called for volunteers to serve in the former soviet republics of central Asia, Diego joined up with a Franciscan sister from Slovakia to establish a much-needed health clinic in rural **Kazakhstan**. There he uses his

acupuncture skills to offer an alternative medical approach, which is especially appealing to Kazakhstan's large Korean community. The clinic treats everyone who seeks assistance regardless of race, creed, ethnic or national origin. A small Secular Franciscan community has grown up there too, sharing the same commitment to justice and human dignity which Diego sees as the very essence of what it means to be a Franciscan.

In the Navajo settlement of Tohatchi in New Mexico, **U.S.A.**, JOHN MITTLESTADT and MIKE HAAG have joined with Franciscan women religious, a Navajo Deacon and other lay people in developing a creative and wide-ranging ministry among these indigenous people. The Mission at St. Michael's covers an area of 3,000 square miles and is home to 8,000 Navajo. The emphasis at the center is on life amongst the poverty and despair of so many people with chronic alcohol abuse problems. At the central "Powerhouse," hundreds of people being treated for alcoholism and other addiction problems meet weekly to try and confront their sense of isolation and despair. Nearby Franciscan sisters from Oldenburg, Indiana, coordinate special programs for Navajos suffering from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

With the help of ANDRIJA BILOKAPIC, the Diocese of Zadar in **Croatia** has set up a "pro-vita" office to counsel women who are considering abortion. The women are not only given confidential advice and support as they face this difficult decision. They are also offered practical and financial help through Caritas or through an association of women and young people in the local parishes if they decide to keep the child. Since the office has reported a significant success rate, the initiative has begun to spread to other cities in Croatia.

Throughout the war in **Bosnia & Herzegovina** and Croatia, FRANJO GREBENAR and ZORAN LIVANEIC worked together to start a hospital within the Church building of the Holy Spirit in Nova Bila. The remarkable transformation took place overnight, at the beginning of 1993, when Muslim militias attacked the local Croatian population. The injured pleaded with Zoran for assistance since the conflict prevented them from travelling across enemy lines to the nearest hospital. Within hours, medical personnel joined the friars to set up an emergency surgery ward. During the course of the war, many hundreds of lives were saved by the team, but despite their vital assistance Zoran sadly recalls, "We had so many funerals that no one even had time to cry."

For DAVID SCHLATTER in the **U.S.A.** making an option for life means coming into daily contact with those facing certain death. He is a spiritual advisor to prisoners in the state of Delaware, several of whom are facing the death penalty. State officials were in the process of reactivating the use of capital punishment when he moved there some six years ago - now there are at least one or two executions each year. Schlatter has spent many years ministering to those contemplating death or facing bereavement following the suicide of a loved relative or friend. "Most of us who work with people in pain of this kind find that we minister best through our own wounds. It's when wound touches wound that we allow God to work most fully," Schlatter explains. "There is a healthy self-consciousness of our own sinful nature which allows a Franciscan to sit down with men and women in prison and see that there's not much of a distance between them. The fact that Francis himself was imprisoned and struck up a rapport with his fellow inmates helps us to identify with them and to experience Christ there." Schlatter currently works with two other friars at a center in Wilmington, Delaware, where they

offer hospitality, counseling, various 12-step recovery programs for those with addictions--in fact anything that can help people looking for a sense of purpose in their lives.

A common problem for children throughout **Brazil** and elsewhere in the developing world is diarrhea, which regularly leads to dehydration and death. KLAUS FINKAM has worked with the Brazilian Bishops' Conference and the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, to design a successful rehydration program for the children of Brazil. Thousands of young lives have been saved through a very simple salt, sugar and water solution. The rehydration program trains mothers to work as "medical teams" in villages throughout the country, educating others to successfully diagnose and treat the symptoms before it is too late.

In Gallup, New Mexico, **U.S.A.**, MAYNARD SHURLEY strives to raise awareness about HIV and AIDS among the largely African-American, Hispanic and Native American people who struggle with life on the streets. Maynard is the grandson of a Navajo medicine man and the only active Franciscan from among the Navajo people. He explains, "For us [the Navajo] all life is sacred, the sun, the earth, the water and the sky--just as with Saint Francis, each is a member of our extended family." As a health educator and outreach worker with the Navajo AIDS Network based in Chinle, Arizona, Maynard has found that "spirituality is the key to healing yourself." His fellow Franciscans at St. Michael's Mission supported Maynard's decision to enter a line of work which was unconventional and often dangerous as well. His continued presence on the streets and his willingness to listen to the emotional and physical needs of the people there has enabled Maynard to broaden the appeal and impact of Franciscans among Native Peoples.

Developing a successful AIDS education program is a special challenge for the friars in **Pakistan** where Islamic laws reinforce taboos about the discussion of sexuality. KUSHI LAI, of St. John Baptist Province in Pakistan, runs a series of popular AIDS Awareness Workshops in different parts of the country and has come up with some creative ways of coping with government restrictions. In Pakistan most barbers work not in shops but in the street, cutting hair and shaving men with a common razor that is seldom sterilized. Supported by Christian and Muslim volunteers, Kushi's HIV awareness program begins by drawing attention to the risks of infection through razors and dentists' equipment, before moving more carefully onto the topic of sexually transmitted diseases.

Many friars all over the world have made a special commitment to life through their work with young people of all races, religions and social backgrounds. From Sicily to Colombia, friars are working in schools, youth groups or simply the parish setting to encourage young people to take a courageous stand against drugs the culture of death. Working with young runaways on the streets of New York, **U.S.A.**, has become the personal mission of PLACID STROIK. At Covenant House, where Placid serves as the Director of Pastoral Ministry, teenagers are given the shelter and care they require to move away from life on the streets. Counseling and support are just two aspects of Placid's pastoral work among the young who have found their way to New York and have often been forced into prostitution and drug addiction. Their impoverished state is often only the outward sign of a life of abuse and neglect. Many of them find in Placid and his colleagues the first adults they have ever been able to truly trust. Placid's position also enables him to provide counseling for the staff of Covenant House -- often

“veterans” of the streets themselves. Working alongside other social and health professionals, Placid engages in advocacy on behalf of America's children and youth, who he says are “culturally exploited by drugs, poverty, pornography and the cultural models perpetuated by advertising and TV.”

General Constitutions

Article 7:3. “Through the charity of Spirit' the brothers should 'voluntarily serve and obey one another' and together search for the signs of the Lord God's will.”

Article 89:1. “Living in lowliness and in fraternity,” the brothers “acknowledge that they are Christians,” and, in doing so, begin their common proclamation of the Gospel.

Other references: articles 66,1-2; 67; 69,2; 71; 96,1-3; 97,1-2; 98,2; 132.

Discussion Questions

1. In your city, what are the biggest obstacles to promoting respect for life at all stages (conception to natural death)?
2. Do people experience you as a defender of human life, especially the life of the most vulnerable members in your society?
3. Do you visit friars who are sick in the hospital? who are chronically ill?
4. Do you see rampant consumerism as threatening respect for life at all its stages? If so, do you ever refer to that in your apostolic work?
5. How does your local community or provincial fraternity show its respect for and enthusiasm about life?
6. Are questions about assisted suicide growing in your society? How do you respond to them as an individual? as a local fraternity? as a province?
7. Do we support the defense of life, from the moment of conception in the womb until its natural conclusion?
8. Do we undertake to improve the quality of life so that it may improve and reach levels appropriate to the dignity of the human person?
9. What are the attempts against life which occur most frequently in the area in which you live?