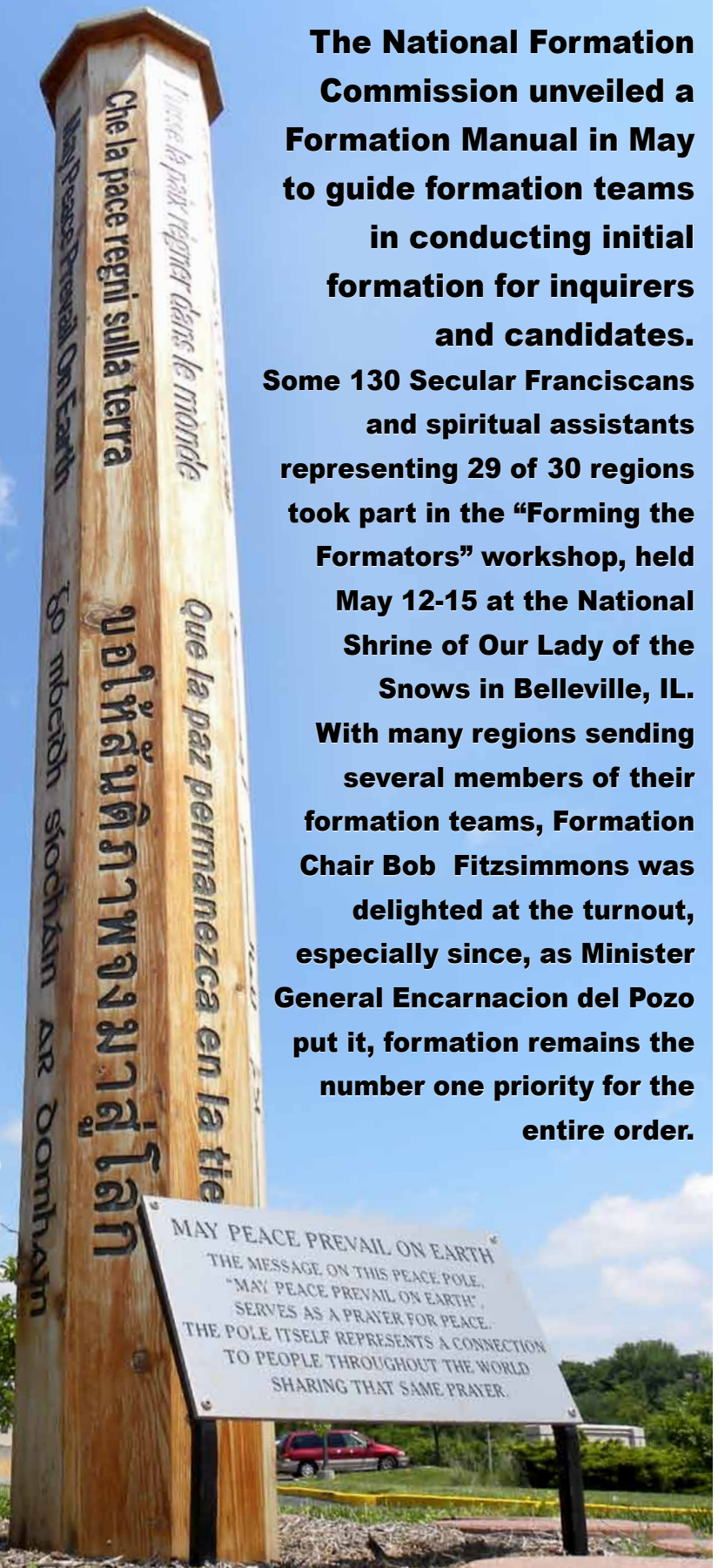


Workshop helps to re-ignite **Formation**

By BOB & MARY STRONACH, SFO

The National Formation Commission unveiled a Formation Manual in May to guide formation teams in conducting initial formation for inquirers and candidates. Some 130 Secular Franciscans and spiritual assistants representing 29 of 30 regions took part in the “Forming the Formators” workshop, held May 12-15 at the National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows in Belleville, IL. With many regions sending several members of their formation teams, Formation Chair Bob Fitzsimmons was delighted at the turnout, especially since, as Minister General Encarnacion del Pozo put it, formation remains the number one priority for the entire order.



Like Franciscans around the globe, a pole proclaims a multi-tongue message of peace at the site of “Forming the Formators” Workshop.

WORKSHOP CANDIDS



Crystal Holley, SFO



Clare McCluggage, SFO



Imelda Aguilar, SFO



Robert Murray, SFO



Rock DeSpain, SFO



Sue Nelson, SFO



Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO, charged attendees to return to their regions to replicate the workshop training and introduce the manual to local fraternities.

Fitzsimmons referred to it as the “FUN” manual, an acronym for part of the title, *“For Up to Now: Foundational Topics for Initial Formation.”* The words, *For Up to Now*, come from a charge by Francis of Assisi: “Let us begin, *for up to now* we have done nothing.”

The new manual doesn’t mean formation teams need to replace the formation books they are using, he said. It does mean they need to make sure that key subject areas outlined in the new manual are covered.

“You need to read it, you

need to study it, you need to pray with it,” Fitzsimmons told attendees in charging them to return to their regions and replicate the introductory training for local formation directors and their teams.

The Formation Commission took new material and guidelines developed by the International Fraternity (CIOFS), and added its own material, drawing on the rich development of formation resources in the United States. Among other things, the new manual promotes a deeper understanding of the Catholic faith, development

and charism of the Franciscan movement, and Catholic and Franciscan theology. It also makes clear that membership in the Secular Franciscan Order is a true vocation – a calling from God – and that initial formation leads candidates to the life-changing act of profession, with an understanding of the profound commitment to God’s kingdom. Simply put, noted Formation Commission Spiritual Assistant Richard Trezza, OFM, the church and Franciscan family recognize profession in the Secular Franciscan Order as having



The National Shrine of Our Lady of the Snows spreads over 200 acres. Among its features are a shrine church, conference center, hotel (shown here across the street from the conference center), a Children’s Memorial Playground, numerous devotional sites, and the main shrine amphitheatre for large crowds.



Jan Parker, SFO



Kathleen White, SFO



Fr. Richard Trezza, OFM

the same significance as religious profession – different, but of equal import.

After all, Fitzsimmons said, formation is about “changing the heart during the journey.”

Formation Commission Member Jan Parker called the release of the FUN manual “an exciting time” because “we are experiencing an awakening...with a new responsibility.” She listed the “agents of formation” as the Holy Spirit, the candidates, the whole fraternity, the formation team and the spiritual assistant. “Formation is never the work of the formation

director alone.” She emphasized: If you are truly living the Secular Franciscan vocation, you not only can teach it, but candidates can see it.

Discerning a vocation occurs while the fraternity gets to know the individual and the individual gets to know the fraternity. “The importance of discernment cannot be overemphasized, for the good of the fraternity and for the good of the individual,” Parker said.

In simple terms, “we have come to Francis because we have fallen in love,” she said. The task is to stay in love, to

keep the passion, no matter how tough it gets. “A Franciscan without passion had better leave.”

Formation Commission member Kathleen White said something similar: “If we’re not committed, then it’s not a vocation.” And it’s a commitment that sees others above self. “If all of us said, ‘not me, but you’, all of us would be living a life of Francis.”

Through reading and taking to heart the Gospel, Francis fell in love with Christ, and, she said, his love for Christ is what made Francis recognize everyone and everything as

his brother and sister. With a mission to rebuild the church, Francis understood the Gospel was to be lived.

White also noted that with a Secular Franciscan vocation being a call from God, formation and life in fraternity “call forth gifts,” or charisms, “from within ourselves and from others.” She urged: “Don’t leave gifts unwrapped,” or unused.

Parker pointed to resources in the manual and an accompanying CD that will help fraternities prepare for the rite of profession. It needs to be planned, with care, to portray its profound significance.

During profession, the minister calls on the Holy Spirit, noted Fr. Richard Trezza.

“It’s a big deal.”

He elaborated: “We need to understand from the get-go that a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is a gift... and that it is driven by the Spirit... We progress through this gift and a moment comes when you make profession... It allows you to profess your love for the Beloved in a public way,” dedicating yourself to service of God’s kingdom.



Huge hands hold up a climbing rock at the Children's Memorial Playground at the shrine. Similarly, the Holy Spirit supports Secular Franciscans in their vocations. Fr. Richard Trezza, OFM, puts it this way: The commitment to God's service is so significant when Secular Franciscans make their profession that they could only do it through an outpouring of grace from God.

WORKSHOP CANDIDS



Tuan Anh Cao, SFO



Susan Simeone, SFO



Steve White, SFO



Theresa Witto, SFO



Joanne Anderson-Castillo, SFO



Rena Xuereb, SFO
Commission Member



Bl. Kateri Tekakwitha Regional Minister Mary Frances Charsky, SFO, center, with two of her formation team members, Joanne Lockwood, SFO, and Katie Koscinski, SFO. She called the workshop “a joyful opportunity to revitalize our formation process” and said: “We have been re-ignited with the burning love of God and our neighbor.”



Alice Crews, SFO



Joanne Angeletti, SFO,
and Linda Monitello, SFO



Dave Dieringer, SFO

Art and Poetry of Franciscan Formation

Rita Baughman, SFO, a local formation director in St. Clare Region, spent time in meditation at the Children’s Memorial Playground during a break in the workshop. She was gazing on a scene from the life of Francis (an original illustration of Francis and the San Damiano Cross), seeking inspiration for a poem.

It’s part of an on-going formation project that she and graphic illustrator Howard Schroeder are doing for their St. Francis of Assisi Frater-

nity in St. Louis, Missouri.

“The fraternity is putting together a binder of stories and art on Francis,” she said.

Schroeder is creating 12 scenes, based on his interpretation of Francis sculptures that a deceased Secular Franciscan had created. Once he completes an illustration, he composes an essay on what it means to him; and then Baughman takes the illustration and pens a poem. For example, for a scene depicting the story of the wolf of Gubbio, she wrote a poem

from the wolf’s point of view called “Hunger.” Her goal is simple: “The only reason for my poetry is to get people inspired.”

As a section is finished, it is copied and passed out to fraternity members for discussion as an on-going formation exercise.

“We’ve completed three of the 12 sections,” she said, adding: “Once all the sections are done, we’re thinking about getting it copyrighted and making it available.”

Rita Baughman, SFO, a poet with formation in mind.

