

# Religion Teacher's JOURNAL

## Discipleship

HOW TO ENCOURAGE

**spiritual  
children**

IN A SECULAR WORLD

HOW TO BE A MODERN-DAY

**PEACEMAKER**

A NEW WAY TO REACH

**ADOLESCENTS**

Three national organizations  
collaborated with the U.S.  
bishops to develop a plan

UNDERSTANDING  
CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP IN

**five simple  
steps**



# SAINT FRANCIS

## CAN SHOW US THE WAY

► When I was growing up, in the yard of every Catholic house was either a statue of Mary or a statue of Saint Francis—sometimes both. Michael H. Crosby gives us some wonderful insight into Francis' popularity. ~ *NW*

**N**ext to Jesus and Mary, Francis of Assisi has become the world's most popular saint. Why? Francis is an example of embodied faith that appeals to people today. He has been called a "living Christ" because of his passion for building up the church—thus, part of his appeal.

Francis' commitment to Christ and to build up the church did not come overnight. In fact, it took many years. Francis' process of conversion involved three steps, which contemporary people can embody in their own lives.

### Recognize violence as a false way of faith

Originally Francis uncritically embraced violence. One biographer says that the people of Francis' day "could not imagine" sustaining their faith in any way but through violence.

At age 21, Francis sought fame through battle. He was taken prisoner and was ransomed by his father. However, his year-long captivity

## How to be a modern-day peacemaker

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jarred him deeply. It was not long before he tried to join a small army of a famous knight, Walter of Brienne.

On the way to join Walter of Brienne, Francis had a dream. He saw a room full of the trappings of war and knight-hood. He heard someone ask: "Who can do more good for you? The lord or the servant?" When Francis answered, "The lord," the voice responded: "Then why are you abandoning the lord for the servant, the patron for the client?"

Francis' experience embodied Jesus' words in Matthew's gospel that invites all of us to stop "running after" things that appeal to our senses (eating, drinking, and clothing) as well as our image and reputation to "seek first" God's way in our lives.

### Withdraw from the values of the world

When Francis asked, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" he heard: "Return, and what you are to do will be told to you. You must understand this vision

you have seen in another way."

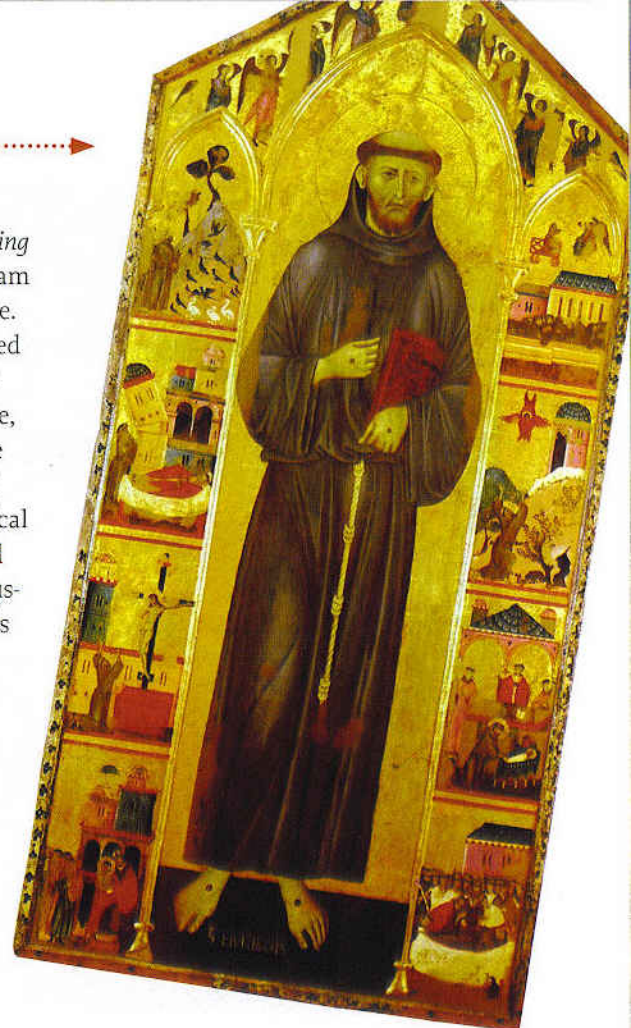
In my book *Finding Francis, Following Christ* (Orbis), I note that Francis' dream offered him an alternative to violence. The dream's compelling power invited Francis to "withdraw" from violence and submit to another, more effective, power. That power is God's word, the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel that came to define Francis' evangelical way of life. In other words, in a world that could not imagine any way to sustain faith other than violence, Francis began to imagine a new vision.

It was not long before Francis understood what this new vision might involve.

### Live the gospel

He was praying one day in the crumbling church of San Damiano. There he heard a voice from the Cross: "Francis, don't you see that my house is falling into ruin? Go, then, and repair it for me."

Francis began to repair the physical



building of San Damiano. However, it was not long before he realized the words from the Cross envisioned a kind of "repair" of the church that was not so limited. He was being called to repair the universal church that had begun to fall into ruin because of the violence it had embraced. He was being called to proclaim another way.

Francis ultimately found this new vision in the very words of Jesus himself: to proclaim the gospel not only in his words but in his life. The gospel thus became the new lens by which he imagined a world free of violence. In the process he would become its messenger of the new order and the peace it promised. **RTJ**



Michael Crosby is a Capuchin Franciscan living in a fraternity in downtown Milwaukee. It is dedicated to serve the hundreds of homeless and needy people who come there each day. His book *Finding Francis, Following Christ* has received critical acclaim. His Web site is [michaelcrosby.net](http://michaelcrosby.net); he can be contacted at [mikecrosby@aol.com](mailto:mikecrosby@aol.com).

## A PROCESS for becoming a peacemaker

We find a three-part pattern in the Gospel of Matthew that was replicated in Francis' life.

1. Recognize some overpowering violence that also seems to have become a way of faith.
2. "Withdraw" from it lest it become overwhelming.
3. In this process of "withdrawal" from the violence, a person finds a Scripture passage or the Scriptures themselves being fulfilled in him or her.

### SUGGESTION

- ▶ If violence is "any force that inflicts injury," what are the forms of violence that have most impacted your life? Have these had any impact on your life of faith?
- ▶ How have you seen others model their own ways of "withdrawal" or "disarmament" to offer an alternative way of becoming peacemakers?
- ▶ What Scripture seems to be inviting you to imagine how you can better make the gospel come alive in the world through you? How might you live in the world in an "evangelical" way?