



FRANCISCAN FAMILY CONNECTIONS (revised - 2011)

A course to prepare Spiritual Assistants

The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) revised the 2007 edition of the *Franciscan Family Connections* course in 2011. The 19 month course prepares people for the role of spiritual assistance to local and regional councils and fraternities. The original manual, *Life-giving Union*, was written in 1996.

1. Who is eligible to take the *Franciscan Family Connections* (Revised 2011) course?

1st Order or TOR friars; Franciscan religious; secular Franciscans who are permanently professed for at least 5 years; men or women of non-Franciscan religious Orders; diocesan priests and deacons. Friars are strongly encouraged to take the course or read the appropriate pages of the book when they are appointed as a spiritual assistant to a local or regional fraternity. Regional SA applicants answer all the questions in the book and local applicants answer only those questions listed for local SA's.

2. Who conducts the course?

Usually the PSA of the Province to which the fraternity-in-need is bonded. It can also be a qualified person willing to be the mentor and delegated by the appropriate PSA to do so. The PSA requires a letter of recommendation from the applicant's pastor or deacon and a religious/lay person who knows the applicant well. The local council-in-need may recommend people and send the recommendation(s) to the PSA. During the course the discernment of a call to be a SA is part of the process. Applicants who wish to take the course for personal ongoing formation can contact a PSA to initiate the process. Dialogue can usually solve any particular difficulties. Applicants ultimately should be able to fulfill the role of an SA after taking the course. The course can be conducted by a competent OFS/1st Order/TOR team. This is recommended when the course is conducted through regular monthly gatherings of applicants.

3. Where does an applicant get a copy of the *Franciscan Family Connections* (Revised 2011)?

Smoky Valley Printing - P.O. Box 189 - Lindsborg, KS 67456 - (785) 227-2364 - lindabce@kans.com prints and distributes the book. The applicant or the fraternity purchases the book. The introductory pages (Pages i to iv) of *Franciscan Family Connections* - Revised 2011, spell out the process to follow when applying for the course. *The needed information is in the book.*

4. What is the process for taking the course?

Nineteen months (or more) is the normal time-frame for completing the course. The applicant contacts the PSA of the Province to which the fraternity-in-need is bonded. The time period may be longer or shorter as determined through dialogue and depending on the needs of the applicant or mentor.

- a. If the course is taken individually, applicant and mentor mutually decide on the way the course will be handled. If they are geographically close, they could meet together once a month to deal with the questions for each chapter. One chapter a month is a common norm. If distance is a problem, the applicant types his/her answers to the questions and sends them to the mentor. The mentor returns the answers with any corrections, suggestions etc that are appropriate. They then move on to the next chapter until the course is completed.
- b. If there are a number of applicants in proximity to one another, the group can meet monthly with the mentor to answer the questions and share ideas on the chapter. *When possible this is a preferred way to take the course.* Other competent people can collaborate in guiding the sessions. In a correspondence course applicants should type their answers. If a number of applicants are reasonably close but cannot meet monthly, they might meet quarterly or semi-annually with the mentor. *Meeting as a group is a preferred process for learning.*
- c. During the period of study, *mentor and applicant mutually discern* whether the applicant is called to be a SA. They agree to acknowledge that the Spirit calls the applicant to serve as a SA or is inviting him/her to some other way of service.
- d. If the applicant completes the course satisfactorily, the applicant receives a certificate that says he/she is ready to serve as a SA. If the mentor is someone other than the PSA, the PSA

- is informed of the successful completion of the course.
- e. CNSA recommends that anyone completing the course be ready to serve as a spiritual assistant to a fraternity in his/her area. A Secular Franciscan does not ordinarily serve his/her own fraternity as spiritual assistant. There may be situations when pastoral considerations make this necessary. Only the Provincial or PSA of the province to which a fraternity is bonded can make the appointment. *The name, address and certification information of the SA is sent to the CNSA secretary and any others who need the information.*
 - f. In the final months of the course we recommend that the applicant *spend some time as an intern* to an experienced spiritual assistant.
 - g. If no fraternity is in need of a spiritual assistant, the individual remains available to serve when the need arises. If this period is prolonged, *ongoing formation* will keep the applicant up-to-date on his/her role as a spiritual assistant.
 - h. If a number of people complete the training program within a region, they may be part of a pool of trained SA's who are available when needs arise.

The spiritual assistant plays an important and sensitive role in the meetings of the fraternity and its council. The assistant's specific area is spiritual: to foster communion with the Church, to bear witness to Franciscan spirituality, to co-operate in formation and to nourish the Christian life of the fraternity. The assistant's contributions to the meetings, those of the fraternity as well as those of the council, should be related chiefly to this specific area. Naturally this calls for tact and spiritual maturity to know when to keep quiet and give priority to the secular leaders in the co-ordination and animation of the fraternity.

Manual for Spiritual Assistants - General Spiritual Assistants - Chapter iv - #4.1

5. What is the cost of the course?

That varies depending on a number of issues. The recommended readings may require purchasing books and the costs will escalate. If a local fraternity or local library has the books it would save the costs of purchase. If the course is by mail, postage costs will be part of the cost. It may be reasonable to offer a stipend to the PSA or mentor who conducts the course. If a group gathers at a parish, friary or home for their meetings, it is a matter of justice to offer an alms for the use of the facility. In short, cost depends on many factors and is the responsibility of *the applicant in collaboration with the fraternity* which will benefit from his/her service. If a group meets together, they share a mutual responsibility to cover the costs. Local and regional fraternities may contribute to these costs since they will be the beneficiaries. The applicant can make his/her needs known to those who are able to offer help or financial assistance. A region or fraternity can create a budget item to support people who need it.

6. Preparing a Regional Spiritual Assistant.

Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) also serves as a training book for **regional** spiritual assistants. Particular texts and questions in FFC focus on the responsibilities of an RSA. The process that is followed for appointing local spiritual assistants also applies to regional spiritual assistants.

*1. The regional Assistants to the OFS and the Franciscan youth are appointed by the competent major superior, **after consultation with the respective regional council.** Where more than one major superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms established jointly by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity shall be followed.*

2. They give their service to the regional (executive) council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference and render their service collegially.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS -- Article 21.1, .2

In the day-to-day working, COLLABORATION and DIALOGUE are vital ingredients between a spiritual assistant and a fraternity council, *Use them regularly and wisely.*