



**2025**

## *Council Members Handbook*



### **YOU ARE SERVANT LEADERS AND YOUR ATTITUDE SETS THE TONE FOR YOUR FRATERNITY**

Jesus shows us a perfect example of the servant leader. In Mark 10:45, He urges us to serve and even “give our lives” for the sake of others.

The picture of a servant leader is shown no better than in Jesus washing the disciples’ feet (John 13).

# HANDBOOK

## For

### FRATERNITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

#### *TABLE OF CONTENTS*

<b>Local Fraternity Council Guidelines and Responsibilities (Art. 50 of the GC)</b> .....	1
<b>What Is a Fraternity Council (Art. 31 Rule 21 Art. 32 and 49 of the GC)</b> .....	2
Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership .....	2
A Healthy Council Makes for a Healthy Fraternity .....	2
<b>Structure of the Secular Franciscan Order</b> .....	5
<b>Care and Feeding of Councils</b> .....	6
What Does a Fraternity Need.. .....	7
Environment, Formation, Prayer .....	8
It Needs Exercise .....	10
It Needs Periodic Check-Ups.....	11
When to Call the Doctor.....	12
<b>Ministers Responsibilities (Art. 51 of the GC)</b>	
Duties.....	13
Suggested Agenda.....	16
<b>Vice Minister’s Responsibilities (Art. 52.1 of the GC)</b>	
Duties.....	17
<b>Secretary’s Responsibilities (Art. 52.2 of the GC)</b>	
Duties.....	18
Suggested Secretary’s Calendar.....	20
Suggested Functions and Committees Functions.....	21
Record Keeping .....	24
<b>Formation Director’s Responsibilities (Art. 52.3 of the GC)</b>	
Duties.....	25
Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order .....	26
Orientation .....	27
Inquiry.....	27
Candidacy .....	27
Rite of (Temporary or) Permanent Profession.....	27
Pathway to Profession .....	28
Application Form at Time of Inquiry.....	29
Request for Rite of Admission Form .....	32
Preparation for Profession – Interview and Assessment .....	34
Preparation for Profession – Interview Questionnaire .....	35
Certificate of Profession.....	36
<b>Treasurer Responsibilities (Art. 52.4 of the GC)</b>	
Duties .....	37
Financial Assistance Fund Request Form For Regional Events .....	39
<b>Councilors</b> .....	40

<b>Change in Elected Offices (Art. 31 of the GC) (Rule 21)</b> .....	41
Vacant Offices (Art. 81 of the GC) .....	41
Incompatible Offices.....	41
Resignation from Office (Art. 83 of the GC) .....	42
Removal from Office (Art. 84 of the GC) .....	42
<b>The Fraternity Gathering (Rule 22)</b> .....	43
General Elements of a Fraternity Gathering .....	43
Prayer .....	43
Ongoing Formation.....	43
Business Meeting.....	43
Social Time.....	43
<b>Fair Share</b> .....	44
<b>Renewal of Commitment</b> .....	45
<b>Ideas to Foster a Feeling of Belonging</b> .....	46
<b>Ideas for Outreach</b> .....	47
<b>Attendance Must Be Emphasized</b> .....	48
<b>Member Status (Art. 18.7a NAFRA Statutes)</b>	
Active Member .....	49
Moved.....	49
Transfers .....	49
Lapsed Member .....	49
Death of a Fraternity Member .....	49
<b>Excused Member Policy (Art. 53.3, 56 (1) of the GC) (Art. 18.10 NAFRA Statutes)</b>	
Purpose .....	50
Excused Definition.....	50
The Elderly and Sick.....	50
Sporadically Hindered Members .....	50
Permanently Hindered Members .....	50
<b>Criteria for Excused Status</b>	
Fraternal Meeting Attendance.....	51
Health .....	51
Family .....	51
Death of Immediate Family Member .....	51
Work.....	51
Distance .....	51
Combination .....	51
<b>Financial Support of Local Fraternity</b>	
Job Loss.....	51
Financial Hardship.....	51
<b>Participation in Life of Local Fraternity</b>	
Serious and Disabling Medical Condition(s) .....	51
Additional Guidelines .....	51
<b>Request for Excused Status Form</b> .....	53
<b>Sample Letter from the Council When a Member Has Not Requested to Be Excused</b> .....	54
<b>Lapsed Status (Art. 53.3 of the GC) (Art. 18.7b NAFRA Statutes)</b>	
Purpose .....	55
Definition of Lapsed .....	55

<b>Process to Change Member to Lapsed Status</b> .....	56
Sample Letter – Absence at Fraternity Gatherings.....	57
<b>Suspension/Withdrawal (Art. 56.2, 57, and 58 of the GC), (Rule 23)</b> .....	58
Suspension Notice Form (Art. 56.2 of the GC).....	59
Withdrawal Request Letter .....	60
Temporary Withdrawal Request Form (Art. 53.3 of the GC).....	61
Resignation Notice Form in accordance with (Art. 58.1 of the GC).....	62
<b>Dismissal (Art. 58.2 of the GC)</b> .....	63
Request for Dismissal Form (Art. 58.2 and Art. 58.3 of the GC).....	64
Appeal Process (Art. 59 of the GC) .....	65
<b>Transfer Guidelines – Transfer to a Fraternity</b> .....	66
Transfer Procedures (Art. 55 of the GC).....	66
Request for Transfer Form Pages 2 and 3 .....	67
Official Transfer Form Page 4 .....	69
<b>Death of a Fraternity Member (Art. 52.2 of the GC)</b> .....	70
Death Notice to the Region .....	71
<b>Spiritual Assistant (Art. 90 of the GC)</b> .....	72
<b>Guidelines for Fraternal Visitation (Art. 92, 93 and 94 of the GC), (Rule 26)</b> .....	73
<b>Request for Fraternal Visitation (Art. 51.2 of the GC)</b> .....	74
<b>Preparation for Visitation</b>	
Fraternity Minister’s Checklist.....	75
Pre-Visitation Questionnaire – Completed by the Fraternity Council .....	77
Fraternity Council Self-Evaluation for Council Member .....	81
Request for Pastoral Visitation (Art. 92.2a of the GC), (Rule 26).....	85
Checklist for Pastoral Visitation .....	86
<b>Fraternal Visitation</b>	
The Visit.....	87
During the Visitation .....	87
Evaluation .....	87
The Fraternal Visitation Report.....	87
Regional Representative Stipend (Art. 18.8 of the GC).....	87
<b>Audit of Treasury Records (Art. 4.5 NAFRA Stats) (Art. 54.3 of the GC) (Art. 94.3 of the GC)</b> .....	88
Audit Questionnaire Checklist .....	89
Audit Questionnaire for Fraternity Financial Records.....	92
<b>Elections (Art. 31, 49, 76, 77, 78, 79, and 80 of the GC), (Rule 21)</b> .....	97
<b>Elections (Art. 3.5 of the NAFRA Statutes)</b> .....	99
<b>Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance (Statutes Art. 12.3) at Fraternity Elections</b> .....	99
<b>Request for Fraternity Chapter of Elections Form</b> .....	100
<b>Offices in the Fraternity to Be Placed in Fraternity Newsletter</b> .....	101
<b>Election Requirements</b>	
Eligibility to Vote (2) .....	103
Quorum Requirement (5).....	103
Absentee Ballots (6) .....	103
Third Term Candidates (11) (Art. 79 of the GC).....	103
Stipend (Art. 18.8 of the GC) .....	103
<b>Fraternity Election Procedures Before Elections – Nominations Committee</b> .....	104
<b>Fraternity Chapter of Elections – Nominations Slate</b> .....	105

<b>Duties of the Election Tellers and Election Secretary</b> .....	106
Ballot and Vote Count Form.....	107
Report of Elections.....	109
The Apostles Creed .....	111
<b>After the Elections</b> .....	112
<b>Transition Phase After Elections</b> .....	113
<b>Affiliate Orientation Plan (Art. 53.5, 103 of the GC) (Art. 18.13 NAFRA Statutes)</b> .....	114
<b>Suggested Links for Resources</b> .....	116
St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Website .....	116
National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order .....	116
FUN Manual .....	116
Formation Resources .....	116
Franciscan Saints.....	116
US Conference of Catholic Bishops .....	116
Vatican Website .....	116
YouTube Links - Secular Franciscan Order.....	116
The Reluctant Saint .....	116
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	117
<b>Council Duties Review</b> .....	<b>CDR-1</b>
<b>General Constitutions</b> .....	<b>GC-1</b>
<b>National Statutes</b> .....	<b>NS-1</b>
<b>Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order</b> .....	<b>Rule-1</b>
<b>Handbook for Spiritual Assistance</b> .....	<b>SA-1</b>

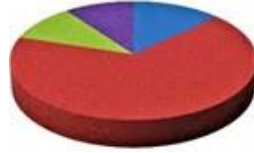
# *Local Fraternity Council Guidelines and Responsibilities*



## **Article 50 General Constitution**

1. It is the duty of the council of the local fraternity:
  - a. to promote the initiatives necessary for fostering fraternal life, for improving the human, Christian, and Franciscan formation of its members and for sustaining their witness and commitment in the world;
  - b. to make concrete and courageous choices, appropriate for the situation of the fraternity, from among the numerous activities possible in the field of the apostolate.
2. The duties of the council are also:
  - a. to decide on the acceptance and admission to profession of new brothers and sisters; (See [General Constitutions Article 39.3](#) and [Article 41.1](#)).
  - b. to establish a fraternal dialogue with members in particular difficulties and adopt appropriate measures;
  - c. to receive the request for withdrawal and to decide on the suspension of a member from the fraternity;
  - d. to decide on the establishment of sections or groups in conformity with the Constitutions and the Statutes;
  - e. to decide on the destination of available funds and, in general, deliberate on matters concerning financial management and the economic affairs of the fraternity;
  - f. to assign duties to the councilors and to the other professed members;
  - g. to request from competent superiors of the First Order and Third Order Regular suitable and well-prepared religious as assistants;
  - h. to perform such other duties as are required by these Constitutions or which are necessary to carry out its proper purposes.

## *What Is a Fraternity Council?*



### **The Fraternity Council**

#### **Article 31**

**Rule 21** On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions.

Their service, which lasts for a definite period, is marked by a ready and willing spirit and is a duty of responsibility to each member and to the community.

Within themselves, the fraternities are structured in different ways according to the norms of the constitutions, according to the various needs of their members and their regions, and under the guidance of their respective councils.

#### **Article 49 General Constitutions**

1. The council of the local fraternity is composed of the following offices: minister, vice-minister, secretary, treasurer, and master of formation. Other offices may be added according to the needs of each fraternity. The spiritual assistant of the fraternity forms part of the council by right. (See [General Constitutions, Article 90.2](#))

#### **Article 32 General Constitutions**

1. The ministers and councilors should live and foster the spirit and reality of communion among the brothers and sisters, among the various fraternities, and between them and the Franciscan family. They should, above all, cherish peace and reconciliation in and around the fraternity.

#### **Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership**

Every Council Member should read the *Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership* – thoughtfully and often. It contains a good deal of useful information. As a suggestion, give everyone on the council a copy and assign a few pages each month. Discuss what impressed each council member the most, and be sure everyone has an opportunity to speak. You can order the *Handbook* from Smoky Valley Printing on the form found in *TAU-USA Magazine*.

#### **A Healthy Council Makes for a Healthy Fraternity**

It is admirable to watch the constructive efforts of local councils to fulfill their calling in support of the whole fraternity. On the other hand, it is sometimes also observed that the weakness of a council leads to mediocrity or serious malaise in their fraternity – and they wonder why.

Fortunately, it is very encouraging to witness a council that is enthusiastic and convinced of its supportive roles in the fraternity. What a blessing for their fraternity!

Each council member has multiple responsibilities for the welfare of their fraternity.

With the triennial election process, the resulting frequent turnover of members in the leadership necessarily creates the demand that all “new” council members in turn know what they are expected to

take part in. How is this regular formation for councils accomplished? What means are available for the council itself to examine its duties as spelled out and identified in the SFO General Constitutions? Too often this understanding of duties is left to chance or just assumed – and the fraternity suffers.

Hopefully, during the first six months of a new council, the whole council itself will hold a “study day” devoted specifically to reviewing this material about their responsibilities.

Based on “*Nuts and Bolts of a Council*” by Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order - Used by permission

Additional Guidelines for a new council:

To help with council formation, the following guidelines are suggested.

- The fraternity council makes ALL the decisions at council meetings and supports each other at fraternity gatherings. The minister inspires and animates both the council and fraternity gatherings.
- Know every member of your fraternity by name and by their strengths and weaknesses. Give each a responsibility so they feel they are vital to the fraternity.
- Inspire each other to live better lives! The minister and council must be exceptionally careful to treat all members with respect and love – Christ lives in all! – the members will be aware of this.
- As leaders, you must keep the monthly gatherings positive and inspiring. Apologize rather than offend... “I may have misunderstood or made a mistake” are good phrases, then go to the next item on the agenda. Never argue or complain, even if you are correct. Keep the gathering in a positive tone.
- You will not always make popular decisions. Thus, don’t expect everyone to love you all the time. You must do what the council believes is right and then convey this to the members... with love and concern. Give your reasons for the decision.
- Communicate often with the individual members. Asking for volunteers at a gathering might glean one or two, if any at all but, if you phone them and personally ask them to do something, they will usually respond positively.
- Circumstances permitting, attend all the functions the council decides to undertake. That shows you think they are important, and the members will follow your lead.
- Once you are a leader, others can read through you and know whether you are doing your best and whether your Franciscan promises are important to you. If something else is more important in your life – it will show. On the other hand, you will not always succeed.
- Try not to focus on the disappointments; look ahead to the possibilities of attaining the goals – both the current and the long-term ones.
- Remain open to the “promptings” of the Holy Spirit. You can do nothing – God will do it through you if you allow Him!
- Fortunately, it is very encouraging to witness a council that is enthusiastic and convinced of their supportive roles in the fraternity. What a blessing for their fraternity!
- Each council member has multiple responsibilities for the welfare of their fraternity.

When a person is elected to a position on the council, they take on new duties for the welfare of their



fraternity. But what specifically are they expected to do? What are their new duties?

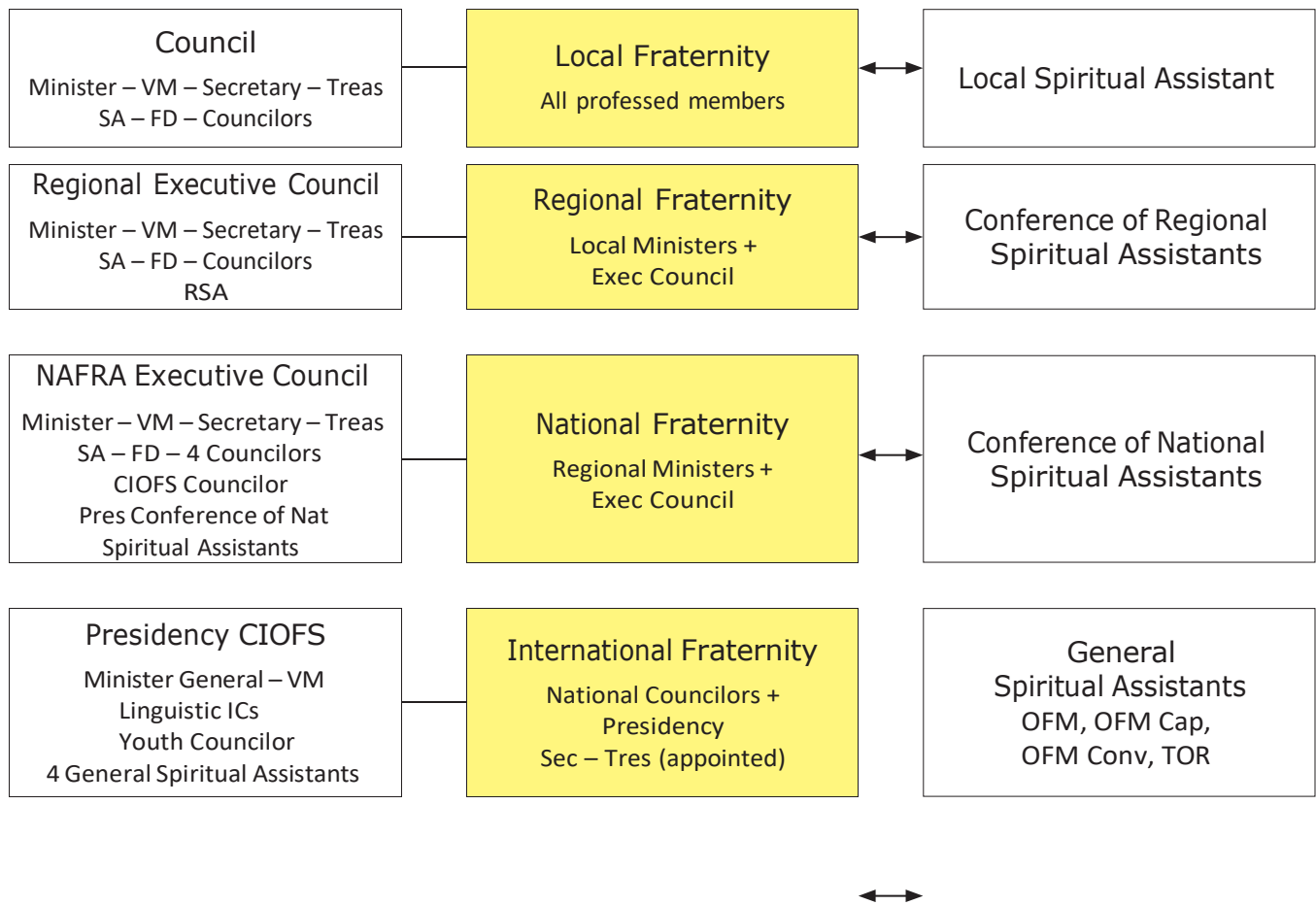
Their new duties are especially found in eight articles in the SFO [General Constitutions: Articles 28, 29, 30, 31](#) and [49, 50, 51, 52](#))

However, many additional specific expectations are embedded in the other articles of the *SFO Constitutions*, such as:

1. minister and council working together for the good of the fraternity when needed
  2. assisting the formation director
  3. formation team choosing formation topics with the approval of the council
  4. keeping and securing the fraternity records and files
  5. determining “active” and “excused” members and “lapsed” (See [pages 48-52](#) and [pages 55-56](#))
  6. handling member transfers (See [pages 66-69](#))
  7. discerning fraternity apostolic and projects
  8. council vacancies (See [pages 41-42](#))
  9. canonical bonds.
  10. cooperation with higher levels of SFO
  11. requesting triennial fraternal visitations (See [page 73](#))
  12. requesting triennial pastoral visitations (See [page 85](#))
  13. welcoming the Franciscan Youth
  14. preparing for elections (See [pages 97-104](#))
- each councilor member should take time to read and reflect on [Articles 28 to 36](#) in the [General Constitutions](#) (think over the following):
    1. It is important that you replenish your own spiritual and fraternal life.
    2. Take advantage of any retreats so you can spend quality time with God.
    3. Take advantage of the minister gatherings to replenish your fraternal life by sharing your problems, tasks, questions, etc., with others who may have experienced the same situations.
    4. If nothing else, we can listen to each other and empathize! We need God. We need each other because God is in us.
  - For council members to neglect acquaintance with these topics and their practice is to weaken the functioning of the fraternity. These are all listed as COUNCIL duties; they are not to be the concern only of the fraternity minister.
  - Promote the activities necessary for fostering fraternal life, for improving the human, Christian, and Franciscan formation of its members, and for sustaining their witness and commitment in the world.
  - Make concrete and courageous choices, appropriate for the situation of the fraternity, from among the numerous activities possible in the field of apostolates.
  - Decide on the establishment of sections or groups in conformity with the *SFO Constitutions* and the *Statutes*.
  - Assign duties to the councilors and to the other professed members.
  - Be responsible for assuring that the fair share is paid to the region in a timely manner.

(See [Council Duties Review](#) for more information.)

## Structure of the Secular Franciscan Order



*For Up to Now (FUN) Manual - Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order – 3-23-2011*

## CARE AND FEEDING OF COUNCILS

So you find yourself elected to council. Now what?

If you're feeling somewhat "in over your head," you're probably in the right place.

Our Franciscan tradition gives us the story of one of the first friars, John the Simple, who likewise felt insecure. He was so unsure of himself that he decided the only way around it was to copy Francis in absolutely everything. It got to the point that when Francis coughed, John the Simple coughed; when Francis spat, John the Simple would spit (*Omnibus*, 996).

Francis soon put a stop to this sort of blind imitation, but the story of John the Simple is a powerful reminder that the Franciscan charism is not meant to produce carbon copies, but rather to consecrate individual uniqueness.

So don't expect your council or your fraternity to conform too closely to any other group you've belonged to... or any other fraternity, for that matter. Nor will your council conform to worldly models, such as Robert's Rules of Order, or the efficiency of a corporate executive board.

Your model is St. Paul's image of the Body of Christ. Listening and being aware of the needs of the whole body is your goal. This takes time. It takes practice. Becoming familiar with what's "normal" for your particular body doesn't happen overnight. And your body is not necessarily going to behave the same way someone else's body does.

But there ARE rules of thumb to maintain the health of this body (fraternity) for which you've accepted responsibility.

## What Does a Fraternity Need?

Be thinking of ways to feed your brothers and sisters. Vary the diet of your monthly programs. If you've embarked on an in-depth study of one particular topic, don't belabor it for a whole year. Instead, consider presenting a series of three or four sessions and saving further material for another year.

Vary not only the topics, but also the method of presentation. Have you explored the use of videos available from your diocesan audiovisual library, or from other fraternities? Are your members being heard through the use of different group processes, such as small group discussions or one-on-one sharing? Do you use the lecture format sparingly?

Some staples in your fraternity's diet ("ongoing formation") should include: a periodic examination of different sections of the Rule; attention to Franciscan feasts, stories, and customs as they occur on the calendar; discussion of current papal and episcopal letters regarding social justice teachings of the Church; a continuing focus on personal spirituality topics such as prayer and the simplification of our lifestyle; current issues related to work, family, environment, and peace and justice.

The fraternity, as a whole, will benefit from at least one annual injection of a program related to the group apostolate, if you have one, or to explore a possible apostolate, if you do not. Also, for the health of the fraternity, a periodic presentation related to group dynamics such as building communication skills, or conflict resolution, is prudent – BEFORE problems arise.

- Who is responsible for the teachings?
- Is the group overly dependent on the spiritual assistant for spoon-feeding?
- Are gifted members emerging and being encouraged to share their research and interests?
- What's happening in your fraternity's common prayer life? Is there variety and creativity?
- No matter how praiseworthy the structure of your prayer is, it needs constant attention or it will become dry. The Liturgy of the Hours is the preferred format (and your spiritual assistant will gladly give you instruction), but the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order gives other suggestions in Appendix II. Do you have the courage to experiment?
- Do all members participate in active discussion?
- Do members come prepared to participate in formation activities, or do they just try to fake it?
- Do all members participate in various aspects of fraternity life?
- How do you feed those fraternity members who are shut-ins or who are not able to participate fully for personal reasons?
- Council members should arrange for telephone contacts to bring absent members up-to-date about what happened at the last meeting, to share handouts or notes, and to communicate to those absent that the fraternity missed them.
- Is someone from the fraternity making sure that Communion is brought regularly to members who are shut in?
- Is there a system for remembering special personal occasions such as birthdays?
- Have you devised some rituals celebrating "Jubilees" of long-professed members?

The personal touch is everything.

## Environment, Formation, Prayer

A major part of being council is to create an open and safe environment to encourage members to be a vital part of fraternity life and to challenge those who do not take part or offer themselves.

- Is the fraternity gathering open and inviting?
- Do we actively communicate and encourage attendance?
- Does the gathering have the basic components, prayer, formation, sharing and social time, properly balanced?
- How are the silent types challenged to take part in sharing and discussions?
- Do you experiment with the gathering to add interest and variety, or do you remain rigid or routine?
- Do you constantly let those who are unprepared or who refuse to share off the hook?
- Do the minister and spiritual assistant provide both loving challenge and gentle fraternal correction when needed?
- Does the council remain blind to problems until it is too late, or does it intervene to head off problems and complacency?

Our profession requires an understanding of being in an Order within the Church: we have consecrated ourselves and our lives to God. As professed members of the Franciscan Family, we also have entered into a life-long journey to transform ourselves into better images of Christ. Ongoing formation is a key component of this transformation, and active participation in the process is a requirement of profession.

- How do members view/understand “Profession”?
- Do members see themselves as “consecrated” people?
- How do we share our stories of God’s actions in us?
- Do all members actively invite new people to explore a Secular Franciscan vocation?
- Do all council members actively and joyfully fulfill their individual council responsibilities? Or does everything get dumped on the minister?
- How are council members held accountable to each other and to the fraternity?

We are called to live the Gospel, following Jesus in the model of St. Francis, and that process was not finished when we professed. We share with all parts of the Franciscan Family the obligation to pursue continual conversion/transformation. (This is the essence of the penitential movement that has been our foundation for more than 800 years.)

- Is the fraternity environment/atmosphere truly a privileged place?
- The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members. (See [Rule of the SFO, Chapter 3](#) and [Article 22](#))

Formation begins with the council, which should have a brief formation period at every council meeting. Learning to be fraternity helps in building up the larger fraternity.

- The General Chapters of the SFO, in both 2002 and 2008, declared formation to be the number one priority of the entire Order. How does this compare with your fraternity priorities?
- Do all council members actively support and participate in the initial formation process of new folks, or is it just a one-man band?
- Do you take time to pray, form, and share, or do you just jump into the business at hand?
- Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of formation (initial formation is not less than 24 months), (See [National Statutes, 19.2](#)) and profession of the rule. The entire community is engaged in the process of growth by its own manner of living. (See [Rule 23](#))

No matter how praiseworthy the structure of your prayer, it needs constant attention, or it will become dry. The Liturgy of the Hours is the preferred format (and your spiritual assistant will gladly give you instruction), but the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order gives other suggestions in Appendix II.

- Do you have the courage to experiment?

How do you feed those fraternity members who are shut-ins or who are not able to participate fully because of personal reasons?

Council members should arrange telephone contacts to bring absent members up-to-date about what happened at the last meeting, to share handouts or notes, and to communicate to those absent that the fraternity missed them. Have you devised some rituals celebrating “Jubilees” of long-professed members?

- What is communication like within the fraternity? Does the word get out? Is there a good prayer chain or is communication hit or miss?
- Is there communication and relationship among the members outside the gathering or only at the gathering?
- Are external groups (e.g., K of C, Altar Society, Rosary Society, etc.) and parish ministries (except ordained) generally a higher priority than fraternity gatherings and commitments? If so, what is the level of understanding of the Order and also the members own sense of belonging?
- Do your professed members view the fraternity as “simply” another parish group, something to “join”?
- How do you emphasize vocation and profession?
- How do you keep folks interested in fraternal life?

The personal touch is everything.

## **IT NEEDS EXERCISE**

Living in fraternity is not just talking about it.

Making special efforts to meet with brothers and sisters will sometimes mean setting other priorities aside. Being companions to each other on this shared journey is something we have chosen, something we have promised.

- Do fraternity members actively and deliberately pray for each other? Do you encourage prayer partners or spiritual companions?
- How is the spiritual health of your fraternity?

Once-a-month Council meetings and once-a-month fraternity meetings are a minimum. Your council will “stay in shape” better if other opportunities are taken advantage of when they present themselves.

- How often does the fraternity gather? The recent fraternal visitors from our Minister General could not believe that many SFO fraternities gather only once a month. Their recommendation was every week with a different format each time.
- Does your current gathering frequency lead to greater communal and spiritual growth or does it favor the “just another meeting” idea?
- How often does the council meet? Does the current frequency lead to proper animation and spiritual guidance for the fraternity?

Can you offer to carpool members to a seminar or a workshop or day of recollection or a regional meeting? A simple conversation in the car can be a powerful community builder.

- Does the fraternity regularly participate in a communal retreat, day of reflection, etc.? If not, why not – what stands in the way of making fraternal life and growth a priority?
- How often does the fraternity have communal Mass and/or a Eucharistic Liturgy?

Do you notice whether several members attend the same parish Mass on some days who may be able to go out to breakfast together? Can you invite someone over to see a good video? Is there a book or a CD you could share?

How about the muscles of future leadership? Are you flexing them by using the specialized gifts of your members? Can one person be asked to prepare a presentation, while another is asked to organize a picnic or a trip? Do you have a newsletter? Are different people being asked to take responsibility for your common prayer?

In all of this, if the feeling of “being stretched” is absent, atrophy will quickly set in.

## **IT NEEDS PERIODIC CHECK-UPS**

The fraternity minister and council have the responsibility of inviting the Regional Spiritual Assistant and the appropriate Regional Executive Council Member to local fraternity meetings and council meetings. A triennial visitation is required, but more frequent “check-ups” are desirable.

The Regional Executive Council is the bond connecting your fraternity with the broader Franciscan reality. It’s becoming more and more imperative to strengthen this bond in our day when so many exciting things are happening.

Have you scheduled some kind of visitation for this year? When was your last one? What topics would you like the visitor to address? How will you communicate your local needs and concerns?

Another form of check-up is peer communication with members from other fraternities. Sharing experiences multiplies enthusiasm.

Are you on the mailing list for other fraternity newsletters? Do you receive the national newsletter, the [TAU-USA](#) Magazine.

When was the last Day of Recollection or weekend retreat for your fraternity? If you feel your group is too small for an endeavor like this, have you considered joining with a neighboring fraternity to sponsor one?

Members of the Regional Council will be glad to help you make arrangements. An opportunity for annual or bi-annual reflection should be offered to all Secular Franciscans. Is the council doing its own “ongoing formation” by working through one of the many checklists available, or have council meetings become the dry bones of business busyness? Are you rotating the responsibility for council input, or has one person been handling it alone? Have you polled the members about current concerns?



## WHEN TO CALL THE DOCTOR

Just like the human body, the fraternity's body sometimes signals its ill health. Contact your Regional Council Member or Regional Spiritual Assistant if your fraternity and your local assistant can't seem to shake these symptoms:

The feeling of malaise; dryness; being stuck in a rut with your gathering format, programs, materials, or even prayer types. (Antidote: Variety; Creativity; Courage to experiment; Examples from other fraternities.)

Factions; power struggles; competition, envy; officers or members trying to exercise authority inappropriately. (Antidote: Attention to communication skills; outside mediation; Conflict resolution; Group reconciliation service.)

Lack of new vocations for prolonged periods of time or older members deciding to lapse. (Antidote: Evangelization; Attention to the image projected by the group; Change in leadership; renewed enthusiasm.)

One person doing everything. (Antidote: Honest discussion by council; Renewal of commitment; Reevaluation of priorities of the group; Teaching on giftedness.)

Difficulty in accepting our Rule (1978) or accepting changes in formation or other policies aimed to address the life of the Order and the needs of the Church. (Antidote: Education; Gentleness; Outside speakers; Attendance at regional and national meetings.)

Considering all this, would you say there's any easy "formula" to follow in guiding your fraternity "from Gospel to life and life to Gospel"?

The answer, of course, is a resounding "No!" Praise God that this is so.

Another story about Francis – who taught the world that Brother Sun praises God by being uniquely Brother Sun, and Sister Moon by being Sister Moon – tells why:

It seems that the early friars were caught up one day discussing the question, "Who is the 'perfect friar'?" Francis put a stop to this seed of competition and comparison by looking around the room and pointing to each person present.

Brother Angelo was the perfect friar for his courtesy, Francis said. And Brother Maseo for his natural good sense. Brother Leo was the perfect friar for his simplicity. Brother Bernard for his faith. Brother Juniper, for his patience. Brother John of Lauds for his sheer physical strength... and so Francis continued, pointing to each friar in turn. The message is clear. The more completely we help each other offer our uniqueness to God, the more truly He is praised.

Francis did what was uniquely HIS to do. And as he lay dying, he blessed all of us with the challenge: "May Christ teach you what is yours." (*Omnibus*, 739)

These are just some of the ideas and signs to consider in helping you evaluate the life of both your council and fraternity. Some are mentioned more than once – they are important and have borne fruit when councils had the courage to actively animate and guide and be more engaged. So again, congratulations on your election, and please consider yourself a blessing to the sisters and brothers who called you forth, love and support them, and expect the same back from them for your gift of yourself!

Original:

-Page Zyromski SFO

-John Petrikovic, OFM Cap

From [Care and Feeding of Fraternity Councils](#) (NAFRA website)

Updated:

-2010 Cyl Maljan, OFS

-2011 Robert Fitzsimmons, OFS



## Article 51 General Constitutions

1. While firmly upholding the co-responsibility of the council to animate and guide the fraternity, the minister, as the primary person responsible for the fraternity, is expected to make sure that the directions and the decisions of the council are put into practice and will keep the council informed about what he or she is doing.
2. The minister also has the following duties:
  - a. to call, preside at, and direct the meetings of the fraternity and council; to convoke, every three years, the elective chapter of the fraternity, having heard the council on the formalities of the convocation;
  - b. to prepare an annual report to be sent to the council of the higher level after it has been approved by the council of the fraternity;
  - c. to represent the fraternity in all its relations with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the fraternity acquires a juridical personality in the civil order, the minister becomes, when possible, its legal representative;
  - d. to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years;
  - e. to put into effect those acts that the Constitutions refer to his or her competence.

The minister also has the following additional responsibilities:

- The Rule, Constitutions, and Statutes are guides for growth in fraternal life. Read them, study them, and implement them.
- Become familiar with guidelines and responsibilities based, in part, on **Articles 50-52** of the [General Constitutions](#).
- The minister is also responsible for setting goals, resolving issues, and accomplishing tasks for the good of the fraternity.
- The minister will set parameters on how the council meetings will be conducted.
- The minister, along with the council, will set goals for the next three years.
- The minister and the council will set in place a plan as to how fraternity gatherings will be conducted.
- To oversee that all council members are fulfilling their assigned duties.
- To ensure that the directions and the decisions of the council are put into practice.
- If the local fraternity minister is unable to be present at a fraternity council meeting, the meeting may be held with the vice minister conducting the business ([General Constitutions](#), **Article 52.1**.) Business should be accomplished each and every month (including summers) so as not to hinder the life and growth of the fraternity.

- Inform the council members of their reporting responsibilities.
- The minister and the council will need to become familiar with the following:
  1. Excused Member Policy (See [page 50](#))
  2. Inactive Status Updates (See [pages 55-56](#))
  3. Lapsed Status (See [pages 55-57](#))
  4. Transfer Policy Procedure (See [pages 66-69](#))

When needed, the minister will delegate responsibilities to appropriate council member(s).

- Keep the council and fraternity informed about activities and information from the regional fraternity and ensure that the region is informed about changes.
- Ensure that communication is linked back and forth between the region through your area councilor and the local fraternity. Local fraternity ministers should consider their area councilor as a resource person and someone to whom they can turn for help and suggestions in time of need.
- Attend or send a local council representative to regional meetings, such as the yearly Chapter of Ministers meeting convened by the regional minister.
- Provide annually an accurate candidate and professed headcount report for the period ending on December 31 of the reporting year to the regional treasurer. This report is usually due the following January.
- Any forms and/or questionnaires sent by the regional area councilor and regional minister should be completed in a timely fashion. If necessary, you may call a special gathering of your local council to complete the forms. Since it is acceptable to complete business electronically (See [National Statutes, Article 5.6](#)) when not in session, the Council may conduct business electronically (i.e., via e-mail, telephone, fax, etc.), provided that any decisions and determinations made in this way are reviewed and ratified at the next regular meeting of the Council. You may gather the needed information before and after your monthly council meeting and return the forms ASAP.
- Prepare the end-of-year annual report to be sent to the regional minister after the approval of the fraternity council.
- Work closely with the secretary to make sure updates for the Regional Directory for the fraternity are sent in a timely manner to the Regional Database Manager.
- Ensure candidacies, professions, withdrawals, transfers, dismissals, and deaths are recorded in your fraternity register. Notify the Regional Database Manager.
- Ensure that Fair Share is paid to the region in a timely manner, and develop a schedule for making Fair Share payments.
- Periodically request input from candidates and professed members for new ideas to improve the spiritual as well as the active growth of fraternity life.
- Your certificate of canonical establishment should be available at all times.
- Make sure the Regional Newsletter ([Up to Now](#)) is sent to every member of the fraternity, either by e-mail/posted on the fraternity website or by post office delivery. Bring extra copies to your fraternity gatherings.

- Makes sure your monthly fraternity newsletter is sent to every member of the fraternity, either by e-mail/posted on the fraternity website or by post office delivery. Bring extra copies to your fraternity gatherings.
- Make sure all candidates and professed are receiving the National Fraternity [TAU-USA Magazine](#), either by e-mail or by postal delivery.
- Appoint a historian (professed) for your fraternity to update your fraternity's history, to create a scrapbook for write-ups and photos of various events in your fraternity.
- The Spiritual Assistant assigned by the province to which you are bonded should be known, appreciated, and kept informed.
- Update and maintain the minister's binder containing your agendas, annual regional reports, results of the visitation, copies of your advertising, job descriptions for each council member, retreats that were offered, and fraternity rosters.
- Upon leaving the position, the binder is passed on to the new minister.
- After elections, an outgoing minister makes him or herself available to help the incoming minister become acquainted with and up to date on pending matters.
- A yearly regional and/or local fraternity retreat should be offered to candidates and professed members.
- Perform such other duties as are required by the Constitutions and Statutes to carry out the proper purposes of the council.

## Suggested Agenda

### Council Meeting Agenda Day, Date, and Time

Opening Prayer from the Ritual – page 38

- After opening prayer from the Ritual, another form of prayer could be recited before the start of the council meeting, for example, the Liturgy of the Hours, group *Lectio Divina*, Rosary, etc. Secretary minutes from previous council meeting is read, amended if necessary, and approved by the council.
- Inquirer/Candidate formation updates
- Ongoing formation updates
- Morning/Evening Prayer format for upcoming gathering
- Treasurer Report(s) (presented and approved by the council)
- Other Standing Committee Reports (if any)
- Old Business
- New Business
- Questions or comments

Closing Prayer from the Ritual – *page 39*

## *Vice Minister*

### **Article 52 General Constitutions**

1. The vice-minister has the following duties:
  - a. to collaborate, in a fraternal spirit, and to support the minister in carrying out his or her specific duties;
  - b. to exercise the functions entrusted by the council and/or by the assembly or chapter;
  - c. to take the place of the minister in both duties and responsibilities in case of absence or temporary impediment;
  - d. to assume the functions of the minister when the office remains vacant.

The vice minister has the following additional responsibilities:

- To update and maintain the vice-minister's binder and, upon leaving the position, to pass it to the new vice-minister.
- After the elections, if applicable, the outgoing vice-minister should make himself/herself available to help the incoming vice-minister become acquainted and up to date on pending matters.

### **Article 81 General Constitutions**

1. When the office of minister remains vacant as a result of death, resignation, or other impediment of a definitive character, the vice-minister assumes the office until the end of the term for which the minister was originally elected.

## Secretary

### Article 52 General Constitutions



The secretary has the following duties:

1. to compile the official acts of the fraternity and of the council and to ensure that they are sent to their respective proper recipients;
2. to see to the updating and preservation of the records and the registers, noting admissions, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers to and from the fraternity;
3. to provide for the communication of the more important facts to the various levels and, if appropriate, to arrange their dissemination through the mass media.

The secretary also has the following responsibilities:

- If elected, holds voting privileges and is accountable for all decisions made by the fraternity council; if appointed, does not have voting rights on the council.
- To compile the official minutes of council meetings and fraternity gatherings (if it is the fraternity's practice).

The council minutes are extremely important and must be maintained; they contain valuable and sometimes personal information. Every decision the council makes should be documented.

This is especially true of:

- a. Replacing a council member: In the event one of the council members resigns, the council must vote on his or her replacement. This must be documented in the minutes. A council member who has been appointed in this manner does not have voting rights.
- b. Professed members who transfer from another fraternity, should have a six-month waiting period before the council votes on accepting the transferee into the receiving fraternity. This must be noted in the council meeting minutes.
- c. Members who withdraw: If a member has not attended fraternity meetings for some time and the council has made several attempts to contact him or her, the council may vote to consider the individual lapsed. (Be sure to document the conversations and/or letters.) It is recommended that a certified letter concerning this decision be sent to the member, a copy put in his or her file, and the decision documented in the council meeting minutes.
- d. Members in Distress: Periodically, a member may be suffering financially, physically, etc., and the council must decide how to proceed. This is sensitive information, but the decision is made in charity and must be recorded in the council minutes.
- e. Confidentiality: Many discussions and decisions made by the council are confidential and should be kept confidential. Therefore, be discreet in speech and keep this part of the meeting separate from the council meeting minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> Each local fraternity is to have a fraternity register of enrollments (admissions, professions, transfers, deaths, and every other important annotation relative to the individual members), the register of minutes of the council, and the register of administration.

#### Additional Guidelines

- As mentioned in Article 52.2 (b) – Maintains and updates the fraternity register with names, addresses, and phone numbers of all members. Notifies the **Regional Database Manager**, as soon as possible, of any changes made in the fraternity register.
- Maintains a confidential file for each fraternity member. Sacramental documents, reference letters, disciplinary action memos, etc., should be placed in the file and stored in a safe place, preferably in a locked area.
- Keeps attendance records of fraternity meetings.
- Assists the minister in sending announcements of upcoming events, meetings, or other fraternity activities.
- Assists the council with general communication.
- Updates fraternity roster – keeps the roster of candidate(s) and professed updated and distributes to candidate(s) and professed members twice a year. Visitors, aspirants, and inquirers are not members of the Order and should not receive a copy of the roster.
- Updates and maintains the secretary's binder.
- Upon leaving the position, the binder is passed on to the new secretary.



## Suggested Secretary's Calendar

<b>Month</b>	<b>Fraternity Gathering Activity</b>	<b>Other Activities</b>
January		
February		
March		
April		
May		
June		
July		
August		
September		
October		
November		
December		

## **SUGGESTED FUNCTIONS AND COMMITTEE FUNCTIONS**

Enter on a yearly calendar the events that occur regularly throughout the year.

### **FRATERNITY MEETINGS**

#### **Contacting the Minister**

The best way to reach the minister or other council members is by phone or email.

#### **Gatherings**

Meetings should be well organized and approved by the council monthly.

### **SFO SIGN UP SHEET for SERVICE onC OMMITTEES**

#### **Example**

God is calling you to serve your fraternity in some capacity. We are asking each member to serve on one of the following committees as a way to meet the needs of your Franciscan family. People may belong to more than one committee, but please remember that quality, not quantity matters the most!

May God bless you for the work you are doing.

### **SOCIAL COMMITTEES**

#### **INFIRM MEMBERS**

***(call or visit sick members, send cards)***

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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#### **BIRTHDAY REMEMBRANCE FOR MEMBERS**

***(Send out cards to members)***

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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**HELP CLEAN AND STRAIGHTEN UP AFTER THE MEETINGS**

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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**FORMATION INSTRUCTORS**

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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**TELEPHONE COMMITTEE**

**(Call people when there are changes to meetings, etc.)**

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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**LECTORS**

**Name**

**Phone #**

**Email**

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**EXTRAORDINARY MINISTERS**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone #</u>	<u>Email</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**HELP LEAD THE FRANCISCAN CROWN ROSARY**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone #</u>	<u>Email</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**PRAYER COMMITTEE**

(Responsible for a specified set of prayers to be prayed faithfully daily for the fraternity and families, vocations, all Franciscans, as well as the needs of the Church and the world.)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone #</u>	<u>Email</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**WILLING TO BE A MENTOR TO SOMEONE IN FORMATION**

<u>Name</u>	<u>Phone #</u>	<u>Email</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

From Mt. St. Sepulcher Fraternity  
(Used by permission)



## RECORD KEEPING

It is the responsibility of the outgoing council and minister to meet with the incoming council and minister to turn over all records, The new council and minister should determine the principal location of the documents and records so that information can be accessed easily. Those records should be kept in a safe place and include:

1. Document of canonical establishment
2. Ritual
3. Rule
4. General Constitutions
5. National Statutes
6. A file containing guidelines for
  - Elections, local and regional
  - Duties of council members
  - Reports to National and Region
7. History of the Fraternity
8. Up-to-date inventory of all equipment that belongs to the fraternity, such as computers, office furniture, and miscellaneous supplies

It is also considered essential to keep files for:

- Correspondence by date
  - Formation material
    - Guidelines for Initial Formation published by the National Formation Commission
  - Up-to-date record of formation procedures including texts used
9. It is the duty of the secretary and minister to see that their fraternity has an up-to-date register of the brothers and sisters, which includes:
- information for the National Database - Date of Rite of Admission
  - Date of profession
  - Date of transfer, including fraternity of origin and destination
  - Date of death

(Fraternal visitors will check this register)

### HARD COVER BINDERS ARE RECOMMENDED FOR:

- Minutes of council meetings
- Ledger showing income, expenses, and balance and treasurer's reports
- Formation material

From "Nuts and Bolts of a Council"

by Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order

**(Used by permission)**



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## *Formation Director*

### **Article 52 General Constitutions**

3. The master of formation has the following duties:
  - a. to co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of the council, the formative activities of the fraternity;
  - b. to instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initial formation, and the newly professed;
  - c. to inform the council of the fraternity prior to profession, concerning the suitability of the candidate for a commitment to live according to the Rule;

The formation director has the following additional responsibilities:

- If elected, holds voting privileges and is accountable for all decisions made by the fraternity council. If appointed, does not have voting rights on the council.
- Keeps in mind that ongoing formation is the heart and soul of the fraternity.
- The council and fraternity formation director and/or formation team, co-ordinate good initial formation. This entails knowing the initial formation materials recommended by the regional formation director/team. Keep in mind, good quality material is a must for initial formation, as well as for ongoing formation. The [FUN Manual](#) is a great resource for both initial and ongoing formation, so make sure the members of the formation team become familiar with its contents.
- With the council and the local fraternity formation director/team, a good ongoing formation program should be executed. Records of items used for this ongoing formation should be kept and shared with your regional formation director.
- The regional formation director is a valuable resource: when needed, seek advice.
- Ongoing formation materials such as *Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership* can be purchased from Smoky Valley Printing, found in [TAU-USA](#) Magazine.
- Be sure the fraternity's spiritual assistant is involved in the formation process in both initial and ongoing formation instruction.
- Keep written records and attendance records of all participating in the initial formation program.
- See that Baptism, Communion, and Confirmation certificates, as well as verification of the validity of marriage, Decree of Nullity, if applicable, and two letters of recommendation, one from the inquirer's pastor, are received before the Rite of Admission. If the inquirer is ordained, provide a copy of the letter verifying faculties.
- Conduct interview(s) by the fraternity spiritual assistant and minister or a member of the council or by the whole council.
- Council approves each candidate for profession.
- The formation director's binder and manual should be updated and maintained. When the formation director leaves the position, the binder is passed to the new formation director.

## Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order

By Ron Pihokker, OFS, Regional Director of Formation  
Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity

(Used by permission)



Formation is the broad term we use when we speak of the process of fostering the overall spiritual growth and development of the vocation of potential members and professed members of the Secular Franciscan Order. Especially as it is understood from the Franciscan perspective, formation is an encounter with the Lord. It begins with the call of God and the response of the individual person in answering that call with a decision to walk with Saint Francis in the footsteps of the poor and crucified Christ as His disciple under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a continuous process of growth and conversion involving the whole of a person's life in the radical living of the Gospel within the context of fraternity. It is a dynamic process of growth in which the person opens their heart to the Gospel in their daily life and opens themselves to full conversion in following Jesus Christ.

The formation of Secular Franciscans can be spoken of in terms of initial formation and ongoing formation. Initial formation deals with the process of becoming a Secular Franciscan while ongoing formation refers to the continuing process of spiritual support for professed members. Formation is a life-long process for Secular Franciscans.

Formation, whether initial or ongoing, concerns itself with the overall development of the Franciscan person. We can speak of formation in terms of three dimensions: the human, the Christian, and the Franciscan. All three of these dimensions should be present and reflected in a balanced and well-planned fraternity formation process.

The human dimension is reflected in relation to the individual, the community and to the world. As regards the individual, this dimension of formation consists in coming to know and accept oneself, through growth in freedom and responsibility, in developing oneself physically, psychologically, morally, spiritually, and socially. It includes the development of balance emotionally and effectively; it involves sexual integration and growth, honesty, and loyalty, joyfulness, and a sense of humor. As regards the human dimension of community, formation leads the individual to be able to relate well with others, the ability to communicate and deal with conflict, develop a spirit of cooperation and develop a sense of openness and flexibility. In terms of the human dimension, in relation to the world, formation should lead the individual to develop the ability to "read the signs of the times" and develop a sense of solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

The Christian dimension of formation is reflected both in relation to God and in relation to the Church and the world. Formation should develop one's sense of gratitude to God, one's ongoing conversion, and one's life of faith and hope. It should promote growth in unconditional love and the seeking of the will of God in all things. With regard to one's relation to the Church and the world, formation should develop one's sense of God's presence in the world; it should promote knowledge of the Catholic faith, and a love for the Catholic Church. It should promote a missionary and ecumenical spirit and the pursuit of justice and peace.

With regard to the Franciscan dimension of formation, in relationship with God, formation should promote the following of the poor and humble Christ through a radical living of the Gospel, by means of a life of penance and lived in the spirit of prayer and devotion. With reference to the fraternity, Franciscan formation should develop a love for the brotherhood/sisterhood and love and

understanding for each brother and sister, it should call one to fraternal service, especially to the elderly and sick members. It should promote fraternal obedience to one another through the overcoming of one's egoism, one's own will, and the forces that block the building up of the fraternity. It should develop a willingness to work with one's own hands and promote participation in community prayer and liturgy.

In relation to the Church and the world, the Franciscan dimension of formation should promote a love for the Church and loving obedience to the Church's ministers, a desire for evangelization and mission, a prophetic spirit, an embrace of the option for the poor, a commitment to reconciliation and forgiveness and respect for nature and the environment.

**Initial formation is a process, not a program.** That is to say, there should be no rigidly definite time frames but instead should be somewhat fluid. The process should be adjusted to the needs of the individual in formation. Broadly, it should respect a gradual process experienced in several stages that mark a person's growth and gradual entrance into the fraternity. Broadly defined, these periods are:

- **Orientation**—a period of at least 3 months, followed by Ritual of Welcoming
- **Inquiry**—a period of at least 6 months followed by Rite of Admission (to the fraternity and the Order)
- **Candidacy**—a period of at least 18 months, [2020 Ritual](#) page 7, followed by
- **Rite of Temporary or Permanent Profession**

(Optionally, depending on a person's readiness, a Temporary Profession may be made for one year and renewed up to three times, after which a Permanent Commitment is made.)

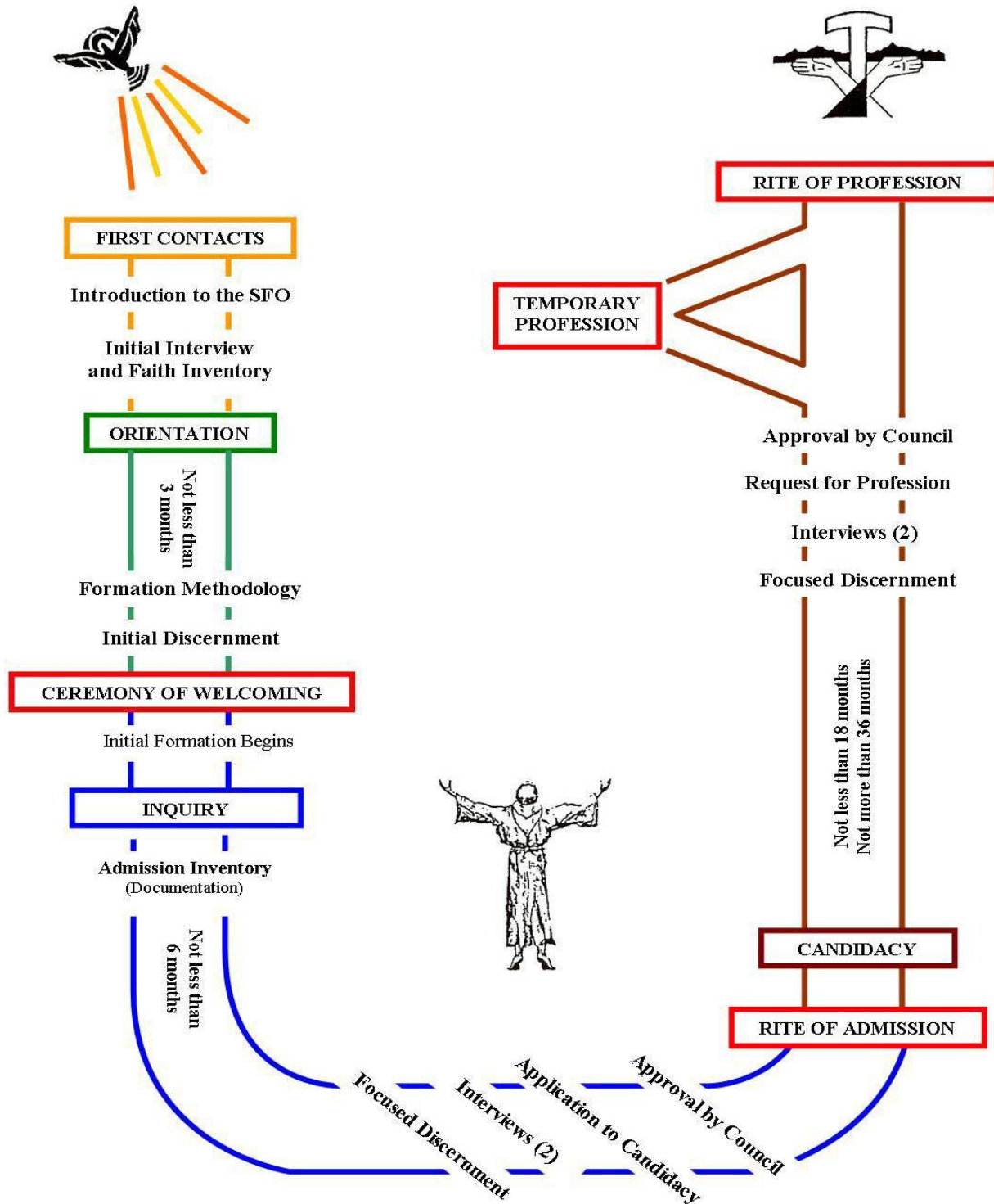
During these periods of formation, the individual follows a curriculum that introduces him or her to the history, theology, and spirituality of Franciscanism. They follow a personal daily regimen of prayer and study and meet regularly with a group of fellow candidates for study, dialogue, and prayer. Franciscan ministerial/apostolic experiences should also be a part of the initial formation that gives the individual a sense of the Franciscan apostolate and an opportunity for group sharing discussion and dialogue.

The individual, in formation, is the most important agent in this entire process. They themselves are responsible for their own growth as adults within the overall formation process. In addition, the fraternity spiritual assistant, the fraternity director of formation, the fraternity council, and its professed membership all have a role to play in the formation process. Finally, it is the Holy Spirit who is the Agent par excellence, of the journey of formation, a journey leading to commitment to the Franciscan way of life.

On-going (or permanent) formation is that period of formation that follows the initial formation and permanent commitment to the Rule and Life of the Secular Franciscan Order. Its purpose is to continue the development of the Franciscan vocation in the life of the individual Secular Franciscan. Franciscanism is a life journey, it is not an individual achievement and cannot be marked by "an arrival." We are always on a pilgrimage to the Father following the way of the Lord Jesus in the manner of St. Francis. This journey requires a continuous process of support in the movement towards full maturity in Christ and commitment to the Gospel way. It needs continuous nurture of a critical consciousness—the Franciscan vision. It demands regular and constant updating, a continuous rediscovery of the poor and crucified Christ in the daily experiences of one's life through prayerful reflection, dialogue, and support in fraternity.



# PATHWAY TO PROFESSION



*For Up to Now (FUN) Manual – For the Formator – 3-23-2011*

APPLICATION FORM AT TIME OF INQUIRY

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone (H) \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_ Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Parish \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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Religious Education/Faith Enrichment Information

1. What is the extent of your formal religious education?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Have you continued educating yourself in the faith? Describe:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Have you participated in Bible Classes, Days of Recollection, SALT or Weekend Retreats?  
Explain: How many? When? Where? Recently?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Do you or have you ever belonged to a Religious Order? Explain:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. How are you active in your parish community? Describe your activity:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Secular Franciscan Order

1. How did you hear of the Secular Franciscan Order?

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2. What draws your interest to St. Francis?

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3. What do you understand the Secular Franciscan Order to be?

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4. What do you expect from the Secular Franciscan Order?

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5. What are you willing to bring to the Secular Franciscan Order?

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6. What are your hobbies, special interests?

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7. Would your family have any objections to you becoming a Franciscan? Explain

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8. Can you freely commit your time to become a Franciscan?

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9. Describe your understanding of “vocation.”

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**References:**

*Please provide name, address, and phone number of your references.*

❖ **Pastor and/or Spiritual Director**

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❖ **Character Reference**

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**Other Forms needed during initial formation:**

If you do not have official copies of your **Baptismal, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage** certificates/records, please make arrangements to obtain them from the Churches where the Sacraments were received. If divorced, a copy of a divorce decree and if remarried, a copy of a Decree of Nullity is required. If ordained as a Diocesan Deacon or Priest, supply a copy of a letter verifying faculties.

**SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

**Request for Rite of Admission**

To the COUNCIL of \_\_\_\_\_ FRATERNITY:

I have fulfilled the following requirements for admission into the Candidacy Phase of the Formation Program of the Secular Franciscan Order:

- ❖ Completed Orientation (minimum 3 months per [National Statutes](#) 2005, [Art 19](#))
- ❖ Completed Inquiry (minimum 6 months per [National Statutes](#) 2005, [Art 19 sec 2a](#).)
- ❖ Faithfully attended formation and fraternity gatherings
- ❖ Participated in community life
- ❖ Submitted required Sacramental paperwork and references
- ❖ Completed interviews with my Formation Director and Spiritual Assistant

I desire to begin my Franciscan journey because:

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\_\_\_\_\_

(Inquirer’s Signature) (Date)

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To the COUNCIL:

As a representative of the council, I/we have personally interviewed this inquirer and affirm that he/she understands the nature of the Secular Franciscan vocation and is motivated by a Divine call to undertake this commitment and embrace a Franciscan lifestyle within the Church. Therefore, I petition the Council to approve this REQUEST FOR ADMISSION and receive this inquirer into the Formation Program as a Candidate of the Secular Franciscan Order.

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date Inquirer Interviewed) (Formation Director Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Date Inquirer Interviewed) (Spiritual Assistant Signature)

***NB: Only one interview/signature is required; close collaboration between the FD & SA is recommended.***

COUNCIL ACTION

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(Date of Council Approval)

---

(Fraternity Minister's Signature)

---

(Date of Rite)

---

(Spiritual Assistant's Signature)

---

(Date Entered in Register)

---

(Fraternity Secretary's Signature)

*Revised March 2006*

## SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

### Preparation for Profession

### Interview and Assessment

#### *Instructions:*

1. Set a time with the candidate at least a month prior to the profession date for an interview to certify the candidate's readiness to make the SFO their way of life.
2. The Spiritual Assistant and the Formation Director interview each candidate individually so they can validate their conclusions about the readiness of each candidate for profession.
3. The Spiritual Assistant and the Formation Director may use questions from the Interview Prior to Profession.
  - a. IT IS ALSO HELPFUL FOR THEM TO REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR INITIAL FORMATION IN THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER IN THE UNITED STATES.
4. After their interviews are completed, they discuss their findings.
5. At the council meeting prior to the profession, the spiritual assistant and the formation director share the information with the council. The fraternity council members consider the candidate's statements, responses to the interview questionnaire and the assessments of the formation director and spiritual assistant and ask for explanations and/or clarification as necessary to evaluate the candidate's readiness for profession.
6. After due and prayerful consideration, the council votes, by secret ballot\*, on the candidate's readiness for profession. The vote may be:

YES – *Candidate is ready for profession.*

NEEDS MORE TIME – *Candidate needs more time for discernment of their vocation.*
7. The fraternity council notifies the candidate and the fraternity of its decision.

\* See [THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER, Rule 23](#), and [General Constitutions, Art. 41](#).

## SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

### Preparation for Profession Interview Questionnaire

**The fraternity may use as many of these questions as they choose or create its own list of questions. However, the answers to questions 1 and 2, are essential in evaluating a candidate's preparedness for profession.**

1. Do you fully understand and are you deeply aware that by making your profession in the Secular Franciscan Order you will be making a lifelong commitment?
2. Do your present circumstances allow you to freely commit yourself to the Secular Franciscan Order and this fraternity (to live the Gospel life and fulfill your obligations to attend meetings and participate in fraternity activities and projects as you are able)?
3. How would being a member of the Secular Franciscan Order affect your everyday living?
4. Do you have any particular gifts (talents, skills, spiritual insights, etc.) that you can share with this fraternity?
5. Are you willing to take on responsibilities in the fraternity when needed, according to your abilities?
6. What can you bring to the Secular Franciscan Order and this fraternity?
7. What can the Secular Franciscan Order and this fraternity give you?
8. What areas of spiritual growth will you be better able to pursue as a member of the Secular Franciscan Order and this fraternity?
9. Please explain your view of Franciscan life.
10. Do you have any questions about the Secular Franciscan Order or this fraternity that you would like to bring up? You may use the back of this page to write your question(s).

*Revised March 2006*



**THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**  
in the United States of America



***Certificate of Profession***

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Full Name

**Has Made Permanent Profession**

And was received into the

**Fraternity of** \_\_\_\_\_

**in** \_\_\_\_\_

City, State

**on**

the \_\_\_ day of the \_\_\_\_\_ month, in the Year of Our Lord \_\_\_.

---

Signature

---

Signature

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

*Minister of Profession*

Name (Print) \_\_\_\_\_

*Friar (or other Clerical) Witness  
(Spiritual Assistant- if a priest is unavailable)*

## *Treasurer*



### **Article 52.4 General Constitutions**

The treasurer, or bursar, has the following duties:

- a. to guard diligently the contributions received, recording each receipt in the appropriate register, with the date on which it was given, the name of the contributor, or the one from whom it was collected;
- b. to record in the same register the items of expense, specifying the date and the purpose, in conformity with the directions of the fraternity council;
- c. To render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and the council of the fraternity according to the norms of the national statutes.

The treasurer also has the following additional responsibilities:

- The treasurer holds voting privileges and is accountable for all decisions made by the fraternity council.
- The treasurer presents an up-to-date financial report at each monthly council meeting showing current expenses, income, and checkbook balance. Appropriate forms for reporting the financial health of the fraternity can be found at: <http://www.nafra-sfo.org/form/index.html>.
- Expenditure of fraternity funds needs to be approved by the council in advance, the money belongs to the entire fraternity, not only to the council minister, treasurer, formation director, etc.
- To provide for the payment of monies as the business of the fraternity may require in the annual budget or by order of the fraternity council. All payments are to be made by check and recorded in an accurate ledger.
- To ensure the deposit of all funds into such bank accounts in the name of the fraternity as the fraternity council shall designate, to keep an accurate ledger.
- To provide the fraternity council a year-end report showing receipts, expenditures, and balances in the treasury for the year.
- Upon request, provide individual members with a statement of annual contributions for tax purposes.
- Upon the written request of any member of the fraternity to the treasurer, these financial records shall be open for inspection.
- To maintain a yearly calendar showing monthly payouts and future activity events for which the fraternity will need to provide funding. This calendar will help the newly elected treasurer after council elections have taken place.

- The Fair Share assessment from the fraternity Common Fund is sent to the regional treasurer annually.
- Submit the current report of candidates and professed to the regional treasurer, at the end of the year.
- It is customary to provide a stipend for the pastoral visitor and, if approved by the council, a stipend may be given to the regional visitor.
- Update and maintain the treasurer's binder.
- Upon leaving the position, pass the binder to the new treasurer.

## St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Fraternity OFS Financial Assistance Fund Request Form For Regional Events

The Regional Executive Council created a Financial Assistance Fund to aid active professed members to attend any Regional planned events (e.g., Day of Reflection, Annual Chapter Retreat, Chapter of Mats, Formation Directors Weekend, Chapter of Ministers, and other regional events). Financial Assistance Fund will cover part or all of the registration fee and will not cover travel/transportation.

Steps are as follow:

- Local fraternity's active professed member requesting assistance will first discuss with their minister.
- Local fraternity's minister will fill out this form, sign and forward it to the regional minister.
- The regional minister and/or Regional Executive Council will review.
- If approved, the regional minister will inform both the regional treasurer and local minister.
- If disapproved, the regional minister will inform the local minister.

Name of Professed Member: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Local Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_

Year first professed: \_\_\_\_\_

Active Professed:     Yes     No

Name of regional event for which Financial Assistance Fund requested:

\_\_\_\_\_

What circumstances caused this professed member to ask for financial assistance (brief statement only)

Amount of Financial Assistance Fund requesting (Note: the amount should not exceed the cost of registration.)

\_\_\_\_\_

Total Cost \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Contribution Amount: Participant \$ \_\_\_\_\_      Local Fraternity \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Amount requested from the Region \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Local Fraternity's Minister / Signature / Date

Below for Regional Minister use only

Approved     Disapproved      Amount if approved: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Regional Minister's Name/Signature/Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Councilors



- A fraternity may elect or appoint councilors to strengthen the relationship among members of a fraternity and to assist the council, when deemed necessary due to language barriers, distance, size of a fraternity, or other needs, both administrative and pastoral in nature.
  - If elected, a councilor holds voting privileges and is accountable for all decisions made by the fraternity council.
  - If appointed to a councilor position, the individual does not have voting rights on the council. (see [National Statutes, Article 15.2](#))
  - The councilor collaborates with the council in determining areas of need within the fraternity, and follows through on jobs assigned.
- Accurate and organized records should be maintained of all communication in regard to assigned duties.
  - Notations or a short summary of important conversations or actions should be kept in a file for future reference.
  - A councilor's binder should be maintained.
  - No councilor should stay on the council in the same position for more than nine years; this causes the fraternity to stagnate. (The attitude becomes: "if it works, why change it"?) It also causes everyone to rely on that one person, which destroys the true meaning of "fraternity."
  - If it is the decision of the voting fraternity members to elect or appoint new councilor(s) position(s), pass the binder to the new councilor(s).
  - If it is not the desire of the voting members to elect or appoint a professed member to a councilor position, the outgoing councilor will hand over his or her binder to the newly elected minister.

## Familiarize yourself with the following:

### Changes in Elected Offices

#### Article 31 General Constitutions

1. *Rule 21* “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president).” These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own Statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular council. The council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out the elections.
2. The office of minister or councilor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so each one will realize his or her own vocation and each fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.
3. The leaders of the SFO at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.
4. The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings, both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.

### Vacant Offices

#### Article 81 General Constitutions

1. When the office of minister remains vacant as a result of death, resignation or other impediment of a definitive character, the vice-minister assumes the office until the end of the term for which the minister was originally elected.
2. If the office of vice-minister becomes vacant, one of the councilors is elected to the office of vice-minister by the council of the fraternity, to serve until the next elective chapter.
3. When the office of councilor becomes vacant, the council will proceed to substitute for him or her in conformity with its own statutes, to serve until the next elective chapter.

**Note:** Send information to the **Database Manager** to update the National Database.

### Incompatible Offices

#### Article 82 General Constitutions

The following are incompatible:

- a. the office of minister at two different levels;
- b. the offices of minister, vice minister, secretary, and treasurer at the same level.

**Note:** Send information to the **Database Manager** to update the National Database.

## Resignation from Office

### Article 83 General Constitutions

1. When a minister of whatever level resigns during a chapter, that same chapter can accept the resignation.

When a minister resigns outside the time of chapter, that resignation must be presented to the council. If the resignation is accepted, it must be confirmed by the minister of the higher level; if the general minister is resigning, the confirmation comes from the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

2. The resignation of other offices is presented to the minister and to his or her council, who are competent to accept the resignation.

**Note:** Send information to the **Database Manager** to update the National Database.

## Removal from Office

### Article 84 General Constitutions

1. In the case in which the minister does not fulfil his or her duties, the council concerned manifests its concerns in a fraternal dialogue with the minister. If this does not produce positive results, the council should inform the council of the higher level whose competence it is to examine the case and, if needed, by secret ballot, decide to remove the minister.
2. For a serious, public, and proven reason, the council of a higher level, after a fraternal dialogue with the person concerned, may, by a secret ballot, order the removal of a minister of a lower level.
3. When there is a serious reason to remove those who hold other offices of the council, it is the responsibility of that council to which they belong to make its decision by a secret ballot after there has been a fraternal dialogue with the person involved.
4. A recourse, which by itself suspends the action to remove someone from office, can be presented within thirty days to the council of the level immediately higher than the one which imposed the sanction.
5. The removal of the general minister belongs to the competence of the Conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.
6. When there is a case of serious lack of concern or evidence of irregularities on the part of a minister or a council, the council of the next higher level conducts a fraternal visit of the council in question and, eventually, requests a pastoral visit. With charity and prudence, it will evaluate the circumstances uncovered and decide on the best way to proceed, not excluding the eventual removal of the council or leaders involved.

**Note:** Send information to the **Database Manager** to update the National Database.

## The Fraternity Gathering

A gathering is when the fraternity comes together in the community to pray together; to explore, through ongoing formation, the spirit of Francis and Clare and the Franciscan way of life; and for sharing and support.



**Rule 22** The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

Fraternity gatherings open with prayer in the *Ritual*, page 35, which includes a brief scriptural/Franciscan reading or spiritual reflection, or *Liturgy of the Hours*. The closing prayer at the end of the fraternity gathering can be found on page 36 in the *Ritual*.

### General Elements of a Fraternity Gathering

**Prayer** at a fraternity gathering can take a variety of forms; the precise form is not important. What is important is that the fraternity spends time in community prayer. The most common form is the Divine Office: The Liturgy of the Hours.

**Ongoing Formation** occurs at each fraternity gathering and involves visitors, inquirers, candidates, and professed. (Initial formation takes place at a time separate from the fraternity gathering.) The content of the ongoing formation is open to a variety of topics, but whatever the topic, it should be related to the Franciscan charism. Ongoing formation is an opportunity, through dialogue, for the brothers and sisters to explore and further enrich their Franciscan way of life.

**Business** should be a very small part of the fraternity gathering; usually, it would entail the council reporting back to the fraternity at large. The only need for minutes would be to record a decision made by the entire fraternity, and this would be an addendum to the council minutes. Many business items can be shared with the fraternity through the fraternity newsletter.

**Social Time** is an important part of each fraternity gathering. This is the time when Franciscan brothers and sisters informally and joyfully are present to each other. This time is key to the formation of a community of love. Often it is the time when true sharing occurs. As a community, the Franciscan Spirit grows.

Based on “Nuts and Bolts of a Council” by Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order  
(Used by permission)



## Fair Share

### Candidates, Professed and Excused Members

Each year the fraternity treasurer makes the fraternity's "Fair Share" payment to the regional council. The amount for each candidate and professed member varies in the different regions in the United States. The Fair Share is paid from the monthly Common Fund received at each gathering. If a candidate or professed member is unable to attend the gathering for more than a month, that person is asked to mail his/her Common Fund contribution to the fraternity treasurer.

### Article 30 General Constitutions

3. [Rule 25](#) In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.

### Article 18 NAFRA Statutes

7. The Local Fraternity is responsible for contributing to the Regional Fraternity on a fair share basis from its common fund to underwrite the costs of that fraternity [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 30.3](#) brothers and sisters, but not for those who are deemed lapsed.
  - a. An active fraternity member is one who participates both by attending fraternity meetings and by providing financial support to the community, or whom the fraternity has excused from such obligations.

## **Renewal of Commitment**

### **Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order**

The annual renewal of commitment can be found in the *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order* on pages 28-29, or use the simple renewal commitment format below:

“Let us bless our Lord and God, living and true; to him we must attribute all praise, glory, honor, blessing, and every good forever.”

We thank you, Lord, for calling us to the Secular Franciscan Order. We ask your pardon for all our shortcomings, weaknesses, and transgressions against our commitment to the gospel life and against the Rule.

We pray that you will allow us to experience once again the fervor and readiness of that first day when we entered the fraternity. We renew once again our commitment to the gospel life, according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, until the end of our days.

Grant also that we may live in harmony with our brothers and sisters and may give witness to younger people of the great gift we received from you: our Franciscan calling to “go forth as witnesses and instruments of the Church’s mission among all people proclaiming Christ by our life and words.”

“All praise be yours, O Lord, through all that you have made.” Amen.

### [Indulgences of the Secular Franciscan Order](#)



## IDEAS TO FOSTER A FEELING OF BELONGING

Below are some suggestions for apostolates for active and inactive members to foster a feeling of belonging:

1. ***Birthday Card Ministry*** – Send birthday cards to active and inactive members.
2. ***Anniversary Profession Cards Ministry*** – Mail or hand carry to the gathering an acknowledgment of a member’s anniversary of profession.
3. ***Infirm Ministry*** – A member would assume the responsibility of calling or visiting the sick and making reports to the fraternity.
4. ***Get Well Cards Ministry*** – Mail a Get-Well Card to a sick member.
5. ***Historian Ministry*** – To continue or start historical documentation on the fraternity, start a photo album showing fraternity events.
6. ***Photographer Ministry*** – Would be responsible for taking pictures of various events and putting them in an album with annotations of the names, dates, types of events, etc.
7. ***Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation (JPIC) Ministry*** – inform the fraternity of upcoming events in your diocese that have a JPIC theme, do write-ups for your newsletter or website when the occasion arises.
8. ***Prayer Ministry*** – A prayer request could be placed in the monthly newsletter, or posted on the fraternity website, or read at the monthly gathering. The prayer request could be placed in a “Prayer Request Book” and brought to the monthly gathering.
9. ***Telephone Relay Ministry*** – Call all those who do not have computers, email, etc., with important information when necessary.
10. ***Newsletter Editor Ministry*** – The person would be responsible for creating a monthly newsletter.
11. ***Hospitality Ministry*** – Would be responsible for helping visitors feel at home and explain what the Secular Franciscan Order is all about.
12. ***Cantor/Music Ministry*** – Would be responsible for the music portion of the service.

Based on (From “Nuts and Bolts of a Council” by Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order (Used by permission)



## IDEAS for OUTREACH

1. Place an ad in the Church Bulletin every month informing of upcoming gatherings. Change the icon and first line each month. Examples: Are you looking for a deeper meaning in your life? God wants you!
2. Keep pamphlets of the OFS available at the Church entrance. Change both the pamphlet and the color of the paper annually.
3. Set up a time with the parish pastor to speak about the OFS at all the Masses.
4. Speak about the OFS to various groups: Knights of Columbus, Legion of Mary, etc.
5. Speak to RCIA groups at local parishes once they have been accepted into the church. Give them a fraternity pamphlet and a small book on St. Francis.
6. Have special Masses on August 2 for Portiuncula Indulgence. On October 3 hold a Transitus ceremony and invite guests. Have a November Mass for OFS deceased.
7. Invite parish members to fraternity gatherings and have brochures and handouts available.
8. Wear the TAU cross (as often as possible) and your fraternity's name tag each time you perform a ministry such as lecturing, distributing communion, helping in the food pantry, etc.
9. Hold an annual Christmas party, and invite family and friends.
10. Be a visible sign in your parish, lead the Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, etc. Do not be afraid to tell people you are a member of the Secular Franciscan Order.
11. Occasionally go as a group, outside the fraternity gathering, to attend a Sunday or weekday Mass, then go to lunch together (invite friends or relatives to join you). Wear your Tau.
12. Rotate from house to house, when time permits, have a potluck lunch or dinner, and invite your friends. After eating, as a group, recite the Rosary, Divine Mercy Chaplet, or participate in *Lectio Divina*.
13. Sponsor a retreat or picnic and invite local fraternities in your area.
14. Show a movie with a Franciscan theme and serve popcorn and soda, and invite friends. After the movie, start a discussion and invite friends to join in on the discussion.

Based on "Five Franciscan Martyrs Region" of the Secular Franciscan Order) (Used by permission)

## **ATTENDANCE MUST BE EMPHASIZED**

### ***The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order***

***Rule 22.*** The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

***Rule 23.*** Request for admission to the Secular Franciscan Order must be presented to the local fraternity, whose council decides upon the acceptance of new brothers and sisters.

Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule. The entire community is engaged in this process of growth by its own manner of living. The age for profession and the distinctive Franciscan sign are regulated by the Statutes.

Profession by its nature is a permanent commitment.

Members who find themselves in particular difficulties should discuss their problems with the council in fraternal dialogue.

Withdrawal or permanent dismissal from the Order, if necessary, is an act of the fraternity council according to the norm of the Constitutions.

### **Obligations of a Secular Franciscan**

A member, by his/her profession, promises to strive to meet, as a part of his/her life, a set of obligations outlined in the Rule. The local fraternity council has the authority to excuse a member from certain obligations; namely, those that deal with the local fraternity.

### ***Rule of the OFS, Chapter III – Life in Fraternity***

***Article 24.*** To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.

***Article 25.*** Regarding expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means. Local fraternities should contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils.

## Member Status

**An Active Fraternity Member** participates both by attending fraternity gatherings and by providing financial support to the community (Common Fund/Fair Share Fund), or whom the fraternity has excused from such obligations. (See [National Statutes, Article 18.7.a](#) STATUS: ACTIVE OR EXCUSED)

**Moved:** A member who moves away remains on the fraternity roster unless:

1. They submit transfer papers, or
2. After many attempts to contact the person, the council votes the member as lapsed.

Some members move where there is no fraternity. They may request to be kept on the fraternity roster. Hopefully, they will contribute to the Common Fund/Fair Share and will receive the fraternity newsletters and good wishes.

When a member has moved and does not remain in contact with his/her fraternity and therefore is deemed lapsed by the member's council, the secretary will notify the **Regional Database Manager** of lapsed status as soon as possible. The updated information will be entered into the National Database.

**Transfers:** You will need the name of the fraternity the person is transferring into, the Region, its location, and THE DATE of the approved transfer. (See Transfer Procedures on [page 66](#))

**A Lapsed Fraternity Member** is a brother or sister who neither attends the gatherings, nor supports the community financially, nor has valid reasons due to health, family, work, or distance; and who, after personal invitations to return to fraternity consciously and deliberately reject or ignore the invitation.

**Note:** A lapsed member will not be carried on the fraternity membership roll nor reported as a member to higher fraternity councils. (See [National Statutes, Article 18.7.b](#))

When the council votes on the member as lapsed, the secretary will send the member's name, and home address to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The updated information will be entered into the National Databases.

**Death of a Member:** The secretary will send the member's name, home address, and date of death to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The updated information will be entered into the National Database.

## Excused Member Policy

**Purpose:** To provide a process by which the council can act to change a member's formal status within the Order to active-excused, hereinafter referred to as excused. This process is to be used once the council determines that a member meets the definition of excused.

**Excused Definition:** An excused member is one whom the council has excused from attending fraternity meetings, either on a temporary or permanent basis, for reasons acceptable to the council. Examples of such reasons are health, family, work, or distance. The designation for excused does not exempt the member from following the SFO Rule, which includes providing support to the fraternity.

### Article 18.10 NAFRA Statutes

As fraternity members become unable to attend meetings on a regular basis, the local fraternity council should set up a method by which regular contacts are maintained [cf. [General Constitutions](#), Article [53.3](#)].

### Article 53.3 General Constitutions

3. Insertion into a local fraternity and participation in fraternity life is essential for belonging to the SFO. Appropriate initiatives should be adopted according to the directives of the national statutes, to keep those brothers and sisters united to the fraternity who – for valid reasons of health, family, work, or distance – cannot actively participate in community life.

*The General Constitutions of 2000 have clarified the procedure to be used in cases of absent brothers and sisters:*

### Article 56 General Constitution

1. I Members who find themselves in difficulty may ask, with a formal act, for temporary withdrawal from the fraternity. The council will evaluate the request with love and prudence, after a fraternal dialogue between the minister and the assistant with the person concerned. If the reasons appear to be well founded, after the brother or sister in difficulty has been given time to reconsider, the council agrees to the request.

**NOTE:** The local councils cannot treat all the absent brothers and sisters with the same criteria in due consideration of the fact that various types of hindrances exist:

**The elderly and the sick.** These people must be treated specially and be offered a special service by the fraternity. The elderly have already contributed their share. If they cannot go to the fraternity themselves, the active members must go to them and support them in every possible way, both spiritually and materially. Regarding the financial contribution, they will continue to contribute, if possible, with the maximum comprehension and tolerance on the part of the fraternity council.

**Sporadically hindered members.** Those, who for any reason, are legitimately hindered from participating in the meetings, but not in a permanent manner. They must make a point of justifying their absence and possibly give prior notice. They should still contribute to the common fund.

**Permanently hindered members.** These can be brothers and sisters who cannot attend the fraternity on a permanent basis for reasons connected with their work or studies, family commitments, or change of residence to a location where there is no SFO fraternity. They do not cease to be Secular Franciscans for reasons such as these. They should explain their situation to the council and ask for an exemption from attending meetings. They should try to keep up to date with the life of the fraternity also by making their financial contribution to the Common Fund, which is a way of showing interest and communion with the fraternity. The fraternity, in turn, will find the means and ways to keep in touch with them.

Mt. St. Sepulcher Fraternity, Holy Land Monastery, Washington DC (Used by permission)

**Note:** Notify the **Regional Database Manager** of changes in any of the above categories as soon as possible.

## Criteria for Excused Status

The following criteria should be used by the council to determine whether a member's request for excused status is reasonable and should be granted, although the council may consider other criteria it believes to be fair. They are organized by obligation.

### Fraternity Meeting Attendance

- **Health**: A member's health condition prevents or impairs the member's ability to attend meetings, either temporarily or for a longer period.
- **Family**: A member has responsibilities of care for elderly, young, or those with long-term or serious medical conditions that would prevent the member from attending meetings.
- **Death of immediate family member**: An immediate family member has recently deceased, and the member is unable to bring him/herself to attend a meeting.
- **Work**: A member's required work hours or shift may temporarily or for a longer period prevent the member from attending meetings.
- **Distance**: The member lives too far to travel to a meeting, for reasons of remoteness or immobility.
- **Combination**: There are multiple reasons, none of which individually suffice, but together place an unusual load on member's time or resources.

### Financial Support of Local Fraternity

- **Job loss**: This is not a sufficient reason in itself; it must be coupled with financial hardship.
- **Financial hardship**: Member has low savings, suffered the loss of a major wage earner, has significant debt or some other threat to the financial stability of the member or member's family that may exist.

### Participation in Life of Local Fraternity

- **Serious and disabling medical condition**: A member is unable to communicate, unable to move freely, is generally weak, or is unable to perform two or more normal daily activities without assistance.

St. Sepulcher Fraternity, Holy Land Monastery, Washington D.C  
(Used by permission)

### Additional Guidelines: Mt.

- As part of the formation process as well as during ongoing formation, the need to attend fraternity gatherings as a way of participating in the life of the fraternity needs to be emphasized.
- Following the National Statutes and the General Constitutions, when the need arises, a sister or brother of the fraternity should request to be excused by discussing the reasons with the council. An Excused Form (See example on page 59) stating pertinent reasons for such a request must be submitted to the fraternity council. If the member is ill or cannot meet with the council, the minister or delegate should attempt to meet with the brother or sister and/or send the required Excused Status Form to be completed and returned to the council for approval/disapproval. If the council approves the request, the term would be for a six-month period. If the member needs additional time the council can approve the request for an additional six-month period. If, there-

**Note:** Notify the **Regional Database Manager** to update the National Database to "Excused Status" for members in the above categories as soon as possible.



after the member needs additional time, the council would need to revisit the original request to possibly change member to lapsed status, if need be.

- The fraternity council is the sole and final authority on the validity of a request and the extent to which it may be granted, which may differ from the terms requested by the member.
- If the request is granted, either in its original or modified form, the minister shall inform the member of the request's status. The secretary shall make the proper annotation in the fraternity's records, to include the obligation(s) from which the member is excused and, if excused status is granted for a limited duration, the date of its expiration.
- If the request is not granted, the member remains under the same obligations as existed prior to the request. Council may, in a separate action, determine to change a member's status to lapsed (See *Lapsed Status* on [pages 54-56](#)).
- If the request is not granted, the member may resubmit the request after a reasonable interval has elapsed or upon material changes in circumstances.
- If a member is not able to act on his/her own behalf, the minister, with council consent, may temporarily excuse a member from certain obligations, not to exceed six months, after which the member must formally request to be placed on excused status or resume full participation in the life of the local fraternity. Alternatively, a representative of the member, a non-council member, may make a request on behalf of the member.
- It must be made clear to those excused that they must continue their commitment to the fraternity, and to the Franciscan way of life, to the best of their ability.
- Those sisters and brothers who continue to be absent from the fraternity gatherings and or other activities without becoming excused as above should be asked to meet with the council concerning this problem. After due consideration, the council may declare the person lapsed (See *Lapsed Status* on [page 55](#)).
- If a member cannot be contacted by telephone or e-mail a letter may be sent by postal delivery, (See sample letter on [page 57](#)).
- All communications and actions must be noted in the minutes of the council meetings.
- All communications regarding this matter are confidential and should be kept on file and noted in the council minutes.
- All actions must be in accordance with the General Constitutions, and National Statutes.

From Five Franciscan Martyrs Region – (Used by permission)

# REQUEST FOR EXCUSED STATUS

Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

wish to request that my fraternity consider me an excused member for six months. If my situation warrants an extension, I will renew my request for a vote of approval for another extended period of six months.

I am unable to meet in community with my Franciscan brothers and sisters because:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Signature) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)



**SAMPLE LETTER** – Letter from Council when a member has not requested to be excused.

Name of Fraternity  
Secular Franciscan Order

Date

Minister’s Mailing Address

Recipients Address

Dear (name),

Peace be with you!

We have not seen you at our fraternity meetings in some time and are concerned about you. We want you to know that we care about you and all aspects of your well-being, and that is why we are sending this letter. Fraternal interaction is the means by which we can remain close as members of our Franciscan family\*.

Is there something that is keeping you away from your brothers and sisters? Is there a way your council can help? Please contact us so we can learn how to assist you, for we want you to return to life with our community.

However, there are situations in one’s life that prevent one from attending fraternity meetings for an extended period \*\*. If you believe this to be the case with you, there is a process by which you can request to be excused. Please contact one of the council members for details on the process. Additionally, the region requires that we maintain the status of each member and that we give them a yearly update on our members for record-keeping purposes. This is crucial information when we pay our yearly Fair Share Funds to the Region.

If you are unable to attend our meetings for two or more months, please, as a courtesy, contact your minister or any council member and let them know.

We look forward to hearing from you and, if possible, helping you to reconnect with your brothers and sisters.

Fraternally yours,

Council Members:

name (Minister)	phone	name (Vice Minister)	phone
name (Secretary)	phone	name (Treasurer)	phone
name (Formation Dir.)	phone	name (Spiritual Asst.)	phone

\* [[General Constitutions, Article 53.3](#)] and [[Rule, 24](#)]

\*\* [[National Statutes, Article 18.7a](#)]

## Lapsed Status

### *Purpose*

To provide criteria by which the council can objectively and fairly evaluate if whether a member has insufficient lack of participation in the life of the fraternity to warrant reclassifying the member to lapsed status, as well as a process by which the council can act to change a member's formal status within the Order to lapsed.

### *Definition of Lapsed*

When the council evaluates whether a member meets the definition, it shall apply the approved set of criteria in an objective yet charitable manner.

Mt. St. Sepulcher Fraternity, Holy Land Monastery, Washington DC (Used by permission)

### **Article 18. 7b NAFRA Statutes**

Those brothers and sisters who neither attend meetings, support the community financially, nor have valid reasons due to health, family, work, or distance, and who, after personal invitations to return to fraternity, consciously and deliberately reject or ignore the invitation, will be termed "lapsed" and will not be carried on the fraternity membership roll nor be reported as a member to higher fraternity Councils (cf. [General Constitutions, Article 53.3](#)).

### **Article 53.3 General Constitutions**

Insertion into a local fraternity and participation in fraternity life is essential for belonging to the SFO. Appropriate initiatives should be adopted according to the directives of the national statutes, to keep those brothers and sisters united to the fraternity who — for valid reasons of health, family, work, or distance cannot actively participate in community life.

To determine whether a member is lapsed; a member must meet all the criteria. They are intended to be objective, written, specific, and fair, and to conform to the Statutes and General Constitutions. They were formulated by collaboration of all council members and agreed to by a formal council vote. They should, however, be implemented with charity.

### **The following criteria are to be met:**

1. Member has not attended a meeting in the past three months.
2. Member has missed six or more of the preceding twelve meetings.
3. Member has not given a valid reason for absences, nor made anyone on the council aware of extenuating circumstances.
4. Member has not communicated with anyone on council, or to council's knowledge, with anyone in the fraternity, for the past three months, about the absences; or, having communicated with the council, and member has not accepted invitations to return to life with the fraternity, indicated a willingness to do so, or indicated the absence is for a limited duration.
5. Member has not contributed financially to the support of the fraternity for six or more of the preceding twelve months, without any evidence that the member lacks the means to do so, and has not been excused from doing so.
6. If the member has requested a change to active-excused status, the council has already considered that request and rejected it.

Mt. St. Sepulcher Fraternity, Holy Land Monastery, Washington DC. (Used by permission)

## Process to Change Member to Lapsed Status

- a. Council shall review, on a regular basis, but not less than yearly, each active and excused member's attendance, financial contributions, and other contributions to the life of the local fraternity, using the criteria approved by the council.
- b. For each member who meets the criteria for a lapsed member, the council shall contact the member, and with charity and concern invite the member back to full participation in the life of the local fraternity, unless this has already been done recently.
- c. If the member responds and resumes active participation in the life of the local fraternity, the council shall monitor the member's activity and interaction with the local fraternity for some time, no less than six months, and no more than one year. If during this period the member once more meets the criteria for lapsed status, the council may resume this process from the point at which it was suspended.
- d. If the member responds with a request for a change of status to active-excused, the council shall suspend this process and initiate the appropriate process (See Excused Member Policy on pages 50-51). If the council does not grant the member excused status, the council need not contact the member again; but may resume this process from the point at which it was interrupted.
- e. If a member does not respond by telephone or e-mail, a letter may be sent as a last effort to contact, (See example letter on [page 54](#)).
- f. If the member does not respond within a reasonable time frame after the attempt at contact, the council, by formal vote, may change the member's status to lapse. Although not required at this stage, the council should inform the member of the change in status, encourage the member to feel free to return when the time is right, and let the member know how to reach the council should the member reconsider.
- g. When the council evaluates whether a member meets the definition, it shall apply the approved set of criteria in an objective yet charitable manner.
- h. All communications regarding this matter are confidential and need to be kept on file and noted in the council minutes.

When the council votes the member lapse the secretary will send the member's name and home address to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The information will be updated in the National Database.



## Sample Letter

Name of Fraternity

Secular Franciscan Order

Date

Ministers Home Address

E-Mail Address

Members Home Address

Re: Absence at Fraternity Gatherings

Dear (name),

At its (Month) meeting, the council of the (Name of Fraternity) discussed the fact that you have not been attending our monthly fraternity gatherings. We have tried calling and sending e-mails and still have not heard from you.

It is important that you let us know what is preventing you from attending our gatherings or whether there is anything the fraternity might be able to do for you.

At this time, you may wish to consider requesting a change in your membership status, by taking one of two actions:

1. You may want to request that your status be changed to “Excused” for a period of six months while you discern whether you want to remain a member of the fraternity. After six months, your status will be reviewed by the council, which can either extend your excused status for another six months or accept your resignation from the fraternity.
2. If it is your desire, you can resign your membership in the fraternity at this time by requesting that your membership be categorized as “lapsed.” Please be aware that a lapsed membership does not affect your status as a professed Secular Franciscan. The promises you made on the day of your profession represent a lifelong commitment to the Gospel life. Your lapsed status affects only your membership in our fraternity. Your membership can be reactivated in the future when you are able to participate more fully in the life of the fraternity.

Please let us know how you want to proceed.

Fraternally yours,

## **Suspension/Withdrawal**

### **Article 56.2 General Constitutions**

The repeated and prolonged default in the obligations of the life of the fraternity and other conduct in serious opposition to the Rule have to be discussed by the council in dialogue with the person at fault. Only in the case of obstinacy or relapse may the council decide, with a secret vote, to suspend someone. It communicates its decision in writing to the person concerned

### **Article 57 General Constitutions**

1. In the case of voluntary withdrawal or suspension from the fraternity, the Secular Franciscan may ask to be readmitted by addressing an appropriate written request to the minister. After examining the reasons offered by the person involved, the council evaluates whether the causes which led to the withdrawal or suspension can be considered as overcome. If the conclusion is affirmative, it readmits him or her and the decision is recorded in the proceedings of the fraternity.
2. After examining the reasons offered by the person involved, the council evaluates whether the causes which led to the withdrawal or suspension can be considered as overcome. If the conclusion is affirmative, the person is readmitted, and the decision is recorded in the proceedings of the fraternity.

### **Article 58 General Constitutions**

1. The brother or sister who intends to withdraw definitively from the Order, communicates so in writing to the minister of the fraternity. The minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the person concerned and keep the council informed. If the brother or sister confirms the decision in writing, the council takes notice and communicates it in writing to the person concerned. The definitive withdrawal is recorded in the register of the fraternity and communicated to the council of the higher level.

When the council votes the member suspended/withdrawn, the secretary will send the member's name and home address to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The information will be updated in the National Database.

**Secular Franciscan Order**  
**St. Margaret of Cortona Region**  
**SUSPENSION NOTICE**

571-\_\_\_\_\_

---

Name of Fraternity and Location

NAME OF MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT STATUS:  CANDIDATE  PROFESSED

ADMITTED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

PROFESSED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

In accordance with the General Constitutions of the SFO, Article 56.2, the council of the above-named fraternity hereby suspends said member for the following reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Complete this section of the form or attach appropriate documentation)

Did the council meet with member to discuss the reason(s) for suspension?  YES  NO

If not, explain why: \_\_\_\_\_

If not, were other methods of communication attempted (i.e., letter, telephone), explain: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

If this suspension is for a limited period of time, indicate the duration: \_\_\_\_\_

It is understood and has been communicated to said member that this is a temporary provision, and although no longer a member of this fraternity, they will remain a member of the Secular Franciscan Order until such time that further action is taken regarding membership. They may also be re-admitted to a fraternity by making a written request to the fraternity minister, which is subject to council approval.

**The suspension of this member has been accepted by the fraternity council.**

\_\_\_\_\_

Date Accepted

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Minister

**Written notification sent to suspended member on:** \_\_\_\_\_

Record suspension in fraternity archives and file, the secretary will forward a copy to the Regional Database Manager as soon as possible.

*Revised April 2024*



## *Secular Franciscan Order*

---

(Name of Fraternity)

Member's Address

Date:

Re: Withdrawal Request

Dear,

Please know of my sadness to hear of your decision to leave the Secular Franciscan Order. Our prayers are with you.

Attached, please find a letter of withdrawal form from the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS). Please fill out the requested information, sign and return to me by mail.

Our next council meeting will be \_\_\_\_\_, and I will present your withdrawal letter for approval before the council. Once the withdrawal is approved, I will notify you and close our local, regional, and national records.

Thank you so much for being a part of the (Name of the Fraternity) and please feel free to visit our gatherings in the future.

Please remember to keep the poor and the homeless in your daily prayers.

Fraternally Yours,

Minister, OFS

(Name of Fraternity mailing address, e-mail address, and telephone number)

# Secular Franciscan Order

## St. Margaret of Cortona Region

### TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL REQUEST

(This form is NOT to be used by those members requesting Active-Excused Status)

(See [General Constitutions, Article 53.3](#))

571-

\_\_\_\_\_  
*(Name of Fraternity and Location)*

NAME OF MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT STATUS:     CANDIDATE     PROFESSED

ADMITTED ON: \_\_\_\_\_ PROFESSED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBER'S STATEMENT / REASON FOR TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL:

*(Member may complete this section of the form or attach a signed statement.)*

In accordance with the General Constitutions of the SFO, Article 56.1, I hereby request to temporarily withdraw from fraternity life for the following reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that this is a temporary provision, and although I will no longer be a member of my fraternity, I will remain a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. I may request to be re-admitted to a fraternity by making a written request, which is subject to council approval, to the fraternity minister.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Accepted

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Member

Did the minister and this member discuss the reasons for this request in a fraternal dialogue?

Yes     No

If not, explain why: \_\_\_\_\_

If this temporary withdrawal is for a limited period, indicate duration:

TEMPORARY WITHDRAWAL OF MEMBER ACCEPTED BY THE FRATERNITY COUNCIL

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Accepted

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Minister

*Revised April 2004*

*Secular Franciscan Order*

St. Margaret of Cortona Region

RESIGNATION NOTICE

\_\_\_\_\_ 571-\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Fraternity and Location

NAME OF MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT STATUS:  CANDIDATE  PROFESSED

ADMITTED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

PROFESSED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

MEMBER'S STATEMENT/REASON FOR RESIGNATION:

*(Member may complete this section of the form or attach a signed statement.)*

In accordance with the General Constitutions of the SFO, Article 58.1, I hereby submit my resignation from the Secular Franciscan Order for the following reason(s):

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

I understand that this is a definitive provision, and once accepted by my fraternity council, I am no longer a member of the Secular Franciscan Order.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Member

**This resignation has been accepted by the fraternity council**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date Accepted

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Minister

Written notification sent to person regarding the acceptance of resignation on: \_\_\_\_\_

Record resignation in fraternity archives and file notice, the secretary will forward a copy to the Regional Database Manager as soon as possible.

*Revised April 2004*

## Dismissal

### Article 58 General Constitutions

2. In case of serious causes, provided that they are external, imputable, and juridically proven, the minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the brother or sister concerned and keep the council informed. The brother or sister is given time to reflect and to discern, eventually with the help of an external and competent expert. If the time set aside for reflection passes without any result, the council of the fraternity requests the council of the higher level to dismiss the brother or sister from the Order. The request must be accompanied by all the documentation relative to the case.

The council of the higher level will issue the decree of dismissal after having collegially examined the request with the relative documentation and having verified observance of the directives of the Law and the Constitutions.

3. The brother or sister who publicly rejects the faith, or defects from ecclesiastical communion, or upon whom an excommunication is imposed or declared, by the fact itself ceases to be a member of the Order. This does not mean, however, that the council of the fraternity should not discuss the matter with the person concerned or offer fraternal help. The council of a higher level, upon request of the council of the local fraternity, collects the proofs and officially declares that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order.

4. The decree of dismissal or the declaration that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order, to become effective, must be confirmed by the national council to whom all the documentation will be sent.

When the council votes for the member dismissed, the secretary will send the member's name and home address to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The information will be updated in the National Database.

## ***Secular Franciscan Order***

### **St. Margaret of Cortona Region**

#### **REQUEST FOR DISMISSAL**

\_\_\_\_\_ No. \_\_\_\_\_

(Name and Location of Fraternity)

NAME OF MEMBER \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

PRESENT STATUS:     CANDIDATE     PROFESSED

ADMITTED ON: \_\_\_\_\_ PROFESSED ON: \_\_\_\_\_

In accordance with the [General Constitutions](#), **Article 58.2** and/or **Article 58.3**, the Council of the above-named fraternity hereby requests the dismissal of said member for the following reason(s):

*(Complete this section of the form or attach appropriate documentation)*

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did council meet with member to discuss why this request for dismissal is being submitted to the Regional Office? Yes  No

If not, explain why: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

This request for dismissal is being submitted by the council of the above-named fraternity

\_\_\_\_\_

Date of Request

Signature of Minister

**Note:** To become effective, a decree of dismissal must be confirmed by the National Council. Record suspension in fraternity archives and file notice, the secretary will forward a copy to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The information will be updated in the National Database.

*Revised April 2004*

## Appeal Process

### Article 59 General Constitutions

If anyone is convinced that he or she has been wronged by a measure adopted, that person may appeal within three months to the council above the one that adopted the decision in question and, in successive cases, to further levels all the way up to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO and, in the final instance, to the Holy See.

When the council receives a notice to appeal, the secretary will send the member's name and home address to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The information will be updated in the National Database.



## National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – USA

# TRANSFER FORM

### This Transfer Form consists of four (4) pages:

Page 1 – Basic information and Procedure

Page 2 - Transfer Request Form

Page 3 – Documentation from the Fraternity of Origin

Page 4 – Documentation from the Receiving Fraternity

### Basic Information

General Constitutions, Article 55 states: “If a brother or sister, for any reasonable cause, desires transfer to another fraternity, he or she first informs the council of the fraternity to which he or she belongs and then makes the request, including the reasons for the transfer, to the minister of the fraternity to which he or she wishes to belong. The council makes its decision after having received the necessary information in writing from the fraternity of origin.”

Transfers are most often requested for one of two reasons: (1) the member will be moving to another location and can no longer participate in their fraternity or (2) the local fraternity to which they belong has been deactivated.

### It is important to note:

- Those requesting a transfer for reasons other than the above should first discuss their situation with the Council including the Spiritual Assistant of the fraternity of which they are a member.
- The receiving fraternity is free to accept or to not accept a transfer request.

### Procedure for transfer: (Please read carefully)

1. The professed member or candidate requesting the transfer completes relevant sections of Page 2 of this form, retains a copy for themselves, and sends the **entire 4-page form** to the Minister of the Fraternity from which they are transferring (Fraternity of Origin).
2. The Minister of the Fraternity of Origin completes Page 3, retains a copy for the fraternity records, and sends **all 4 pages** of this form to the Minister of the Fraternity to which the member wishes to transfer (Receiving Fraternity).
3. **Before the transfer is complete, there must be a period of discernment (a minimum of several months from the submission of the transfer papers but not more than a year).** Modification of this timeframe is left to the discretion of the receiving fraternity council. **During this time the transferring member and the Receiving Fraternity get to know each other.** In addition, the Minister of the Receiving Fraternity must consult with the Minister of the Fraternity of Origin to obtain additional details about the transferee not contained in this form.
4. **The Council of the Receiving Fraternity will interview the transferee. A council vote on whether to accept the transfer follows.** The Minister of the Receiving Fraternity then completes Page 4, retains a copy for the fraternity files, and sends a copy to the Minister of the Fraternity of Origin and the Minister(s) of the Region(s) involved.
5. **If questions or difficulties arise during this process the Regional Executive Council(s), and if necessary, the National Executive Council, should be consulted.**

If the Receiving Fraternity accepts the transfer: (1) the member is notified by the receiving fraternity, (2) the transfer is recorded in the registers of both the Fraternity of Origin and the Receiving Fraternity (3) notification is made to the next higher level to record the transfer in the National Database and (4) the Receiving Fraternity then assumes the responsibility of the Fair Share payment for the transferee.

If the Receiving Fraternity does not accept the transfer: The member who requested the transfer may appeal to the Receiving Fraternity Council or request a review by the Regional Executive Council(s) to which the two fraternities belong or if necessary the National Executive Council.

**Page 2 - Transfer Request**

To be completed by the member requesting the transfer

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

I was admitted to the Order (Rite of Admission) on \_\_\_\_\_(Date)

Name of Fraternity \_\_\_\_\_

In (City, State) \_\_\_\_\_

Region \_\_\_\_\_

I made my profession to the OFS on \_\_\_\_\_(Date)

Name of Fraternity \_\_\_\_\_

In (City, State) \_\_\_\_\_

Region \_\_\_\_\_

**I would like to transfer to** \_\_\_\_\_ Fraternity

Located In \_\_\_\_\_(City) \_\_\_\_\_(State)

Region \_\_\_\_\_

Reason for request: (Use additional sheet if necessary) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Member

**Date**



### Page 3 – Documentation from Fraternity of Origin

To be completed by the Minister of the Fraternity of Origin

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Minister)

certify that \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Member)

was received (Rite of Admission) into the Secular Franciscan Order on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

as recorded in the register of \_\_\_\_\_ Fraternity

located in \_\_\_\_\_ (City, State)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Region)

Name of Minister at time of Admission \_\_\_\_\_

Ecclesial Witness at the time of Admission \_\_\_\_\_

I certify that \_\_\_\_\_ (Name of Member)

made their profession in the Secular Franciscan Order on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date)

As recorded in the register of \_\_\_\_\_ Fraternity

located in \_\_\_\_\_ (City, State)

\_\_\_\_\_ (Region)

Name of Minister at time of Profession \_\_\_\_\_

Ecclesial Witness at time of Profession \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Minister of Fraternity of Origin\*

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: (Phone / Email) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Witness (Council Member)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Please Print Name and Title: \_\_\_\_\_

\* Regional Executive Council Representative signs if the Fraternity has been deactivated

***Comments may be included on a separate sheet.***

### Page 4 – Documentation from Receiving Fraternity

To be completed by the Council of the Receiving Fraternity

The Council of \_\_\_\_\_ Fraternity,  
established in \_\_\_\_\_(City) \_\_\_\_\_(State)  
in \_\_\_\_\_(Region)  
has received the request of \_\_\_\_\_(Name of Member)  
on \_\_\_\_\_(date on which the request was received) to transfer into this fraternity.

**The decision of the Council is as follows:**

On \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) the Council voted **to accept** the above-named Secular Franciscan as a member of our local fraternity.

On \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) the Council voted **to not accept** the above-named Secular Franciscan as a member of our local fraternity.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature - Minister of Receiving Fraternity Date

Please Print Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact information: (Phone / Email) \_\_\_\_\_

***A copy of this form is sent to the Minister of the Fraternity of Origin  
and the Ministers of the Regions Involved***

If the Receiving Fraternity accepts the transfer:

- (1) the member is notified by the receiving fraternity,
- (2) the transfer is recorded in the registers of both the Fraternity of Origin and the Receiving Fraternity
- (3) notification is made to the next higher level to record the transfer in the National Database and
- (4) the Receiving Fraternity then assumes the responsibility of the Fair Share payment for the transferee.

If the Receiving Fraternity does not accept the transfer: The member who requested the transfer may appeal to the Receiving Fraternity Council or request a review by the Regional Executive Council(s) to which the two fraternities belong or if necessary the National Executive Council.

**Note:** When the council votes on the acceptance of the new member, the secretary will send the **Regional Database Manager**, as soon as possible, a copy of page 4 of the completed transfer form. The information will be updated in the National Database.

## **Death of a Fraternity Member**

### **Article 52. General Constitutions**

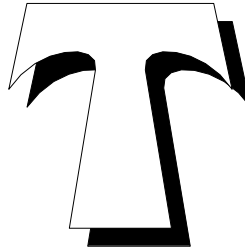
2. The Secretary has the following duties:
  - b. to see to the updating and preservation of the records and the registers, noting admissions, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers from the fraternity;

The secretary will send the date of death, the deceased former home address, and other necessary information to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. This information will be updated in the National Database.

**Secular Franciscan Order**  
**St. Margaret of Cortona Region**

**DEATH NOTICE**

\_\_\_\_\_ #57- \_\_\_\_\_  
Name and Location of Fraternity



NAME OF MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF DEATH: \_\_\_\_\_

The death of a fraternity member is to be recorded in the fraternity register; forward the death notice (if available) and this form to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. The National Database will be updated.

## *Spiritual Assistant*

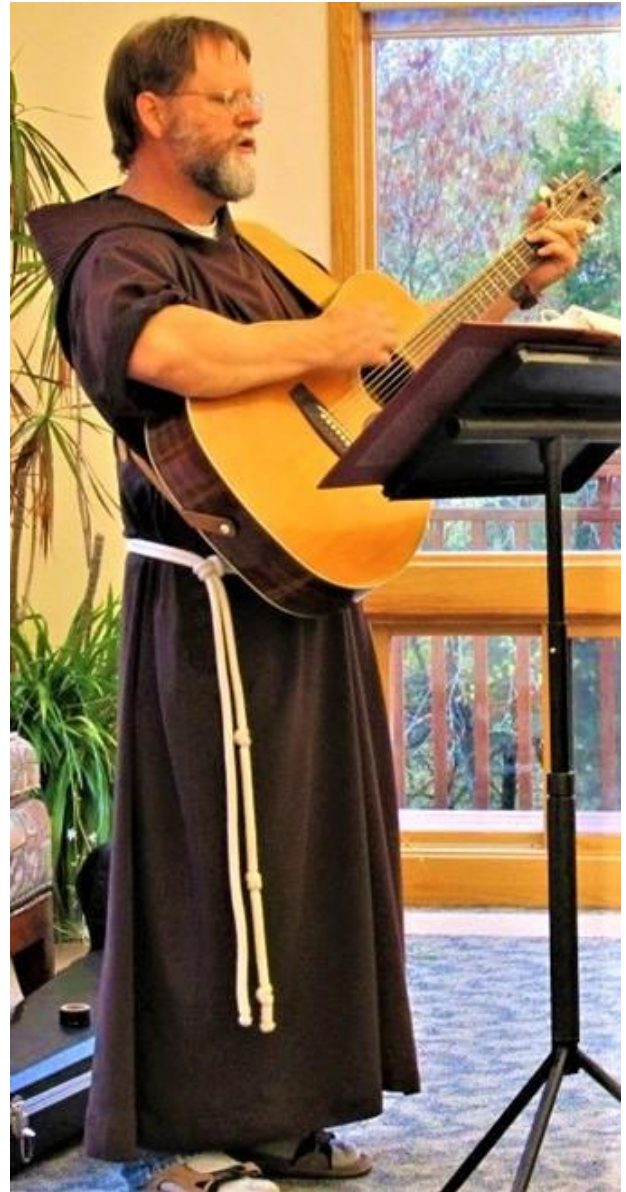
Each fraternity is bonded to a province of either the OFM, OFM Conventual, OFM Capuchin, or Third Order Regular (TOR).

### **Article 90** [General Constitutions](#)

1. The principal task of the assistant is to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters.
2. The spiritual assistant is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. The spiritual assistant does not exercise the right to vote in financial questions.

### **Article 91** [General Constitutions](#)

- 2d. the local council requests the assistant from the major superior of the jurisdiction responsible for the assistance.
3. The competent major superior, having heard the council of the fraternity concerned, appoints the assistant according to the norms of these Constitutions and of the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order.



**GUIDELINES FOR THE FRATERNAL VISITATION  
OF A LOCAL FRATERNITY**  
**Title VI**  
**The Fraternal Visitation**

**Article 92** [General Constitutions](#)

1. **Rule 26** The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical
2. Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
3. With the consent of the appropriate council, the request for the fraternal visit as well as for the pastoral visit is made:
  - a. by the minister of the local and regional fraternity, at least every three years, to the council of the immediately higher level and to the respective conference of spiritual assistants;
  - b. by the national minister, at least every six years, to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO and to the conference of general assistants;
  - c. by the general minister, at least every six years, to the Conference of General Ministers.
4. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respective competent council or conference of spiritual assistants.

**Article 93** [General Constitutions](#)

1. In the visits to the local fraternity and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will verify the evangelical and apostolic vitality, the observance of the Rule and Constitutions, and the insertion of the fraternities into the Order and into the Church.
2. In the visits to the local fraternities and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will in time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the interested council. He or she will examine the registers and the records, including those relative to the preceding visits, to the election of the council, and to the administration of goods.
3. In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. He or she will give special attention to the brothers and sisters in formation and to those brothers and sisters who may request a personal meeting. Where required, he or she will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings eventually encountered.
4. If it is useful for the service of the fraternity, the two visitors, secular and religious, may make the visit at the same time, agreeing beforehand on the program, in a way most consonant with the mission of each of them.
5. The fraternal and pastoral visits, carried out by the immediately higher level, do not deprive the visited fraternity of the right to appeal to the council or to the conference of spiritual assistants of a higher level.

**Article 94** [General Constitutions](#)

1. The fraternal visit is a moment of communion, an expression of the service and concrete interest of the secular leaders at the various levels, so that the fraternity may grow and be faithful to its vocation.
2. Among the various initiatives to achieve the purpose of the visit, the visitor will give special attention:
  - to the validity of the formation, both initial and permanent;
  - to the relations entertained with other fraternities at different levels, with Franciscan youth, and with the entire Franciscan family;
  - to the observance of the directives and of the guidelines of the International Council of the SFO and of the other councils;
  - to the presence in the local Church.
3. The visitor will check the report of the previous audit or verification of the financial and property management of the Council, the register of the accounts and every document pertaining to the property of the fraternity and, if applicable, the condition of the juridical personality in the civil order, including the fiscal aspects. In the absence of the required audit of the financial and property management of the council, the visitor can commission such an audit, to be paid by the visited fraternity, to an expert who is not a member of the council concerned. Wherever he or she deems it opportune, the visitor will obtain the assistance of a competent person in these aspects.
4. The visitor will check the records of the election of the council. He or she will evaluate the quality of the service offered to the fraternity by the minister and by the other leaders and will study with them the solution to problems which may arise. If, for whatever reason, he or she should find that their service does not meet the needs of the fraternity, the visitor will promote appropriate initiatives, taking into account also the provisions concerning resignation and removal from office, given special circumstances.

## **Request for Fraternal Visitation**

**Article 51** [General Constitutions](#)

2. The minister also has the following duties:
  - a. to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years.

**NOTE:** The fraternity minister should contact the regional area councilor to request a fraternal visitation. The pastoral visitation request should be made to the next higher level (Regional Council of Spiritual Assistants) and should be directed to the regional spiritual assistant to which the fraternity is bonded. Do not hesitate to contact your regional area councilor for assistance if needed.

## PREPARATION FOR VISITATION

### FRATERNITY MINISTER'S CHECKLIST

This checklist is for the Minister of the Fraternity to use before the Fraternal Visitation. The minister should keep the original of this form in his/her file for transmission to the newly elected minister when the time comes. Please remember that it is the duty and obligation of each member of the council to transfer all appropriate manuals, records, and documents to the newly elected officers as part of the Chapter of Elections.

If the fraternity keeps electronic files rather than binders, please provide computer access to these files at time of visit.

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#### FRATERNITY COUNCIL:

- Each office filled by properly elected or appointed professed member (See [General Constitutions, Title IV, Articles 76 through 84.](#))
- Spiritual Assistant appointed for the fraternity
- Consistent monthly fraternity council meetings
- Records of council decisions regarding membership (lists of excused or dismissed members; delinquent members, pastoral decisions, related correspondence)

#### FRATERNITY LIFE:

- Consistent time and date for monthly gatherings
- Consistent monthly initial formation meetings
- Program of ongoing formation provided to the fraternity
- Annual retreat provided for the fraternity
- Retreat provided for candidates prior to profession
- Regional programs participated in by fraternity representatives
- Fraternity apostolate accepted by membership
- Annual roster of membership (provided to all members, and kept on record)

#### DOCUMENTS ON FILE:\*

- Document of canonical establishment
- Fraternity membership record book (Register)
- Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order
- Minister's Binder(s), containing copies of:
  - Description of the duties of the office of minister
  - Agendas for council and fraternity meetings
  - Minutes of fraternity and council meetings
  - Annual reports submitted to the region
  - Election procedures, including a description of duties of each office
  - Visitation reports
  - Reports of member status (transfers, withdrawals, etc.)
  - Correspondence
  - Fraternity membership directory

\* Electronic document keeping is permitted. Discs of the "documents on file" should be handed over to the newly-elected minister along with other record-keeping files.



- \_\_\_\_\_ Formation Director's Binder(s), containing copies of:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of the duties of the office of formation director
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Regional Formation Manual
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of Inquirer Formation Program
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of Candidate Formation Program
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of Ongoing Formation Program
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Reports on inquirers and candidates (including attendance and progress)

- \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary's Binder(s), containing copies of:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of the duties of the office of formation director
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of the duties of the office of secretary
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Agendas and minutes of fraternity and council meetings\* (council agendas and minutes should be kept together; fraternity meeting agendas and minutes should be kept together, but in the same binder)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter of Election Reports
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Reports of member status (transfers, withdrawals, etc.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Correspondence
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Copies of current and past fraternity newsletters
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Inventory of what the fraternity owns (equipment, furniture, books, tapes, videos, etc.)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Directory of fraternity membership

- \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer's Binder(s), containing:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Description of the duties of the office of treasurer
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Treasurer's reports (provided by the treasurer to the council and made available to the members of the fraternity)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ A bookkeeping ledger of income and expenses with receipts (reconciliation of the fraternity's account should be done monthly).
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Audit reports (prepared the last year of the treasurer's term by a member of the fraternity who is not serving on the council)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Historian's Binder (containing the history of the fraternity, special events, news clippings, pictures, etc.)

*OTHER RESOURCES:*

- \_\_\_\_\_ Extra copies of the Rule and Constitutions
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handbook for Spiritual Assistance
- \_\_\_\_\_ Guidelines for Initial Formation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Resources for initial formation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Availability of fraternity library

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**\* Minutes of council meetings should be reviewed and approved by the council and marked "Approved as Submitted" or "Approved as Corrected"; they should then be signed and dated by the fraternity secretary.**

## Pre-Visitation Questionnaire Completed by the Fraternity Council

The purpose of this document is to assist fraternities in preparing for the fraternal visitor.

- The completion of this questionnaire is meant to be a collaborative effort accomplished by the entire fraternity council. They may wish to meet together, discuss, and reflect upon the questions and their answers. It is not intended to be filled out by one person.
- A copy of the completed questionnaire is to be returned to the Fraternal Visitor by e-mail or snail mail at least two weeks prior to visitation. The Fraternal Visitor will in turn share its content with the Pastoral Visitor.
- A copy is also to be kept for the records of the local fraternity.

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*Date Canonically Approved:* \_\_\_\_\_

Canonically Bonded Order:    OFM    OFM Cap.    OFM Conv.    TOR

1. Name of the Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location of the Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Members of the Council:

Minister: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice-Minister: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer: \_\_\_\_\_

Formation Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Councilors: \_\_\_\_\_

Councilors: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Assistant: \_\_\_\_\_

The current Council Members were elected on: \_\_\_\_\_

Does each council member know their responsibilities per the General Constitutions? Yes  No

Scheduled Fraternity Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Fraternity Meeting Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Scheduled Council Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Fraternity Statistics:

Active Professed: \_\_\_\_\_ Candidates: \_\_\_\_\_ Inquirers: \_\_\_\_\_

Aspirants: \_\_\_\_\_ Inactive Professed: \_\_\_\_\_ Excused Members: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Introduction and Aspirant Formation:

Do you hold an annual open house or event to encourage interest in the Secular Franciscan Order?

Do you have an application and interview process for newcomers? Council review?

Is there a mutual discernment process between the council and the individual at each stage of formation concerning the person's call to the OFS?

6. Initial Formation (inquirer, candidate):

What resources do you use for your initial formation programs?

---

Are the Rule and the Constitutions integrated in this phase of formation?

YES  NO How often? \_\_\_\_\_

What structure do you use for formation?

---

When do the formation programs meet?

---

What form do the instructions take?

---

7. Ongoing Formation

What structure do you use in ongoing formation?

---

Are the Rule and the Constitutions integrated in this phase of formation?

YES  NO How often? \_\_\_\_\_

What resources do you use for ongoing formation?

---

Who provides ongoing formation for the fraternity?

---

How might the quality of ongoing formation be enhanced?

8. Spirituality (Please address the following areas):  
Common prayer: Liturgy of the Hours or other recommended sources.

---

Personal spiritual commitment of the members:

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The fraternity's embodiment of Franciscan gospel values:

- 
9. Describe the fraternity's involvement in the life and activities of the local parish(es) to which its members belong:

- 
10. The quality of integration of life and work in the fraternity:

- 
11. Does your fraternity have an apostolate? Please list:

- 
12. What do you feel is the quality of spiritual assistance provided to the fraternity?

- 
13. Has the fraternity made any efforts toward increasing vocations to the SFO or within the Church as a whole?

- 
14. Does the fraternity publish a monthly newsletter? Yes  No

Do you share it with other fraternities? Yes  No

Do you have a fraternity website? Yes  No

Provide website address:

15. What efforts or accomplishments is your fraternity particularly proud of?

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16. Does your fraternity have any goals it has set for the coming year?

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17. What are your concerns, needs or problems?

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18. What questions or issues do you feel that the Fraternal Visitor can address?

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19. Quality of fraternity's participation in regional activities:

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20. What are the fraternity's future goals?

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## Fraternity Council Self-Evaluation for Each Council Member

Copies of this questionnaire are sent to the fraternity minister no less than two months prior to the time of visitation. They are in turn distributed to each of the council members.

The questionnaire is meant to be completed by each council member separately. It is not to be a collaborative effort. The purpose is to provide an opportunity for each council member to voice praise, compliments, concerns, or problems.

Additional information on specific questions may be added on the back of the questionnaire or a separate paper.

The completed questionnaire is to be returned at least two weeks before the date of the visitation directly to the fraternal visitor by email or mail. The contents will be shared with the Pastoral Visitor.

**Please send your completed form to** (*Area Councilor's name*) \_\_\_\_\_  
by email: (*area councilor's e-mail*) \_\_\_\_\_  
or postal delivery: (*area councilors home address*) \_\_\_\_\_

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1. Do the council members attend council meetings and fraternity meetings faithfully?  
Yes  No

2. Do the council members fulfill their duties responsibly?  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How would you rate the council in regard to task performance for council meetings and fraternity meetings?  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Does the council give priority to the spiritual well-being and growth of the fraternity?  
 Always  Sometimes  Rarely  Never

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Does the council seek to give creative leadership to the fraternity, or just “manage the shop”?  
 Always    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What goals should the council set for itself in the future?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. How would you rate the leadership of the fraternity’s minister?

Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. Does the minister see that each council member fulfills his or her responsibilities?

Always    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Does your minister share all official correspondence with you?

Yes    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How would you rate the spiritual assistance your fraternity receives?

Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

11. Are the fraternity’s records kept faithfully and adequately?

Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. Is the financial planning for the fraternity done according to Franciscan values?

Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. How would you rate your fraternity meetings?  
 Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

14. What means is the council using to develop a greater sense of community in the fraternity?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Are the fraternity members as a whole able to share in the long and short range planning of the fraternity?

Yes    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

16. Is the Ritual used regularly at meetings, especially at elections, professions and receptions?

Yes    No

17. Does the fraternity use the Liturgy of the Hours regularly at its meetings? Yes    No

18. Please rate the fraternity's functioning in regard to the Commissions. *Excellent rating would be appropriate if the fraternity had at least: appointed one member as a contact person for that area; that person kept up with and reported on what was happening at the Regional and National levels; and the fraternity itself is involved in an active way in that area.*

**Formation**    Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor **JPIC\***

Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

**Youth**    Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

\*Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation

19. What is your fraternity's potential to attract new members?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

20. Does the fraternity understand and celebrate its identity as Franciscan penitents while encouraging growth in ongoing conversion in its brothers and sisters?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21. What would you see as the short- and long-range future of the fraternity?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



22. How would you rate your fraternity's participation at the regional level?

- Excellent    Good    Fair    Poor

23. Does your fraternity participate in other area meetings and cooperate with area projects?

- Yes    No

24. Does your fraternity feel an accountability and responsibility with regard to the Regional and National Fraternities?   Yes    No

Please use this space to comment on any ideas, compliments, concerns, and comments you may have about your fraternity.

Comment: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Request for Pastoral Visitation

### Article 92 General Constitutions

1. **Rule 26** The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
2. With the consent of the appropriate council, the request for the fraternal visit as well as for the pastoral visit is made:
  - a. by the minister of the local and regional fraternity, at least every three years, to the council of the immediately higher level and to the respective conference of spiritual assistants;
3. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respective competent council or conference of spiritual assistants.

### Additional Responsibilities:

It is suggested that when the fraternity minister requests a pastoral visitation and fraternal visitation, they take place at the same time, saving your fraternity an additional visit from the region.

The fraternity minister should contact the regional area councilor to request a fraternal visitation. The pastoral visitation request should be made to the next higher level (Regional Council of Spiritual Assistants) and should be directed to the regional spiritual assistant to which the fraternity is bonded. Do not hesitate to contact your regional area councilor for assistance if needed.

**Note:** Once the Pastoral Visitation is completed, the presider will contact the **Regional Database Manager** of the visitation, no need to send the visitation report, the date is all that is needed.

## Checklist for Pastoral Visitation

Date and Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_

Formation:

Number of Candidates \_\_\_\_\_ Inquirers \_\_\_\_\_ Aspirants \_\_\_\_\_

Check Register of:

- Reception:
- Profession
- Evaluate Community Prayer
- Evaluate Community Life and Living the Charism
- Evaluate the Quality and Content of Formation
- Initial
- Ongoing
- Evaluate participation in region and local church
- Evaluate ministry of local Spiritual Assistant
- Attendance at council meetings
- Availability to fraternity
- Ascertain Involvement in apostolates
- Dialogue about setting one spiritual goal for fraternity
- Give a short spiritual exhortation and assure fraternity of Regional Spiritual Assistant's availability.

Anne Mulqueen, OFS delegated Regional Spiritual Assistant – May 2016

## FRATERNAL VISITATION

1. **The Visit:** The fraternity must allow enough time for the visitors to go over the appropriate material.
2. **During the Visitation:** Before and after the gathering of the fraternity, time should be allowed for the visitors to meet with the council as a group and also with the minister. The regional visitors will be present at the annual gathering to observe and evaluate. Time should be allowed for the visitors to address the fraternity as a whole.
3. **Evaluation:** The visitors will look at the following services and methods:
  - Spirituality: Spiritual growth, prayer, and liturgy
  - How needs are communicated and met
  - Communication with the fraternity
  - Description of formation programs both initial and ongoing including text used
  - Vocation promotion methods
  - Proper recording and accounting for the fraternity's common fund.

The regional visitor will review the following:

- a. Minister's binder
  - b. The fraternity register
  - c. The secretary's minutes for the last three years
  - d. The treasurer's bank statements and ledger
  - e. The formation director's binder of notes and availability of the FUN Manual
- 4 **The Visitation Report:** After the visitation, the fraternity will receive a written report from the visitor. Implementation of recommendations is a sign of true growth and cooperation.

What happens before and after the visits themselves is in many ways as important as the visit.  
The council should review the report and try to carry out the recommendations given.

**Note:** The regional visitor will contact the **Regional Database Manager** of the visitation, no need to send the visitation report, the date is all that is needed.

### Stipend

*According to the Statutes of the National Fraternity of Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America:*

**Article 18.8.** The local fraternity will present to the Regional Minister or his or her delegate and to the Regional Spiritual Assistant or the representative of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants a stipend appropriate to the journey made and the length of stay required at the time of fraternal and pastoral visits, and also on the occasion of their presiding over and witnessing elections.

## **Audit of Treasury Records**

### **Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America**

#### **Article 4.5**

5. In accordance with article #54.3 of the General Constitutions, for the fraternities at each level, a financial audit must be done every 3 years, just prior to the end of the Council's term of office. This audit may be conducted by a professional accountant who is not a member of the fraternity Council, or by a "board of examiners" established by the particular fraternity (consisting of two or more experts selected at large by the membership who are not also members of that fraternity's Council). A written report of such audit must be given to the Council of the higher fraternity.

#### **The General Constitutions:**

#### **Article 54.3**

4. The national statutes must also set up precise criteria for local fraternities that possess or administer property or real estate, so that the respective council before its term of office is finished, has the fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the council or by the fraternity's board of examiners.

#### **The Fraternal Visit**

#### **Article 94.3**

3. The visitor will check the report of the previous audit or verification of the financial and property management of the Council, the register of the accounts and every document pertaining to the property of the fraternity and, if applicable, the condition of the juridical personality in the civil order, including the fiscal aspects. In the absence of the required audit of the financial and property management of the council, the visitor can commission such an audit, to be paid by the visited fraternity, to an expert who is not a member of the council concerned. Wherever he or she deems it opportune, the visitor will obtain the assistance of a competent person in these aspects.

**Note: The Fraternity Audit should be completed at least three months before the fraternal visitation. This will give the fraternity time to correct any deficiencies in the current audit.**

**St. Margaret of Cortona Region**  
**Audit Questionnaire for Fraternity Financial Records**  
**Fraternity Treasurer:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Fraternity Name/Location:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Date of Audit:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please check  
Appropriate box

		YES	NO
1.	<b>ARE RECORDS KEPT ELECTRONIC? Note: If no, skip to #2</b>		
	a. What application/software is used?		
	b. How frequently are backups done?		
	c. Where are backups stored?		
	d. Do you have online access to bank accounts? If so, who else is allowed access?		
	e. Is the bank reconciliation process automated within the application/software?		
2.	<b>ARE RECORDS FOR THREE YEARS PRESENT?</b>		
	a. Treasurer's report (form available on NAFRA website)		
	b. Check register		
	c. Invoice for each bill paid or expense report from members submitting for reimbursement. If so, what is the approval process?		
	d. Bank Statement for each bank account (see Treasurer's report for number of accounts to expect.		
	e. Bank Reconciliations		
	f. Letter from the Federal government assigning the region a Federal Identification Number		
	If records are not present, what reason is given?		
3.	<b>REVIEW THE CHECK BOOK REGISTER:</b>		
	a. Do all payees appear to be related to Local/Regional business?		
	b. Is a monthly reconciled balance noted in the register?		
	c. Are all check numbers accounted for?		
4.	<b>BANK STATEMENTS:</b>		
	Select 2 monthly bank statements for each bank account in each year reviewed. (i.e. for 3 years for 1 account there will be 6 different bank statements reviewed.		
	a. For EACH monthly bank statements selected, has the bank statement been reconciled? If not, explain the reason given.		
	b. For EACH bank statement selected, does the reconciled balance from the bank statement agree to the reconciled balance in the check register. If not, explain the reason given.		
	c. For EACH bank statement selected, trace deposits listed to deposit slip. Do these amounts agree? If not, explain the reason given.		

**St. Margaret of Cortona Region**  
**Audit Questionnaire for Fraternity Financial Records**  
**Fraternity Treasurer: \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Fraternity Name/Location: \_\_\_\_\_**  
**Date of Audit: \_\_\_\_\_**

		YES	NO
	d. For EACH bank statement selected, trace the checks that cleared the bank to the source documents. Is there an invoice, expense report, or some document that explains why the check was written? If not, explain the reason given.		
	e. Is the invoice marked paid with the date and check number		
<b>5.</b>	<b>CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED:</b>		
	a. Do deposits document source of the receipt?		
	b. Is there a register or some document that lists the amount each fraternity has given monthly?		
<b>6.</b>	<b>REPORTS:</b>		
	a. Are annual financial reports made to the Regional Treasurer?		
	b. Are regular financial reports made available to the Council and fraternity members? If so, how?		
	c. Is a budget prepared on an annual basis? If so, how is it reviewed and approved?		
<b>7.</b>	<b>NON-FINANCIAL ASSETS:</b>		
	d. Does the fraternity have any non-financial assets (real estate, bond/stock certificates, etc.)? If so, how and where are records of those assets kept?		
<b>8.</b>	<b>LOCATION OF RECORDS:</b>		
	a. Checkbook, register and blank checks		
	b. Records of contributions and disbursements		
	c. Record of receipts for reimbursements		
	d. Monthly and annual reports		
	e. Account Reconciliations		
	f. Account numbers and passwords		





## Audit Questionnaire for Fraternity Financial Records

Fraternity Name/Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Fraternity Treasurer: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Audit: \_\_\_\_\_

Person Performing Audit: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Fraternity Bank Accounts:

Please list the institution(s), account number(s), account name(s), authorized signature(s) and their position on the Council

Institution Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Account Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Institution Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Account Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Account Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Authorized Signature(s): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How and where are the fraternity's financial records kept?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. If electronic records are kept, how frequently are backups done, and where are they stored? \_\_\_\_\_

4. If electronic records are kept, what software is used (including version)? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Is there a record of each receipt, including the date and name of the contributor? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Is there a record of each expense/disbursement, including date and purpose? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Who counts and deposits Common Fund and other contributions? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Are contributions deposited in a timely manner? \_\_\_\_\_
9. How are checks endorsed? \_\_\_\_\_
10. Who receives/opens fraternity mail? \_\_\_\_\_
11. Are bank accounts reconciled monthly? \_\_\_\_\_
12. Does the fraternity have a petty cash account? \_\_\_\_\_
13. If there is a petty cash account, what are the petty cash procedures? \_\_\_\_\_
- 
14. What are the approval procedures for expenditures?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
15. Are regular financial reports made available to the Council and fraternity members?  
If so, how?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
16. Are annual financial reports made to the Regional Council? \_\_\_\_\_
17. Are treasurer's records kept for at least six years? \_\_\_\_\_
18. Does the fraternity have treasurer's procedures specific to the accounts and responsibilities and needs of the fraternity? \_\_\_\_\_
19. Does the fraternity have any non-financial assets (real estate, bond/stock certificates, etc.)? \_\_\_\_\_. If so, how and where are records of those assets kept?  
\_\_\_\_\_
20. Location of Records:
- |  |       |
|--|-------|
| Check book, register and blank checks      | _____ |
| Records of contributions and disbursements | _____ |
| Record of receipts for reimbursements      | _____ |
| Monthly and annual reports                 | _____ |
| Account reconciliations                    | _____ |
| Account numbers and passwords              | _____ |
21. If members are reimbursed for expenses, what is the procedure? Are adequate receipts and approvals maintained?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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22. Is online access available to bank accounts? \_\_\_\_\_. If so, who is allowed access?

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23. Is a budget prepared on an annual basis? \_\_\_\_\_. If so, how is it reviewed and approved? \_\_\_\_\_

24. Is at least one other Council member (besides the treasurer) aware of the location of all records, and have access to bank accounts? \_\_\_\_\_

25. Is there any evidence in the account statements of overdrafts? \_\_\_\_\_

26. Is there any evidence in the account reconciliations or check register of unexplained adjustments or errors in bookkeeping? \_\_\_\_\_

Auditor's Recommendations:

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Other Comments:

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Auditor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Supporting Documentation**

### **Article 52.4 of the General Constitutions**

The treasurer, or bursar, has the following duties:

- a. to guard diligently the contributions received, recording each receipt in the appropriate register, with the date on which it was given, the name of the contributor, or the one from whom it was collected;
- b. to record in the same register the items of expense, specifying the date and the purpose, in conformity with the directions of the fraternity council;
- c. to render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and to the council of the fraternity according to the norms of the national statutes.

### **Fraternity Treasurer's Guidelines [Prepared by the National Treasurer]**

1. The treasurer shall keep full and accurate accounts of receipts and disbursements in books belonging to the fraternity and shall deposit all money or other valuable effects in the name and to the credit of the fraternity in such depositories as may be designated by the council.
2. The treasurer shall record each contribution received in the appropriate register, with the date and the name of the contributor. Confidential annual statements prepared from the member's record, signed by the treasurer, should be sent to the individual members who request it, summarizing his/her contributions to the fraternity.
3. The treasurer shall disburse the funds of the fraternity as may be ordered by the council, taking proper vouchers for such disbursements in a timely manner. Every established and emerging fraternity must have its own bank account(s) which should be in the name of "Secular Franciscan Order, ... ", followed by appropriate fraternity, region, etc., name, and use the appropriate federal identification number. (Note: The term "bank" used in this document means any appropriate financial institution including a credit union.)
4. All bank accounts must have signature authority for the minister and the treasurer, i.e., either one can sign checks and make withdrawals. This is necessary to insure the payment of bills in case of a temporary vacancy in the office of treasurer or the temporary inability of the treasurer to discharge his or her duties. Ideally, cash receipts such as common fund donations received at local fraternity meetings, should be counted by two persons. A note of the amount received should be given to the minister.
5. Ideally, all mail should be opened by the secretary or minister.
6. The treasurer shall perform a monthly reconciliation of book-to-net bank balances. If a discrepancy is noted during the reconciliation process, the treasurer shall promptly determine the source of the error and make appropriate correction to the records.
7. All moneys shall be deposited intact as soon as possible after receipt. All checks should be endorsed with "For Deposit Only" and the name of the fraternity. The practice of accepting checks made out to the name of the treasurer should be avoided. Under no circumstances shall payments be made from undeposited cash receipts. If cash is

needed for immediate expenditure, it should be taken from a petty cash fund authorized by the council, and the payment noted on a suitable petty cash voucher (inexpensive pads of these vouchers are available from any office supply store).

8. All expenditures (other than from petty cash) must be made by check drawn on the fraternity's bank account. Expenditures of a routine nature are pre-approved by the council in the form of an annual budget. Extraordinary expenses (up to a maximum of 5% of the annual budget total) must be approved by the council before payment, or on the alternative, by the minister (up to 1% of the annual budget), and reported to the council.
9. The treasurer must make annual or more frequent financial reports to the membership and council that show details of all income, expenses, cash balances, investments, and any money held in trust, and to the next higher council as part of the fraternity's annual report. [[General Constitutions, Article 51\(4\)](#) states: "*The treasurer, or bursar, has the following duties: ... (c) To render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and to the council of the fraternity according to the norms of the national statutes..*"] A local fraternity treasurer should publish the annual report in the fraternity bulletin or newsletter. In addition, that same report must be given to the regional council. The regional treasurer's report should be disseminated to the membership through the fraternity ministers or the newsletter. The regional financial report should also be delivered to NAFRA as part of the region's annual report. In addition, the treasurer should provide a written financial report periodically to the council; in regional fraternities to the executive council.
10. Treasurer's records should routinely be kept for 6 years.

## **ELECTIONS IN THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS AND NATIONAL STATUTES**

### **Article 31 [General Constitutions](#)**

1. [Rule 21](#) “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president).” These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own Statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular council. The council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity; to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out the elections.
2. The office of minister or councilor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so that each one will realize his or her own vocation and each fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.
3. The leaders of the SFO at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.
4. The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings, both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.

### **[The Fraternity Council](#)**

### **Article 49 [General Constitutions](#)**

2. The fraternity, meeting in an assembly or chapter, discusses questions regarding its own life and organization. Every three years, in an elective assembly or chapter, the fraternity elects the minister and the council in the way established by the Constitutions and Statutes.

## **Title IV: ELECTION TO AND TERMINATION OF OFFICES**

### **Article 76 General Constitutions**

1. The elections at the various levels will take place according to the norms of the law of the Church [[See Can. 164 ff.](#)] and of the Constitutions.  
The convocation should be carried out at least one month in advance, indicating the place, the day, and the time of the election.
2. The elective assembly, or chapter, will be presided over by the minister of the immediately higher level, or by his or her delegate, who confirms the election.  
The president or the delegate cannot preside over the elections in his or her local fraternity, nor the elections of the council of a higher level, of whose council he or she is a member.

The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the TOR.

3. The president of the chapter and the assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.
4. The president of the chapter designates, among the members of that chapter, a secretary and two tellers.

**Article 77** [General Constitutions](#)

1. In the local fraternity the perpetually professed of the same fraternity have an active voice, that is can elect, and passive voice, that is can be elected. The temporarily professed have only active voice.
2. At the other levels, the following have active voice: the secular members of the outgoing council, the representatives of the immediately lower level, and of the Franciscan Youth, if professed. It belongs to the particular statutes to establish more concrete norms in application of the preceding norm, taking care to assure the broadest elective base. The perpetually professed secular Franciscans of the corresponding area have passive voice.
3. Both the national and the international statutes – each for its own area – can establish objective qualifications regarding who can be elected to the various offices.

[Ed. Note: See [General Constitutions Article 31.3](#); [National Statutes Article 11.2](#)]

4. The presence of more than half of the number of those having the right to vote is required for the valid celebration of an elective chapter. For the local level, the national Statutes can establish a different norm. [Ed. Note: for the local level, See [National Statutes Article 18.6](#): “No official business may be transacted at a Local Fraternity meeting unless a quorum is present. The quorum consists of a majority of active members who are not excused from attendance.”]

**Article 78** [General Constitutions](#)

1. An absolute majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is required for the elections of the minister. After two inconclusive ballots, the voting continues between the two candidates who have obtained the largest number of votes or, in case there are more than two, between the two candidates who are oldest by profession. If there is still a tie after the third ballot, the older by profession will be considered elected.
2. The election of the vice minister proceeds in the same manner.
3. For the election of the councilors, after a first ballot without an absolute majority, a relative majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is sufficient, unless the particular statutes require a greater majority.
4. The secretary announces the result of the elections; the president confirms the election according to the Ritual [part II, chapter. II] if all has been carried out properly and those elected have accepted their office.

**Article 79** [General Constitutions](#)

1. The minister and vice-minister may be elected for two consecutive terms of three years each. For a third and final successive election to the office of minister or vice-minister, a majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary. [See [National Statutes 13.2](#)]

2. The out-going minister cannot be elected vice-minister.
3. The councilors may be elected for additional successive terms of three years. Beginning with the third successive election, a majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.
4. The general minister, vice-minister, and presidency councilors can only be elected for two consecutive terms of six years.
5. The council of the higher level has the right and duty to invalidate the elections and to call them anew in all cases of observance of the preceding norms.

**Article 80** [\*General Constitutions\*](#)

The particular statutes may include further directives concerning elections, as long as they are not contrary to the Constitutions.

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**Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the USA**

**Article 3.5.** The National Fraternity Council meets in an elective chapter every three years; the National Minister convokes this meeting at least two months in advance, indicating the place the day, and the time of the election.

[\*National Statutes\*](#) **Section II**

[Ed. Note: this applies also to regions, **See Article 23.4**, and to local fraternities, **See Article 28**.]

**STATUTES FOR SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE TO THE SFO Rome, 2002**

**Article 12.3.** The spiritual assistant is by right a voting member of the council and of the chapter of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. Only in economic matters and in elections at any level does he or she not enjoy the right to vote.



**Secular Franciscan Order**  
**St. Margaret of Cortona Region**  
**REQUEST FOR FRATERNITY ELECTIONS**

\_\_\_\_\_571-\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Fraternity and Location

The above-named fraternity requests a Chapter of Elections

to be held at: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Gathering Place)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Street Address)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(City and State)

Our gathering is on the (\_\_\_\_\_) of the month.

We hereby request that the Region provide a Presider to conduct the elections, and a Friar Witness. The fraternity council has appointed a nominating committee. To confirm the above date, and for further information, please contact:

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Send this form to your Regional Executive Councilor for action.**

*Revised April 2004*

**Place in Fraternity Newsletter or Distribute to Members Two Months Before Elections**

**The Offices in the Fraternity**

**Article 51**

1. While firmly upholding the co-responsibility of the council to animate and guide the fraternity, **the minister**, as the primary person responsible for the fraternity, is expected to make sure that the directions and the decisions of the council are put into practice and will keep the council informed about what he or she is doing.
2. **The minister** also has the following duties:
  - a. to call, to preside at, and to direct the meetings of the fraternity and council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the fraternity, having heard the council on the formalities of the convocation;
  - b. to prepare the annual report to be sent to the council of the higher level after it has been approved by the council of the fraternity;
  - c. to represent the fraternity in all its relations with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the fraternity acquires a juridical personality in the civil order, the minister becomes, when possible, its legal representative;
  - d. to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years.
  - e. to put into effect those acts which the Constitutions refer to his or her competence.

**Article 52**

1. **The vice-minister** has the following duties:
  - a. to collaborate in a fraternal spirit and to support the minister in carrying out his or her specific duties;
  - b. to exercise the functions entrusted by the council and/or by the assembly or chapter;
  - c. to take the place of the minister in both duties and responsibilities in case of absence or temporary impediment;
  - d. to assume the functions of the minister when the office remains vacant;
2. **The secretary** has the following duties:
  - a. to compile the official acts of the fraternity and the council and to ensure that they are sent to their respective proper recipients;
  - b. to see to the updating and preservation of the records and the registers, noting admissions, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers from the fraternity;
  - c. to provide for the communication of the more important facts to the various levels and, if appropriate, to provide for their dissemination through the mass media.
3. **The master of formation** has the following duties:
  - a. to co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of the council, the formative activities of the fraternity;
  - b. to instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initiation formation, and the newly professed;
  - c. to inform the council of the fraternity prior to profession, concerning the suitability of the candidate for a commitment to live according to the Rule.

4. **The treasurer**, or bursar, has the following duties:
  - a. to guard diligently the contributions received, recording each receipt in the appropriate register, with the date on which it was given, the name of the contributor, or the one from whom it was collected;
  - b. to record in the same register the items of expense, specifying the date and the purpose, in conformity with the directions of the fraternity council;
  - c. to render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and to the council of the fraternity according to the norms of the national statutes.
5. The provisions regarding the rights and duties of the vice-minister, the secretary, and the treasurer apply, with the appropriate adaptations, to all levels.

## Election Requirements

The following requirements should answer questions the fraternity may have about the elections and should be discussed at a meeting prior to elections.

1. The elections will take the place of the gathering; the last duty of the outgoing minister will be to introduce the regional presider and the regional witness to the fraternity members.
2. Only **active professed/excused** sisters and brothers are eligible to vote, **excused members can not hold office and are not part of the quorum.**
3. Temporarily professed members can vote, but may not hold a council office.
4. Inquirers and candidates may not vote in council elections.
5. Half plus ONE of “active professed” (per the fraternity roster) must be in attendance to establish a quorum.
6. All must be present at the election to vote; absentee ballots are not permitted.
7. Temporary and permanently professed members must be on time: arriving once the elections begin makes one ineligible to vote.
8. All nominees must be present, unless there is some circumstance that legitimately prevents a candidate from attending, e.g., illness.
9. No one can be nominated from the floor if they are not present.
10. Once the presider closes the nominations, the voting must take place.
11. The minister can serve no more than three terms. The other councilors can serve more than three terms. (See [General Constitutions Article 79](#)).
12. The outgoing minister cannot be elected to the vice minister position during the current election period.

## Stipend

*According to the Statutes of the National Fraternity of Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America:*

**Article 18.8.** The local fraternity will present to the Regional Minister or his or her delegate and to the Regional Spiritual Assistant or the representative of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants a stipend appropriate to the journey made and the length of stay required at the time of fraternal and pastoral visits, and also on the occasion of their presiding over and witnessing elections.

## **FRATERNITY ELECTION PROCEDURES BEFORE ELECTIONS**

### **Nominations Committee**

It is the duty of the Nominations Committee to ensure that each nominee meets the qualifications for the office, has reviewed the duties of that office, and is willing to serve if elected. The presider also has the duty to review all the nominations, including those from the floor, to make sure that they conform to the requirements enunciated by NAFRA. Those nominated from the floor must be present in order to accept the nomination.

The fraternity should make sure the environment is suitable for the election procedure.

Requirements include:

- Copy of the Regional Guidelines for the presider to review.
- Copies of the Ritual for the presider and the secretary of the election.
- A long table with four chairs facing the assembly.
- A chalkboard, dry-erase board, flipchart, or similar item, in view of everyone, on which to write the names of each candidate and to tally votes.
- A supply of blank paper and slips of blank paper for ballots.
- Two baskets or other containers in which to collect the ballots.
- A “roll call list,” prepared by the outgoing council or the nominations committee.
- The members of the newly elected council will need copies of the Ritual and the Creed for use during the concluding prayers. (See [2020 Ritual](#), page 25)

Jan Parker, OFS, (NAFRA Secretary, 2009 – 2015) compiled this particular “step by step” document in 2013. It is based on the procedures finalized by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, on August 2, 1994, and conforms to the National Statutes, as revised and approved in 2013.

## Fraternity Chapter of Elections - Nominations Slate

Name of Fraternity: \_\_\_\_\_ Regional No. \_\_\_\_\_

### Nominations for Minister

_____	_____
_____	_____

### Nominations for Vice Minister

_____	_____
_____	_____

### Nominations for Secretary

_____	_____
_____	_____

### Nominations for Treasurer

_____	_____
_____	_____

### Nominations for Director of Formation

_____	_____
_____	_____

### Nominations for Other (i.e., Councilor)

_____	_____
_____	_____

Nomination Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Duties of the Election Tellers and Election Secretary

### The Duties of the Two Tellers:

1. Election tellers and secretary should be non-voting members of the fraternity.
2. One teller at the table *counts out loud* the number of ballots needed (one for each voter). The other teller distributes ballots to voters.
3. One of the tellers collects ballots and facing the assembly, one teller will count out loud so the voters can hear the total number of ballots received.
4. The votes should be tallied out loud, while the secretary, presider, and friar witness confirm and record the tallies.

After all the folded ballots are counted, one of the tellers will open them, one by one, *announcing the name on each ballot out loud*, while the *secretary records the tallies*. The second teller marks tallies on the board in sight of all. *After all ballots are read out loud*, the presider will ask the secretary to confirm his/her tallies to make sure both tally counts match.

### Duties of the Secretary:

1. Has Report of Elections Form (See page [103](#)).
2. Make sure the secretary has a ballot and vote count tally sheet or blank paper on which to write names and keep tallies for each vote (See pages [101](#) and [102](#)).
3. Announces the name of the person elected by using the Franciscan use old ritual book, page **42**

### The Presider

Ask whether the candidate accepts the nomination (cf. use old ritual book, page. **42**). If there is no absolute majority vote for minister on the first ballot, repeat the voting process.

If no one is elected on the second ballot, repeat the voting process, announcing to the electors that the top two candidates of the second ballot are the only nominees for the third ballot. If there is a tie after this balloting, the senior by profession is deemed elected: if both were professed on the same day, the senior by age is elected.

Following the same procedure, the balloting proceeds to the election of the vice-minister, secretary, treasurer, councilors, and formation director.

[See [National Statutes Article 14.4](#) and [General Constitutions, Article 78.1](#)].

4. The presider is responsible for making sure all documents are signed by the tellers, secretary, presider, and witness for the elections.
5. After all elections have taken place, the presider is responsible for the newly elected council members to fill out the information required on the “Report of Elections” Form.
6. If possible, the secretary or other attendee at the elections is to take a **picture** of the new council from, left to right, with the new minister, vice minister, secretary, treasurer, formation director, and newly elected councilor(s) at large in this order. Send the picture to the regional newsletter editor for publication. The presider over the elections will send the **Regional Database Manager** a copy of the “**Report of Elections**” as soon as possible, to update the database.

# NATIONAL FRATERNITY of the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

## Ballot and Vote Count Form

Fraternity \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Election \_\_\_\_\_

Eligible Voters \_\_\_\_\_ Quorum \_\_\_\_\_  
[more than half the eligible voters must be present]

Number of votes needed for: Absolute \_\_\_\_\_ Relative \_\_\_\_\_ Two Thirds \_\_\_\_\_  
[more than half] [highest number]

OFFICE	BALLOT #1	BALLOT #2	BALLOT #3
<b>MINISTER</b>	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
<b>VICE MINISTER</b>	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
<b>SECRETARY</b>	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
<b>TREASURER</b>	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

[Administrative Info: *Active voice* = the right to vote - **permanent and temporary professed**; *Passive voice* = the right to be elected to office - **permanently professed only**; After two consecutive terms, the third term **MUST** be by 2/3 on the first ballot; Nominations from the floor must be called for three times; all elections must be carried out according to the *SFO General Constitutions* and *National Statutes*.]



**NATIONAL FRATERNITY of the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA**

**Ballot and Vote Count Form**

<b>OFFICE</b>	<b>BALLOT #1</b>	<b>BALLOT #2</b>	<b>BALLOT #3</b>
<b>FORMATION DIRECTOR</b>			
<b>COUNCILOR</b>			
<b>COUNCILOR</b>			
<b>COUNCILOR</b>			

_____ <b>Presider</b>	_____ <b>Friar Witness</b>
Print Name _____	Print Name _____

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Secretary of Elections**  
Print Name \_\_\_\_\_

_____ <b>Teller</b>	_____ <b>Teller</b>
Print Name _____	Print Name _____

*Secular Franciscan Order*  
*National Fraternity--USA*  
**REPORT OF ELECTION**

Region (Fraternity) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_\_

Place of Election: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary of Elections: \_\_\_\_\_

Tellers: (1) \_\_\_\_\_ (2) \_\_\_\_\_

Presider – Fraternal Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Spiritual Assistant Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

# Voting: \_\_\_\_\_

**RESULTS OF ELECTION**

Minister: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ----- E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Vice Minister: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ----- E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ----- E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Treasurer: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ----- E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Formation Director: \_\_\_\_\_ Elected \_\_\_\_\_ Appointed \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: ----- E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Attested to (Please sign): Secretary of Election: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Spiritual Assistant Witness: Presider

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teller (1)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Teller (2)

**Page 2 (if needed)**

Councilor (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Elected \_\_\_ Appointed \_\_\_ Address  
Phone----- E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Councilor (2) \_\_\_\_\_ Elected \_\_\_ Appointed \_\_\_ Address:  
Phone----- E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

Councilor (3) \_\_\_\_\_ Elected \_\_\_ Appointed \_\_\_ Address:  
Phone----- E-MAIL \_\_\_\_\_

**Note:** The results of the “**Report of Elections**” is to be sent to the **Database Manager** to update the National Database.

*Revised December 6, 2012*

## **The Apostles Creed**

*(To be prayed by the newly elected minister after the Chapter of Elections.)*

I believe in God, the Father Almighty,  
Creator of heaven and earth;

and in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord:  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the Virgin Mary;  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died and was buried.

He descended into hell;  
on the third day He rose again from the dead;  
He ascended into heaven,  
And is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty;  
from thence He shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body,  
and life everlasting. Amen.

## After the Elections

1. The installation of the newly elected council takes place immediately unless it is postponed until a later date.
2. The installation begins when the newly elected minister makes the Profession of Faith by reciting the Creed in the name of the whole newly elected council. (Some fraternities have the tradition that all the members of the new council recite the Creed together.)
3. The whole council together commits itself to its ministry of service according to the *Ritual*, page 42.
4. The one presiding confirms the installation according to the *Ritual*, page 43, beginning with the words, “May the God of hope...,”
5. **The Friar Witness** begins the common prayer according to the *Ritual*, page 43, beginning with the words, “Let us pray...”
6. After the common prayer, all come forward to greet and congratulate the newly elected council.
7. The ceremony may conclude with the blessing by the Friar Witness.

*At NAFRA's request, these procedures were finalized by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, August 2, 1994. Modified to conform with the revised National Statutes approved 7/4/2003. Rev. Date 1/3/2005.*

**Note: The Presider of the elections will forward to the Regional Minister, \*Regional Database Manager, and the Friar Witness the following documents:**

- a. Ballot and Vote Count Form with signatures\*\*
- b. Report of Election Form with signatures and the required information of newly elected council members\*

**\*The Regional Database Manager only needs a copy of the Report of Elections, not the Ballot and Vote Count Form to update the National Database.**

\*\*Scanned documents are acceptable (perhaps, even preferred, because they are easier to print for the hard-copy file).

**If possible, the secretary or other attendee at the elections is to take a picture of the new council from, left to right, with the new minister, vice minister, secretary, treasurer, formation director, and newly elected councilor(s) at large in this order. Send the picture to the regional newsletter editor for publication.**

## **TRANSITION PHASE AFTER ELECTIONS**

### **Responsibility**

The current council has the responsibility to transition all fraternity documentation and records to the newly elected council after the completion of the Chapter of Elections.

### **Activities**

Each departing council member shall transfer all documentation directly to the newly elected member, along with any guidance or instructions about the information. In the case of the treasurer's documentation, the newly elected minister should appoint two members of the fraternity to conduct a review of the books prior to the transfer. This review should include all transactions, bank statements, and receipts since the last approved annual treasurer's report.

### **Support of Past Council Members**

After the elections, the outgoing council members should make themselves available to help the incoming council members become acquainted and up to date on pending matters.

New council members, not previously on the council, will not have a clue as to what their council position entails.

The outgoing council should make themselves available to help the new council, whenever possible, in the transition process.

It is strongly recommended that outgoing council members work, for a period of time, with the newly elected members taking over the position of the outgoing council member. It is also strongly recommended that the outgoing council meet with the newly elected council at the first scheduled council meeting.

## Affiliate Orientation Plan

### **Article 53.5** [General Constitutions](#)

The national statutes can indicate special forms of association with the fraternity for those who, without becoming a member of the OFS, want to participate in its life and activities

### **Article 103. 1** [General Constitutions](#)

Remaining faithful to their own identity, the fraternities will take care to make the most of each occasion for prayer, formation, and active collaboration with other ecclesial groups. They should welcome with pleasure those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to share its experiences and activities.

### **Article 18. 13** [National Statutes](#) Affiliation with a local fraternity

- a. Those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to participate in its life and activities (See GC Article. 53.5 and Article 103.1) according to Franciscan principles and teachings, may be welcomed by the local fraternity, so as to make their communion living and effective. Individuals wishing to become affiliates should make their desire known by a written request to the local fraternity council, which makes a decision regarding the request.
- b. These affiliate brothers and sisters will have no juridical bond with the Secular Franciscan Order and are, therefore persons welcomed to love and be loved “as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ” (OFS Rule Article 13). They may share the experiences and activities of the fraternity, without the right to vote.
- c. In order that the identity of the fraternity not be altered, the number of affiliates may not exceed 40% of the number of active professed members of a fraternity.
- d. Regional councils have the right to establish their own guidelines for the acceptance of affiliates.

### **Process**

- Before proceeding with a request for affiliate status, (read pages 13-25) in “Praying with Francis of Assisi”, the section “Is praying with Francis for you?” and the overview on Francis and Franciscan Spirituality.
  - Before responding to a request for affiliate status, read [General Constitutions Article 53.5](#) and [Article 103.1](#) and [National Statutes Article 18.13](#).
  - An interested individual makes a written request to the local fraternity minister and is interviewed by a member of the local fraternity council.
  - A sponsor (a professed SFO) is assigned and orientation materials are provided.
  - Should a person in affiliate status seek to become a professed member of the SFO, the requirements of the formal formation program supersede all parts of the affiliate orientation plan. Affiliation orientation does not shorten or alter the norms of the Formation Program of the SFO.
- **Note:** that at the beginning of affiliate orientation, the local fraternity minister and assigned sponsor must advise that the affiliate, once approved, has no juridical bond, no right to vote or hold office nor official status within the SFO.

Once approved, the secretary will notify the **Regional Database Manager**, so entry can be made in the National Database.

## Orientation

- The sponsor and affiliate meet monthly to complete 12 sessions from one of the suggested resources:
  1. *Praying with Francis of Assisi*, Joseph Stoutzenberger & John Bohner, St. Mary's Press
  2. *A Retreat with Francis and Clare of Assisi: Following our Pilgrim Hearts*, Murray Bodo, OFM, & Susan Saint Sing, St. Anthony Messenger Press
  3. *Francis and Clare, A Gospel Story*, Helen Julian
  4. *Francis, the Journey and the Dream*, Murray Bodo, St. Anthony Messenger Press
  5. *The Way of St. Francis: The Challenge of Franciscan Spirituality for Everyone*, Murray Bodo, OFM, St. Anthony Messenger Press
- Concurrently with beginning the 12 sessions, the person seeking affiliate status is presented with and asked to read some selections on Franciscan Spirituality.
- With recommendations by the sponsor and local minister, the local council approves the affiliate.
- Once approved, the initial affiliation is made for a period of two years and commences with a simple welcome in the context of a fraternity social gathering, (meeting, pot-luck, picnic, but not a Mass or a Rite), and a simple certificate of affiliation is presented.
- A medal of St. Francis may be presented, but not the Tau or Tau jewelry (which are reserved for the members of the Order).

## Ongoing

- The affiliate must express a desire to remain as an affiliate and make a written request for renewal every two years.
- If the request is approved, a renewal ceremony occurs, similar to the initial welcoming.
- The affiliate continues to grow through prayer, study, and immersion in the life of the local fraternity.

Based on “Nuts and Bolts of a Council” by Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order  
(Used by permission)



## **SUGGESTED LINKS FOR RESOURCES**

Individual fraternities and their websites can be found on the St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Website below:

[\*St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Website\*](#)

[\*National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order\*](#)

[\*FUN Manual\*](#)

[\*Formation Resources\*](#)

[\*Franciscan Saints\*](#)

[\*US Conference of Catholic Bishops\*](#)

[\*Vatican Website\*](#)

[\*YouTube Links - Secular Franciscan Order\*](#)

[\*The Reluctant Saint\*](#)

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

**Anne Mulqueen, OFS** - Delegated Regional Spiritual Assistant

**Bob Longo, OFS** - Creator of the “Council Members Handbook”

**Blessed Junipero Serra Region of the Secular Franciscan Order** – “Nuts and Bolts of a Council”

**Care and Feeding of Councils** - (NAFRA website)

**Chapter of Elections Reference Guide** – Saint Margaret of Cortona Region

**Five Franciscan Martyrs Region of the Secular Franciscan Order**

**For Up to Now (FUN) Manual** – “Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order” 3-23-2011

**General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order**

**Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States. U.S.A**

**Mary Lou Coffman, OFS** - For her great editing skills used in preparing this handbook

**Mt. St. Sepulcher Fraternity**, - Larry Bleau, OFS, Minister - Holy Land Monastery, Washington DC

**NAFRA Form Letters**

**NAFRA Statutes**

**Ron Pihokker, OFS** - Regional Director of Formation, Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity

## COUNCIL DUTIES REVIEW

### **Council Review, Part 1:**

“A healthy council makes for a healthy fraternity”. Most of us recognize that principle. It is admirable to watch the constructive efforts of local councils to fulfill their calling in support of the whole fraternity. Similarly, it is sometimes also observed that the weakness of a council leads to mediocrity or serious malaise in their fraternity – and they wonder why.

Fortunately, it is very encouraging to witness a council which is enthusiastic and convinced of their supportive roles in the fraternity. What a blessing for their fraternity! Each council member has multiple responsibilities for the welfare of their fraternity. But with the triennial election process, the resulting frequent turn-over of members in the leadership necessarily creates the demand for all “new” council members to in turn know what they are expected to take part in. How is this regular formation for councils accomplished? What means are available for the council itself to examine its duties as spelled out and identified in the OFS [General Constitutions](#)? Too often this understanding of duties is left to chance or just presumed – and the fraternity suffers.

To help with such a council formation, the following reflections titled “**COUNCIL DUTIES REVIEW**” are offered. Hopefully, **in the course of the first 6 months of a new council, the whole council itself will schedule and hold a “study day” devoted specifically for review of this material of their responsibility.**

When a person is elected to a position on the council, they take on new duties for the welfare of their fraternity. But what specifically are they really expected to do? What are their new duties?

These are especially found in eight articles in the OFS [General Constitutions](#): **Articles [28-29-30-31](#) and [49-50-51-52](#)**. However, imbedded in the other articles of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) are many additional specific expectations, such as:

preparing for elections - required recruitment procedures - assisting the formation director - keeping and securing their fraternity records and files - determining “active” and “excused” members (and “lapsed”) - requesting [triennial] pastoral visitations - requesting [triennial] fraternal visitations - handling member transfers - choosing formation topics - discerning fraternity apostolic projects - Franciscan youth - cooperation with other levels of OFS - council vacancies - jurisdictional bonds.

For council members to neglect the acquaintance with these topics and their practice is to weaken the functioning of the fraternity. These are all listed as COUNCIL duties; they are not just to be the concern of the fraternity minister.

Each councilor should take time to read and reflect on **Articles [28](#) to [36](#)** in the **GC**. Then, think over the following:

Some significant overall principles are spelled out in **GC - Article [31.1](#)** which states: “**On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president)**”. These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own Statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular council. The council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time

it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity; to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out the elections.

**GC - Article 31.2.** “ The office of minister or councilor is **a fraternal service, a commitment** to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so that each one will realize his or her own vocation and each fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.”

Q1. What requirements are identified in **GC - Article 31**, part 1 and 2 (quoted above)?

Read **GC - Article 31.3.** “ The leaders of the OFS at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.”

Q2. What are the five expectations for leaders (*council members*) described in **GC - Article 31.3**?

Read **GC - Article 31.4.** “ The leaders should see to **the spiritual and technical preparation and animation** of the meetings **both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities** by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity **and** of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it **that the decisions made are carried out** and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.”

Q3. What specific concerns does **GC - Article 31.4** identify that the council is supposed to care for? Make a list? Does this article indicate that the council is going to be making decisions?

Q4. By examining the description by the Catholic Church in Canon 303 of a “Third Order”, what are the six requisites? Does our Council encourage fulfillment of and support for these six requirements? Do the members know these requirements?

[[Canon 303](#): “Associations whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction of that same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name.”]

### **Council Review, Part 2:**

**Note well: It is necessary that *each member of the council* have a copy of the [OFS Rule](#) and [General Constitutions](#) and the [National Statutes](#).**

Read and examine the contents of **GC - Article 49**

- Q1. What is the makeup of a council?
- Q2. What council offices are required?
- Q3. Can other offices be added?

Next, you need to read and study **GC - Article 50.1.**

- Q4. What two general areas of fraternal life are defined in this article for the council to focus on?
- Q5. What is your understanding of the word “duties”? Are “duties” the same as “suggestions”?

Now follows 22 duties for councils contained in these OFS [General Constitutions](#).

Take time now to read **GC** - Article [50.2](#) with its eight (8) specific duties of a COUNCIL.

1. - The *first* listed duty: – **vote on acceptance & admission** - “to decide on the acceptance and admission to profession of new brothers and sisters.” In addition, you also need to read through **GC** - Articles [39](#), [40](#), [41](#).

Q6. What are the specific requirements for this voting procedure to be carried out? (see **GC** - Article [41.1](#)) Is this to be done in writing?

Q7. How do the council members get appropriate information beforehand on this matter in order to make a prudential judgment for voting?

Q8. Has the formation team assured the council that each candidate fulfills the requirements expressed in [National Statutes](#), Article [19](#), parts 2 and 3?

Q9. How well does our fraternity handle its initial formation program? Should it be strengthened and improved? What options do we have?

Q10. How is the council preserving the fraternity records, such as those of admission to candidacy, and professions?

2. - The *second* listed duty: – **member in difficulties** – “to establish a fraternal dialogue with members in particular difficulties and to adopt consequent measures.” For this matter you need to read **GC** - Article [56](#). The OFS [General Constitutions](#) distinguish between “temporary provisions” and “definitive provisions”. These are found in **GC** - Articles [56-57](#) and in **GC** - Articles [58-59-60](#). Read both sets of difficulties.

In any case, it is the council which “evaluates”, “discusses”, “dialogues”, and “decides” the appropriate action. Appropriate records should be kept in the fraternity’s permanent files and council minutes of the progress of the resolution.

Q11. Do you know of any situation where this could be applicable?

3. – The *third* listed duty: – **member withdrawals** – “to receive the request for withdrawal and to decide on the suspension of a member from the fraternity”, again, you have to read over **GC** - Articles [56-57-58-59-60](#). The first understanding of the problem has to be established by the council, whether (as mentioned above) this matter is “temporary” or “definitive”. Accordingly, different steps are taken by the council. Appropriate records should be kept in the fraternity’s permanent files and council minutes of the progress of the resolution.

Q12. What is the clear distinction between “withdrawal” and “suspension”?

Q13. Have we kept written records as indicated above, if this situation(s) has occurred in our fraternity?

4. - The *fourth* listed duty: – **having cells in a fraternity** – “to decide on the establishment of sections or groups in conformity with the Constitutions and the statutes.” Under certain conditions and requirements, a fraternity can form from its membership “cells” or similar groupings of members for special purposes. Read **GC** - Article [34](#) and Article [35](#), and [National Statutes](#) - Article [18.5](#).

Q14. What written agreements need to be made?

Q15. Can you think of any circumstances that might recommend the formation of a cell of a fraternity?

Q16. What conditions do these articles specify? Does this need to be worked out beforehand?

Q17. Does the council have the supervisory duty for accountability for cells?

Q18. So far in this “Council Duties Review”, how many council duties have we become acquainted with? Make a list of them.

### **Council Review, Part 3:**

**5.** - The *fifth* listed duty: – **Finances** - “to decide on the destination of available funds and, in general, to deliberate on matters concerning financial management and economic affairs of the fraternity.” Finances in a fraternity not only involve the duties of the Treasurer and his/her regular reporting to the council, but each and all members are called upon to contribute and help with the common expenses and projects of the fraternity.

This is highlighted in **GC** - Article [30.3](#) which says:

[see [Rule 25](#)] “In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity common fund, according to each one’s means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.” A written financial report at each monthly council meeting is normative.

**6.** - The *sixth* listed council duty: – **making assignments** – “To assign duties to the councilors and to the other professed members.” A cooperative effort must be developed in the fraternity, both on the level of the council and that of all the members of the fraternity, aware of the abilities and talents of the respective members. For example, how the fraternity handles its ongoing formation, its initial formation, the social aspects of the meeting, the collating and publishing and mailing of the fraternity newsletter, etc. Some councils do not notice the cooperation expected in **GC** Article [52.3](#), when it describes the role of the “master of formation”: “to coordinate, with the help of the other members of the council...”

Q2. In practice, how do our council members work together on formation matters?

Q3. In practice, are fraternities’ needs simply carried out by the minister, or do they flow from discussions among the councilors and the decisions they make?

Q4. What kinds of “news” should be included in your monthly newsletter?

Q5. How often are these assignments reviewed by the council? How often does the council evaluate their effectiveness or need for modifications and changes?

**7.** - The *seventh* listed council duty: – **requesting a Spiritual Assistant**. “to request from the competent superiors of the First Order and the TOR, suitable and prepared religious as assistants.” Read **GC** Articles [85](#) to [91](#).

Q6. What are the specific roles expected of a spiritual assistant?

Q7. Does our fraternity supply to the appointed spiritual assistant the materials to help him/her to be “suitable and prepared”, namely the [Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS \(2012\)](#) and the [Franciscan Family Connections \(2007\)](#)?

Q8. How is it possible for the spiritual assistant to “guarantee” fidelity to the Franciscan charism, etc. (see **GC** - Article [85.2](#))?

Q9. Do we know the expected time-limit for the same friar to serve a fraternity as the spiritual assistant?

Q10. Are we aware that the Friar General Ministers (2002) and CNSA have called for these spiritual assistant appointments “to be in writing and for a specified time”?

Q11. Does the council appoint its own spiritual assistant?

**8. - The eighth** listed council duty: – **Other assignments as needed.** - “to perform such other duties as are required by the Constitutions which are necessary to carry out its proper purposes.” This statement tends to be a “grab-bag” approach to cover many other items not listed above. Sometimes special instructions are issued from NAFRA or requests for further information and cooperation in a particular region. Besides these eight duties, the **OFS General Constitutions** also identify the following fourteen (14) itemized duties of a council.

**9. - A ninth** council duty - **preparing for elections** - Quite a number of articles are devoted to the issue of elections. The Order has a very defined procedure that is to be followed. This expectation is identified in **GC** - Articles [49.2](#) & [51.2. a](#), which we should read.

The election procedures themselves are found in **GC** - Articles [76-77-78-79-80-81-82](#). These seven articles also need to be reviewed beforehand.

**GC** - Article [77.1](#) - states: “In the local fraternity the perpetually professed of the same fraternity have active voice, that is, can elect, and [have] passive voice, that is, can be elected. The temporarily professed have only active voice.”

Several months before the scheduled and planned elections, it is recommended that the council appoint one or two members to serve as a “**nominating committee**” to develop a slate of candidates from among the professed members for each of the offices to be filled by this election. After a general discussion on elections in the fraternity, this nominating committee does this by contacting, calling, and inviting individual members to consider such a commitment to this needed service for the welfare of the fraternity.

Q1. How is this scheduled? Who gets contacted? Who does the contacting? When?

Q2. Has our fraternity encouraged use of a nominating committee?

Q3. How often are elections to be held?

**10. - A tenth** council duty - **required recruitment procedures** – The recruitment efforts by a fraternity give great witness to their convictions about the richness and treasure of their OFS vocation. The promotion of OFS vocations “is a duty of all brothers and sisters”. The Constitutions further state that promotion of OFS vocations “is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.” (see **GC** – Article [45.1](#)).

And, to quote **GC** - Article [45.2](#):

“Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, **the council must adopt appropriate means to promote the secular Franciscan vocation.**”

This quote makes this duty for recruitment very clear. Not only do they use the word “MUST”, but they speak of “APPROPRIATE MEANS”. Appropriate means involves that the council decides to make serious efforts beyond general advertising procedures. A procedure of planning for contacting individuals, setting up information meeting(s), “orientation” formation teams leading to “inquiry” phase of formation, etc. Unfortunately, a number of fraternities simply choose not to make the effort to carry out this **GC** - Article [45.2](#).

Q4. How serious has our council taken this call?

Q5. Have the efforts we have tried truly been “appropriate means”?



**11. - An *eleventh* council duty - give help to formation director -** This topic was already mentioned above under “*the sixth duty*” but deserves being repeated.

Some councils do not notice the cooperation expected in **GC** - Article [52.3](#). a, when it describes the role of the “master of formation”: “to coordinate, with the help of the other members of the council...” The one elected to be “director of formation” is not isolated in that duty. As you have read, the council members are expected to work together with the director of formation in carrying out their duties as chosen by the council – such as the programs they approve to carry out, topics for ongoing formation, etc. In turn, the council can invite other members in the fraternity to help with presenting some of the ongoing formation and participate in the initial formation program.

Q6. In practice, how do our council members work together on formation matters?

Q7. How often are formation issues reviewed by the council? How often does the council evaluate their effectiveness or need for modifications and changes?

**12. - A *twelfth* duty - Keeping and securing their fraternity records and files -** Since the OFS is an Order in the Catholic Church, appropriate records are to be complete and properly preserved. All council members should know where these are kept during the month. Such records of concern are identified in such **GC** - Articles [52.2](#), b & [52.4](#). Each book should be properly identified as ‘Property of the Secular Franciscan Order’ with a slip of paper containing at least two members and their telephone numbers for contact in case of emergency.

Q8. What books should our council be caring for? How is this handled? Where are they being kept?

**13. - A *thirteenth* duty - Determining “active” and “excused” members (and “lapsed”)**  
Twice a year the council should wisely make a systematic review of its membership, classifying their members according to these three categories identified by the [National Statutes](#) in Article [18.7](#) “**active**” - [National Statutes](#), Article [18.7.a](#) – “an active fraternity member is one who participates both by attending fraternity meetings and by providing financial support to the community, or whom the fraternity has excused from such obligations.

“**excused**”- a fraternity member whom the council has decided for valid reasons to excuse from one or more of the obligations mentioned above in [National Statutes](#), Article [18.7.a](#).

“**lapsed**” – [National Statutes](#), Article [18.7.b](#) – “Those brothers and sisters who neither attend meetings, support the community financially, nor have valid reasons due to health, family, work or distance, and who, after personal invitations to return to fraternity, consciously and deliberately reject or ignore the invitation, will be termed “lapsed” and will not be carried on the fraternity membership roll nor be reported as a member to higher fraternity Councils [cf. [General Constitutions](#), Article [53.3](#)].

Q9. Does our council follow these procedures?

#### **Council Review, Part 4:**

**14. - A *fourteenth* duty - requesting [triennial] fraternal visitations – **GC** - Article [51.2.d](#) tells us: “The minister also has the following duties:....**

**d.** to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years.”

The Regional Minister is to be contacted for scheduling the **fraternal visitation** every three years. The Regional Spiritual Assistant is contacted for scheduling the **pastoral visitation** every three years.



Should a fraternity fail to fulfill this duty, the respective Regional Minister or Assistant are directed to implement this duty, as seen mentioned in **GC** - Article [92.3](#) "...in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respectively competent council or conference of spiritual assistants." (See also **GC**- Article [62.2.h](#) on this matter.)

A description of what is expected to transpire in the fraternal visitation time, and its purposes are explained in the sections of **GC** - Articles [92-93-94](#). These articles should be examined by the council BEFORE the scheduled fraternal visitation together with a review of the previous fraternal visitation report with its recommendations.

**15.** - A *fifteenth* council duty - **requesting [triennial] pastoral visitations** – **GC** - Article [51.2.d](#) tells us: "The minister also has the following duties:....

d. to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years." The purposes for the pastoral visitation differ from fraternal visitation carried out by the regional minister (or their delegate).

Read [OFS Rule 26](#) and [General Constitutions](#), Article [90-92-93-95](#).

The pastoral visitation also serves to keep the friars and the respective friar province informed of the life of a particular fraternity.

Eleven focus points are listed in your [General Constitutions](#) – such as:

the fraternity's growth; the fraternity's spiritual growth and incorporation of the Franciscan charism, the relationship with the wider Church; the Fraternity's community life; the Fraternity's community prayer; the apostolic ministry in the fraternity; the council's function and role; the Fraternity's initial formation; the Fraternity's ongoing formation; the literature supplied to the spiritual assistant; the spiritual assistance offered.

Should a fraternity fail to fulfill this duty, the respective Regional Minister or Assistant are directed to implement this duty, as seen mentioned in **GC** - Article [92.3](#) "...in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respectively competent council or conference of spiritual assistants." (See also **GC** - Article [62.2.h](#) on this matter.)

A description of what is expected to transpire in the pastoral visitation time, and its purposes are explained in the section of **GC** - Articles [92-93-94-95](#). These articles should be examined by the council BEFORE the scheduled pastoral visitation together with a review of the previous pastoral visitation report with its recommendations.

**16.** - A *sixteenth* duty - **member transfers** - – see **GC** - Article [55](#).

Q1. Do you have a transfer form on file? Who gets informed? Who issues it?

Q2. Does our OFS Region have guidelines for accepting transferring OFS members? What are they?

**17.** - A *seventeenth* duty - **choosing formation topics** – see **GC** - Articles [31.4](#) and [40.2](#) and [44](#). The recommended procedure for initial and ongoing formation is given in **GC** - Article [40.4](#). All the topics listed for ongoing formation in **GC** - Article [44](#) cannot be done within one year, but have our council been developing some organized type of rotation of topics to help our members grow in these areas of Franciscan spirituality?

Q3. Make a list of the many topics that should be covered in ongoing formation, as listed in **GC** - Article [44](#). How many categories of formation are listed there? How many have we covered in the past three years? Are some being neglected?

Q4. Is our fraternity honestly allotting sufficient time for implementing the contents of **GC** - Article [44](#) at our regular meetings?

Q5. Are there some activities that our fraternity chooses to do that cut into our monthly ongoing formation time allotment? How often does this happen?

Q6. Should this deficiency be remedied by the council?

**18.** - An eighteenth duty - discerning fraternity apostolic projects – see **GC** – Article [50.1](#)

Q7. How does our fraternity handle this duty on a monthly basis?

Q8. Do we share reports from the members as part of our meeting?

Q9. How do we make these project plans, encourage them, and carry them out?

**19.** - A nineteenth duty – Franciscan Youth – see **GC** - Articles [96](#) and [97](#).

Q10. What procedure is our fraternity following to fulfill this expectation?

Q11. Does our region give us guidance to implement these articles? Do we need help?

**20.** - A *twentieth* duty - **Cooperation with other levels of OFS** – see **GC** - Article [33.2](#).

Q12. Do we encourage a spirit of participation by all the members in regional activities?

**21.** - A *twenty-first* duty - **Council Vacancies** – see **GC**- Articles [81](#) to [84](#).

**22.** - A *twenty-second* duty - **jurisdictional bonds** (*altius moderamen*) - Each fraternity is bonded to a province of the friars (OFM, OFM Capuchin, OFM Conventual, or TOR). This bond is created in the process of the valid establishment of the fraternity.

Article Article [18.4](#). in the [National Statutes](#) begins by saying:

A local fraternity may pass to the pastoral care of another friar province of the First Order or Third Order Regular in one of two ways

[Read over the **GC** - Article [47.2](#). This transfer need can readily surface here in the U.S.A. as the friar provinces re-define their locations for presence and ministry in the various states.

As the constitutions say in **GC** -Article [85,2](#): “The purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the secular Franciscans.”

Q13. Since the province is expected to be kept informed of each fraternity's life, does our council keep our bonded province informed about election results, names and addresses for contacts, current news, etc.?

Q14. Because a particular province is not readily available to our fraternity, would it be advisable for our fraternity to consider transferring to another friar province of jurisdiction?

Q15. Do you have your document of establishment on file? Where? Do you have a copy on a wall display, perhaps?

# General Constitutions

## CHAPTER I

### THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

#### Article 1

1. All the faithful are called to holiness and have a right to follow their own spiritual way in communion with the Church.<sup>1</sup>
2. [Rule 1](#) There are many spiritual families in the Church with different charisms. Among these families, the Franciscan Family, which in its various branches recognizes St. Francis of Assisi as its father, inspiration, and model, must be included.
3. [Rule 2](#) From the beginning, the Secular Franciscan Order<sup>2</sup> has had its own proper place in the Franciscan Family. It is formed by the organic union of all the Catholic fraternities whose members, moved by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves through profession to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis, in their secular state, following the Rule approved by the Church.<sup>3</sup>
4. The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care and spiritual assistance of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO), because it belongs to the same spiritual family, to the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular (TOR). These are the "Institutes" who are responsible for the *altius moderamen*, referred to by [Canon 303](#) of the Code of Canon Law.<sup>4</sup>
5. The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church.<sup>5</sup> It is divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own juridical personality within the Church.

#### Article 2

1. The vocation to the SFO is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members. Therefore, those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life cannot belong to the SFO.

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<sup>1</sup> See Can. 210; 214; *Lumen Gentium* 40.

<sup>2</sup> It is also called "Secular Franciscan Fraternity", or "Franciscan Third Order" (TOF). See [Rule 2](#), footnote 5. [Canon 303](#) of the CCL defines third orders: "Associations whose members live in the world, but share in the spirit of some religious institute, under the overall direction (*altius moderamen*) of the same institute, and who lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, are known as third orders, or are called by some other suitable title."

<sup>3</sup> After the Rules approved by Pope Nicholas IV in 1289 and by Pope Leo XIII in 1883, the present Rule was approved by Pope Paul VI, June 24, 1978.

<sup>4</sup> See *General Constitutions SFO* [85.2](#). When the Constitutions are cited without any other specification, the reference is to the present text.

<sup>5</sup> See Can. 116; 301,3; 312; 313.

2. The SFO is open to the faithful of every state of life. The following may belong to it:
  - the laity (men and women);
  - the secular clergy (deacons, priests, bishops).

### Article 3

1. The secular state characterizes the spirituality and the apostolic life of those belonging to the SFO.
2. Their secularity, with respect to vocation and to apostolic life, expresses itself according to the respective state, that is:
  - for the laity, contributing to building up the Kingdom of God by their presence in their life situations and in their temporal activities;<sup>6</sup>
  - for the secular clergy, by offering to the people of God the service which is properly theirs, in communion with the bishop and the presbytery.<sup>7</sup>Both are inspired by the gospel options of Saint Francis of Assisi, committing themselves to continue his mission with the other components of the Franciscan Family.
3. The vocation to the SFO is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the SFO gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities.

### Article 4

1. The SFO is governed by the universal law of the Church, and by its own: the Rule, the Constitutions, the Ritual, and the particular statutes.
2. The Rule establishes the nature, purpose, and spirit of the SFO.
3. [Rule 3](#) The Constitutions have as their purpose:
  - to apply the Rule;
  - to indicate concretely the conditions for belonging to the SFO, its government, the organization of life in fraternity, and its seat.<sup>8</sup>

### Article 5

1. [Rule 3](#) The authentic interpretation of the Rule and of the Constitutions belongs to the Holy See.
2. The practical interpretation of the Constitutions, with the purpose of harmonizing its application in different areas and at the various levels of the Order, belongs to the General Chapter of the SFO.
3. The clarification of specific points which require a timely decision is the competence of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO (CIOFS). Such a clarification is valid until the next General Chapter.

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<sup>6</sup> See Can 225, and the Discourse of Pope John Paul II to the SFO, September 27, 1982 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 28, 1982.

<sup>7</sup> See Can. 275 ff, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 12; 14; 15 ff.

<sup>8</sup> See Can. 304.

## **Article 6**

1. The international fraternity of the SFO has its own statutes approved by the General Chapter.
2. National fraternities have their own statutes approved by the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.
3. The regional and the local fraternities may have their own statutes approved by the council of the higher level.

## **Article 7**

All regulations not in accordance with the present Constitutions are abrogated.

## CHAPTER II

### FORM OF LIFE AND APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

#### Title I

#### THE FORM OF LIFE

##### Article 8

1. The Secular Franciscans commit themselves by their profession to live the Gospel according to Franciscan spirituality in their secular condition.
2. They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the SFO:
  - [Rule 7](#) in a continually renewed journey of conversion and of formation;
  - [Rule 4](#) open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
  - in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

##### Article 9

1. [Rule 5](#) The spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ,<sup>9</sup> rather than a detailed program to be put into practice.
2. [Rule 4](#) The Secular Franciscan, committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and its leaders should foster love for the word of the Gospel and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit<sup>10</sup>.

##### Article 10

[Rule 10](#) "Christ, poor and crucified", victor over death and risen, the greatest manifestation of the love of God for humanity, is the "book" in which the brothers and sisters, in imitation of Francis, learn the purpose and the way of living, loving, and suffering. They discover in Him the value of contradictions for the sake of justice and the meaning of the difficulties and the crosses of daily life. With Him, they can accept the will of the Father even under the most difficult circumstances and live the Franciscan spirit of peace, rejecting every doctrine contrary to human dignity.

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<sup>9</sup> See *Rule* of 1221, Chapt. 22; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 51.

<sup>10</sup> See *Dei verbum* 10.

## Article 11

Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission, Secular Franciscans should seek to imitate the faithfulness of Francis to His inspiration. They should listen to the exhortation of the Saint to desire above all things "the Spirit of God at work within them."<sup>11</sup>

## Article 12

1. Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of Francis and, above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father. They should bear witness to this faith before all:
  - in their family life;
  - in their work;
  - in their joys and sufferings;
  - in their associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father;
  - in their presence and participation in the life of society;
  - in their fraternal relationships with all creatures.
2. [Rule 10](#) With Jesus, obedient even to death, they should seek to know and do the will of the Father. They should give thanks to God for the gift of freedom and for the revelation of the law of love. In order to carry out the will of the Father, they should accept the help which is offered to them through the mediation of the Church by those who are constituted as authority in her and by their confreres. They should take on the risk of courageous choices in their life in society with decisiveness and serenity.
3. [Rule 8](#) The brothers and sisters should love meeting God as His children and they should let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. They should seek to discover the presence of the Father in their own heart, in nature, and in the history of humanity in which His plan of salvation is fulfilled. The contemplation of this mystery will dispose them to collaborate in this loving plan.

## Article 13

1. [Rule 7](#) Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance," propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *Rule of 1223*, Chapt. 10.

<sup>12</sup> *Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda* 22 ff.

2. In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.<sup>13</sup>
3. Traditional among Franciscan penitents, penitential practices such as fasting and abstinence should be known, appreciated, and lived out according to the general guidelines of the Church.

## Article 14

1. Aware that God wanted to make of us all a single people and that he made his Church the universal sacrament of salvation, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to a faith-inspired reflection on the Church, its mission in today's world and the role of the Franciscan laity within it. They should take up the challenges and accept the responsibilities that this reflection will lead them to discover.
2. [Rule 8](#) The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church. Christ unites us to himself and to one another as a single body in it. Therefore, the Eucharist should be the center of the life of the fraternity. The brothers and sisters should participate in the Eucharist as frequently as possible, being mindful of the respect and love shown by Francis, who, in the Eucharist, lived all the mysteries of the life of Christ.
3. They should participate in the sacraments of the Church, attentive not only to personal sanctification, but also to fostering the growth of the Church and the spreading of the Kingdom. They should collaborate in achieving living and conscious celebrations in their own parishes, particularly in the celebrations of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and the anointing of the sick.
4. The brothers and sisters, as well as the fraternities, should adhere to the indications of the Ritual with respect to the different forms of participating in the liturgical prayer of the Church, giving priority to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours<sup>14</sup>.
5. In all places and at all times, it is possible for true worshippers of the Father to give him adoration and to pray to him. Nevertheless, the brothers and sisters should try to find times of silence and recollection dedicated exclusively to prayer.

## Article 15

1. [Rule 11](#) Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to live the spirit of the Beatitudes and, in a special way, the spirit of poverty. Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes them to promote a more just distribution of wealth.
2. Secular Franciscans, who must provide for their own families and serve society by means of their work and material goods, have a particular manner of living evangelical poverty. To understand and achieve it requires a strong personal commitment and the stimulation of the

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<sup>13</sup> See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ritual SFO*, Appendix 26, 27.



fraternity in prayer and dialogue, communal review of life, and attentiveness to the instructions of the Church, and the demands of society.

3. Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to reduce their own personal needs so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially those most in need. They should give thanks to God for the goods they have received, using them as good stewards and not as owners.  
They should take a firm position against consumerism and against ideologies and practices which prefer riches over human and religious values and which permit the exploitation of the human person.
4. They should love and practice purity of heart, the source of true fraternity.

## Article 16

1. [Rule 9](#) Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the gospel virtues realized in her.<sup>15</sup>  
The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most holy virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.
2. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community.  
Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

<sup>16</sup> See 2 *Celano*, 198.

## Title II

### ACTIVE PRESENCE IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

#### Article 17

1. [Rule 6](#) Called to work together in building up the Church as the sacrament of salvation for all and, through their baptism and profession, made "witnesses and instruments of her mission," Secular Franciscans proclaim Christ by their life and words. Their preferred apostolate is personal witness<sup>17</sup> in the environment in which they live and service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situations of this world.
2. The preparation of the brothers and sisters for spreading the Gospel message "in the ordinary circumstances of the world"<sup>18</sup> and for collaborating in the catechesis within the ecclesial communities should be promoted in the fraternities.
3. Those who are called to carry out the mission of catechists, presiders of ecclesial communities, or other ministries, as well as the sacred ministers, should make the love of Francis for the Word of God their own, as well as his faith in those who announce it, and the great fervor with which he received the mission of preaching penance from the Pope.
4. Participation in the service of sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and, finally, through their active presence in the local Church and in society.

#### For a Just and Fraternal Society

#### Article 18

1. Secular Franciscans are called to make their own contribution, inspired by the person and message of Saint Francis of Assisi, towards a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities.<sup>19</sup>
2. [Rule 13](#) They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.
3. [Rule 13](#) They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all people.

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<sup>17</sup> See *Rule* 1221, 17,3; *Legend of the Three Companions* 36; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 53.

<sup>18</sup> [Lumen Gentium](#) 35.

<sup>19</sup> See [Gaudium et Spes](#) 31 ff.

4. Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person.

## Article 19

1. [Rule 14](#) Secular Franciscans should always act as a leaven in the environment in which they live through the witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations.
2. In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people; they should collaborate in overcoming the exclusion of others and those forms of poverty that are the fruit of inefficiency and injustice.

## Article 20

1. [Rule 14](#) Secular Franciscans, committed by their vocation to build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities, live their membership both in the Church and in society as an inseparable reality.
2. As the primary and fundamental contribution to building a more just and fraternal world, they should commit themselves both to the generous fulfillment of the duties proper to their occupation and to the professional training that pertains to it. With the same spirit of service, they should assume their social and civil responsibilities.

## Article 21

1. [Rule 16](#) For Francis, work is a gift and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood, but the opportunity to serve God and neighbor as well as a way to develop one's own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane.
2. Leisure and recreation have their own value and are necessary for personal development. Secular Franciscans should maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to create meaningful forms of using leisure time.<sup>20</sup>

## Article 22

1. [Rule 15](#) Secular Franciscans should "be in the forefront ... in the field of public life." They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances.

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<sup>20</sup> See [Gaudium et Spes](#) 67; *Laborem exercens* 16 ff.

2. The fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives, consistent with their Franciscan vocation and with the directives of the Church, in the field of human development and justice. They should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice.
3. The renunciation of the use of violence, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. However, the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love.

## Article 23

1. [Rule 19](#) Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and of fraternal love.<sup>21</sup> Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society:
  - they should see to the proposal and spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes;
  - they should develop their own initiatives and should collaborate, individually and as a fraternity, with initiatives of the Pope, the local Churches, and the Franciscan Family;
  - they should collaborate with those movements and institutions which promote peace while respecting its authentic foundations.
2. While acknowledging both the personal and national right to legitimate defense, they should respect the choice of those who, because of conscientious objection, refuse to bear arms.
3. To preserve peace in the family, the brothers and sisters should, in due time, make a last will and testament for the disposition of their goods.

## In the Family

## Article 24

1. [Rule 17](#) Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death. Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.
2. In the fraternity:
  - the spirituality of the family and of marriage and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;
  - they should share the important moments of the family life of their Franciscan brothers and sisters and they should give fraternal attention to those — single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced — who are living difficult situations;
  - [Rule 19](#) they should create conditions suitable for dialogue between generations;
  - the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered.

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<sup>21</sup> See [Gaudium et Spes](#) 78.

3. The brothers and sisters should collaborate with the efforts undertaken in the Church and in society to affirm both the value of fidelity and respect for life and to provide answers to the social problems of the family.

## Article 25

Out of the conviction of the need to educate children to take an interest in community, "bringing them the awareness of being living, active members of the People of God"<sup>22</sup> and because of the fascination which Francis can exercise on them, the formation of groups of children should be encouraged. With the help of a pedagogy and an organization suitable to their age, these children should be initiated into a knowledge and love of the Franciscan life. National statutes will give appropriate orientation for the organization of these groups and their relationship to the fraternity and to Franciscan youth groups.

## Messengers of Joy and Hope

### Article 26

1. Even in suffering, Francis experienced confidence and joy from:
  - the experience of the fatherhood of God;
  - the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life;
  - the experience of being able to meet and praise the Creator in the universal fraternity of all creatures.<sup>23</sup>

[Rule 19](#) Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans, therefore, affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future.
2. In the fraternity, the brothers and sisters should promote mutual understanding and they should see to it that the atmosphere of their meetings is welcoming and that it reflects joy. They should encourage one another for the good.

### Article 27

1. [Rule 19](#) The brothers and sisters, progressing in age, should learn to accept illness and increasing difficulties and to give a deeper sense to their life. This should be undertaken with increasing detachment as they set out for the Promised Land. They should be firmly convinced that the community of those who believe in Christ and who love one another in Him will go forward into eternal life as the "communion of saints."
2. Secular Franciscans should commit themselves to create in their environment and, above all, in their fraternities, a climate of faith and hope so that "Sister Death" may be regarded as a passage to the Father, and all may prepare themselves with serenity.

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<sup>22</sup> *Apostolicam actuositatem* 30.

<sup>23</sup> See 2 *Celano*, 125; *Legend of Perugia* 43; *Major Life*, 9.

## CHAPTER III

### LIFE IN FRATERNITY

#### Title I

### GENERAL ORIENTATIONS

#### Article 28

1. The fraternity of the SFO finds its origin in the inspiration of Saint Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High revealed the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion.<sup>24</sup>
2. [Rule 20](#) "The SFO is divided into fraternities of various levels," the purpose being to promote, in an orderly form, the union and mutual collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence in both the local and the universal Church. The SFO shall also support the commitment of the fraternities in their service to the world, and specifically to the life of society.
3. The brothers and sisters gather in local fraternities established in connection with a church or a religious house, or in personal fraternities, constituted for specific and valid reasons recognized in the decree of establishment.<sup>25</sup>

#### Article 29

1. Local fraternities are grouped into fraternities at various levels: regional, national and international according to criteria that are ecclesial, territorial, or of another nature. They are co-ordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions. This is a requirement of the communion among the fraternities, of the orderly collaboration among them, and of the unity of the SFO.
2. [Rule 20](#) These fraternities, that each have their own juridical personality in the Church, should acquire, if possible, a civil juridical personality for the better fulfillment of their mission. It pertains to the national councils to give guidelines concerning the motivations and the procedures to be followed.
3. National statutes should indicate the criteria for the organization of the SFO in the nation. The application of these criteria is left to the prudent judgement of the leaders of the fraternities concerned and of the national council.

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<sup>24</sup> See [Constitutions 3.3](#); *Testament* 14.

<sup>25</sup> See Can. 518.

## Article 30

1. The brothers and sisters are co-responsible for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the SFO as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.
2. The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer, and active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity.
3. [Rule 25](#) In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic, and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.

## Article 31

1. [Rule 21](#) “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president).” These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own Statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular council. The council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity; to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out the elections.
2. The office of minister or councilor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so that each one will realize his or her own vocation and each fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.
3. The leaders of the SFO at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.
4. The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings, both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.

## Article 32

1. The ministers and councilors should live and foster the spirit and reality of communion among the brothers and sisters, among the various fraternities, and between them and the Franciscan family. They should, above all, cherish peace and reconciliation in and around the fraternity.

2. [Rule 21](#) The ministers' and councilors' task to lead is temporary. The brothers and sisters, rejecting all ambition, should show love for the fraternity with a spirit of service, prepared both to accept and to relinquish the office.

### **Article 33**

1. In the guidance and co-ordination of the fraternities and of the Order, the personality and capacity of the individual brothers and sisters and of the individual fraternities should be promoted. The plurality of expressions of the Franciscan ideal and cultural variety must be respected.
2. The councils of higher levels should not do what can be adequately carried out either by the local fraternities or by a council of a lower level. They should respect and promote their vitality so that they fulfil their duties properly. The local fraternities and councils concerned should commit themselves to carry out the decisions of the international council and of the other councils of higher levels, and to implement their programs, adapting them when necessary to their own situation.

### **Article 34**

Where the situation and the needs of the members require it, sections or groups which gather members sharing particular needs, common interests, or the same choices, may be established within the fraternity under the guidance of the one council.

Such groups can give themselves specific norms relative to their meetings and activities, firmly remaining faithful, however, to the requirements which arise from membership in the one fraternity. National statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups.

### **Article 35**

1. Secular priests who recognize that they are called by the Spirit to participate in the charism of Saint Francis of Assisi within the secular fraternity should find in it specific attention in conformity with their mission among the People of God.
2. Secular Franciscan priests may also gather in personal fraternities in order to pursue the ascetical and pastoral incentives which the life and doctrine of Francis and the Rule of the SFO offer them to live their vocation in the Church better. It is proper that these fraternities have their own statutes which envision concrete forms for their composition, their fraternal meetings and for spiritual formation as well as for making their communion with the whole Order living and functional.

### **Article 36**

1. The brothers and sisters who commit themselves with private vows to live in the spirit of the beatitudes and to make themselves more disposed to contemplation and to the service of the fraternities, can be a great help in the spiritual and apostolic development of the SFO.



2. These brothers and sisters may gather in groups according to statutes approved by the national council, or when these groups spread beyond the borders of a nation, by the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.
3. Such statutes should be in harmony with the present Constitutions.

## **Title II**

### **ENTRANCE INTO THE ORDER AND FORMATION**

#### **Article 37**

1. [Rule 23](#) Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the profession of the Rule.
2. The journey of formation, which should develop throughout life, begins with entrance into the fraternity. Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation and always attentive to collaboration with Him, those responsible for formation are: the candidate, the entire fraternity, the council with the minister, the master of formation, and the assistant.
3. The brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord. The fraternity is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer, and example.
4. The elaboration and adoption of means of formation, adapted to the local situations and offered as a help to those responsible for formation in the individual fraternities, belong to the national and regional councils in common agreement.

#### **The Time of Initiation**

#### **Article 38**

1. [Rule 23](#) The time of initiation is a phase preparatory to the true and proper time of formation and is intended for the discernment of the vocation and for the reciprocal acquaintance between the fraternity and the aspiring member. It should guarantee the freedom and the seriousness of entrance into the SFO.
2. The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development are established by the national statutes.
3. It belongs to the fraternity council to decide possible exemptions to this time of initiation, keeping in mind the guidelines of the national council.

#### **Admission to the Order**

#### **Article 39**

1. [Rule 23](#) The request for admission to the Order is presented by the aspirant to the minister of a local or personal fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.

2. Conditions for admission are: to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of a vocation.<sup>26</sup>
3. The council of the fraternity decides collegially on the request, gives a formal answer to the aspirant, and communicates this to the fraternity.
4. The rite of admission is performed according to the Ritual.<sup>27</sup> The act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

### **The Time of Formation**

#### **Article 40**

1. [Rule 23](#) The time of formation lasts at least one year. The national statutes can establish a longer period. The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of the evangelical life in fraternity, and a better knowledge of the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with the candidates of other fraternities.
2. The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her teaching. The laity practice living their secular commitment in the world in an evangelical way.
3. Participation in the meetings of the local fraternity is an indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life.
4. A style of teaching which is Franciscan in character and which fits the mentality of the persons concerned should be adopted.

### **The Profession or Promise of Evangelical Life**

#### **Article 41**

1. [Rule 23](#) Having completed the time of initial formation, the candidate submits to the minister of the local fraternity a request to make his or her profession. Having heard the master of formation and the assistant, the fraternity council decides by secret ballot on the admission to profession, gives its reply to the candidate, and informs the fraternity.
2. The conditions for the profession or promise of evangelical life are:
  - attainment of the age established by the national statutes;
  - active participation in the time of formation for at least one year;
  - the consent of the council of the local fraternity.

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<sup>26</sup> See Can. 316.

<sup>27</sup> See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 10 ff.; Chapt. I.

3. Where it is held to be opportune to lengthen the time of formation, it must not be extended to more than a year beyond the time established by the national statutes.

## Article 42

1. Profession is the solemn ecclesial act by which the candidate, remembering the call received from Christ, renews the baptismal promises and publicly affirms his or her personal commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to the example of Francis and following the Rule of the SFO.
2. [Rule 23](#) Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years.<sup>28</sup>
3. Profession is accepted by the minister of the local fraternity or by his or her delegate in the name of the Church and of the SFO. The rite is carried out according to the norms of the Ritual.<sup>29</sup>
4. Profession does not only commit those professed to the fraternity, but also, in the same way, it commits the fraternity to be concerned with their human and religious well-being.
5. The act of profession is registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

## Article 43

The national statutes establish:

- [Rule 23](#) the minimum age for profession which, however, may not be less than eighteen years completed;
- the distinctive sign of membership in the Order (the "Tau" or other Franciscan symbol).

## Continuing Formation

### Article 44

1. Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each<sup>30</sup> and everyone and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.
2. The Fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.

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<sup>28</sup> See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 18.

<sup>29</sup> See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 13 ff.; Part I, Chapter II.

<sup>30</sup> See [Constitutions 8](#); *I Celano* 103.

3. Ongoing formation – accomplished by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experience – aims to assist the brothers and sisters:
  - [Rule 4](#) in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
  - in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith, and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions;
  - in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of Saint Francis, Saint Clare and Franciscan authors.

### **Promotion of Vocations**

#### **Article 45**

1. The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.  
The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members.
2. Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the Secular Franciscan vocation.

## **Title III**

### **THE FRATERNITY AT THE VARIOUS LEVELS**

#### **The Local Fraternity**

#### **Article 46**

1. [Rule 22](#) The canonical establishment of the local fraternity belongs to the competent religious major superior at the request of the brothers and sisters concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the council of the higher level to which the new fraternity will be related according to the national statutes.  
The written consent of the local Ordinary is necessary for the canonical establishment of a fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the First Order or the TOR.<sup>31</sup>
2. For the valid establishment of a local fraternity, at least five perpetually professed members are required. The admission and profession of these first brothers and sisters will be received by the council of another local fraternity or by the council of a higher level which will have provided for their formation in appropriate ways. The acts of admission and profession and the decree of establishment are preserved in the records of the fraternity. Copies are sent to the council of the higher level.
3. If there is not yet a fraternity of the SFO in a nation, it belongs to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO to make provision in this regard.

#### **Article 47**

1. [Rule 22](#) Each local fraternity, the primary cell of the one SFO, is entrusted to the pastoral care of the religious Franciscan Order that canonically established it.
2. A local fraternity may pass to the pastoral care of another religious Franciscan Order in the ways determined by the national statutes.

#### **Article 48**

1. In the case of cessation of a fraternity, the patrimonial goods of the same, the library and the records are acquired by the fraternity of the immediately higher level.
2. In the case of revival according to the canonical laws, the fraternity will repossess any remaining goods, its own library, and records.

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<sup>31</sup> See Can. 312.

## The Fraternity Council

### Article 49

1. The council of the local fraternity is composed of the following offices: minister, vice-minister, secretary, treasurer, and master of formation. Other offices may be added according to the needs of each fraternity. The spiritual assistant of the fraternity forms part of the council by right.<sup>32</sup>
2. The fraternity, meeting in an assembly or chapter, discusses questions regarding its own life and organization. Every three years, in an elective assembly or chapter, the fraternity elects the minister and the council in the way established by the Constitutions and statutes.

### Article 50

1. It is the duty of the council of the local fraternity:
  - to promote the initiatives necessary for fostering fraternal life, for improving the human, Christian, and Franciscan formation of its members and for sustaining their witness and commitment in the world;
  - to make concrete and courageous choices, appropriate for the situation of the fraternity, from among the numerous activities possible in the field of the apostolate.
2. The duties of the council are also:
  - a. to decide on the acceptance and admission to profession of new brothers and sisters;<sup>33</sup>
  - b. to establish a fraternal dialogue with members in particular difficulties and to adopt consequent measures;
  - c. to receive the request for withdrawal and to decide on the suspension of a member from the fraternity;
  - d. to decide on the establishment of sections or groups in conformity with the Constitutions and the statutes;
  - e. to decide on the destination of available funds and, in general, to deliberate on matters concerning financial management and the economic affairs of the fraternity;
  - f. to assign duties to the councilors and to the other professed members;
  - g. to request from the competent superiors of the First Order and the TOR suitable and prepared religious as assistants;
  - h. to perform such other duties as are required by these Constitutions or which are necessary to carry out its proper purposes.

## The Offices in the Fraternity

### Article 51

1. While firmly upholding the co-responsibility of the council to animate and guide the fraternity, the minister, as the primary person responsible for the fraternity, is expected to

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<sup>32</sup> See [Constitutions 90.2](#).

<sup>33</sup> See [Constitutions 39.3](#); [41.1](#).

make sure that the directions and the decisions of the council are put into practice and will keep the council informed about what he or she is doing.

2. The minister also has the following duties:
  - a. to call, to preside at, and to direct the meetings of the fraternity and council; to convoke, every three years, the elective chapter of the fraternity, having heard the council on the formalities of the convocation;
  - b. to prepare the annual report to be sent to the council of the higher level after it has been approved by the council of the fraternity;
  - c. to represent the fraternity in all its relations with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the fraternity acquires a juridical personality in the civil order, the minister becomes, when possible, its legal representative;
  - d. to request, with the consent of the council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years.
  - e. to put into effect those acts which the Constitutions refer to his or her competence.

## Article 52

1. The vice-minister has the following duties:
  - a. to collaborate in a fraternal spirit and to support the minister in carrying out his or her specific duties;
  - b. to exercise the functions entrusted by the council and/or by the assembly or chapter;
  - c. to take the place of the minister in both duties and responsibilities in case of absence or temporary impediment;
  - d. to assume the functions of the minister when the office remains vacant.<sup>34</sup>
2. The secretary has the following duties:
  - a. to compile the official acts of the fraternity and of the council and to assure that they are sent to their respective proper recipients;
  - b. to see to the updating and preservation of the records and the registers, noting admissions, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers from the fraternity;<sup>35</sup>
  - c. to provide for the communication of the more important facts to the various levels and, if appropriate, to provide for their dissemination through the mass media.
3. The master of formation has the following duties:
  - a. to co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of the council, the formative activities of the fraternity;
  - b. to instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initiation formation, and the newly professed;
  - c. to inform the council of the fraternity prior to profession, concerning the suitability of the candidate for a commitment to live according to the Rule.
4. The treasurer, or bursar, has the following duties:

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<sup>34</sup> See *Constitutions* 81.1.

<sup>35</sup> Each local fraternity is to have at least a register of enrollments (admissions, professions, transfers, deaths, and every other important annotation relative to the individual members), the register of minutes of the council and the register of administration.



- a. to guard diligently the contributions received, recording each receipt in the appropriate register, with the date on which it was given, the name of the contributor, or the one from whom it was collected;
  - b. to record in the same register the items of expense, specifying the date and the purpose, in conformity with the directions of the fraternity council;
  - c. to render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and to the council of the fraternity according to the norms of the national statutes.
5. The provisions regarding the rights and duties of the vice-minister, the secretary and the treasurer apply, with the appropriate adaptations, to all levels.

## Participation in the Life of the Fraternity

### Article 53

1. [Rule 24](#) The fraternity must offer to its members opportunities for coming together and collaborating through meetings to be held with as great a frequency as allowed by the situation and with the involvement of all its members.
2. [Rule 6: 8](#) The fraternity should come together periodically, also as an ecclesial community to celebrate the Eucharist in a climate which strengthens the fraternal bond and characterizes the identity of the Franciscan family. Where, for whatever reason, this particular celebration may not be possible, they should participate in the celebration of the larger ecclesial community.
3. Insertion into a local fraternity and participation in fraternity life is essential for belonging to the SFO. Appropriate initiatives should be adopted according to the directives of the national statutes, to keep those brothers and sisters united to the fraternity who — for valid reasons of health, family, work, or distance — cannot actively participate in community life.
4. The fraternity remembers with gratitude its brothers and sisters who have passed away and continues its communion with them by prayer and in the Eucharist.
5. The national statutes can indicate special forms of association with the fraternity for those who, without becoming a member of the SFO, want to participate in its life and activities.

### Article 54

1. In cases where the fraternity of whatever level has property or real estate at its disposal, the procedures necessary for that fraternity to acquire a juridical personality in the civil order must be followed in conformity with the national statutes.
2. Based on the respective civil legislation, the national statutes must establish precise criteria regarding the purpose of the juridical person, the administration of its material goods and the relevant internal controls. They must also contain instructions so that the establishing document may provide for the disposal of its property in case the juridical person ceases to exist.

3. The national statutes must also set up precise criteria for local fraternities that possess or administer property or real estate, so that the respective council, before its term of office is finished, has the fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the council or by the fraternity's board of examiners.

## **Transfer**

### **Article 55**

If a brother or sister, for any reasonable cause, desires transfer to another fraternity, he or she first informs the council of the fraternity to which he or she belongs and then makes the request, including the reasons for the transfer, to the minister of the fraternity to which he or she wishes to belong. The council makes its decision after having received the necessary information in writing from the fraternity of origin.

## **Temporary Provisions**

### **Article 56**

1. [Rule 23](#) Members who find themselves in difficulty may ask, with a formal act, temporary withdrawal from the fraternity. The council will evaluate the request with love and prudence, after a fraternal dialogue between the minister and the assistant with the person concerned. If the reasons appear to be well founded, after the brother or sister in difficulty has been given time to reconsider, the council agrees to the request.
2. The repeated and prolonged default in the obligations of the life of the fraternity and other conduct in serious opposition to the Rule have to be discussed by the council in dialogue with the person at fault. Only in the case of obstinacy or relapse may the council decide, with a secret vote, to suspend someone. It communicates its decision in writing to the person concerned.
3. Voluntary withdrawal or the provision for suspension must be noted in the registers of the fraternity. It involves exclusion from the meetings and activities of the fraternity, including the right of active and passive voice, but membership in the Order itself is not affected.

### **Article 57**

1. In the case of voluntary withdrawal or of suspension from the fraternity, the Secular Franciscan may ask to be readmitted by addressing an appropriate written request to the minister.
2. After examining the reasons offered by the person involved, the council evaluates whether the causes which led to the withdrawal or suspension can be considered as overcome. If the conclusion is affirmative, it readmits him or her and the decision is recorded in the proceedings of the fraternity.

## Definitive Provisions

### Article 58

1. The brother or sister who intends to withdraw definitively from the Order, communicates so in writing to the minister of the fraternity. The minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the person concerned and keep the Council informed. If the brother or sister confirms the decision in writing, the Council takes notice and communicates it in writing to the person concerned. The definitive withdrawal is recorded in the register of the fraternity and communicated to the council of the higher level.
2. In case of serious causes, provided that they are external, imputable, and juridically proven, the minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the brother or sister concerned and keep the council informed. The brother or sister is given time to reflect and to discern, eventually with the help of an external and competent expert. If the time set aside for reflection passes without any result, the council of the fraternity requests the council of the higher level to dismiss the brother or sister from the Order. The request must be accompanied by all the documentation relative to the case. The council of the higher level will issue the decree of dismissal after having collegially examined the request with the relative documentation and having verified observance of the directives of the Law and of the Constitutions.
3. The brother or sister who publicly rejects the faith, or defects from ecclesiastical communion, or upon whom an excommunication is imposed or declared, by the fact itself ceases to be a member of the Order. This does not mean, however, that the council of the fraternity should not discuss the matter with the person concerned or offer fraternal help. The council of a higher level, upon request of the council of the local fraternity, collects the proofs and officially declares that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order.
4. The decree of dismissal or the declaration that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order, in order to become effective, must be confirmed by the national council to whom all the documentation will be sent.

### Article 59

If anyone is convinced that he or she has been wronged by a measure adopted, that person may appeal within three months to the council above the one that adopted the decision in question and, in successive cases, to further levels all the way up to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO and, in the final instance, to the Holy See.

### Article 60

What is said in these Constitutions with respect to the local fraternities is valid, to the extent that it is applicable, for the personal fraternities also.

## The Regional Fraternity

### Article 61

1. The regional fraternity is the organic union of all the local fraternities existing in a territory or which can be integrated into a natural unity, either by geographic proximity or by common problems and pastoral circumstances. It assures the link between the local fraternities and the national fraternity in respect to the unity of the SFO and in accord with the cooperative efforts of the Franciscan religious orders to provide spiritual assistance within the area.
2. It is for the national council to compose the regional fraternity according to the Constitutions and to the national statutes. The competent religious superiors, from whom spiritual assistance must be sought, should be informed of it.
3. The regional fraternity:
  - is animated and guided by council and a minister;
  - is ruled by the national statutes and by its own statutes;
  - has its own seat.

### Article 62

1. The regional council is constituted according to the provisions of the national statutes and of its own regional statutes. At the heart of the regional council there can be set up an executive council (or board) whose duties are determined by those same statutes.
2. The regional council has the following duties:
  - a. to prepare the celebration of the elective chapter;
  - b. to promote, animate, and co-ordinate the life and activities of the SFO and its insertion into the local Church within the regional area;
  - c. to detail the action plan of the SFO within the region according to the directives of the national council and in collaboration with it and to publicize that program to the local fraternities;
  - d. to communicate the directives of the national council and of the local Church to the local fraternities;
  - e. to provide for the formation of those responsible for animation;
  - f. to offer to local fraternities, activities which support their formative and operative needs;
  - g. to discuss and approve the annual report to the national council;
  - h. to schedule, when circumstances recommend so, the fraternal visit to the local fraternities, even if it is not requested;
  - i. to make decisions regarding the use of available funds and, in general, to deliberate on matters regarding the financial management and the economic affairs of the regional fraternity;
  - j. to have, before its term of office is finished, the regional fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the council or by the fraternity's board of examiners;
  - k. to perform such other duties as are indicated by the Constitutions or necessary to achieve its own aims.

## Article 63

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the council for the animation and guidance of the regional fraternity, it is the duty of the minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the council are put into practice. He or she will keep the council informed concerning his or her activities.
2. In addition, the regional minister has the duty:
  - a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the regional council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the fraternity after having listened to the council on the formalities of the convocation;
  - b. to preside at and to confirm the elections of the local fraternities either in person or through a delegated member of the regional council, with the exception of the spiritual assistant;
  - c. to make fraternal visits to the local fraternities, personally or through a delegate who is a member of the council;
  - d. to participate in the meetings called by the national council;
  - e. to represent the fraternity whenever it has acquired a juridical personality in the civil order;
  - f. to prepare the annual report to the national council;
  - g. to request the pastoral and fraternal visits with the consent of the council, at least once every three years.

## Article 64

The regional chapter is the representative organ of all the fraternities existing within the confines of a regional fraternity, with elective and deliberative power.

The national statutes provide for the formalities of convocation, its composition, frequency and powers.

## The National Fraternity

## Article 65

1. The national fraternity is the organic union of the local fraternities existing within the territory of one or more states which are joined and coordinated among themselves through regional fraternities, wherever they exist.
2. It is the duty of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO to provide for the establishment of new national fraternities upon request and in dialogue with the councils of the fraternities concerned. The competent religious superiors of the nation, of whom spiritual assistance will be requested, should be informed.
3. The national fraternity:
  - is animated and guided by a council and a minister;
  - is governed by its own statutes;
  - has its own seat.

## Article 66

1. The national council is constituted according to the provisions of the national statutes. At the heart of the national council there can be set up an executive council (or board) whose duties are determined by those same statutes.
2. The national council has the duty:
  - a. to prepare the celebration of the national elective chapter, according to its own statutes;
  - b. to make known and to promote the Secular Franciscan spirituality in the whole area of its own national fraternity;
  - c. to decide upon programs of annual activities of a national character;
  - d. to seek, indicate, publish, and distribute the necessary instruments for the formation of the Secular Franciscans;
  - e. to animate and coordinate the activities of the regional councils;
  - f. to maintain the connection with the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO;
  - g. to make sure that the national fraternity is represented in the international council and to assume responsibility for the expenses involved;
  - h. to discuss and approve the annual report to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO;
  - i. to see to the presence of the SFO in the ecclesial bodies at the national level;
  - j. to schedule, when circumstances recommend so, the fraternal visit to the regional and local fraternities, even if it is not requested;
  - k. to make decisions regarding the management of the available funds and, in general, regarding the economic affairs of the fraternity;
  - l. to have, before its term of office is finished, the national fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the council or by the fraternity's board of examiners;
  - m. to perform such other duties as are indicated by the Constitutions or necessary to achieve its own aims.

## Article 67

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the council for the animation and guidance of the national fraternity, it is the duty of the minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the council are put into practice. He or she will keep the council informed concerning his or her activities.
2. In addition, the national minister has the duty:
  - a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the national council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the national fraternity, according to the national statutes, after having listened to the council on the formalities of the convocation;
  - b. to direct and coordinate with the national leaders the activities at the national level;
  - c. to give a report to the national council and chapter on the life and activity of the SFO in the country;
  - d. to represent the national fraternity in contacts with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the national fraternity has a civil juridical personality, its legal representation belongs to the minister;
  - e. to preside at and to confirm the elections of the regional fraternities either in person or through a delegated member of the national council, with the exception of the spiritual assistant;

- f. to make fraternal visits to the regional councils, personally or through a delegate who is a member of the national council;
- g. to request the fraternal and pastoral visits, with the consent of the council, at least once every six years.

## **Article 68**

1. The national chapter is the representative organ of the fraternities existing within the confines of a national fraternity. It has legislative, deliberative, and elective powers. In conformity with the Rule and the Constitutions, it may make legislative decisions and give norms valid within its national confines. The national statutes determine the composition of the national chapter, its frequency, its powers, and how to convoke it.
2. The national statutes may envisage other forms of meetings and assemblies to promote the life and apostolate at the national level.

## **The International Fraternity**

### **Article 69**

1. The international fraternity is constituted by the organic union of all the Catholic Secular Franciscan fraternities in the world. It is identical to the SFO. It has its own juridical personality within the Church. It is organized and it functions in conformity with the Constitutions and its own statutes.
2. The international fraternity is guided and animated by the International Council of the SFO (CIOFS), with its seat in Rome (Italy), by its Presidency and by the general minister or international president.

### **Article 70**

1. The international council is composed of the following members, elected according to the norms of the Constitutions and its own statutes:
  - professed brothers and sisters of the SFO;
  - representatives of the Franciscan Youth.In addition, the four General Assistants to the SFO form part of the international council.
2. The Presidency of the International Council of the SFO is constituted within the international council of which it forms an integral part.
3. The International Council convened in General Chapter is the highest governing body of the SFO with legislative, deliberative, and elective powers. It can make legislative decisions and give norms in conformity with the Rule and the Constitutions.
4. The international council meets every six years in elective general chapter, and at least once between two elective general chapters, according to the norms established by the Constitutions and by the international statutes.

## Article 71

1. The purposes and duties of the International Council of the SFO are:
  - a. to promote and sustain the evangelical life according to the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi within the secular condition of the faithful living throughout the world;
  - b. to increase the sense of unity of the SFO while respecting the pluralism of the persons and groups, and to strengthen the bond of communion, collaboration, and sharing among the national fraternities;
  - c. to harmonize the sound traditions, according to the original nature of the SFO, with advances in theological, pastoral, and legislative fields, with a view to a specific evangelical Franciscan formation;
  - d. to contribute, in line with the tradition of the SFO, to the spreading of ideas and initiatives which are valuable for promoting the availability of Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society;
  - e. to determine the orientations and establish priorities for the actions of its Presidency;
  - f. to interpret the Constitutions according to article 5,2.
2. The international statutes specify the composition of the international council and how to convoke its meetings.

## Article 72

1. The Presidency of the International Council of the SFO is composed of:
  - the general minister;
  - the vice-minister;
  - the presidency councilors;
  - a member of the Franciscan Youth;
  - the general assistants of the SFO.
2. The presidency councilors are elected according to the international statutes, which determine their number and the areas represented.

## Article 73

The duties and tasks of the Presidency are:

- a. to see that the decisions and orientations of the general chapter are carried out;
- b. to co-ordinate, animate, and guide the SFO at the international level, in order to make the interdependence and reciprocity of the SFO a reality at the various levels of fraternity;
- c. to intervene in a spirit of service, according to the circumstances, providing fraternal aid in the clarification and resolution of grave and urgent problems of the SFO, informing the national council concerned and the next general chapter;
- d. to strengthen reciprocal relationships of collaboration between the SFO and the other components of the Franciscan family at the world level;
- e. to organize meetings or assemblies, according to the norms of the international statutes, to promote the life and the apostolate of the SFO at the international level;
- f. to collaborate with organizations and associations which defend the same values;
- g. to fulfill the other duties indicated in the Constitutions or needed in order to reach its own proper goals.



## Article 74

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO in the guidance and animation of the international fraternity, it belongs to the general minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the general chapter and of the Presidency are put into practice and to inform them concerning his or her activities.
2. In addition, the general minister has the duty:
  - a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the Presidency according to its own statutes;
  - b. to convoke the meetings of the general chapter, with the consent of the Presidency, and to preside at them;
  - c. to be a visible and effective sign of the communion and life-giving reciprocity between the SFO and the general ministers of the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, among whom he or she represents the SFO, and to preserve the bond with the conference of general assistants;
  - d. to represent the SFO at the world level before ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the international fraternity has a civil juridical personality, its legal representation belongs to the minister;
  - e. to make the fraternal visit to the national councils, personally or through a delegate;
  - f. to preside at the elections of the national councils, personally or through a delegate;
  - g. to request, with the consent of the Presidency, the pastoral visit by the Conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR;
  - h. to intervene in urgent cases, informing the Presidency of them;
  - i. to sign the official documents of the international fraternity;
  - j. to exercise, with the consent of the Presidency, the property rights of the international fraternity together with another councilor of the Presidency designated by that same body;
  - k. before every general chapter, have the financial and property situation of the international fraternity verified by a qualified accountant who is not involved in the economic and financial management of the Presidency.

## Article 75

The specific duties of the international councilors are determined by the international statutes.

## **Title IV**

### **ELECTION TO AND TERMINATION OF OFFICES**

#### **Elections**

#### **Article 76**

1. The elections at the various levels will take place according to the norms of the law of the Church<sup>36</sup> and of the Constitutions.  
The convocation should be carried out at least one month in advance, indicating the place, the day, and the time of the election.
2. The elective assembly, or chapter, will be presided over by the minister of the immediately higher level, or by his or her delegate, who confirms the election.  
The president or the delegate cannot preside over the elections in his or her local fraternity, nor the elections of the council of a higher level, of whose council he or she is a member.  
The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the TOR.  
A representative of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR presides at and confirms the elections of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.
3. The president of the chapter and the assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.
4. The president of the chapter designates, among the members of that chapter, a secretary and two tellers.

#### **Article 77**

1. In the local fraternity, the perpetually professed of the same fraternity have an active voice, that is can elect, and a passive voice, that is can be elected. The temporarily professed have only active voice.
2. At the other levels, the following have active voice: the secular members of the outgoing council, the representatives of the immediately lower level and of the Franciscan Youth, if professed. It belongs to the particular statutes to establish more concrete norms in application of the preceding norm, taking care to assure the broadest elective base. The perpetually professed Secular Franciscans of the corresponding area have a passive voice.
3. Both the national and the international statutes – each for its own area – can establish objective qualifications regarding who can be elected to the various offices.

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<sup>36</sup> See Can. 164 ff.

4. The presence of more than half of the number of those having the right to vote is required for the valid celebration of an elective chapter. For the local level, the national Statutes can establish a different norm.

### **Article 78**

1. An absolute majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is required for the election of the minister. After two inconclusive ballots, the voting continues between the two candidates who have obtained the largest number of votes or, in case there are more than two, between the two candidates who are oldest by profession. If there is still a tie after the third ballot, the older by profession will be considered elected.
2. The election of the vice-minister proceeds in the same manner.
3. For the election of the councilors, after a first ballot without an absolute majority, a relative majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is sufficient, unless the particular statutes require a greater majority.
4. The secretary announces the result of the elections; the president confirms the election according to the Ritual<sup>37</sup> if all has been carried out properly and those elected have accepted their office.

### **Article 79**

1. The minister and vice-minister may be elected for two consecutive terms of three years each. For a third and final successive election to the office of minister or vice-minister, a majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.
2. The outgoing minister cannot be elected vice-minister.
3. The councilors may be elected for additional successive terms of three years. Beginning with the third successive election, a majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.
4. The general minister, vice-minister, and presidency councilors can only be elected for two consecutive terms of six years.
5. The council of the higher level has the right and duty to invalidate the elections and to call them anew in all cases of inobservance of the preceding norms.

### **Article 80**

The particular statutes may include further directives concerning elections, as long as they are not contrary to the Constitutions.

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<sup>37</sup> See the old *Ritual SFO Book*, Part

## **Vacant Offices**

### **Article 81**

1. When the office of minister remains vacant as a result of death, resignation or other impediment of a definitive character, the vice-minister assumes the office until the end of the term for which the minister was originally elected.
2. If the office of vice-minister becomes vacant, one of the councilors is elected to the office of vice-minister by the council of the fraternity, to serve until the next elective chapter.
3. When the office of councilor becomes vacant, the council will proceed to substitute for him or her in conformity with its own statutes, to serve until the next elective chapter.

## **Incompatible Offices**

### **Article 82**

The following are incompatible:

- a. the office of minister at two different levels;
- b. the offices of minister, vice-minister, secretary and treasurer at the same level.

## **Resignation of Office**

### **Article 83**

1. When a minister of whatever level resigns during a chapter, that same chapter can accept the resignation.  
When a minister resigns outside the time of chapter, that resignation must be presented to the council. If the resignation is accepted, it must be confirmed by the minister of the higher level; if the general minister is resigning, the confirmation comes from the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.
2. The resignation of other offices is presented to the minister and to his or her council, who are competent to accept the resignation.

## **Removal**

### **Article 84**

1. In the case in which the minister does not fulfill his or her duties, the council concerned manifests its concerns in a fraternal dialogue with the minister. If this does not produce positive results, the council should inform the council of the higher level whose competence it is to examine the case and, if needed, by secret ballot, decide to remove the minister.

2. For a serious, public, and proved reason, the council of a higher level, after a fraternal dialogue with the person concerned, may, by a secret ballot, order the removal of a minister of a lower level.
3. When there is a serious reason to remove those who hold other offices of the council, it is the responsibility of that council to which they belong to make its decision by a secret ballot after there has been a fraternal dialogue with the person involved.
4. A recourse, which by itself suspends the action to remove someone from office, can be presented within thirty days to the council of the level immediately higher than the one which imposed the sanction.
5. The removal of the general minister belongs to the competence of the Conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.
6. When there is a case of serious lack of concern or evidence of irregularities on the part of a minister or a council, the council of the next higher level conducts a fraternal visit of the council in question and, eventually, requests a pastoral visit. With charity and prudence, it will evaluate the circumstances uncovered and decide on the best way to proceed, not excluding the eventual removal of the council or leaders involved.

## Title V

### SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE OF THE SFO

#### Article 85

1. As an integral part of the Franciscan family and called to live the charism of Francis within the secular dimension, the SFO has particular and close relations to the First Order and the TOR<sup>38</sup>.
2. The spiritual and pastoral care of the SFO, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, is the duty, above all, of their general and provincial ministers. The *altius moderamen*, of which Canon 303 speaks, belongs to them. The purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the SFO to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans.

#### Article 86

1. The general and provincial ministers exercise their office with respect to the SFO through:
  - the establishment of fraternities;
  - the pastoral visits;
  - the spiritual assistance to the fraternities at the various levels.They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate.
2. This service of the religious ministers completes but does not substitute for the secular councils and ministers to whom belong the guidance, coordination, and animation of the fraternities at the various levels.

#### Article 87

1. For all that concerns the SFO as a whole, the *altius moderamen* must be exercised by the general ministers collegially.
2. It belongs to the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR:
  - a. to take care of the relations with the Holy See concerning the approval of the legislative or liturgical documents, which need to be approved by the Holy See;
  - b. to visit the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO;
  - c. to confirm the election of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.

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<sup>38</sup> From Franciscan history and from the Constitutions of the First Order and the TOR, it is clearly evident that these Orders recognize that they are committed to the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the SFO in virtue of their common origin and charism and by the will of the Church. See Constitutions OFM, 60; Constitutions OFM Conv., 116; Constitutions OFM Cap., 95; Constitutions TOR, 157; Rule of the Third Order of Pope Leo XIII, 3,3; Rule approved by Paul VI, 26.

3. Each general minister, for his own Order, sees to the interest of the religious for the SFO and to their preparation for service to it according to the respective Constitutions and the Constitutions of the SFO.

### **Article 88**

1. The provincial ministers and the other major superiors, in the area of their own jurisdiction, guarantee the spiritual assistance to the local fraternities entrusted to the jurisdiction. They see to it that their own religious are interested in the SFO and that capable and well-prepared persons are appointed for the service of spiritual assistance.
2. It is the specific competence of the major superiors, in the name of their jurisdiction:
  - a. to establish, canonically, new local fraternities and guarantee them spiritual assistance;
  - b. to animate spiritually and visit the local fraternities assisted by their own jurisdiction;
  - c. to keep themselves informed on the spiritual assistance given to the SFO.
3. The major superiors are responsible for the spiritual assistance to the local fraternities which they have established.
4. The major superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory, are to establish together the most adequate means to guarantee spiritual assistance to local fraternities which, because of causes beyond their control, could remain without such assistance.
5. The major superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory, are to establish together the most adequate means for carrying out collegially their mission with respect to the regional and national fraternities of the SFO.

### **Article 89**

1. By virtue of the vital reciprocity between the religious and the secular members of the Franciscan Family and in regard to the responsibilities of major superiors, spiritual assistance to the fraternities of the SFO at all levels must be assured as a fundamental element of communion.
2. The spiritual assistant is the person designated by the competent major superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the SFO.
3. To be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the Secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between his Order and the SFO, the spiritual assistant should be a Franciscan religious, member of the First Order or the TOR.
4. When it is not possible to give such a spiritual assistant to the fraternity, the competent major superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:
  - a. religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
  - b. diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the SFO;
  - c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.

5. The previous authorization of the superior or the local ordinary, when needed, does not exempt the Franciscan major superior of the responsibility for the quality of the pastoral service and of the spiritual assistance given.

## Article 90

1. The principal task of the assistant is to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters.
2. The spiritual assistant is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. The spiritual assistant does not exercise the right to vote in financial questions.
3. Specifically:
  - a. the general assistants give their service to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO, form a conference, and collegially see to the spiritual assistance to the SFO as a whole;
  - b. the national assistants give their service to the national council, see to the spiritual assistance to the SFO in the whole territory of the national fraternity, and, at the national level, to the co-ordination of the regional assistants. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially;
  - c. the regional assistants give their service to the regional council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially;
  - d. the local assistants give their service to the local fraternity and its council.

## Article 91

1. The council of the fraternity at each level requests suitable and prepared assistants from the competent superiors of the First Order and the TOR.
2. Specifically:
  - a. the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO requests the general assistant from the respective general minister;
  - b. the national council requests the national assistant from the major superior, indicated collegially by the major superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the national fraternity;
  - c. the regional council requests the assistant from the major superior, indicated collegially by the major superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity;
  - d. the local council requests the assistant from the major superior of the jurisdiction responsible for the assistance.
3. The competent major superior, having heard the council of the fraternity concerned, appoints the assistant according to the norms of these Constitutions and of the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*.



## **Title VI**

### **THE FRATERNAL VISIT AND THE PASTORAL VISIT**

#### **Article 92**

1. [Rule 26](#) The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
2. With the consent of the appropriate council, the request for the fraternal visit as well as for the pastoral visit is made:
  - a. by the minister of the local and regional fraternity, at least every three years, to the council of the immediately higher level and to the respective conference of spiritual assistants;
  - b. by the national minister, at least every six years, to the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO and to the conference of general assistants;
  - c. by the general minister, at least every six years, to the Conference of General Ministers.
3. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respectively competent council or conference of spiritual assistants.

#### **Article 93**

1. In the visits to the local fraternities and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will verify the evangelical and apostolic vitality, the observance of the Rule and Constitutions, and the insertion of the fraternities into the Order and into the Church.
2. In the visits to the local fraternities and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will in time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the interested council. He or she will examine the registers and the records, including those relative to the preceding visits, to the election of the council, and to the administration of goods.  
The visitor will draw up a report of the visit carried out, appending it to the records in the appropriate register of the fraternity visited, and will inform the council of the level which has held the visit.
3. In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. He or she will give special attention to the brothers and sisters in formation and to those brothers and sisters who may request a personal meeting. Where required, he or she will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings eventually encountered.
4. If it is useful for the service of the fraternity, the two visitors, secular and religious, may make the visit at the same time, agreeing beforehand on the program, in a way most consonant with the mission of each of them.

5. The fraternal and pastoral visits, carried out by the immediately higher level, do not deprive the visited fraternity of the right to appeal to the council or to the conference of spiritual assistants of a higher level.

## The Fraternal Visit

### Article 94

1. The fraternal visit is a moment of communion, an expression of the service and concrete interest of the secular leaders at the various levels, so that the fraternity may grow and be faithful to its vocation.<sup>39</sup>
2. Among the various initiatives to achieve the purpose of the visit, the visitor will give special attention:
  - to the validity of the formation, both initial and permanent;
  - to the relations entertained with other fraternities at the different levels, with Franciscan youth, and with the entire Franciscan family.
  - to the observance of the directives and of the guidelines of the International Council of the SFO and of the other councils;
  - to the presence in the local Church.
3. The visitor will check the report of the previous audit or verification of the financial and property management of the Council, the register of the accounts and every document pertaining to the property of the fraternity and, if applicable, the condition of the juridical personality in the civil order, including the fiscal aspects. In the absence of the required audit of the financial and property management of the council, the visitor can commission such an audit, to be paid by the visited fraternity, to an expert who is not a member of the council concerned. Wherever he or she deems it opportune, the visitor will obtain the assistance of a competent person in these aspects.
4. The visitor will check the records of the election of the council. He or she will evaluate the quality of the service offered to the fraternity by the minister and by the other leaders, and will study with them the solution to problems which may arise. If, for whatever reason, he or she should find that their service does not meet the needs of the fraternity, the visitor will promote appropriate initiatives, taking into account also the provisions concerning resignation and removal from office, given special circumstances<sup>40</sup>.
5. The visitor may not carry out the visit of his or her own local fraternity, nor of the council of another level of which he or she is a member.

## The Pastoral Visit

### Article 95

1. The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion with the First Order and the TOR. It is carried out also in the name of the Church and serves to guarantee and promote the observance of the Rule and the Constitutions and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. The visit is carried out with respect to the organization and the law proper to the SFO itself.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. [Constitutions 51.1c](#); [63.2g](#); [67.2g](#).

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. [Constitutions 83](#); [84](#).

2. Having verified the canonical establishment of the fraternity, the visitor will give attention to the relations between the fraternity and its spiritual assistant and the local Church. The visitor will meet the pastors (bishop or parish priest) when this is opportune for fostering communion and service for building up the Church.
3. The visitor will promote collaboration and a sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the religious assistants. The visitor is to examine the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity, encourage the spiritual assistants in their service and promote their continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
4. The visitor will give special attention to programs, methods and experiences of formation, to the liturgical and prayer life, and to the apostolic activities of the fraternity.

## **Title VII**

### **THE FRANCISCAN YOUTH**

#### **Article 96**

1. The SFO, by virtue of its very vocation, ought to be ready to share its experience of evangelical life with the youth who feel attracted to Saint Francis of Assisi and to seek the means of adequately presenting it to them.
2. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra), as understood by these Constitutions and in so far as the SFO considers itself to be particularly responsible for it, is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.
3. The members of the Franciscan Youth consider the Rule of the SFO as an inspirational document for the growth of their own Christian and Franciscan vocation either individually or in a group. After a suitable period of formation, of at least one year, they confirm this option with a personal pledge before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.
4. The members of the Franciscan Youth who wish to belong to the SFO should satisfy the requirements of the Rule, the Constitutions, and the Ritual of the SFO.
5. The Franciscan Youth has a specific organization, methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth, according to the existing realities in the various countries. The national statutes of the Franciscan Youth should be approved by the respective national council of the SFO, or in its absence, by the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.
6. The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan family, requests from the competent secular leaders and religious superiors, respectively, fraternal animation and spiritual assistance.

#### **Article 97**

1. The SFO fraternities will promote the vocation to the Franciscan Youth by means of appropriate and dynamic initiatives. They should see to the vitality and the expansion of the Franciscan Youth fraternities and will accompany the youth in their journey of human and spiritual growth with proposals for specific activities and contents.
2. The SFO fraternities commit themselves to give to the Franciscan Youth fraternities a fraternal animator, who together with the spiritual assistant and the council of the Franciscan Youth guarantees an adequate Secular Franciscan formation.

3. To promote a close communion with the SFO, all leaders of the Franciscan Youth at the international level and at least two members of the national council of the Franciscan Youth are to be professed Secular Franciscan youth.
4. A representative of the Franciscan Youth is to be designated by his or her council to form part of the SFO council of the corresponding level; a representative of the SFO, designated by his or her own council, forms part of the council of the Franciscan Youth of the same level. The representative of the Franciscan Youth has a vote in the SFO council only if he or she is a professed Secular Franciscan
5. The representatives of the Franciscan Youth in the international council of the SFO are elected according to the international statutes which also determine how many there are, what fraternities they represent, and what their responsibilities are supposed to be.

## Title VIII

### IN COMMUNION WITH THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY AND THE CHURCH

#### Article 98

1. [Rule 1](#) Secular Franciscans should seek to live in life-giving reciprocal communion with all the members of the Franciscan family. They should be ready to promote common initiatives or participate in them with the religious of the First, Second, and Third Orders, with Secular Institutes, and with other lay ecclesial groups that recognize Francis as a model and inspiration in order to work together to spread the Gospel, remove the causes of marginalization, and serve the cause of peace.
2. They must cultivate a special affection, which expresses itself in concrete initiatives of fraternal communion, towards the sisters of the contemplative life who, like Saint Clare of Assisi, bear witness in the Church and in the world and by whose mediation they expect the abundance of grace for the fraternity and for the works of the apostolate.

#### Article 99

1. [Rule 6](#) As a living part of the people of God and inspired by the Seraphic Father, the Secular Franciscans, "living in full communion with the Pope and the bishops", should seek to know and deepen the doctrine proposed by the teaching Church through its more important documents and they should be attentive to the presence of the Holy Spirit who vivifies the faith and charity of the people of God.<sup>41</sup> They should collaborate in the initiatives promoted by the Holy See, in a particular way in those areas in which they are called to work by virtue of their secular Franciscan vocation.
2. The SFO, as an international public association, is connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff from whom it has received the approval of its Rule and the confirmation of its mission in the Church and in the world.

#### Article 100

1. The vocation to "rebuild" the Church ought to induce the brothers and sisters sincerely to love and to live the union with the local Church in which they develop their own vocation and realize their apostolic commitment, aware that in the diocese the Church of Christ is truly functioning<sup>42</sup>.
2. The Secular Franciscans should fulfill with dedication the duties with which they are occupied in their relations to the local Church. They should lend their help to the activities of the apostolate

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<sup>41</sup> [Lumen Gentium](#) 12.

<sup>42</sup> *Christus Dominus* 11; Can. 396; See 2 *Celano* 10; 1 *Celano* 18.

as well as to the social activities existing in the diocese.<sup>43</sup> In the spirit of service, they should make themselves present, as the fraternity of the SFO, within the life of the diocese. They should be ready to collaborate with other ecclesial groups and to participate in pastoral councils.

3. Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and the witness of building fraternity, sincerely and openly, are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love. They should be recognized in it by their "being," from which their mission springs.

### **Article 101**

1. The Secular Franciscans should collaborate with the bishops and follow their directions in so far as they are the moderators of the ministry of the Word and of the Liturgy and the coordinators of the various forms of apostolate in the local Church.<sup>44</sup>
2. The fraternities are subject to the vigilance of the Ordinary in so far as they perform their activities within the local Churches.<sup>45</sup>

### **Article 102**

1. The fraternities established in a parish church should seek to co-operate in the animation of the parochial community, in the liturgy and in fraternal relations. They should integrate themselves into the pastoral apostolate as a whole, with preference for those activities more congenial to the Secular Franciscan tradition and spirituality.
2. In the parishes entrusted to Franciscan religious, the fraternities constitute the mediation and the secular witness of the Franciscan charism in the parochial community through their exercise of the fruitful life-giving reciprocity. Therefore, united with the religious, they see to the spreading of the gospel message and of the Franciscan lifestyle.

### **Article 103**

1. Remaining faithful to their own identity, the fraternities will take care to make the most of each occasion for prayer, formation, and active collaboration with other ecclesial groups. They should welcome with pleasure those who, without belonging to the SFO, wish to share its experiences and activities.
2. The fraternities will promote, wherever possible, fraternal relations with non-Catholic associations inspired by Francis.

Approved by the Vatican December 8, 2000

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<sup>43</sup> See Can. 311.

<sup>44</sup> See Can. 394; 756; 775 ss.

<sup>45</sup> See Can. 305; 392.

# Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America

## Introduction

We, the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America, called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi, in order to provide for the life of the Order and specifically for its organization and function, do establish and adopt these *Statutes*.

All regulations not in accordance with these present National Statutes are abrogated [cf. General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order (hereafter [General Constitutions](#)), [Article 7](#)].

## Section I

### Organization and Structure

#### Article 1. National Fraternity

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America (hereafter NAFRA)

- 1 is a juridic person [cf. Code of [Canon Law](#), Canons 116 and 117] made up of the Regional and Local Fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order (hereafter SFO) [legal title for the international body is *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis* (OFS)] existing within the United States [cf. *Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order* (hereafter [Rule](#)), [Article 2](#); [General Constitutions](#), [Articles 1.5](#) and [65.1](#); Code of [Canon Law](#), Canons 214 and 303];
- 2 is animated and guided by a Council and Minister who are duly elected;
- 3 is organized and functions in conformity with the Code of [Canon Law](#), and the following SFO documents: the *Rule*, the *General Constitutions*, the *Ritual*, the [CIOFS International Statutes](#), and these *National Statutes* [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 4.1](#)].



## Article 2. Governing Body

1. The governing body of NAFRA is the National Fraternity Council. The National Executive Council acts on behalf of the National Fraternity Council when the members of the entire Council are not in session [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 66.1](#)].
2. The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants exercises pastoral care and spiritual guidance in regard to NAFRA as one of the integral component parts of the SFO by suitable means including participation in deliberations of its governing body [cf. *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order* (hereafter [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#)), Articles 19 and 20].

## Article 3. National Fraternity Council

1. The National Fraternity Council is composed of the Regional Ministers, the National Executive Council, and the members of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants.
2. The business of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America shall be conducted by the National Fraternity Council.
3. In addition, the National Fraternity Council has legislative, deliberative and elective powers; in conformity with the *Rule* and the *General Constitutions*, it may make legislative decisions and produce norms valid within its national confines.
4. The regular meeting of the National Fraternity shall be the annual meeting of the National Fraternity Council convoked by the National Minister, which convocation shall provide for at least two months' advance notice.
5. The National Fraternity Council meets in elective chapter every three years; the National Minister convokes this meeting at least two months in advance, indicating the place, the day, and the time of the election.
6. If considered necessary by the National Executive Council, or when at least one-third of the Regional Ministers requests it, the National Fraternity Council may meet at other times during any year.
7. In addition to the duties enumerated in [Article 66.2](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), the National Fraternity Council has the following duties:
  - a. To compose and approve modifications to boundaries of Regional Fraternities (see appendix A);

- b. To set the fair share amount of annual financial contributions to NAFRA from the Regional Fraternities.

#### Article 4. Structure for Property Control

1. In accordance with [Article 54](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), NAFRA is incorporated under the laws of the United States of America, State of Ohio, as "The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - U.S.A." and has its statutory office at 1615 Vine Street, Cincinnati, Ohio 45202.
2. The elected officers of the National Fraternity Council shall function as the officers of the corporation.
3. Upon the termination of existence of the corporation, all assets, real and personal, tangible and intangible, along with its library and records, shall become the property of the "juridic person immediately superior" [cf. *Code of [Canon Law](#)*, Canon 123].
4. NAFRA is the organic union of all Local and Regional Secular Franciscan Fraternities located within the United States of America and is itself incorporated. Therefore, no Local or Regional Fraternity may itself incorporate without the specific written prior approval of NAFRA. Because of the usual requirement to incorporate for the purpose of owning real estate, no Local or Regional Fraternity may acquire real estate without the specific written prior approval of NAFRA.
5. In accord with [Article 54.3](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), for the fraternities at each level, a financial audit must be done every 3 years, just prior to the end of the Council's term of office. This audit may be conducted by a professional accountant who is not a member of the fraternity Council, or by a "board of examiners" established by the particular fraternity (consisting of two or more experts selected at large by the membership who are not also members of that fraternity's Council). A written report of such audit must be given to the Council of the higher fraternity.

#### Article 5. National Executive Council

1. Between the meetings of the National Fraternity Council, an elected National Executive Council shall carry on the business and carry out the purposes of the National Fraternity in a spirit of ministry and service [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 66.1](#)].
2. The National Executive Council is composed of the National Minister, the National Vice Minister, the National Secretary, the National Treasurer, at least one elected Councilor, and the International Councilor. The President of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants is by right a member of this Council. The Chair(s) of the National Formation Commission and the

National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (“JPIC”) Commission may attend meetings of the National Executive Council.

3. All members of the National Executive Council have voting rights. The Chair(s) of the National Formation Commission and the National Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (“JPIC”) Commission exercise a consultative role.
4. Election of the members of the National Executive Council shall proceed in accordance with **Section II** of this document.
5. The duties of the National Executive Council are:
  - a. To form, animate, guide, and coordinate the SFO at the national level;
  - b. To see that the decisions of the National Fraternity Council are carried out;
  - c. To provide practical and pastoral interpretations and to clarify specific points in the *National Statutes*, with validity until the next meeting of the National Fraternity Council;
  - d. To resolve urgent problems which may arise that were not encompassed in the *General Constitutions* or *National Statutes*, until the next meeting of the National Fraternity Council;
  - e. To intervene to resolve serious and urgent problems in a spirit of reconciliation when requested by a Regional Fraternity Council or on the National Executive Council's own initiative;
  - f. To hear appeals from decisions of dismissal from membership rendered by Regional Executive Councils where appropriate [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 59](#)];
  - g. To establish and direct commissions and committees deemed necessary to achieve the goals and objectives determined by the National Fraternity Council;
  - h. To present to the representative of the International Fraternity and the representative of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants a stipend appropriate to the journey made and the length of stay required at the time of fraternal and pastoral visits, and also on the occasion of their presiding over and witnessing elections;
  - i. To administer the financial affairs of NAFRA, including events not foreseen in the annual budget approved at the annual meeting of

the National Fraternity Council, such extraordinary (non-budgeted) expenditures not to exceed five percent (5%) of the annual budget.

6. When not in session, the National Executive Council may conduct business electronically (i.e., via e-mail, telephone, fax, etc.), provided that any decisions and determinations made in this way are reviewed and ratified at the next regular meeting of the Council.

#### Article 6. Duties of Officers of the National Executive Council

1. The National Minister, in addition to the duties enumerated in [Article 67](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), has the following duty:

To approve when necessary extraordinary (non-budgeted) expenditures, not to exceed one percent (1%) of the annual NAFRA budget.

2. The National Vice Minister's duties are enumerated in [Article 52.1](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).

3. The National Secretary, in addition to the duties enumerated in [Article 52.2](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), has the following duty:

To maintain and supervise the archives of the National Fraternity in accordance with instructions of the National Executive Council.

4. The National Treasurer, in addition to the duties enumerated in [Article 52.4](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), has the following duties:

- a. To ensure the deposit of all funds of the National Fraternity which may come into the hands of the National Treasurer into such bank accounts in the name of NAFRA as the National Executive Council shall designate;
- b. To provide for the payment of monies as the business of the National Fraternity may require as approved in the annual budget or on the order of the National Minister or the National Executive Council. All payments are to be made by check.
- c. To submit an annual budget to the National Executive Council for its review, and to the National Fraternity Council for its review and approval at the annual meeting.
- d. To be responsible for the financial books and records of NAFRA. Upon the written request of any member of the National Fraternity

Council to the Treasurer, these financial records shall be open for inspection.

- e. To provide the National Fraternity Council with financial reports of receipts, expenditures, and balances in NAFRA's treasury throughout the year, and at the beginning of each year, to provide a written statement of receipts, expenditures, and balances in NAFRA's treasury for the preceding year.
5. The International Councilor's duties are enumerated in [Article 75](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) and [Article 7](#) of the [CIOFS International Statutes](#).
  6. The President of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, in addition to the duties enumerated in [Article 90](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), has the following duties:
    - a. To attend meetings of the National Fraternity Council and of the National Executive Council, of which he is a member by right, collaborating with these bodies in all their activities;
    - b. To act collegially with the other National Spiritual Assistants to coordinate spiritual assistance on the national level and to cooperate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 90.3b](#); [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Article 19];
    - c. To vote in all matters which come before these bodies for decision except for financial matters and in elective chapters.

## **Section II**

### Voting and Conduct of Business

#### Article 7. Convocation

1. The regular meeting of the National Fraternity shall be the annual meeting of the National Fraternity Council called by the National Minister.
2. The National Executive Council shall meet at least twice during the period between annual meetings of the National Fraternity Council.
3. The National Fraternity Council shall meet in the elective chapter once every three years.
4. The National Fraternity shall celebrate a National Congress at least once every five years, at a time and place determined by the National Executive

Council and confirmed by the National Fraternity Council.

5. The Minister of each Regional Fraternity shall receive at least two months' notice of the place, day and time of the annual National Fraternity Council meeting.

#### Article 8. Voting Rights

1. All members of the **National Fraternity Council** as defined in [Article 3.1](#) of these [National Statutes](#) may vote. No Spiritual Assistant at any level, however, shall vote on any question involving financial matters [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 90.2](#)] or in elective chapters [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 77](#); [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Article #12.3]. This restriction applies to Secular Franciscans as well as religious friars and sisters serving as Spiritual Assistants for a particular Secular Franciscan fraternity.
2. The Minister of each Regional Fraternity has the primary responsibility for casting the vote of the Regional Fraternity in all elections and on all business that may come before the National Fraternity Council.
3. Substitutes/Delegates
  - a. In the event a Regional Minister is impeded from attending the National Fraternity Council meeting, then the delegate of the Regional Fraternity shall automatically be the Regional Vice Minister pursuant to the provisions of [Article 52.1.c](#) of the [General Constitutions](#)
  - b. If both the Regional Minister and the Regional Vice Minister are so impeded, then a member of the Regional Executive Council selected by that body shall attend and exercise all of the powers of a delegate for the Regional Fraternity.
4. No Regional Fraternity may cast more than a single vote on any issue or in any election.
5. Even if a person has a right to vote in his or her own name by more than one title, such person may cast only one ballot [cf. *Code of [Canon Law](#) Canon #168*].
6. During those meetings of the National Fraternity Council at which elections occur, the members of the outgoing and of the incoming National Executive Council, upon election and even prior to formal installation, are members with full rights of the National Fraternity Council until the end of said meeting.

## Article 9. Quorum; Majority; Counting Ballots; Procedure

1. No official business may be transacted at a National Fraternity Council or National Executive Council meeting unless a quorum is present. A quorum is defined as the presence of more than half of the number of those having the right to vote [cf. [General Constitutions](#), Article 77.4].
2. A majority, sometimes designated an *absolute* majority, is more than half of the total number of votes cast. A *relative* or *simple* majority is the highest number of votes cast on a motion or in an election [cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon #119].
3. Where questions arise concerning procedures that are not covered by the *Code of Canon Law*, the *General Constitutions* or the *National Statutes*, reference may be made to *Robert's Rules of Order*. The President of the Elective Chapter (i.e., the Secular Franciscan who presides), after taking advice, retains the authority to determine any matter of procedure.

## Article 10. Elections

1. Elections shall take place according to the norms of [Article 76.1](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), the *National Statutes*, and the *International Statutes*.
2. The National Fraternity Council elects the Secular members of the National Executive Council.
3. The International Councilor is elected by the National Fraternity Council and represents NAFRA as a member of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (hereafter CIOFS) in accordance with its *Statutes*.
4. The National Fraternity Council also elects a substitute delegate for the International Councilor from among the elected members of the National Executive Council should he or she be prevented from attending the CIOFS General Chapter [cf. Article 5.2 of [CIOFS International Statutes](#)]. In the event of such impediment, the National Minister shall inform the CIOFS Presidency of it and of the substitute delegation [cf. [CIOFS International Statutes](#), Article #8.1].
5. The convocation and nominations for the office of International Councilor shall be carried out as in Article 11 of these [National Statutes](#).
6. In tallying votes which are conducted by secret written ballot, each elector shall submit one vote. Then all ballots, including blanks, shall be counted to assure the validity of the vote [cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Canon #173.2].



## Article 11. Convocation and Nominations

1. At least four months prior to elections, the National Executive Council shall appoint a Chair for a Nominations Committee which will, acting according to norms established by the National Executive Council, present a slate of nominees for the offices to the members of the National Fraternity Council. This presentation shall be made approximately two months prior to the date set for the elections.
2. To be eligible as a candidate for election to office in the National Fraternity, one must be a permanently professed active member of the SFO [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 30](#)]. Candidates should be convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to a broad and encompassing vision of the life of the Church and of society, open to dialogue and ready to give and receive help and collaboration [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 31.3](#)].
3. It shall be the duty of the Nominations Committee to ensure that each candidate meets the qualifications for the office for which she or he is proposed, has reviewed the duties of that office, and is willing to serve if elected.
4. Any individual elected to a national office may not hold an elected office at the Regional Fraternity level or the Local Fraternity level. (See [Article 28](#).)
5. The provisions of [Article 76](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall be followed for convocation of the National Fraternity Council meeting for the purpose of elections.
6. Notification of CIOFS
  - a. The National Minister shall in timely fashion contact the General Minister of the SFO, requesting that she or he or a delegate preside over forthcoming National Fraternity elections.
  - b. The National Minister shall in timely fashion contact the President of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants, requesting that he or a delegate attend forthcoming National Fraternity elections as the ecclesial witness.

## Article 12. Right to Vote at Elections

The right to vote in elective chapters has been defined in [Article 8](#) of these [National Statutes](#).



### Article 13. Terms of Office

In addition to the provisions enumerated in [Article 79](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), the following apply:

1. Length of Terms
  - a. The Secular members of the National Executive Council are elected for a term of three years.
  - b. The term of the International Councilor is governed by the provisions of Article 5.4 of the [CIOFS International Statutes](#).
  - c. The term of the President of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants is determined by the members of that Conference.
2. For a third and final successive election to the office of National Councilor (which includes every elected office except those of National Minister and National Vice Minister) or International Councilor, a majority of two-thirds (2/3) of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.
3. The outgoing National Minister cannot be elected to any other office on the National Executive Council. (See [Article 28](#).)

### Article 14. Procedure in Voting

1. The vote shall be taken and completed as to each office before proceeding to the next, commencing with the office of National Minister. Persons not elected to the first office voted upon may be nominated for remaining offices.
2. Further nominations shall be received or at least solicited from the floor at the elective chapter.
3. The election procedure shall follow the provisions of [Articles 76](#) and [78](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).
4. The election of National Councilors proceeds in the same manner as provided for in [Article 78.1](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).

### Article 15. Provisions for Vacancies, Resignations, and Removals

1. The provisions of [Articles 81.1](#), [81.2](#) and [83](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall govern the procedure to be followed in the event the National Minister

or National Vice Minister resigns or is impeded from performing the duties of the office.

2. When the office of National Councilor becomes vacant, the Executive Council will proceed to appoint someone to substitute for him or her until the end of the term for which the Councilor was originally elected. If the appointee is already an elected member of the Council, he or she retains the right to vote. If the appointee is not an elected member, he or she serves without a vote.
3. The provisions of [Article 84](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall govern the procedure to be followed to secure the removal for cause of the National Minister or members of the National Fraternity Council.
4. The provisions of [Article 84.4](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall govern the appeals process for any officer removed from office.

## **Section III**

### Fraternal Life

#### Article 16. Fraternity Life

1. The provisions of [Article 2](#), [3](#) and [Article 4](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) concerning the nature of the vocation to the SFO apply.
2. The fraternal life, with its vitality and sustaining force, is meant to exist on the national level as well as on regional and local levels. For this reason, the National Fraternity is so constituted by leadership and structure, vitalized by the participation of its members, and nurtured by ongoing formation and spiritual assistance as to achieve its objective of being a real fraternity; and the same is true for each Regional and Local Fraternity.
3. The Fraternities should bear in mind that they are subject to the vigilance of the local Ordinary insofar as they perform their apostolic activities within the local churches. Secular Franciscans should, therefore, dialogue with their local Ordinaries and follow their directions, in as much as they are the moderators of the ministry of the Word and of the Liturgy and the coordinators of the various forms of apostolate in the local Diocesan church [cf. [Rule, Article 6](#)].
4. The external sign of the SFO in the United States is the TAU.

## Article 17. Fraternal and Pastoral Visitations

The provisions of [Articles 92](#) through [95](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) and Article #14 of the *Statutes for Spiritual Assistance* concerning the fraternal and pastoral visitations apply.

## Article 18. Local Fraternity

1. The Local Fraternity is the primary constituent part of the entire structure of Secular Franciscan life to which the member relates [cf. [Rule](#), Article 22].
2. The provisions of [Articles 46](#) and [47](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall govern the canonical establishment of new fraternities and determine the Franciscan friar province which assumes pastoral care [cf. [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Articles #6.1 and #11.2].
3. The Council of each Local Fraternity is composed according to the requirements of [Article 49.1](#) of the [General Constitutions](#). With respect to the fraternity they assist, anyone who serves as a Spiritual Assistant is subject to the same rights and restrictions as are Franciscan religious Spiritual Assistants [cf. Articles 12, 13, 15, 23 and 24, [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#)]. Spiritual Assistants who are Secular Franciscans may not be elected to other positions on the Councils of fraternities they assist.
4. A Local Fraternity may pass to the pastoral care of another friar province of the First Order or Third Order Regular in one of two ways [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 47.2](#); [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Article 6.2]:
  - a. The Council and Minister of the Local Fraternity approach the Regional Executive Council, including the Regional Spiritual Assistant(s), with the request for transfer. If the Regional Executive Council, including the Regional Spiritual Assistant(s), approves the request, the Regional Spiritual Assistant asks the Provincial Ministers or Provincial Spiritual Assistants of the two friar provinces to effect the transfer.
  - b. For the sake of providing better pastoral care, the Provincial Ministers or Provincial Spiritual Assistants of two friar provinces may initiate the transfer of a Local Fraternity from the care of one province to that of the other. The Provincial Ministers or Provincial Spiritual Assistants act in consultation with the Councils, including the Spiritual Assistants, of the Local and Regional Fraternities.

5. Establishment of sections or cells
  - a. Should one or more groups desire to establish permanent sections within a Local Fraternity based on particular needs or common interests, they may do so subject to the direction of the Local Fraternity Council [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 50.2.d](#)], so long as they continue to participate fully in the Local Fraternity's fraternal and apostolic life. The Regional Fraternity will receive notice of the formation of such groups.
  - b. Such sections remain subject to the Local Fraternity as constituent parts of it [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 34](#)].
6. No official business may be transacted at a Local Fraternity meeting unless a quorum is present. The quorum consists of a majority of active members who are not excused from attendance.
7. The Local Fraternity is responsible for contributing to the Regional Fraternity on a fair share basis from its common fund to underwrite the costs of that fraternity [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 30.3](#)]. A fair share contribution is made based on the number of active and excused brothers and sisters, but not for those who are deemed lapsed.
  - a. An active fraternity member is one who participates both by attending fraternity meetings and by providing financial support to the community, or whom the fraternity has excused from such obligations.
  - b. Those brothers and sisters who neither attend meetings, support the community financially, nor have valid reasons due to health, family, work or distance, and who, after personal invitations to return to fraternity, consciously and deliberately reject or ignore the invitation, will be termed "lapsed" and will not be carried on the fraternity membership roll nor be reported as a member to higher fraternity Councils [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 53.3](#)].
8. The Local Fraternity will present to the Regional Minister or his or her delegate and to the Regional Spiritual Assistant or the representative of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants a stipend appropriate to the journey made and the length of stay required at the time of fraternal and pastoral visits, and also on the occasion of their presiding over and witnessing elections.
9. It is at the local level that activities have their greatest meaning to members of the SFO. The Local Fraternity Council should expend great care to provide for thought-provoking activities and programs to foster Franciscan life and to deepen Franciscan spirituality among fraternity members.

10. As fraternity members become unable to attend meetings on a regular basis, the Local Fraternity Council should set up a method by which regular contacts are maintained [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 53.3](#)].
11. The provisions relating to property control which appear in these *National Statutes* in the section dealing with the responsibilities of the National Fraternity shall apply to the Local Fraternities insofar as they may be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the Local Fraternity.
12. As required by [Article 54.2](#) of the [General Constitutions](#), the National Executive Council shall approve statements for use by the Local Fraternities that establish “precise criteria” for their “statement of purposes” and “internal controls” which must be used in their establishing documents.
13. Affiliation with a local fraternity
  - a. Those who, without belonging to the SFO, wish to participate in its life and activities (see [General Constitutions, Article 53.5](#)] and [103.1](#)) according to Franciscan principles and teachings, may be welcomed by the local fraternity, so as to make their communion living and effective. Individuals wishing to become affiliates should make their desire known by a written request to the local fraternity council, which makes a decision regarding the request.
  - b. These affiliate brothers and sisters will have no juridical bond with the Secular Franciscan Order and are, therefore persons welcomed to love and be loved “as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ” (SFO [Rule](#) Article 13). They may share the experiences and activities of the fraternity, without the right to vote.
  - c. In order that the identity of the fraternity not be altered, the number of affiliates may not exceed 40% of the number of active professed members of a fraternity.
  - d. Regional councils have the right to establish their own guidelines for the acceptance of affiliates.

## Article 19. Formation

1. Orientation
  - a. Orientation is a time for determining a person’s interest, eligibility and disposition to enter into the initial formation process [cf. *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States* (hereafter *Guidelines for Initial Formation*), page 25].

- b. The period of orientation shall consist of not less than three (3) months.

## 2. Initial Formation

- a. Inquiry – The period of Inquiry, which begins with the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming [cf. *Ritual*, page 9], shall consist of not less than six (6) months.
- b. Candidacy – The period of Candidacy, which begins with the Rite of Admission [cf. *Ritual*, page 11], shall consist of not less than eighteen (18) months and not more than thirty-six (36) months.
- c. All persons in initial formation, in addition to attending their formation sessions, must participate in the meetings of the Local Fraternity as this is an indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 40.3](#)].
- d. To be admitted to the SFO in the United States, a person must be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church (i.e., having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation/Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) in addition to being an actively practicing Catholic.

## 3. Profession

- a. The minimum age for perpetual profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is twenty-one (21) years.
- b. The minimum age for temporary profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is eighteen (18) years.

## 4. Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation is the responsibility of all professed members consonant with [Article 44](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).

## 5. Form and Methodology

- a. The form (i.e., content and process; cf. [General Constitutions, Article 38.2](#)) to be employed in both initial and ongoing formation is that found in the *Guidelines for Initial Formation*.
- b. The methodology employed in formation should be both interactive and experiential in nature [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 40.4](#)].

- c. Opportunities for fraternities to meet together for the purposes of common ongoing and initial formation shall occur whenever possible at all levels of fraternity [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 40.1](#)].
6. Provisions for Remote Initial Formation

In those rare instances in which a person is legitimately impeded from participating in the normal formation process of a Local Fraternity, recourse may be had to the *Guidelines for Remote Initial Formation in the United States* as adopted by the National Executive Council in June 2000.

#### Article 20. Transfer, Withdrawal, Suspension and Dismissal from the Fraternity and from the Order

The provisions set forth in [Articles 55](#) through [59](#) of the [General Constitutions](#) shall constitute the manner and means for transfer, withdrawal, suspension, and dismissal from the fraternity and from the Order.

#### Article 21. Regional Fraternity

1. The Regional Fraternities are constituted according to the provisions of the [General Constitutions, Article 61](#).
2. The governing body of each Regional Fraternity is the Regional Fraternity Council. The Regional Executive Council acts on behalf of the Regional Fraternity Council when the members of the entire Council are not in session [cf. [General Constitutions, Article 66.1](#)].
3. The Regional Spiritual Assistant or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants exercises pastoral care and spiritual guidance in regard to each Regional Fraternity as an integral component part of NAFRA and of the SFO, by the same means and manner as does the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants in regard to NAFRA [cf. [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Articles 21 and 22].

#### Article 22. Regional Fraternity Council

1. The Regional Fraternity Council is composed of the Ministers of the Local Fraternities that together form the Regional Fraternity, the Regional Executive Council, and the Regional Spiritual Assistant or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants, each of whom may vote. Regional Spiritual Assistants, however, do not vote in financial matters and in elective chapters [cf. [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#), Article #12.1].
2. The Regional Fraternity Council is the representative body of all of the Local Fraternities that together compose the Regional Fraternity, and has the power to create regional guidelines in conformity with the *Rule*, the *General Constitutions*, and the *National Statutes*.



3. The Regional Fraternity Council shall meet at least once a year. Every third year the Regional Fraternity Council shall meet in elective chapter in accord with the *General Constitutions* and these *National Statutes*.
4. The Regional Fraternity Council has the duties set forth in [Article 62.2](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).

#### Article 23. Regional Executive Council

1. Between the meetings of the Regional Fraternity Council, an elected Regional Executive Council shall carry on the business and carry out the purposes of the Regional Fraternity in a spirit of ministry and service [cf. [General Constitutions](#), [Article 62.1](#)].
2. The Regional Executive Council is composed of the Regional Minister, the Regional Vice Minister, the Regional Secretary, the Regional Treasurer, at least one elected Councilor, and the Regional Spiritual Assistant or the President of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants. In addition, the Regional Formation Director may also be elected. In those regions in which the Regional Formation Director is appointed rather than elected, she or he attends the meetings of the Regional Executive Council and exercises a consultative role.
3. All elected members of the Regional Executive Council and the Spiritual Assistant have voting rights.
4. Election of the Secular members of the Regional Executive Council shall follow the model set forth in *Section II* of these *National Statutes* which deals with the National Fraternity insofar as it may be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the Regional Fraternity.
5. The Regional Executive Council may establish and direct commissions and committees deemed necessary to achieve the goals and objectives determined by the Regional Fraternity Council.
6. When not in session, the Regional Executive Council may conduct business electronically (i.e., via e-mail, telephone, fax, etc.), provided that any decisions and determinations made in this way are reviewed and ratified at the next regular meeting of the Council.
7. The Regional Executive Council shall meet at least twice a year, at times and places to be determined by its members. The Regional Minister shall give written notice of meetings at least two months in advance.



#### Article 24. Duties of Officers of the Regional Executive Council

1. The Regional Minister has the duties set forth in article #63 of the [General Constitutions](#).
2. The duties of the Regional Vice Minister, Secretary, and Treasurer shall follow the model set forth in that portion of these *National Statutes* which deals with the National Fraternity insofar as it may be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the Regional Fraternity.
3. Each Regional Fraternity shall follow the model set forth in that portion of these *National Statutes* which deals with the National Fraternity in connection with policies and procedures to be followed in the event of resignation or removal from office on the part of any elected Officer.

#### Article 25. Structure for Property Control for the Regional Fraternity

1. The provisions relating to property control which appear in these *National Statutes* in the section dealing with the responsibilities of the National Fraternity shall apply to the Regional Fraternities insofar as they may be adapted to the needs and circumstances of the Regional Fraternity.
2. Particular note should be taken that expenses of the Regional Executive Council and those individuals invited by this Council to serve the Regional Fraternity in some capacity shall be borne by the Regional Fraternity for attendance at required meetings.
3. The Regional Fraternity is responsible for contributing to the National Fraternity on a fair share basis from its treasury to help provide for the expenses of NAFRA.
4. As required by Article #54.2 of the [General Constitutions](#), the National Executive Council shall approve statements for use by the Regional Fraternities that establish “precise criteria” for their “statement of purposes” and “internal controls” which must be used in their establishing documents.

#### Article 26. Fraternal and Pastoral Visits to the Regional Fraternity

1. The provisions of Article #92 through Article #95 of the [General Constitutions](#) concerning the fraternal and pastoral visitations apply as does Article #14 of the [Statutes for Spiritual Assistance](#).
2. The Regional Fraternity will present to the National Minister or his or her delegate and the representative of the Conference of National Spiritual

Assistants a stipend appropriate to the journey made and the length of stay required at the time of fraternal and pastoral visits, and also on the occasion of their presiding over and witnessing elections.

Article 27. Franciscan Youth and Young Adults

The provisions of articles #96 and #97 of the *General Constitutions* concerning Franciscan Youth and Young Adults apply.

Article 28. Applicability of These Statutes to All Levels of Fraternity

The various provisions set forth in these [National Statutes](#) for NAFRA administration shall be used as a model for elections, conduct of business, structures for control of property, composition and duties of the Fraternity Minister and of the Fraternity Council, replacement of officers who are unable to continue in office, and similar business of the fraternity at any level. However, Articles 11.4 and 13.3 do not apply to regional and local fraternities. A member of a regional council may also be a member of a local fraternity council.

Article 29. Amendments

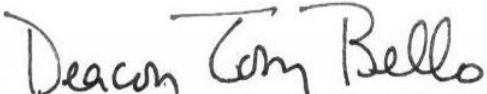
1. These *National Statutes* may be amended by two-thirds vote of the National Fraternity Council provided that a copy of the proposed amendment is distributed to the National Fraternity Council at least 60 days before the vote on said amendment is to be taken.
2. All such amendments are subject to the approval of the Presidency of CIOFS.

**ATTESTED AS APPROVED ON OCTOBER 18, 2002 BY THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY COUNCIL, SFO-USA.**

**APPROVED AND RATIFIED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENCY, JULY 4, 2003.**

**ATTESTED AS AMENDED ON OCTOBER 30, 2010 BY THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY COUNCIL, SFO-USA.**

**CONFIRMED BY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENCY, JULY 24, 2013.**

  
Tom Bello, SFO - National Minister

  
Jan Parker, SFO – National Secretary

**Appendix A**  
**National Statutes Article 3.7.a: Composition of the Regional Fraternities**

- # Name of Region, followed by short geographic description:
- 50 'Ohana 'O Ke Anuenue: HI.
- 51 Five Franciscan Martyrs: FL, plus up to about 31 degrees n latitude to include South GA, and lower AL around the Mobile Bay area.
- 52 St. Francis: s CA up to San Luis Obispo area.
- 53 Blessed Junipero Serra: n CA from Bakersfield n; most of NV except Las Vegas area.
- 54 Troubadours of Peace: OR, WA, ID, AK.
- 55 Queen of Peace: ND, MN, IA, most of SD except sw area around Rapid City, e 2/3 NE, w 1/4 WI.
- 56 Divine Mercy: Lower MI, plus Lucas County OH (Toledo OH area).
- 57 Saint Margaret of Cortona: VA, DC, all of MD except far w around Cumberland, s central PA around the Harrisburg/Lancaster/York area, far e WV around Martinsburg/Charles Town area.
- 58 St. Thomas More: AZ, s part NV around Las Vegas.
- 59 Mother Cabrini: ne IL including all of metro Chicago, w to Rockford and s to Kankakee.
- 60 St. Joan of Arc: LA, MS, far e TX from Houston e, s 2/3 AR from Little Rock s, far sw TN around Memphis.
- 61 Brothers and Sisters of St Francis: NC, SC, n 90% GA, AL except for lower part around the Mobile Bay area, TN except far sw area around Memphis.
- 62 Exaltation of the Holy Cross: N/A.
- 63 Franciscans of the Prairie: n 3/4 IL, excluding East St Louis/Bellville area and s, excluding also ne area from Rockford to Kankakee.
- 64 Holy Trinity Region: KY, s half OH including the counties of the Diocese of Columbus (except Tuscarawas County) and part of the Diocese of Steubenville; se IN near Louisville KY.
- 65 La Verna: e 3/4 WI, Upper MI.
- 66 Our Lady of Indiana: n 3/4 IN, excluding areas around Evansville and Louisville KY.
- 67 Los Tres Compañeros/the Three Companions: central TX from OK border s to Mexico and Gulf of Mexico, w to San Angelo and Abilene, and e to (but not including) Houston.
- 68 Lady Poverty: WV except far e WV around Martinsburg/Charles Town area, w half PA except Erie, far w MD around Cumberland, far e part OH around Steubenville.
- 69 St Katharine Drexel: DE, e half PA except s central area around Harrisburg/Lancaster/York, s half NJ from Trenton s.
- 70 Maximillian Kolbe: n 1/2 OH including all of the counties in the Diocese of Cleveland, the Diocese of Youngstown, and the counties of the Diocese of Toledo, except Lucas County (Toledo area), and only the county of Tuscarawas in the Diocese of Columbus.
- 71 Bl Kateri Tekakwitha: upstate NY plus Erie PA, excluding NY counties adjacent to borders with NJ, CT, and far e PA, also excluding far ne NY around Plattsburgh, Saranac Lake, and Long Lake.
- 72 Santa Maria de las Montañas: CO, UT, WY except far n area around Sheridan, sw area SD around Rapid City, w 1/3 NE to include Stratton, nw corner KS to include Atwood.
- 73 Our Lady of the Rockies: MT; far n WY around Sheridan.
- 74 St Clare: s 80% MO, n 1/3 AR excluding Little Rock and s, s 1/4 IL from East St Louis/Bellville s, far sw corner IN around Evansville.
- 75 Our Lady of Guadalupe: NM, far w TX excluding Abilene and San Angelo and e, far e AZ in Navajo reservation area around St Michaels.

- 76 Solanus Casey: CT, RI, w 1/3 MA from Holyoke/Springfield and w, s MA around Fall River /New Bedford, and part of Cape Cod, NY counties adjacent to borders with NJ, CT, and far e PA except part of s Westchester County which is shared.
- 77 Our Lady of the Angels: n half NJ excluding Trenton and s; NY counties of Staten Island and Manhattan (New York County), plus part of s Westchester County.
- 78 St Elizabeth of Hungary: VT, NH, ME, e 2/3 MA excluding Holyoke/Springfield and w, also excluding s MA around Fall River /New Bedford, plus part of Cape Cod, far ne NY around Plattsburgh, Saranac Lake and Long Lake.
- 79 Tau Cross: NY counties on Long Island, plus the Bronx.
- 80 Juan de Padilla: KS except nw corner around Atwood, OK, plus an area around Kansas City MO.

## *The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order*

### **Prologue: Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance (circa 1210-1215)**

#### Chapter 1: Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength, and love their neighbors as themselves and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because "the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them" and he will make "his home and dwelling among them", and they are the sons of the heavenly Father, whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to him when we fulfill "the will of the Father who is in heaven".

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give light to others by example.

Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven! Oh how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete.

Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep and prayed to the Father saying:

"Oh holy Father, protect them with your name whom you gave me out of the world. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you, they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these, I pray, not for the world. Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word that they may be holy by being one as we are. And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom."

#### Chapter 2: Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance

But all those men and women who are not doing penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and live in vices and sin and yield to evil concupiscence and to the wicked desires of the flesh, and do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and are slaves to the world, in their bodies, by carnal desires and the anxieties and cares of this life.

These are blind, because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ; they do not have spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God who is the true wisdom of the Father. Concerning them, it is said, "Their skill was swallowed up" and "cursed are those who turn away from your commands". They see and acknowledge, they know and do bad things and knowingly destroy their own souls.

See, you who are blind, deceived by your enemies, the world, the flesh, and the devil, for it is pleasant to the body to commit sin and it is bitter to make it serve God because all vices and sins come out and "proceed from the heart of man" as the Lord says in the Gospel. And you have nothing in this world and in the next, and you thought you would possess the vanities of this world for a long time.

But you have been deceived, for the day and the hour will come to which you give no thought and which you do not know and of which you are ignorant. The body grows infirm, death approaches, and so it dies a bitter death, and no matter where or when or how man dies, in the guilt of sin, without penance or satisfaction, though he can make satisfaction but does not do it.

The devil snatches the soul from his body with such anguish and tribulation that no one can know it except he who endures it, and all the talents and power and "knowledge and wisdom" which they thought they had will be taken away from them, and they leave their goods to relatives and friends who take and divide them and say afterwards, "Cursed be his soul because he could have given us more, he could have acquired more than he did." The worms eat up the body and so they have lost body and soul during this short earthly life and will go into the inferno where they will suffer torture without end.

All those into whose hands this letter shall have come we ask in the charity that is God to accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted above. And let those who do not know how to read have them read to them.

And may they keep them in their mind and carry them out, in a holy manner to the end, because they are "spirit and life".

And those who will not do this will have to render "an account on the day of judgment" before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.

### **Chapter 1: The Secular Franciscan Order**

1. The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God – laity, religious, and priests-- who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.
2. The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of St. Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.
3. The present rule, succeeding "Memoriale Propositi" (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

### **Chapter 2: The Way of Life**

4. The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.
5. Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of

Saint Francis, who often said "I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood," should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.

6 They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

7 United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance," and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.

8 As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.

Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

9 The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.

10 United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions.

11 Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel, they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

Thus, in the spirit of "the Beatitudes," and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

12 Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.

13 As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.



A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

14 Secular Franciscans, together with all people of goodwill, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in Christian spirit of service.

15 Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

16 Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

17 In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

18 Moreover, they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

19 Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.

Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

### **Chapter 3: Life in Fraternity**

20 The Secular Franciscan Order is divided into fraternities of various levels--local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own moral personality in the Church. These various fraternities are coordinated and united according to the norm of this rule and of the constitutions.

21 On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president) who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions.

Their service, which lasts for a definite period, is marked by a ready and willing spirit and is a duty of responsibility to each member and to the community.

Within themselves the fraternities are structured in different ways according to the norm of the constitutions, according to the various needs of their members and their regions, and under the guidance of their respective council.

22 The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place



for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

23 Requests for admission to the Secular Franciscan Order must be presented to the local fraternity, whose council decides upon the acceptance of new brothers and sisters.

Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule. The entire community is engaged in this process of growth by its own manner of living. The age for profession and the distinctive Franciscan sign are regulated by the statutes.

Profession by its nature is a permanent commitment.

Members who find themselves in particular difficulties should discuss their problems with the council in fraternal dialogue.

Withdrawal or permanent dismissal from the Order, if necessary, is an act of the fraternity council according to the norm of the Constitution.

24 To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.

25 Regarding expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means. Local fraternities should contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils.

26 As a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, the councils on various levels, in keeping with the constitutions, shall ask for suitable and well-prepared religious for spiritual assistance. They should make this request to the superiors of the four religious Franciscan families, to whom the Secular Fraternity has been united for centuries.

To promote fidelity to the charism as well as observance of the rule and to receive greater support in the life of the fraternity, the minister or president, with the consent of the council, should take care to ask for a regular pastoral visit by the competent religious superiors as well as for a fraternal visit from those of the higher fraternities, according to the norm of the constitutions.

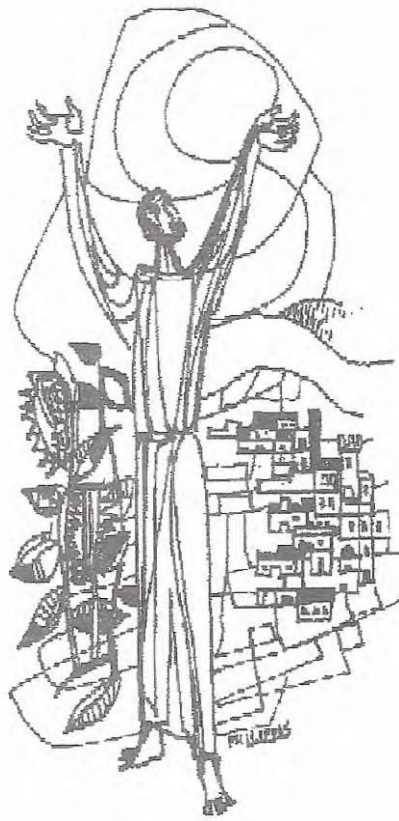
*Blessing of St. Francis (1226):*

May whoever observes all this be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father, and on earth with that of his beloved Son, together with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.

# Revised **HANDBOOK**

for  
**SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE**  
to the  
**Secular Franciscan Order**

*CNSA*



*Conference of National Spiritual Assistants*  
*USA*

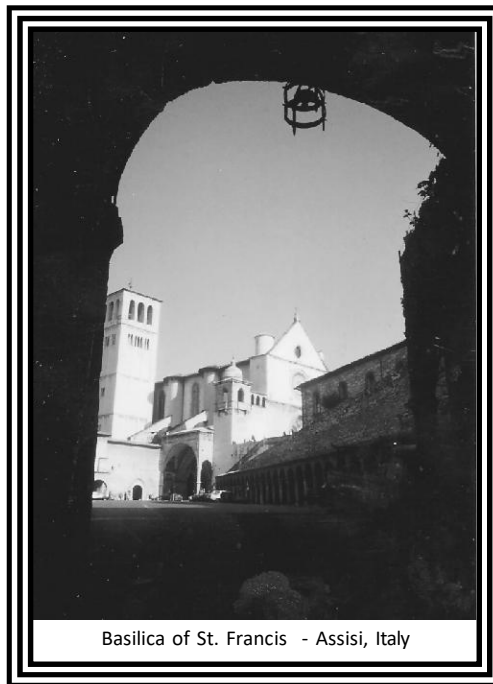
*2012*

# HANDBOOK

for  
Spiritual Assistance  
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+++

OFS = Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis



Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA)  
United States of America  
2012

+++

Bob Brady OFM - Stephen Gross OFM Conv - Kevin Queally TOR - Lester Bach OFM Cap

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Loren Connell OFM - Stephen Gross OFM Conv - Kevin Queally TOR - Lester Bach OFM Cap

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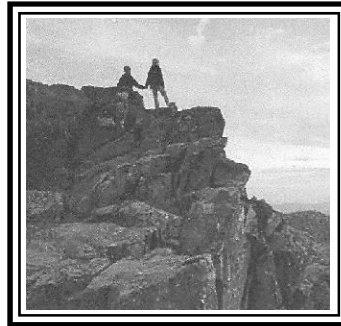
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lindabce@kans.com

*OFS = Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis*



*Unless you try to do something beyond  
what you have already mastered,  
you will never grow.*

+ + +

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## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER ONE +++

<a href="#">Spiritual Assistance - Reflections</a> .....	1
<a href="#">Role of Major Religious Superiors</a> .....	4
<a href="#">The Spiritual Assistant - Job Description</a> .....	6
<a href="#">Questions about the Spiritual Assistant</a> .....	7
<a href="#">The Spiritual Assistant and the Local Council</a> .....	9
<a href="#">The Spiritual Assistant and Initial Formation</a> .....	10
<a href="#">The Spiritual Assistant and Ongoing Formation</a> .....	12
<a href="#">Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) - Training SA's</a> .....	14
<a href="#">Regional Spiritual Assistant - Job Description</a> .....	16
<a href="#">CNSA - Conference of National Spiritual Assistants</a> .....	19
<a href="#">Provincial Spiritual Assistant - Role of</a> .....	22
<a href="#">SA to a National Commission, Responsibilities of</a> .....	24
<a href="#">Terms of Office for a SA</a> .....	25
<a href="#">Conference of General Spiritual Assistants</a> .....	26
<a href="#">Pastoral Visitation on all levels</a> .....	28
<a href="#">Spiritual Assistant - Rite of Installation</a> .....	30
<a href="#">The San Damiano Crucifix</a> .....	33

### CHAPTER TWO +++

<a href="#">Incorporating Members of other Rites or Language</a> .....	34
<a href="#">Ways of Commitment to St. Francis / Affiliates</a> .....	35
<a href="#">Responsibilities of a Sponsoring Fraternity</a> .....	37
<a href="#">Process for Establishing a New Fraternity</a> .....	38
<a href="#">Guidelines for a "Cell" Group</a> .....	42
<a href="#">Options for a Struggling Fraternity</a> .....	43
<a href="#">De-Activating a Fraternity</a> .....	44
<a href="#">Re-Activating a Fraternity</a> .....	45
<a href="#">Guidelines for Suspension - Fraternity &amp; Individuals</a> .....	46
<a href="#">Transferring a Fraternity to another Province</a> .....	49

### CHAPTER THREE +++

<a href="#">Introduction to CNSA Issues &amp; Reflections</a> .....	50
<a href="#">Prison Ministry</a> .....	51
<a href="#">Qualities of a Formation Director</a> .....	52
<a href="#">Choosing a Formation Text</a> .....	52
<a href="#">Eucharist and the Monthly Gathering</a> .....	53
<a href="#">Permanent Deacons &amp; Diocesan Priests - Role in OFS</a> .....	54
<a href="#">SA's and Elections</a> .....	55
<a href="#">Witnessing Elections</a> .....	56
<a href="#">Executive Secretary to CNSA - Job Description</a> .....	58
<a href="#">Treasurer to CNSA - Job Description</a> .....	59
<a href="#">The Santa Clara Statement - 1972</a> .....	60
<a href="#">Conclusions of General Chapter - 2002</a> .....	64
<a href="#">Letter of the Conference of the Franciscan Family - 2005</a> .....	66
<a href="#">Evangelization - International Chapter - 2011</a> .....	67
<a href="#">Thoughts from Vatican II</a> .....	69
<a href="#">Beatitudes and Franciscans</a> .....	73
<a href="#">Role of the Laity - Apostolicam Actuositatem - Vatican II</a> .....	75
<a href="#">Reflections</a> .....	76
<a href="#">Dialogue &amp; Debate</a> .....	78
<a href="#">A Quote from Celano</a> .....	80
<a href="#">Code of Canon Law - References</a> .....	81
<a href="#">John XXIII - 5 Points for Vatican II</a> .....	86

## CHAPTER ONE



## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE - REFLECTIONS

Two elements come together in the term spiritual assistance. The role of a spiritual assistant is both spiritual, i.e. guiding people in gospel living, and assistance, indicating that we "assist" people in living the [Rule](#) of the OFS. SA's are NOT: directors, i.e., giving orders; not dictators, i.e., running the whole program; not experts, i.e., having answers for everything. Spiritual assistants maintain the link between the Franciscan family members. The role of a spiritual assistant is to collaborate with secular Franciscans in order that the OFS fulfills its role in the Church and the world. We collaborate with local, regional, national and international councils. The OFS is assisted by spiritual assistants (Friars or others) who serve the fraternities. Secular Franciscans and their councils assume responsibility for the growth and development of the OFS. A spiritual assistant is part of the council and collaborates in enriching secular Franciscan life through servant-leadership at different levels.

The role of the First Order and the Third Order Regular (TOR) is spelled out in the [General Constitutions](#) of the OFS (2000):

2. The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, is the responsibility, above all, of their general and provincial ministers. The *altius moderamen* (higher direction), of which canon 303 speaks, belongs to them. The purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans. [OFS General Constitutions](#) - Article [85.2](#)

... associations whose members live in the world but share in the spirit of some religious institute, under the "higher direction (*Altius moderamen*)" of the same institute, and who lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, are known as third orders, or some other suitable title (Such as OFS - Ordo Franciscanus Secularis).

[Canon 303](#)

[The Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) (2009) offer another way of expressing the First Order/TOR responsibility to the OFS for spiritual assistance:

1. The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, in virtue of its belonging to the same spiritual family, is entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, to whom the Secular Fraternity has been united for centuries.

2. Religious and Secular Franciscans in fact, in various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, aim to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church and of society.

3. Therefore, as a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, religious superiors must assure spiritual assistance to all the fraternities of the OFS.

[Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 1 1, 2, 3

1. The spiritual and pastoral care is provided as a two-fold service:  
 a) the fraternal office of *altius moderamen* on the part of the major superiors;  
 b) spiritual assistance to the fraternities and their councils.

2. The purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and (life-giving) union with the Franciscan family.

[Ibid](#) - Article 2.1, .2

The words: co-responsibility and life-giving union invite spiritual assistants to work with the Secular Franciscans as equals rather than through domination. Life-giving union requires a true familial sense, working together to achieve the goal of the Franciscan family both in the Church and in the world.



The SA *statutes* clarify the role of spiritual assistants when they state:

*3. The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and the Franciscan family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in the initial and ongoing formation of secular Franciscans and to express fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS.*

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 2.3

*1. The spiritual assistant is the person designated by the competent major superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth.*

*3. The spiritual assistant is by right a voting member of the council and of the chapter of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. Only in economic matters and in elections does he or she not enjoy the right to vote.*

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 12.1, .3

As we develop a job description of the Spiritual Assistant, we adjust it to fit the different levels of the OFS administrative structure. There is always the "how" of implementing these articles at the different levels. But the basic role of the spiritual assistant is consistent. SA's are part of a Franciscan family that embraces the same charism and follows the same spirit shown by St. Francis of Assisi. We support all the members of the Franciscan family, assisting them to embrace a *life-giving union* that enables us to express, together, the spirit of Francis and Clare in the Church and the world. "How" we implement that spirit may differ at various times and at various levels, but the foundation is the same. A spiritual assistant is the supportive link between the OFS and the rest of the Franciscan family.

Spiritual assistants need to understand their role in fraternity life and with the council. They are not simply a passive presence nor are they an overwhelming, aggressive presence. Like all council members, they share whatever will build up fraternity life and the Franciscan charism.

*1. The principal task of the assistant is to foster a deeper insight into Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the secular Franciscans.*

*2. In the Council of the fraternity and in elective and ordinary chapters, the assistant will be respectful of the responsibilities and role of the secular Franciscans, giving them priority with regard to the guidance, co-ordination, and animation of the fraternity.*

*3. The Assistant participates actively and votes in the discussions and decisions taken by the Council or by the chapter. He or she is specifically responsible for the animation of liturgical celebrations and spiritual reflections during the meetings of the Council or Chapter.*

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 13.1, .2, .3

\* Remember the caveat in the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 12.3: *Only in economic matters and in elections does he or she (friar, clergy, religious or laity) not enjoy the right to vote* \*

How a spiritual assistant is appointed and *who* may be appointed are important elements to understand. A spiritual assistant is NOT appointed by the local fraternity. He or she is ordinarily not appointed by the bishop of the diocese. A departing spiritual assistant does NOT appoint his/her successor. The Statutes spell out quite clearly both *who* has the authority to appoint spiritual assistants and *who may be appointed* to that role.

*1. The Assistant is appointed by the competent major superior after consultation with the council of the fraternity concerned.*

*2. Where more than one major superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment of an Assistant, the norms established jointly by the superiors with jurisdiction in the territory should be followed.*

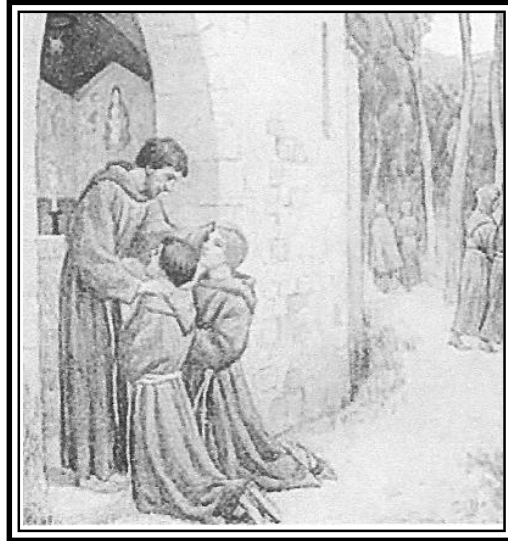
3. The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve years.

4. When it is not possible to give the fraternity a spiritual assistant who is a member of the First Order or the TOR, the competent major superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:

- + religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
- + Secular Franciscans, clerics or lay, specially prepared for such service;
- + other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 15.1, .2, .3, .4

+ + +



Wherever the brothers may be and in whatever place they meet,  
they should respect spiritually and attentively one another,  
and honor one another without complaining.  
Let them be careful not to appear outwardly  
as sad or gloomy hypocrites,  
but show themselves joyful, cheerful  
and consistently gracious in the Lord

*The Earlier Rule*

Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol 1 - Page 69





## THE ROLE OF MAJOR RELIGIOUS SUPERIORS

When we address the issue of who appoints spiritual assistants, we look to the major religious superior. The major religious superior at local and regional levels is the Minister Provincial of the 1st Order or the TOR to whose Province a particular fraternity is bonded. It is the 1st Order/TOR Province which established the fraternity, or to whom the fraternity was transferred. That particular province has the *Altius moderamen* for the fraternity.

The Minister Provincial may delegate a friar of his province to deal with matters pertaining to the OFS. This friar is known as the Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA). The Minister Provincial determines the extent of the delegation of authority to the Provincial Spiritual Assistant. Ordinarily, the PSA is given authority to deal with issues dealing with the OFS fraternities bonded to his province. This includes appointing a spiritual assistant to a local fraternity bonded to his province or to a regional fraternity when his province has fraternities in the region (cf. Article 88.5 of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) - below)

The General Constitutions of the OFS list the responsibilities of a Major superior:

1. The provincial ministers and the other major superiors, in the area of their own jurisdiction, guarantee the spiritual assistance to the local fraternities entrusted to their jurisdiction. They see to it that their own religious are interested in the OFS and that capable and well-prepared persons are appointed for the service of spiritual assistance.
2. It is the specific competence of the major superiors in the name of their jurisdiction:
  - a) to establish, canonically, new local fraternities and guarantee them spiritual assistance;
  - b) to animate spiritually and visit the local fraternities assisted by their own jurisdiction;
  - c) to keep themselves informed on the spiritual assistance given to the OFS.
3. The major superiors are responsible for the spiritual assistance to the local fraternities they have established.
4. The major superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory are to establish together the most adequate means to guarantee spiritual assistance to local fraternities which, because of causes beyond their control, could remain without such assistance.
5. The major superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory, are to establish together the most adequate means for carrying out collegially their mission with respect to the regional and national fraternities of the OFS.

[General Constitutions](#) of the OFS - Article [88.1](#), [2](#), [3](#), [4](#), [5](#)

The Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS continue to spell out the responsibilities of General and Provincial major superiors. These responsibilities are frequently fulfilled by appointing general, national, regional, or local spiritual assistants either personally or through their delegate.

1. The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan 1st Order and the TOR, is the duty above all of their general and provincial ministers.
2. They exercise their office through:
  - + the establishment of local fraternities;
  - + pastoral visits;
  - + spiritual assistance.

They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate (e.g., PSA).

3. The Franciscan major superiors remain responsible for the quality of spiritual assistance and pastoral care, even in those cases where previous approval from a religious superior or from the local Ordinary

is needed to appoint the Assistant (E.g., when the appointee is a diocesan priest or deacon or belongs to another Franciscan province).

4. They should foster the formation and interest of their own religious in the OFS and ensure a specific preparation for the Assistants so that they will be suitable and well-prepared.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 5.1, .2, .3, .4

Responsibilities regarding establishing fraternities, transferring fraternities to another province, or making the pastoral visits will be covered in another part of this Handbook. The ministry of Regional, National or International spiritual assistants can be found in the appropriate sections of this Handbook. Regional, National, and General (International) spiritual assistants, appointed by their major superiors, do the pastoral visits at the appropriate level - to local, regional, national, or international fraternities.

\* ... the general ministers ... say that "the work of spiritual assistance, less far-reaching today in the area of direction and organization, can and must be more profound, as spiritual accompaniment and help in the formation of brothers and sisters." Recognition of the responsibility of the seculars must not be transformed into a passive attitude of "leave it to them," but must be an active attitude of promotion and collaboration so that the seculars might realize their vocation and proper mission.

The goal of "life-giving union with each other" requires the removal, at all levels, of certain obstacles. These lie in a mentality that has been overcome but whose roots are still deep. To go from one form of accompanying the Secular Franciscans to another is always hard:

- + from "director" to "assistant - (spiritual assistance, guidance by the "good shepherd" and not direction);
- + from "commanding" to "serving"
- + from being "Father" who has the last word (even though there is only one Father in heaven!) to being a member who collaborates with the council and its minister and should not substitute for them.

Manual of the General Spiritual Assistants - Chapter iv - #2.1

\* 2.2.1 Obstacles on the part of the seculars:

- + insufficient awareness of the dignity of laity in the Church;
- + limited knowledge of the true identity of the Secular Franciscans;
- + "affective" dependence on the friar;
- + mistaken "reverence" for religious, even in areas that have nothing to do with their status and role;
- + idealization of the figure of the religious and fierce criticism when their limitations and weaknesses are perceived.

\* 2.2.2 Obstacles on the part of religious:

- + an "esprit de corps" with regard to one's own Order, even when convinced of the unity of the OFS;
- + a tendency to pursue and impose one's own idea of the OFS instead of an awareness that the OFS has its own identity;
- + a fear of losing the limelight if responsibilities are shared with Seculars.

Manual of the General Spiritual Assistants - Chapter iv - #2.2.1, 2.2.2

+++

... I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me ... that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned - however much he could have sinned - who, after looking into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy ... love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord.

*Letter to a Minister*

Francis of Assisi, The Saint - Vol 1 - Page 97



## JOB DESCRIPTION - SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

The role of a spiritual assistant is important. He/she is the link between the OFS and the 1st Order and TOR. This relationship is required by the Church. The spiritual assistant has other responsibilities as well. Here are some of the basic qualities/responsibilities of a spiritual assistant.

1. A spiritual assistant must be knowledgeable about Franciscan spirituality as well as understanding the secular Franciscan way of life. Lacking this knowledge would make it difficult for an individual to truly "assist" as a spiritual assistant to a secular Franciscan fraternity.
2. A spiritual assistant needs skills in communicating Franciscan spirituality to the fraternity members and serving the fraternity council. Without this skill, it is difficult to see how a spiritual assistant could give much "assistance" to the fraternity. A spiritual assistant also needs basic "people skills." One way the PSA discovers the presence or absence of people skills is by a personal interview with a nominee.
3. A local spiritual assistant needs time and the ability to co-operate in the initial and ongoing formation of secular Franciscans. It requires presence at initial formation sessions and the monthly gatherings where ongoing formation takes place. His presence is required at the regular fraternity council meetings. Obviously, he/she does not do all the work, but his/her presence is important to developing ways and means of contributing to fraternity life. Attendance at SA/OFS ongoing formation workshops is one way for SAs to keep up to date.
4. A spiritual assistant participates actively in council meetings and may vote on issues. This requires presence at the regular meetings of the fraternity council. The spiritual assistant does not have a vote in economic matters nor in elections - even if he or she is a secular Franciscan.
5. A spiritual assistant "assists" the Secular Franciscans in living the OFS Rule. An SA needs to be a prayerful person. He/she needs prayerful experiences that enable him/her to assist Seculars to let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do (OFS Rule [8](#)). The spiritual assistant needs sound knowledge of social issues in order to proclaim the Gospel by word and action in the world and the Church as the OFS [Rule](#) requires. (cf. OFS [Rule 14](#), [15](#), [16](#) [17](#), [18](#), [19](#))
6. A spiritual assistant must understand how an OFS fraternity fits within the Franciscan family, the People of God called "Church," and how it serves society. He/she must realize that they serve the 1st Order and TOR, maintaining a life-giving union with all Franciscan family members.
7. A spiritual assistant is responsible for the animation of liturgical celebrations. The SA offers spiritual reflections, as seem reasonable, at monthly council meetings and fraternity gatherings. This requires collaboration with the seculars in these areas. The spiritual assistant does not do all the work. He/she enables others to share good ways of animating liturgical celebrations in the fraternity.
8. A local spiritual assistant communicates with the regional spiritual assistant(s), keeping the regional spiritual assistant(s) informed about issues in a local fraternity that need to be addressed on a regional level. Regional gatherings for spiritual assistants expect his/her physical presence. Local spiritual assistants should be present at fraternal and pastoral visitations of the local fraternity. The local Spiritual assistant is to be present at the Regional Chapter gatherings.
9. However, for spiritual assistants to the Secular Franciscans, the role of pastor is better described by the title "spiritual assistant." Assistant, from the Latin verb "adsistere," means to stand beside, to stand near, to be present, to protect, to support, to help by means of one's own active participation. An assistant is one who is called, because of his or her competence, to help the person in charge or chief officer, who, in the case of the OFS, is the council with the minister at the various levels.

Manual of the General Spiritual Assistants - Chapter iv - #3.5



## QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

### 1. Who can be appointed as a spiritual assistant to a local fraternity?

The following people may be appointed. In all cases there is a presumption that they are or will become suitable and well-prepared for their role. Ordination is NOT required.

- + Friars of the 1st Order or TOR
- + Religious brothers and sisters of other Franciscan institutes
- + Secular Franciscans, cleric or lay, well prepared for such service. (Professed for at least five years)
- + Other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious, well prepared for such service.

Appointees must understand the role of a spiritual assistant, be well-prepared, able and willing to fulfill the role of a SA. OFS members and other non-friars are expected to take the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) course (cf. [Page 14](#) in this Handbook) as their preparation for the role of spiritual assistant. OFS members who are recommended to be a spiritual assistant should be perpetually professed for at least five years. Friar appointees and other religious are urged to take the Franciscan Family Connections course or at least to read the book.

### 2. Who makes this appointment?

Local fraternities are bonded to a province of the 1st Order or the TOR. This province established the fraternity or it was transferred to them by the Minister Provincial of another province. The major superior is the Minister Provincial of this Province who often delegates a friar to serve as Provincial Spiritual Assistant to the OFS. The PSA then takes care of issues relating to the OFS. The Provincial Spiritual Assistant makes the appointment of a local spiritual assistant in consultation with the concerned fraternity council. Provincials (or PSAs) with fraternities in a region may appoint Regional SA's after consultation with the Regional executive council.

### 3. What is the process for requesting a spiritual assistant for a local fraternity?

The local council may recommend one or more individuals. They send name(s) and a resume to the Minister Provincial or the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the province to which the fraternity is bonded (This Province has the *Altius moderamen*). The fraternity council must be certain that the individual is, or can become, suitable and well-prepared for the role of SA. Nominees take the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) course to prepare to become a spiritual assistant. If a friar is not available, other individuals may fill the role of spiritual assistant (cf. #1 above). If a monthly gathering of appointees with the mentor(s) is possible, it is the preferred way to conduct the training program. NB: The FFC course provides training for both local and regional spiritual assistants. Local SA's taking the course need not answer questions designed for nominees for regional SAs.

We strongly recommend that nominees for spiritual assistance take the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) course. It is a 19-month long correspondence course. We encourage friars and non-friars to take the course or, at least, to read *Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011)*. Application is made to the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the Province to which the local fraternity is bonded. (cf. Pages i - iv in the FFC book for more information). The mentor is the appropriate PSA or someone he delegates.

After consultation with the Council, the PSA may accept a nominee. The PSA appoints the nominee when assured that the candidate has successfully finished the training course and is well-prepared to be a competent spiritual assistant. In those parts of the country where lay spiritual assistants represent the best option, means and resources for training in pastoral ministry skills need to be made available as a way to supplement the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) course.

NB: A regional council follows these same guidelines when requesting a regional spiritual assistant.

#### 4. What happens after the appointment is made?

When the PSA appoints an individual as spiritual assistant to a particular fraternity, the nominee receives a letter of appointment from the PSA or Minister Provincial of the province to which the specific local fraternity is bonded.

The appointment is for no more than 12-years. At the end of the 12-year period a new spiritual assistant must be sought. Major superiors or their delegate may also appoint spiritual assistants for a chapter term, i.e., 3 or 4 years at a time, until the 12-year limit is reached. It is the role of the PSA to make the decision about such matters and inform SAs of this process. No one serves as SA to the same fraternity for longer than 12 consecutive years.

There is a liturgical ritual which can be used to install the spiritual assistant. The ritual is on [page 30](#) in this Handbook. OFS councils can adjust the ritual to meet local, regional, or national needs.

#### 5. What if the spiritual assistant fails in his/her responsibilities? What do we do?

Since human choices are not infallible, it can happen that a spiritual assistant is not really "assisting" the fraternity. Removal should not be easily sought unless there are serious reasons.

The Gospel requires us to try first to address the situation through dialogue between the local council (Council & Minister) and the spiritual assistant. Sometimes, this clarifies issues and ends the problem. Or a spiritual assistant may realize that he/she can no longer serve and resigns. If the spiritual assistant or the fraternity council refuses to dialogue, nothing is achieved except the suffering of the fraternity. A facilitator from a higher level can be asked to assist in the process.

The process in the General Constitutions of the OFS apply to a local minister (Below). It might also be applied to a spiritual assistant. But only the PSA or the Provincial minister (not the council of the higher level) has the authority to remove a spiritual assistant. If dialogue breaks down, appeal is made directly to the PSA or minister Provincial of the Province to which the fraternity is bonded. (cf. "Comment" below).

1. In the case in which the minister does not fulfill his or her duties, the council concerned manifests its concerns in a fraternal dialogue with the minister. If this does not produce positive results, the council should inform the council of the higher level whose competence it is to examine the case and, if needed, by secret ballot, decide to remove the minister.

[OFS General Constitutions](#) - Article [84.1](#)

Comment: None of this should begin unless there are serious, public, and proven reasons for such action (cf. [OFS General Constitutions](#) - Article [84.2 & 4](#)). It is a difficult situation. It requires both due process and prayerful contemplation. The OFS [Rule](#) and the Gospel require that we respect one another throughout the process. We seek what is best both for the OFS, the fraternity, and the individual involved. Mediation is ultimately guided by the Minister Provincial or PSA. If other help is needed, they can select people who are not part of the Franciscan family. Only the Minister Provincial or PSA can remove a SA.

No fraternity council at any level has the authority to appoint a spiritual assistant nor does it have the authority to remove a spiritual assistant. As indicated in Article 84 of the OFS [General Constitutions](#), dialogue with the individual is the first step. After dialogue, appeal can be made to the REC who then reports their decision to the appropriate Provincial or PSA for mediation, sharing whatever has already been done. Only the Provincial or PSA has the authority to retain or dismiss an SA who is failing in his/her duties. The concerned SA has the right of appeal to the minister provincial or a higher major superior of the 1st Order or TOR. The major superior then makes a decision from the evidence presented.

To maintain an attitude of respect and reverence for one another is not easy in these situations. But it is part of our Franciscan charism to do so. Those involved may find reasons for personal conversions. As far as possible, avoid either/or battles. Seek both/and decisions that maintain a level of relationship.



## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT AND THE LOCAL COUNCIL

This service (as spiritual assistant) of the religious ministers completes but does not substitute for the secular councils and ministers to whom belong the guidance, co-ordination, and animation of the fraternities at the various levels.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [86.2](#)

The spiritual assistant is by right a voting member of the council and of the chapter of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. Only in economic matters and in elections at any level does he or she not enjoy the right to vote.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 12.3

The assistant participates actively and votes in the discussions and decisions taken by the Council or by the Chapter. He or she is specifically responsible for the animation of liturgical celebrations and spiritual reflections during the meetings of the Council or of the Chapter.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 13.3

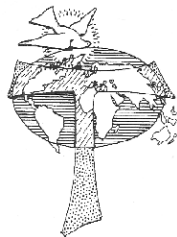
These texts make it clear how important it is for a spiritual assistant to understand what collaboration means. In the council, at any level, the spiritual assistant is one member of the council. He/she is free to share wisdom, creative ideas, insights, experiences, and knowledge that will contribute to vibrant fraternity life. What is equally clear is that the spiritual assistant not expect his/her ideas or opinions to be the last word on a subject. Rather, there is a sense of freely sharing but leaving the councilors free to share a different viewpoint. All the views receive respectful listening and contribute to good decisions. Supporting good council decisions and working to achieve their goals is part of the mission of a spiritual assistant.

Spiritual assistants are servants to all. Even when a spiritual assistant is animating liturgical celebrations, he/she calls upon competent secular Franciscans to participate in the planning and implementation of liturgical celebrations. Spiritual assistants share insights and a Franciscan spirit at gatherings of the fraternity. Thus, they assist the members to a deeper dedication to the OFS way of life. Their contributions should enrich Franciscan life as much as possible.

Spiritual assistants participate in leadership training and other programs to sharpen the skills of council members or the members of the fraternity. He/she is especially alert to see that the action programs of the fraternity are reflective of the Franciscan spirit of respect and compassion for all people. Frequently the experience and training of a spiritual assistant can help the SA to "assist" with difficult issues in fraternity life.

Spiritual Assistants do not dominate a fraternity nor become a dominating presence. Collaboration and dialogue are keywords for his/her service to the fraternity council. There is a gentle sense of equality between council members and the SA. The council also needs to respect that relationship.

Justice requires that the fraternity council offer a stipend to the spiritual assistant. The amount is up to the individual council. But it may include travel expenses, mailing expenses, reasonable stipend for conferences, etc. The SA and council can dialogue about this to find a reasonable monthly or annual stipend.







## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT AND INITIAL FORMATION

1. ORIENTATION ([National Statutes](#) - Article [19.1](#), a-b)
  - a. Orientation is a time for determining a person's interest, eligibility and disposition to enter into the initial formation process. (cf. [Guidelines for Initial Formation in the OFS in the USA](#) - Page 25).
  - b. The period of orientation shall consist of not less than three (3) months.
2. INITIAL FORMATION ([National Statutes](#) - Article [19.2](#))
  - a. INQUIRY - the period of Inquiry, which begins with the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming (cf. [Ritual](#) - page 9), shall consist of not less than six (6) months.
  - b. CANDIDACY - the period of Candidacy, which begins with the Rite of Admission (cf. [2020 Ritual](#) page 7) shall consist of not less than eighteen (18) months and not more than thirty-six (36) months.
  - c. All persons in initial formation, in addition to attending their formation sessions, must participate in the gatherings of the local fraternity as this is an indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life (cf. [General Constitutions](#) - Article [40.3](#))
  - d. To be admitted to the OFS in the United States, a person must be fully initiated member of the Catholic Church (i.e. having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation / Confirmation, and Holy Eucharist).

[National Statutes](#) for the OFS in the USA - Article [19.2](#), a-b-c-d

### 3. PROFESSION

- a. The minimum age for perpetual profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is twenty-one (21) years.
- b. The minimum age for temporary profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is eighteen (18) years.

[Ibid](#) - Article 19.3.a-b

### 5. FORM AND METHODOLOGY

- a. The form (i.e. content and process: cf. OFS General Constitutions 38.2) to be employed in both initial and ongoing formation is that found in the [Guidelines for Initial Formation](#).
- b. The methodology employed in formation should be both [interactive & experiential](#) in nature. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) [40.4](#))
- c. Opportunities for fraternities to meet together for the purposes of common ongoing & initial formation shall occur whenever possible at all levels of fraternity. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) [40.1](#))

[Ibid](#) - Article 19.5a -b-c

### 6. PROVISIONS FOR REMOTE INITIAL FORMATION

In those rare instances in which a person is legitimately impeded from participating in the normal formation process of a local fraternity, recourse may be had to the [Guidelines for Remote Initial Formation in the United States](#) as adopted by the National Executive Council in June, 2000. [National Statutes](#) of the OFS in the USA - Article [19.6](#)

# RE: [General Constitutions](#) - Article [38.2](#) - The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development [are established by the National Statutes](#).

# RE: [General Constitutions](#) - Article [40.1](#) - The time of formation lasts at least one year. The national statutes can establish a longer period (as has been done in the USA). The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of the evangelical life in fraternity, and a better knowledge of the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with

concrete experiences of service and the apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with candidates of other fraternities. (OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [40.1](#))

1. The local Assistant, together with the Council of the fraternity, is responsible for the formation of the candidates and expresses his or her assessment of each of the candidates before profession.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 24.1

Initial formation is the period when people learn to live the requirements of the OFS Rule and Constitutions and begin their initiation into fraternity life. It requires serious attention from the fraternity council (including the spiritual assistant) and the formation director (and formation team). A strong initial formation program promotes a vibrant fraternity way of life. A competent initial formation team of professed secular Franciscans gives dedicated service. Councilors are expected to take turns in attending formation meetings and get to know the newcomers. Ultimately it is the fraternity council which makes the discernment of acceptance for profession. They must be well informed to do this discernment.

A spiritual assistant's presence at formation meetings is important. If he/she cannot attend every meeting, the majority of formation sessions should be blessed by his/her presence. The formation director/team conducts the sessions. The spiritual assistant contributes to the formation of the newcomers, sharing insights and experiences that bring a gift to the formation meetings. The entire formation team is called to do the same. Inter-action and dialogue enable the newcomers to recognize their need to both listen and share. It prepares people for contributing at regular fraternity gatherings. We do NOT encourage lectures at every formation meeting. Interaction, dialogue and putting things into practice are the vital ingredients of a good formation program.

The spiritual assistant shares without dominating the sessions. It is a delicate but necessary presence that the SA brings to initial formation. Healthy collaboration with the formation team is important. The For Up to Now ([FUN Manual](#)) manual offers fine preparation material for formators. Articles on Ecclesiology and the Theology of the Laity in the For Up to Now Manual offer a helpful background resource on the role of laity in the Church. (NB: The FOR UP TO NOW manual is NOT to be used as a formation text!).

Note that OFS legislation encourages fraternities in close proximity to provide a common formation program. Fraternities sharing this responsibility develop relationships that enable people to work together in ministry and Franciscan life. Fraternities with a common initial and ongoing formation program build relationships and a common understanding that reflects a united Franciscan family. Spiritual assistants "assist" in building such collaboration. Fraternity identity is ALWAYS connected to the fact that the fraternity is part of a worldwide organization. Individual fraternity identity is never a good reason to avoid a collaborative formation program with several fraternities. The various councils work together to work out difficulties that may arise.

Fraternities offer candidates a Franciscan retreat, or at the very least, a day of reflection to prepare for profession. Secular Franciscan fraternities, in a district or close geographic area, can have a common retreat/reflection for their candidates for profession. The SAs collaborate in preparing such times of reflection. If possible, profession is done at a Eucharistic celebration. The minister of the candidate's fraternity (NOT the SA) receives the profession.

Questions about formation should be addressed to the National Formation Commission of the OFS in the USA (cf. formation Website). Formators need to be familiar with the For Up to Now manual, a tool to help formators conduct the formation sessions. (It is NOT meant to be used as a text for newcomers!)

The laity should therefore highly esteem and support as far as they can, private and public works of charity and social assistance movements, including international schemes. By these channels effective help is brought to individuals and nations in need. They should collaborate in this with all men and women of good will.

Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People (Apostolicam actuositatem) - Vatican II - Paragraph 8





## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT AND ONGOING FORMATION

1. Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and every one, and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.

2. The Fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.

3. Ongoing formation - accomplished by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experience - aims to assist the brothers and sisters:

- + Rule 4 in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, "... going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
- + in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith, and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions;
- + in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of St. Francis, St. Clare and Franciscan authors.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [44.1](#), [.2](#), [.3](#)

### 4. ONGOING FORMATION

Ongoing formation is the responsibility of all professed members consonant with Article [44](#) of the [General Constitutions](#).

### 5. FORM & METHODOLOGY

- a. The form (i.e. content and process; cf. OFS [General Constitutions 38.2](#)) to be employed in both initial and ongoing formation is that found in the Guidelines for Initial Formation.
- b. The methodology employed in formation should be both interactive and experiential in nature (cf. OFS [General Constitutions 40.1](#))
- c. Opportunities for fraternities to meet together for the purpose of common ongoing and initial formation shall occur whenever possible at all levels of fraternity.

[National Statutes](#) of the OFS in the USA - Article [19.4](#), [5](#), a-b-c-d

Lifetime commitments require growth in knowledge and experience since life does not remain static. The world, the Church, and cultures change. Like it or not we grow older and things are different. We experience changes in employment or move to a new place. Accidents, church rituals, health and many other things change perceptions and viewpoints. Changes in the Church, in society, and in the world require changes in our personal and fraternity lives. Changes around us call for changes within us.

Ongoing formation is a necessity both for fraternity life and for personal life and growth. The old answers often do not fit new situations. Previous understanding cannot deal with the expanding knowledge all around us. Our knowledge of the faith develops with time and experience. Some of our former answers now seem naive. Things we thought were settled need new input to face changing life situations. Acquiring the wisdom that keeps God in the picture is a never-ending process. The Holy Spirit longs to share wisdom with us and guide us to understand fresh insights. Thank you, Spirit of God!

Spiritual assistants have a twofold responsibility:

1. On the one hand SAs must deal with changes in their personal lives. They need to grow in personal understanding and implementation of the faith and Franciscan life.
2. On the other hand, their role requires them to listen and walk with Secular Franciscans who face similar issues. Together they seek better ways for living and understanding their personal growth, faith development and the deepening of their commitment to the Franciscan spirit.

Ongoing formation is part and parcel of Franciscan life. Without ongoing formation people remain stuck in one way of seeing everything. Many people resist change because it requires a personal change. Daily, radical interior conversion (OFS [Rule 7](#)) is easier to talk about than to accomplish. Spiritual Assistants are called to support, encourage and participate in the ongoing formation programs of the fraternity. The SA, like all Franciscans, can make a difference by sharing ideas and possibilities that enhance both fraternity life and the personal lives of the OFS members.

When ongoing formation calls for change/conversion in fraternity life, some people will say that nothing can be done. Then someone in a fraternity begins to do it. Once again hope becomes possible. Before long, it may be achieved while everyone wonders why we didn't do it sooner! Creativity opens the door to fresh insights and new ways of following the OFS Rule and the Franciscan way of life. Creativity frees us from some older perspectives and offers fresh possibilities. As creative insights blossom among us we begin to see with new eyes. Fresh perspectives and knowledge allow growth and development to bloom. Ongoing formation is not only learning about what is happening, but also actively implementing the gospel-vision in daily Franciscan life. It is an exciting process and part of vibrant fraternity life.

Local, regional, national and international councils, working together, develop ongoing formation programs. The monthly "Dossiers" of the OFS Presidency (on the internet - <https://ciofs.info/> ) help ongoing formation. Issues in the Church and in society often challenge our Franciscan spirit. Ongoing formation helps us deal with such issues. Church and societal issues are dealt with through dialogue i.e. listening and sharing with each other. Dialogue at fraternity gatherings is a good way of inter-acting.

The difference between dialogue and debate. (cf. This [Handbook](#) - [Page 78](#))

A debater looks for ways to win the argument. Debaters look for ways to use the other person's ideas in order to find flaws in their arguments. Debaters try to discover where the other person's ideas are distorted or invalid or old-fashioned. At the same time, they are determined not to change their own views. They oppose the "other" and attempt to prove the other person is wrong. Emotions like anger are often used to make their point. It is a win-lose way of communicating and they are going to WIN!

Dialogue is a win-win tool. The goal is to understand the other's way of looking at things and why they think and act like they do. Dialogue seeks to understand how "other peoples' " experiences shape their beliefs. In dialogue we accept the experiences of others as valid and real. Dialogue invites us to share our own experiences and understanding rather than denigrating the ideas of the other. In dialogue, we seek a common understanding even if we still disagree. Our willingness to "listen" with an open mind and heart is a spiritual exercise of abandoning personal perceptions while the other person is speaking. We maintain a relationship even when we disagree with each other's ideas. At the end of dialogue, we understand each other better than before. A relationship remains. We choose to build bridges to the "other" rather than building walls to keep us separate. Dialogue has little chance when participants arrogantly believe they are the only ones with the right answers!

Effective dialogue between people of diverse experiences and beliefs usually requires the guidance of a facilitator. Facilitators help create a safe space by setting ground rules or guidelines to keep dialogue participants focused on listening to and working with each other. Facilitators guide the dialogue process without deciding who is right or wrong, or declaring a "winner" as a moderator does in a debate. ... Dialogue works best when the people involved are open to learning and changing.

The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects - Lisa Schirch & David Campt - Pages 9-10

NB: cf. [Page 78](#) in this Handbook for more information on dialogue and debate!





## 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)?

Smokey Valley Printing - P.O. Box 189 - Lindsborg, KS 67456 - (785) 227-3364 - [lindabce@kans.com](mailto: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, the 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 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

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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.



## JOB DESCRIPTION - REGIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

3c. the regional spiritual assistants give their service to the regional council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [90.3c](#)

2c. the regional council requests the assistant from the major superior, indicated collegially by the major superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity.

3. The competent major superior, having heard the council of the fraternity concerned, appoints the assistant according to the norms of these Constitutions and of the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [91.2c. .3](#)

1. The regional Assistants to the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major superior, after consultation with the respective regional council. Where there is more than one major superior 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 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.

3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of regional spiritual assistants, or to the regional Assistant if there is only one:

- + to collaborate with the regional council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society in the region, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders.
- + to provide for the pastoral visits of the local councils of the OFS and to ensure a presence at the local elective chapters;
- + to co-ordinate, at the regional level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the Assistants and the fraternal union among them;
- + to foster the interest of friars in the OFS and Franciscan youth.

[Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 21.1, .2, .3

1. The regional Assistant must keep the major Superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth in the region.

2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and Franciscan Youth, meet with local fraternities assisted by his own Order in the region and keep constant fraternal contacts with the local Assistants of his own Order.

[Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 22.1, .2

3. The Regional Spiritual Assistant or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants exercises pastoral care and spiritual guidance in regard to each regional fraternity as an integral component part of NAFRA and of the OFS, by the same means and manner as does the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) in regard to NAFRA (cf. [Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - articles 21 & 22)

[National Statutes](#) - Article [21.3](#)

1. The Regional Fraternity Council is composed of the Ministers of the Local Fraternities that together form the Regional Fraternity, the Regional Executive Council and the Regional Spiritual Assistants or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants, each of whom may vote. Regional Spiritual Assistants, however, do not vote in financial matters and in elective chapters. (cf. [Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 12.1)

[National Statutes](#) - Article [22.1](#)



COMMENT: The role of a regional spiritual assistant is similar to a local spiritual assistant. But a RSA serves an entire region. The meetings are regular and longer but not as frequent. The RSA needs a wider perspective to include servant-leadership to all the local fraternities in the region. Regional level leadership provides guidance and visitations to the entire region and develops vibrant Franciscan community life among the fraternities of the region. The regional fraternity includes the local ministers of local fraternities in the region; the regional spiritual assistant (or the Conference of Spiritual Assistants if there are several RSAs); and the regional executive council.

Appointing a regional spiritual assistant is the responsibility of the major superiors (Minister provincial or delegated Provincial Spiritual Assistant) of the First Order/TOR provinces which serve the region. When there are several major superiors, they establish norms for such appointments. If each 1st Order/TOR province or Provincial conference chooses to make appointment(s), the region could have four regional spiritual assistants. The major superiors make the appointment according to the process on which they agree. Having at least one RSA is needed to fulfill the *altius moderamen* required by the Church.

The major superior(s) consult with the regional council about the appointment. When there is a shortage of friars, there are often less than four regional spiritual assistants. In reality, there may be only one regional spiritual assistant if the shortage is acute. CNSA has opened the door to having suitable and well-prepared OFS members or Franciscan religious appointed as regional spiritual assistants.

# Recommendations from the annual meeting of Provincial & Spiritual Assistants with CNSA (2004-2005);

1. We reaffirm fraternal ties between the 1st Order/TOR and the OFS in the selection and appointment of local OFS spiritual assistants.
2. Transfers of *altius moderamen* to another province should already be taking place to insure the better opportunity for assistance by the friars.
3. We affirm our preference that a Regional Spiritual Assistant (RSA) should be a friar, a qualified secular Franciscan or a "Franciscan religious" trained and mentored to collaborate with or replace a friar Regional Spiritual Assistant..

Libertyville, IL - "Marytown" - September 16, 2004  
Seattle, WA -- September 15, 2005 added "Franciscan religious"

2. Regional spiritual assistants collaborate with the regional executive council (REC) to animate the spiritual and apostolic ministry of the region. RSA's assist in the development of leaders in the region.
3. Regional spiritual assistants conduct a pastoral visitation of each fraternity of the region once every three years. This may be done in conjunction with the fraternal visitation or done separately. Details concerning a visitation can be found in the section of this Handbook concerning pastoral visitations (cf. [Page 28](#) ff). One important issue is for the pastoral visitor to explore the formation programs (initial and ongoing) of the local fraternities. The RSA offers support to the local spiritual assistant.
4. At elections the regional spiritual assistant is present as the witness of the Church and the Order in elections at local fraternities of the region. He/she may delegate this role (in writing) if unable to attend.
5. The regional spiritual assistant serves the local spiritual assistants. He/she develops a fraternal union among them and supports them in any way possible. HOW this is done is determined by the regional spiritual assistant(s). Regional spiritual assistants support all the local spiritual assistants in the region. The RSAs serve all the fraternities in the region (no matter to which province they are bonded).
6. The regional spiritual assistant fosters the interest of the friars in the OFS and in Franciscan Youth. His/her creativity and the culture of the province will determine the path this role takes.
7. A regional spiritual assistant informs the major superiors about the life and activities of the OFS and Franciscan youth in the region. As possible and realistic, the RSA keeps in touch with province friars.
8. The RSA works with the regional executive council to communicate with NEC and NAFRA through

their annual reports and other forms as needed. The RSA(s) pass on appropriate communications from CIOFS, NAFRA, NEC or CNSA to the local spiritual assistants. The RSA passes information upward from local SA's to the CNSA and other national groups when the situation requires it.

9. The RSA maintains communication with the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA). RSAs attend and encourage local SAs to attend SA's meetings sponsored by CNSA or called for at a regional pastoral visitation.

10. The president of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants is a member of the regional executive council and the regional fraternity. He/she votes in all matters brought to the regional fraternity and/or the regional executive council (except in economic matters or elections in the region). In imitation of CNSA, the Conference of RSAs may take turns as president of the Conference of RSAs. The president attends the REC meetings. All RSA's attend the regional chapter. If needed, the president may choose to consult the members of the conference about REC topics that are especially important.

11. The president of the Regional spiritual assistants' conference gives a report on the REC's meetings to the RSAs' conference. The RSA conference members attend the regional chapter meetings and have a vote unless otherwise noted (although not on finances nor in elections).

#### PROCESS FOR APPOINTING A MEMBER OF THE OFS AS REGIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT.

1. The Provincial Spiritual Assistants, with fraternities in the region, consult the appropriate council when making the appointment of a RSA (cf. OSF [General Constitutions 91.2c, 3/ Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 21.1). They follow the general process for making appointments.
2. The PSA needs assurance that the nominee is suitable and well-prepared (cf. OFS [General Constitutions Article 88.1](#)). This includes taking the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) course with a focus on texts particular to RSAs and other studies the PSA or the training team may require. The PSA is the mentor or he delegates someone to serve as mentor or work with a training team.
3. Secular Franciscans nominated for the role of RSA should be permanently professed for at least five years. Experience in service on a local, regional, or national council is helpful.
4. Usually, a PSA with fraternities in the region will mentor the FFC course. Mutual agreement among PSA's can adjust these guidelines among themselves as needed. If personal, face-to-face sessions are possible, we encourage it. PSA's with fraternities in the region can establish particular guidelines for the region. Before appointing a regional SA, the regional executive council is to be consulted.

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#### Guide for SAs

Two extremes should be avoided during meetings:

- + First, the temptation to lead the meeting in person, especially if the secular officers appear weak or lack formation.
- + Second, the temptation to let things go and limit oneself strictly to the dictates of one's duty, or even to lose interest in the fraternity.

In council meetings, the spiritual assistant:

- + is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity which he or she serves, and collaborates with it in all its activities, taking part in its meetings and activities in accordance with the law proper to the OFS.
- + acts with respect for the responsibilities and role of the seculars, giving them priority with regard to the guidance, coordination and animation of the fraternity.

Manual for Spiritual Assistants - General Spiritual Assistants - Chapter iv - #4.1, .2



(CNSA) CONFERENCE OF  
NATIONAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

1. The principal task of the assistant is to foster a deeper insight into Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the secular Franciscans.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 13.1

3.b The National assistants give their service to the national council, see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS in the whole territory of the national fraternity, and at the National level, to the co-ordination of the regional assistants. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially.

1. The National Assistants of the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major superior, after consultation with the respective national council. Where more than one major superior is involved in the appointment, the norms established together by the superiors with jurisdiction in the national territory shall be followed.

2. They give their service to the national council and see to the spiritual assistance to the national fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a Conference and render their service collegially.

3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of National Assistants, or to the national Assistant if there is only one:

- + to collaborate with the national council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and the society of the country, and in a special way in the formation of leaders;
- + to provide for the pastoral visits of the regional councils of the OFS and to ensure a presence in the regional elective chapters;
- + to coordinate, at the national level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the assistants, and the fraternal union among them;
- + to foster the interest of the friars in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 19.1, .2, .3

1, The National Assistant must keep the major superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth in the country.

2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth, meet with local fraternities assisted by his own Order, and keep fraternal and constant contacts with the regional and local assistants of his own Order.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 20.1, .2

3. The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve (12) years.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 15.3

2. Each Conference of Assistants functions according to its own internal by-laws.

3. The National and Regional Statutes of the OFS establish the number of assistants who are members of the national or regional council.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 16.2, .3

The members of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) in the USA are generally appointed by the Conference of Provincials of each jurisdiction (1st Order or TOR) -or- the provinces of a jurisdiction may take turns appointing one of their members to CNSA. Only the major superiors have the right to appoint one of their friars to CNSA. The term limit of an appointment to CNSA is limited



to 12 consecutive years.

Within the CNSA itself there are particular offices assumed by one of the friars for a two year period. Thus one friar is President-in-turn for a two year term. Another of the friars serves as CNSA secretary for a two year term. When the president's term is finished the friar secretary assumes the presidency etc. This is not a big problem and the offices are passed on without difficulty.

CNSA has selected two secular Franciscans to be executive secretary and treasurer of CNSA. Their role for the CNSA is spelled out in the job descriptions given in this Handbook - Pages [58](#) & [59](#).

1. The CNSA friars collaborate with the national fraternity (NAFRA) and national executive council (NEC) in the animation and spiritual assistance to the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and secular society in the USA. CNSA meets three times a year unless issues require more meetings.

2. A special concern of CNSA is the formation of leaders of the OFS in the USA.

3. CNSA makes pastoral visitations, once every three years, to the regional executive councils and regional fraternities in the USA. They may make the visit independently of the fraternal visit, or make it collaboratively with the fraternal visitation. A post-visitiation letter, written collaboratively or separately, is sent within a month of the visit to the visited Region. It shares insights, recommendations, corrections or affirmations to help the region enrich its Franciscan life. At visitations, among other issues, CNSA friars show concern for the spiritual assistants, both regional and local, as well as the quality of formation in the region. (cf. Handbook - Page [28](#) & [29](#))

4. CNSA endeavors to assist the Provincial and Regional spiritual assistants in the USA through various gatherings. The frequency is decided by CNSA. CNSA recognizes its responsibilities to the assistants and brings regional and provincial assistants together both to learn and to dialogue about common issues and problems. These gatherings also allow creative ideas to be shared. CNSA has a web-site and a server-list on the internet to enhance communication among SAs at all levels in the USA.

5. CNSA's president-in-turn makes an annual report to the members of NEC and NAFRA to keep them in touch with our work. The CNSA president-in-turn attends meetings of the National Executive Council and NAFRA and shares in their deliberations. Each CNSA member submits an annual written report to their Conference of Provincials (or Provincial) of their 1st Order/TOR jurisdiction.

6. CNSA members provide written materials to serve spiritual assistants. This Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS is one instance as is the Franciscan Family Connections (Revised 2011) program for training spiritual assistants. TAU-USA articles and internet communications support the work of, and facilitate communication with, the spiritual assistants throughout the United States.

7. CNSA is the conduit through which the General Spiritual Assistants communicate information and issues that relate to spiritual assistance. In turn, CNSA represents the needs of the USA spiritual assistants to our counterparts on the General Conference of Spiritual Assistants. CNSA collaborates with the National Executive Council in dealing with OFS issues in the USA.

8. Financial support for CNSA comes from donations from NAFRA and from our own 1st Order/TOR provincial or provincial conferences in the USA. While our publications initially require an infusion of money from our treasury, we generally retire that debt through the sale of our books. There is some money gained from the programs for Provincial and Regional spiritual assistants who pay their own way to the nationwide gathering. Our practice for regular CNSA meetings is: The 1st Order/TOR conferences/provinces pay for our travel expenses; our CNSA treasury pays for our room and board at the places where we meet. Any outside meals at our meetings are paid from personal budgets.

9. CNSA is responsible to stay in touch with the regional and provincial spiritual assistants. We can be a source of help and information when assistants communicate with us about issues and problems that occur in their service to the OFS. We develop ways and means to achieve a bond of union with

the spiritual assistants that we serve.

10. CNSA appoints spiritual assistants to the various national commissions of the OFS. The recommendations for appointment are requested, in writing, by the commission chairperson. The chair sends a written request to the CNSA. The commission chair offers a resume' to show a person's competence to serve on the commission. CNSA then makes the appointment. The role of SA's to national commissions is spelled out on page [24](#) in this Handbook. The appointment is for a 3-year term. The usual term limit is two three-year terms.

11. An important role of each CNSA member is to develop and maintain the interest of the friars of their jurisdiction in the OFS. Each friar seeks ways that are most effective for communicating with the friars of their province or Order.

12. It may be obvious, but CNSA members and all spiritual assistants are called to be prayerful people. We share with the OFS the task of rebuilding our Church and world which is always in need of reform. Our intimacy with Jesus helps us create a world and people influenced by the Gospel. The Holy Spirit dwells in us and prompts us to faithfulness. We are mindful of the importance of keeping our Franciscan charism alive and well in all councils, fraternities, and OFS members in the USA. We remind friars that Secular Franciscans are not "Gofers" for them. We seek a sense of respect that values the Franciscan family relationship among all its members. Ministries among us are collective ways to serve the OFS, our own Franciscan family, the Church, and the world.

14. A member of CNSA shall ordinarily write a column in TAU-USA that focuses on news and ideas for spiritual assistants and OFS members.

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The Church, however,  
claspings sinners to its bosom,  
at once holy and always  
in need of purification,  
following constantly the path  
of penance and renewal.

The Church, "like a stranger  
in a foreign land, presses forward amid  
the persecutions of the world  
and the consolations of God," (St. Augustine)  
announcing the cross and death of the Lord  
until he comes (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:26).

But by the power of the risen Lord,  
it is given strength to overcome,  
in patience and in love,  
its sorrows and its difficulties,  
both those that are from within  
and those that are from without,  
so that it may reveal to the world,  
faithfully, although with shadows,  
the mystery of its Lord until, in the end,  
it shall be manifested in full light.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church  
Lumen Gentium - Vatican II - Paragraph 8



## ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

COMMENT: The major superior in a Province is the Provincial Minister of the 1st Order or TOR. He has primary responsibility for establishing fraternities, making pastoral visits and providing for spiritual assistance. He may perform these duties personally or through a friar he delegates to fulfill these duties in his name. Such a delegated friar is called the PROVINCIAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT. He acts in the name of the minister provincial of his province in those issues that concern the Secular Franciscan Order. The provincial minister determines the extent of the delegated authority he gives to the PSA. (cf. Article 5.2 of the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS) There is no special limit to PSA's term of office.

1. The Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA), duly delegated by the Provincial minister, has the following duties:

2. It is their specific competence, in the name of their jurisdiction:
  - + to canonically establish new local fraternities and to guarantee them spiritual assistance.
  - + to animate spiritually, to visit, and to meet the local fraternities assisted by their own Order.
  - + to keep themselves informed about the spiritual assistance given to the OFS and the Franciscan youth.
  - + to appoint the spiritual assistants.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 11.2

In fulfilling any of these duties, the PSA is limited by the extent of the delegation he receives from his Provincial Minister. The PSA fulfills the *altius moderamen* to the local OFS fraternities bonded to his 1st Order or TOR Province. He keeps his Provincial Minister informed about the condition of the OFS fraternities bonded to his province. Regional SA's usually do the visitations of fraternities in their region.

### RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. The PSA establishes new fraternities who wish to be bonded to his province. He observes all the requirements of the law of the Church, the OFS, and his own Order. (cf. Page [38](#) ff in this Handbook)
2. He witnesses the canonical establishment of a new fraternity, though he may delegate this role to another friar for good reasons. He keeps the Minister Provincial informed on these matters.
3. The PSA is responsible for animating and pastorally visiting local fraternities bonded to his Province. This duty is generally fulfilled through the Regional spiritual assistant(s) of the appropriate region. Copies of the visitation reports of the RSA are sent to the PSA of the province to which fraternities are bonded.
4. Individual fraternities, (bonded to a Province), have the right of recourse to their PSA in serious matters and special needs.
5. The PSA or Provincial appoints spiritual assistants to the local fraternities bonded to his province. The local council submits its request to the PSA (or Provincial if PSA does not have delegation) of the 1st Order or TOR province to which the fraternity-in-need is bonded. The local council submits the name(s) of suitable individuals to the PSA. Whoever is selected takes the CNSA training program if training is needed. If the appointee is not a member of the PSA's Province or the Order, he consults with either the religious superior or, if necessary, the bishop of the diocese of the individual diocesan priest or deacon. In the case of an OFS member, he consults the local council of the applicant. When appointing a regional spiritual assistant he consults with the Regional executive council.
6. The PSA and the RSA's collaborate in developing ongoing formation for local spiritual assistants.
7. If the Provincial retains the authority to appoint SAs, the PSA offers advice and counsel to his Provincial Minister concerning the appointment of a spiritual assistant, local or regional.

8. The PSA, together with other interested friars, shall work among the friars of his province to develop a good knowledge of the OFS. Friars, in their time of formation, need both information about the OFS and, if possible, experience with people in local fraternities.

9. The PSA can provide input and recommendations to the Friar Conference of Provincial Ministers of his own obedience (or his provincial), as part of his annual report on the OFS. The appointment of a friar to the CNSA is another opportunity for ongoing formation for the provincials.

10. The PSA keeps his provincial minister and province informed about the quality of spiritual assistance and the development of the OFS in fraternities attached to their province.

1. The canonical establishment of new fraternities is done at the request of the secular Franciscans concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the OFS Council at the higher level, to which the new fraternity will be related according to the national statutes. The written consent of the local ordinary is necessary for the canonical establishment of a fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the 1st Order or the TOR.

2. Any transfer of a local fraternity to the pastoral care of another Franciscan religious Order is done according to the procedures established by the national statutes of the OFS.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 6.1, .2  
cf. [National Statutes](#) - Article [18.2, 4](#)

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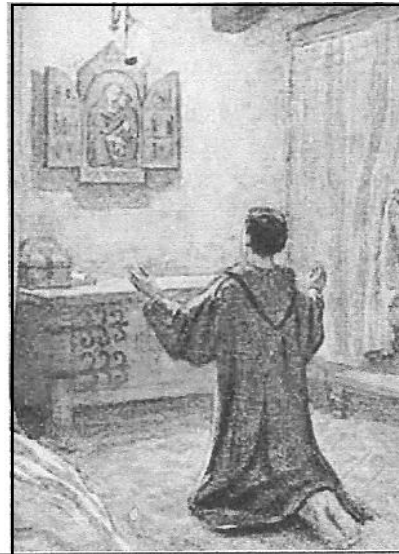
Let no one make being over others  
his own.

"I did not come to be served,  
but to serve, says the Lord."

Let those who are placed over others  
boast about that position as much as  
they would if they were assigned the  
duty of washing the feet of their  
brothers. And if they are upset at  
having their place over others taken  
away from them than at losing their  
position at their feet, the more they  
store up a money bag\* to the peril of  
their soul.

Admonition IV  
Francis of Assisi - The Saint  
Vol I - Page 130

\* The "money bag" is a reference to the  
treachery of Judas Iscariot.





## ROLE OF A SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT TO A NATIONAL COMMISSION

Revised by CNSA - September 13, 2004 / February - 2012

The Spiritual Assistant (SA) to a National Commission is appointed by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) based on a request and/or recommendation of a National Commission Chair. This SA is accountable to CNSA. The SA to a commission will ordinarily serve a term of three years with the possibility of an extension for another three years.

The SA, once appointed, serves as a member of a National Commission. The ministry of the SA to a Commission reflects that of the SA on any other level. The SA's presence illustrates the bond between the National Commission and the 1st Order and TOR. The SA, in a non-directive/non-managing manner, strives to keep present the Franciscan charism during the deliberations of the particular National Commission on which he/she serves.

# The general responsibilities or duties of the SA to a National Commission include:

1. To attend Commission meeting(s) and assist the Commission in carrying out their Mission Statement.
2. To offer guidance concerning matters moral, Franciscan, ecclesial and fraternal to the National Commission for which they serve as spiritual assistant.
3. To facilitate prayer and theological reflection in the National Commission which they serve.
4. Upon the request of the Commission chair, to write an article about the commission's ministry for [TAU-USA](#) Magazine and participate in or present workshops and retreats for national, regional, or local conferences when requested.
5. To communicate with the chair on commission issues and, as delegated by the chair, with regional chairpersons and other members of the Franciscan family.
6. To report to the Commission chair regarding assigned commission activities and projects.
7. To assist the Chair in:
  - A. Responding to commission-related requests from the coordinator of the National Commissions (If there is one).
  - B. Functioning as a clearing house, with other members of the commission, for resources and ideas, receiving recommendations and evaluating proposals for commission-related projects undertaken within the OFS or by other groups, secular and religious, having a bearing on the mission and ministry of the Commission.

Minor revisions - February, 2012

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The world would be better off if people tried to become better.  
 And people would become better if they stopped trying to become better off.  
 For when everybody tries to become better off, nobody is better off.  
 But where everybody tries to become better - everybody is better off.  
 Everybody would be rich if nobody tried to become richer.  
 And nobody would be poor if everybody tried to be the poorest.  
 And everybody would be what they ought to be if everybody tried to be  
 what he wants the other fellow to be.

Peter Maurin - Catholic Worker co-founder.





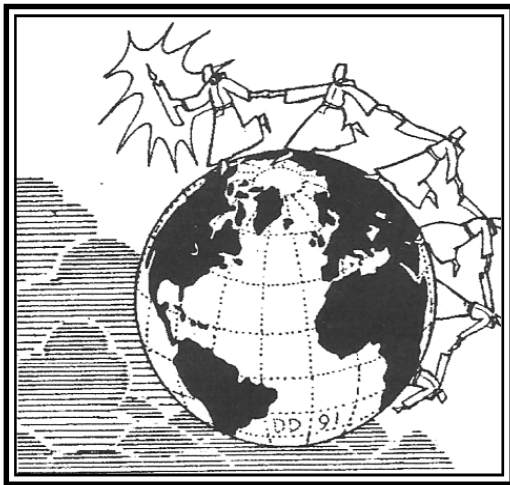
## TERMS OF OFFICE FOR SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

3. The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve years.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 15.3

- + If a spiritual assistant has been appointed for a 12-year term, his/her term ends after serving the same fraternity for 12 consecutive years. When the 12-year term is complete, he/she may be appointed to another fraternity by the PSA with authority to do so. It can happen that an individual SA is transferred by his/her superior to another ministry during the 12-year term. Personal reasons, (health, moving to another area etc) can also prevent his/her ability continue to serve as a SA to a fraternity. In all cases the individual SA involved should notify the PSA and the concerned council of his/her situation.
- + An option: The PSA's may appoint a spiritual assistant to a particular fraternity for a period of three or four years at a time, i.e. the time between the Provincial Chapters of the 1st Order or TOR. The PSA should inform the spiritual assistants, in writing, that this is being done. Spiritual Assistants thus appointed must be re-appointed after each Provincial Chapter. When the shorter terms add up to 12 consecutive years, the official term for the SA is expired and a new SA needs to be appointed to the fraternity. Notifying the appropriate people should be done in a reasonable time before the term ends.

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Among the diverse ways of life that still exist in the Franciscan Family, that of the secular Franciscans - lay and cleric - occupies a very particular place. They recognize Francis as their founder and live the charism within the secular dimension. For them, since they are an integral part of the Franciscan Family and have been historically united to us Franciscan religious, the Church granted the privilege of having the major superiors of the First Order and TOR as those mainly responsible for their spiritual and pastoral care. We are responsible for the higher direction (*Altius moderamen*) that seeks to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and union with the Franciscan Family, values which represent a vital commitment for the secular Franciscans. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [85.1, 2](#))

Letter of the Ministers General  
of the 1st Order/TOR  
at the beginning of the Statutes for Spiritual  
& Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - October 4, 2009



## CONFERENCE OF GENERAL SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS

COMMENT: There are similarities to the responsibilities of the Regional and National Spiritual assistants. The differences focus mainly on the breadth of the responsibilities as we widen the circle of people who are served. This is also true as we summarize the duties of the General Spiritual Assistants.

1. For all that concerns the OFS as a whole, the *altius moderamen* must be exercised by the general ministers collegially.
2. It belongs to the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and TOR:
  - a. to take care of the relations with the Holy See concerning the approval of legislative or liturgical documents, which need to be approved by the Holy See.
  - b. to visit the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS;
  - c. to confirm the election of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.  
(cf. Article 8.2 in the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS).
3. Each General minister, for his own Order, sees to the interest of the religious for the OFS and to their preparation for service to it according to their respective Constitutions and the Constitutions of the OFS.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [89.1, .2, .3](#)

2a. the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS requests the general assistant from the respective general Minister.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [91.2a](#)

1. The general Ministers exercise their office towards the OFS in accordance with the universal law of the Church, with their own Constitutions and with full respect for the specific laws of the OFS. They have the faculty to establish, visit, and meet with local OFS fraternities which are assisted by their own Order.

2. In relation to his own Order, it is the responsibility of each general Minister:
  - + to appoint the general Assistant of the OFS, who, under the authority of the general Minister, looks after all things regarding service to the OFS.
  - + if needed, to confirm or appoint the national assistants belonging to his own Order.  
Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 9.1, .2

1. The general Assistants are appointed by their respective general Minister, after consultation with the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

2. They give their service to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, form a conference, and collegially see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS as a whole.

3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants:
  - a) to collaborate with the International Council and its Presidency in the spiritual & apostolic animation of the OFS and in a special way in the formation of secular leaders;
  - b) to co-ordinate, at the international level, the spiritual assistance to the OFS and the Franciscan Youth;
  - c) to foster the interest of the friars and their Superiors in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth;
  - d) to provide for the pastoral visits of the National councils of the OFS and the presence at the national elective chapters.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 17.1, .2, .3

1. The general assistant must keep his general Minister and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and Franciscan Youth.

2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and Franciscan Youth, meet with local fraternities assisted by his own Order and keep constant contact with the assistants of his own Order.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 18.1, 2

COMMENT: On the international level, the General Spiritual Assistants serve the OFS throughout the world. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants collaborates with the Presidency of the OFS in providing leadership to the OFS throughout the world.

1. The request for a general spiritual assistant is made by the Presidency of the OFS to the general Ministers of the 1st Order and the TOR. These four appointees serve as the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

2. They serve at the disposition of their general Minister.

3. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants make a visitation of the national fraternities once every six years, as indicated by the OFS [General Constitutions](#):

2. With the consent of the appropriate council, the request for the fraternal visit as well as the pastoral visit is made:

b. by the national minister at least every six years, to the presidency of the International Council of the OFS and to the Conference of General Assistants.

c. by the general minister, at least every six years, to the conference of General Ministers.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [92.2b, 2c](#)

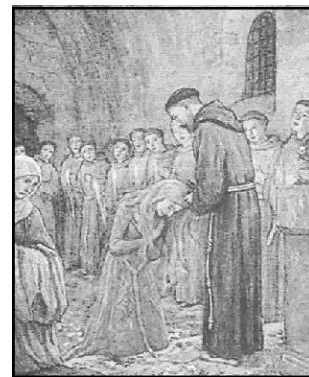
4. The Conference of General Ministers of the 1st Order and the TOR take care of OFS relations with the Holy See in regard to the approval of legislation and liturgical documents which need that approval.

5. The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants deals with issues and problems presented to them by spiritual assistants from the various Conferences of National Spiritual Assistant(s). Spiritual assistants may also have recourse to the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants when a lower level's decision is not acceptable to them. Remember the principle of subsidiarity i.e. issues/problems are settled at the lowest level possible. Only when that fails is recourse had to the next higher level of authority. Requests for clarification of issues may also be presented to the Conference of General Assistants.

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Co-responsibility arises, not from inability or lack of government or animation on the part of the Secular Franciscans, but rather from the charism, which needs to express the manifold riches poured out by the Spirit upon the Franciscan family through Francis, a man of profound ecclesial vision.

In order to be joyful and communicative, this ecclesiology must bear the sign of mission and proclamation through the apostolic life of the Lesser Brothers, through the contemplative life of the Poor Clares, and through the family life and social action of the Secular Franciscans.



Manual of the General Assistants - Chapter iv - #7.1





## PASTORAL VISITATION OF FRATERNITIES ON ALL LEVELS

COMMENT: The purpose of visitations is clear. Do your best to stimulate, encourage, and animate the Franciscan evangelical spirit. The following texts offer guidelines for a pastoral visitation

1. The Pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion with the 1st Order and the TOR. It is carried out in the name of the Church and serves to guarantee and promote the observance of the Rule and Constitutions and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. The visit is carried out with respect to the organization and the law proper to the OFS itself.
2. Having verified the canonical establishment of the fraternity, the visitor will give attention to the relations between the fraternity and its spiritual assistant and the local Church. The visitor will meet with the pastors (Bishop or parish priest) when this is opportune for fostering communion and service for building up the Church.
3. The visitor will promote collaboration and a sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the religious assistants. The visitor is to examine the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity, encourage the spiritual assistants in their service, and promote the continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
4. The visitor will give special attention to programs, methods, and experiences of formation, to the liturgical and prayer life, and to the apostolic activities of the fraternity.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [95.1, .2, .3, .4](#)

1. The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion of the 1st Order and the TOR with the OFS. It is carried out in the name of the Church and serves to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the [Rule](#), to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of unity of the OFS and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
2. The visitor strengthens the fraternity in its presence and mission in the Church and in society; verifies the relation between the secular and religious fraternities; gives special attention to programs, methods, and experiences of formation; gives attention to the collaboration and sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the spiritual assistants; examines the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity; encourages the spiritual assistants in their service and promotes their continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
3. At the request of the respective council, a delegate of the Conference of Assistants carries out the pastoral visit, fully respectful of the OFS's own organization and law. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the conference of spiritual assistants, having consulted the Council of the OFS of the same level.
4. It is recommended that the pastoral and fraternal visits be carried out together, with agreement beforehand on the program. The visitor or visitors will in good time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the council concerned. (Most of the following is done by the fraternal visitor). They will examine the registers and the records, including those relating to previous visits, to the election of the council, and to the administration of goods. They will draw up a report of the visit they have conducted, appending it to the records in the appropriate register of the fraternity visited, and will inform the council of the level which has conducted the visit.
5. In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor or visitors will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. They will give special attention to the brothers and sisters in formation and to those brothers and sisters who may request a personal meeting. Where required, they will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings possibly encountered.

[Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - Article 14.1, .2, .3, .4, .5

COMMENT: Pastoral visitations help to promote the Franciscan charism and maintain the connections within the Franciscan family. The pastoral and fraternal visitors are responsible for the many elements of a visitation, including a post-visitiation report sent within a month after the visitation. The RSA or CNSA can delegate someone to make a visitation, but that person must be qualified and knowledgeable.

1. Local and regional visitations are held once every three years. A visitation should guarantee and promote the observance of the OFS Rule and [General Constitutions](#) as well as fidelity to the Franciscan charism and the Church. The visitor(s) verify the canonical establishment of the fraternity and its relationship to the Church, society, and the spiritual assistant(s) of the fraternity. Individual seculars may wish to meet with the a visitor. The pastoral visitor gives attention to formation programs as well as the fraternity's prayer life, liturgical practices, and apostolic activities.

2. The pastoral visitor promotes collaboration and co-responsibility between the secular council and the spiritual assistant(s). The pastoral visitor promotes the continuing pastoral and spiritual formation of SAs in order to "assist" them; to get their insights about the condition of the fraternity(s); and to discover ways to help one another. The pastoral visitor dialogues with the entire gathering of the whole fraternity and spiritual assistant(s) at a pastoral visitation. The visited fraternity provides adequate time for everything that needs to be done at a pastoral visitation. Councils schedule sufficient time to accomplish the goals of a visitation, especially time for ongoing formation.

3. It is permissible to do the fraternal or pastoral visitations at different times. This alternative gives more time for both the fraternal and pastoral visitor to accomplish their goals. If the visitation is done together, the visitors can do one post-visitiation letter done collaboratively or two post-visitiation letters done separately. Each visitation team makes these decisions when setting the schedule for visitations. The post-visitiation letters should be sent to the visited fraternity within one month after the visitation. Nine to twelve months after the visitation, the visited fraternity council reports to the visitors on the council's implementation of suggestions, recommendations, or corrections in the post-visitiation letter(s).

4. We urge that elections and visitations NOT be done on the same dates. Elections should generally precede the visitation by at least six months. This gives the new council time to get acquainted with their fraternity and their council duties. The old and new councils may dialogue and come to a mutual decision on the timing of the pastoral and/or fraternal visitation.

A Regional pastoral visitation requires careful use of time. Regional visitations begin on Friday evening by meeting with the Regional executive council. While the REC meets with the visitor(s), the REC can have a prepared program for regional fraternity members on Friday evening. (This is good use of time at the chapter.) Saturday morning is time for chapter business (kept to a minimum of necessary issues); Saturday afternoon is time given to the visitors, with Eucharist sometime at or after 4:00 PM. On Saturday evening the visitors can facilitate an open forum with the attendees (including observers). Dialogue requires people to both LISTEN and share! On Sunday morning there may be some need for chapter business (Short). On Sunday morning the entire community gathers to share ideas and questions that may have surfaced during the visitation. A form of round table discussion can be an effective use of time. Dialogue with the visitors beforehand allows the schedule to be adjusted for special regional needs.

5. While Local fraternity visitations are usually much shorter, the efficient use of time is even more important. The meeting with the council requires at least an hour or more. There should be plenty of time for the visitor(s) to share ongoing formation with the whole fraternity. Getting good information on the formation programs of the fraternity is very important.

# Please dialogue with the visitors to settle the schedule for a visitation. Work out difficulties or prepare for various needs of the fraternity and the visitors. The National Executive Council has developed a brochure for Visitations. Get a copy to find other helps in preparing for pastoral and fraternal visitations.

# In ALL VISITATIONS the concerned council sends each visitor a copy of the previous post-visitiation letter and a copy of the most recent annual report.



RITE of INSTALLATION  
FOR A SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT (A model)

The Presider: 1. Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the province to which the local fraternity is bonded;  
- or - 2. The Regional spiritual assistant;  
- or - 3. Someone delegated by the Provincial SA or Regional SA.

\* The new spiritual assistant stands in the presence of the community \*

Presider: In the name of the Lord, Amen ... We begin with Hymn # \_\_\_\_\_  
+ Words of welcome by the presider (The community & SA are seated during this time).

1st reader: A reading from the OFS General Constitutions (Article 89.3):

The local spiritual assistant is to be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the Secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between the 1st Order or Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order.

2nd reader: A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS (Article 23.2)

The local assistant fosters communion within the fraternity and between the fraternity and the First Order or the Third Order Regular. In harmony with the local guardian or superior, the assistant sees to it that between the religious and the secular fraternities, a real life-giving union with each other exists. He or she fosters the active presence of the fraternity in the Church and society.

3rd reader A reading from the first letter of John (1 John 3:18, 4:7-8, 4:12)

Children, love must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action. ... My dear friends, let us love one another because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love. God has never been seen by anyone, but if we love one another, he himself dwells in us; his love is brought to perfection in us.

Reader: The Word of the Lord.

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Presider: I invite the local (or regional / or national) minister to read the letter of appointment of the spiritual assistant.

Local minister: reads the letter.

Presider: In the name of the 1st Order or TOR (Choose one), I install you, name as the spiritual assistant of N.N. fraternity. I thank God for your willingness to serve your Franciscan brothers and sisters. Let us listen to the words of the Gospel

During the reading of the Gospel the SA stands before the community which extends its hands over him/her while the Gospel is read.

4th reader - A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (John 15:7-10, 11-12, 16-17)

ALL: Thanks be to God

If you dwell in me, and my words dwell in you, ask whatever you want, and you shall have it. This is how my Father is glorified: you are to bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love. ... I have spoken thus to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. You did not choose me, I chose you. I appointed you to go on and bear fruit; fruit that will last. ... This is my commandment to you: love one another.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

\*A short reflection/welcome from the presider & the minister\*

All are seated + Presider offers a reflection

+ The local fraternity Minister offers a word of welcome to the new spiritual assistant.

Presider: Let us pray for the new spiritual assistant ... Quiet moment ...

Praise be yours, O Lord, for the love and concern you show the Franciscan family. Look kindly on N.N. as he/she begins his/her service to this fraternity. May the gifts of wisdom and understanding, knowledge and counsel, inner strength, and honest holiness be his/hers in serving this fraternity. May he/she experience the wonder of your presence among us. Holy Spirit, guide his/her life and ministry. We ask this in the name of Jesus.

ALL: Amen

\* The community comes forward to offer the SA a sign of welcome and peace \*

+ Closing song \_\_\_\_\_/ followed by a reception

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In the case of the installation of a Regional Spiritual Assistant or National Spiritual Assistant, the following texts are used at the proper places (in the rite for installing a local SA) - indicated by the numbers of the reader.

+ For a Regional SA: (Use the following texts:)

1st reader: The regional assistant(s) ... give their service to the regional council and see to spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If there are more than one, they form a conference and render their service collegially. Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 21.2

2nd reader: It is the responsibility of the Conference of regional assistants, or to the regional assistant if there is only one: + To collaborate with the regional council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society in the region, and in a special way in the formation of leaders. + To provide for the pastoral visits of the local councils of the Secular Franciscan Order and to ensure a presence at local elective chapters. + To coordinate, at the regional level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the assistants and the fraternal union among them. + To foster the interest of the friars in the Secular Franciscan Order and in Franciscan Youth. Ibid - Article 21.3

3rd reader: The regional assistant must keep the major superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the Secular Franciscan Order and of the Franciscan youth in the region. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order in the region and keep constant fraternal contact with the local assistants of his own Order. Ibid - Article 22.1, .2

\* Continue with the ritual for a local spiritual assistant beginning with the text for Reader #4 \*

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+ For the National Spiritual Assistant(s)

Text for installing National Spiritual Assistant(s). Please replace readers 1 and 2 (in the installation of a local SA) with the following text:

1st Reader: It is the responsibility of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants:

- + To collaborate with the national council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and the society of the country, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders.
- + To provide for the pastoral visits of the regional councils and to ensure presence at the regional

- + To coordinate, on the national level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of assistants, and fraternal union among them;
  - + To foster the interest of the friars in the Secular Franciscan Order and in the Franciscan Youth.
- Ibid - Article 19.3

\* Continue the ceremony with reader # 4 in the ritual for installing a local SA \*

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Those guiding the Rite of Installation ceremony  
may adjust or edit this text in ways that enhance the ritual

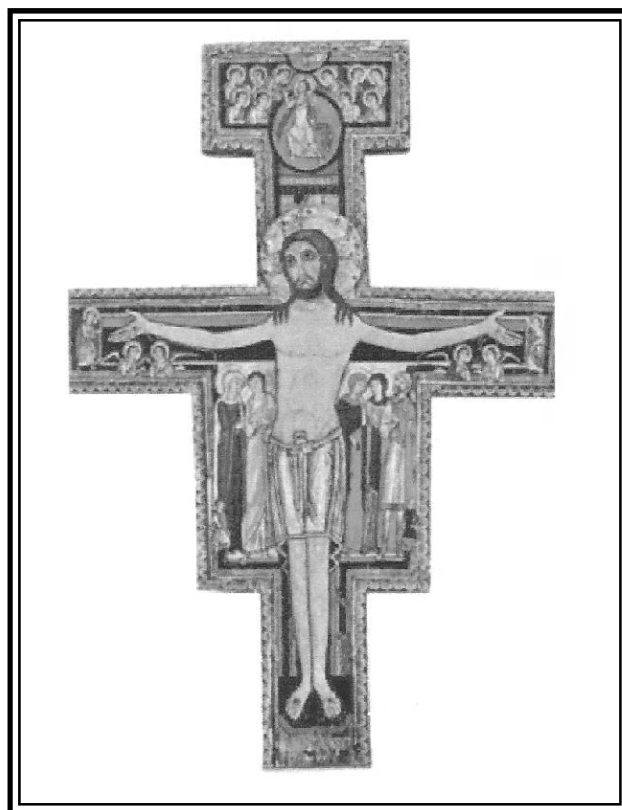
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Do not be afraid, little flock,  
for it is the Father's good pleasure  
to give you the kingdom.  
Sell your possessions, and give alms.  
Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out,  
an unfailing treasure in heaven,  
where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.  
For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12: 32-34

## THE SAN DAMIANO CRUCIFIX



San Damiano Crucifix

An unknown Umbrian artist painted the Crucifix in the 12th century. There is a strong Syrian influence, and history tells us that there had been some Syrian monks in the area. It is painted on wood (walnut) to which cloth had been glued. It is about 190 cms high, 120 cms wide and 12 cms thick. It is more than likely it was painted for San Damiano to hang over the altar as the Blessed Sacrament was not reserved in non-Parish churches of those times and especially those that had been abandoned and neglected as we know San Damiano had been. In 1257 the Poor Clares left San Damiano for San Giorgio and took the crucifix with them. They carefully kept the Cross for 700 years. In Holy Week of 1957, it was placed on public view for the first time over the new altar in San Giorgio's chapel in the Basilica of St Clare of Assisi.

For Eastern Christians, the Icon is a representation of the living God, and by coming into its presence, it becomes a personal encounter with the sacred, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. The San Damiano icon is then a personal encounter with the transfigured Christ - God-made-man. The crucifix contains the story of the death, resurrection, and ascension into glory. It expresses the total and universal Paschal Mystery of Christ. It invites us all to take part in it with a lively and lived faith, just as St. Francis did. Christ's saving death is shown in John's Gospel in its serene majesty, and this Crucifix portrays this in picture form. It is not surprising that St. Francis was attracted to the icon and the inspiration for his life came from this Christ who spoke to him: "Go repair my Church ..."



## CHAPTER TWO

# INCORPORATING OFS MEMBERS  
OF OTHER RITES OR LANGUAGE

COMMENT: The General Spiritual Assistants, at the request of CNSA, addressed the goal of incorporating all Seculars and Secular Franciscan fraternities into the national/regional structure of the OFS in the United States. It is our common task (CNSA, NAFRA & NEC) to guide the regions in accomplishing this integration of various Secular Franciscans who belong to another Catholic rite or who speak a language other than English. Here is the response from Samy Irudhaya OFM Cap, in the name of the Conference of the General Spiritual Assistants to the OFS.

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Pace E Bene,

June 30, 2004

1. It is very clear from the Constitutions of the OFS that any local fraternity in the USA must be part of the National Fraternity of the USA. It should be integrated with the National Fraternity. They may be Koreans, Vietnamese (and others), and the people of the Syro-Malabar rite from India, and all have to be integrated with the National fraternity of USA. In Article [28.3](#) (OFS [General Constitutions](#)) mention is made of personal fraternities (constituted for specific and valid reasons recognized in the decree of establishment). These fraternities are established for reasons of language, particular liturgical rite in the Church or because of their particular position in life. Such PERSONAL fraternities are likewise subject to the higher fraternities of the OFS. These fraternities can exist but under the approval and guidelines of the National Fraternity in the USA. Article [34](#) clearly states that these fraternities may be established within the fraternity under the guidance of one council. National statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups. For the valid establishment of this personal local fraternity, at least five perpetually professed members are required.

2. Spiritual assistance of these groups: They can still remain as members of their province or country but once they are in the USA they belong to the fraternity in the USA. Any spiritual assistant from their own country or from their own rite cannot give spiritual assistance to them without the permission of the major superiors of that province where they are and the major superiors in turn can appoint anybody or that same person. Those members should be well integrated with procedures in the USA. The national Fraternity must spell out criteria pertaining to these issues in its statutes.

3. The Spiritual assistant is not a director but an assistant. The fraternity council is the authority in fraternity life. Your perception is correct. This is what the Constitutions say. We go by the Constitutions. It is better to give formation to the members and often put them in relation with the regional council and invite them into the regional council and regional meetings. They can speak their own languages in their internal circle but when they participate in the regional meetings, they will have greater possibilities to open their minds. It is a question of relationship, and it takes much time.

4. It will take a lot of patience and tolerance. Tolerance is the spirituality today by which we maintain unity and peace. These fraternities need much initial and ongoing formation. It takes time. Your efforts and God's graces will do wonders and gradually bring them into one Franciscan family.

Yours Fraternally

*Samy Irudhaya OFM Cap*

Samy Irudhaya OFM Cap

Capuchin General Spiritual Assistant

## # WAYS OF COMMITMENT TO THE SPIRIT OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

COMMENT: These recommendations are made in response to a number of situations in which individual secular Franciscans also wished to make profession in another form of Franciscan life. Since the OFS has a right to determine the status of members committed to the OFS, the following recommendations were developed. Some thoughts on "affiliates" are also included.

1. There are many responses to St. Francis of Assisi. People of various faith traditions find ways to follow his spirit. Within our Catholic faith tradition, there are many ways for people to follow the Spirit of St. Francis. We rejoice at the attraction that St. Francis has among so many people. But we need to be clear about the consequences of belonging to the OFS - a particular Franciscan way of life. Many Catholic groups develop a way of life in the spirit of Francis and ask its members to commit to that way of life. We believe that Catholics ordinarily make a commitment to only ONE such group. When a Catholic professes his/her total life to the OFS way of following Francis of Assisi, that person cannot be part of another Franciscan group that requires a similar commitment. OFS members (for example), cannot belong to the 1st Order, 2nd Order, or TOR of St. Francis or another public association of the faithful. Commitment to two different expressions of a way of life confuses one's commitment and seems not to make sense. Franciscans choose one way to follow the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. Amen!

2. A Catholic belonging to the OFS (specifically approved by the Church - a Public Association of the Faithful), may not simultaneously belong to groups like the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance," or "Franciscan Tertiaries of the Immaculata," or other groups (Catholic or non-catholic) who profess alternate expressions of Franciscan life. Being faithful to ONE PUBLIC ASSOCIATION of the Franciscan way of life creates enough commitment for anyone. However, collaboration on various issues is certainly possible and encouraged.

3. The Anglican/Episcopal faith tradition has a Third Order Society of St Francis (TOSSF). There is an Order of Ecumenical Franciscans (OEF) for people of various faith traditions. We rejoice at the personal dedication of these groups. However, we do not accept individual members into the OFS if they are not Catholic, nor, if they are Catholic, are committed to another Franciscan group within the Church. We collaborate with these other groups to expand the Franciscan spirit in the world. But because of our profession in the OFS, we do not become members of these groups. One commitment is sufficient.

4. Franciscan Youth are part of our OFS family. The above considerations do not apply to them.

3. The members of the Franciscan youth consider the Rule of the OFS as an inspirational document for the growth of their own Christian and Franciscan vocation either individually or in a group. After a suitable period of formation, of at least one year, they confirm this option with a personal pledge before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.

4. The members of Franciscan Youth who wish to belong to the OFS should satisfy the requirements of the Rule, the Constitutions, and the Ritual of the OFS.

5. The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan family, requests from the competent secular leaders and religious superiors, respectively, fraternal animation and spiritual assistance.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [96.3](#), [4](#), [5](#)

5. Many religious congregations develop groups known as "associates" or "affiliates" with varying degrees of attachment to the particular religious community.

13. Affiliation with a local fraternity.

a. those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to participate in its life and activities (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [53.5](#) and [103.1](#)) according to Franciscan principles and teachings, may be welcomed by the local fraternity, so as to make their communion living and effective.. Individuals wishing to become affiliates should make their desire known by a written



- request to the local fraternity council, which makes a decision regarding the request.
- b. These affiliate brothers and sisters will have no juridical bond with the Secular Franciscan Order and are, therefore, persons welcomed to love and be loved "as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ." (OFS Rule - #13). They may share the experiences and activities of the fraternity, without the right to vote.
  - c. In order that the identity of the fraternity not be altered, the number of affiliates may not exceed 40% of the number of active professed members of the fraternity.
  - d. Regional councils have the right to establish their own guidelines for the acceptance of affiliates.

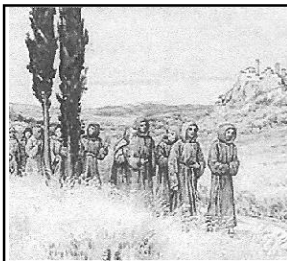
[National Statutes](#) of the OFS - Article [13.1a, .b, c, .d](#)

COMMENT: When dealing with affiliates it is important to ascertain if their "attachment" as an affiliate to a religious congregation is a "way of life" or simply a "generic attachment." If the affiliation requires a profession of some sort, follow the ideas on #2 on page [35](#). Fraternity councils will dialogue with the individual to determine his/her status in connection with a congregation.

Each individual case is different. Local councils need to act prudently. Not everyone who asks for affiliation needs to be granted affiliation. Discernment may suggest that an affiliate will be a good addition to the fraternity. Another affiliate candidate may be a poor candidate for a variety of reasons. Local councils use discernment tools from initial formation before accepting individuals as affiliates. This is the responsibility of the local councils. In addition, the council should make it clear to the affiliate his/her limitations and rights in regard to fraternity life.

# In addition, if a regional executive council wishes to write guidelines for accepting affiliates, they are free to do so. Clear guidelines can be helpful for the local fraternities when affiliate questions arise.

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The whole idea of St. Francis was that the Little Brothers should be like little fishes who could easily go freely in and out of that net. They could do so precisely because they were small fishes and, in that sense, even slippery fishes. There was nothing that the world could hold them by; for the world catches us mostly by the fringes of our garments, the futile externals of our lives. One of the Franciscans says later, "A monk should own nothing but his harp," meaning, I suppose, that he should value nothing but his song, the song which it was his business as a minstrel to serenade every castle and cottage, the song of joy of the Creator in his creation and the beauty of the brotherhood of men. In imagining the life of this sort of visionary vagabond, we may already get a glimpse also of the practical side of that asceticism which puzzle those who think themselves practical.

A man had to be thin to pass always through the bars and out of the cage; he had to travel light in order to ride so fast and so far. It was the whole calculation, so to speak, of that innocent cunning, that the world was to be outflanked and outwitted by him, and be embarrassed about what to do with him. You could not threaten to starve a man who was ever striving to fast. You could not ruin him and reduce him to beggary, for he was already a beggar. There was a very lukewarm satisfaction even in beating him with a stick, when he only indulged in little leaps and cries of joy because indignity was his only dignity. You could not put his head in a halter without the risk of putting it in a halo.

[St. Francis of Assisi](#) - G.K. Chesterton - Image Books - Page 103-104

## # RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF A SPONSORING FRATERNITY

1. The sponsoring fraternity council (SFC) assumes the guidance of a newly forming fraternity. The council of the sponsoring fraternity is responsible for having members of their council at each gathering of the newly forming fraternity. Councilors take turns attending these sessions, developing good relationships with the new people. The sponsoring fraternity's council votes to accept people to stages of growth and to perpetual profession. For councilors to lack personal knowledge is inexcusable. It can create future problems for a new fraternity. Council discernment discovers that some new people may not have a vocation to the OFS, while others embrace our way of life with sound qualities of understanding.

2. After the orientation phase and certainly before candidacy (when the new group is more stable), the sponsoring fraternity council initiates the process of getting a 1st Order/TOR province to accept the newly forming group and provide them with a spiritual assistant. This allows the newly forming group to work with a SA and develop normal fraternity relationships with the 1st Order/TOR. This issue should NOT be put off until the group is ready to be canonically established. Canonical establishment requires that the emerging fraternity is bonded to a province of the 1st Order/TOR. The province assumes the altius moderamen of the newly forming fraternity. The province also provides a spiritual assistant. This action is required by the Church. It should be done early in the process.

3. A formation team from the sponsoring council is responsible for the orientation and initial formation of the newly forming group. They conduct initial formation sessions, using the For Up to Now [FUN Manual](#) as a resource for the formation team. (The For Up to Now {FUN} manual is NOT to be used as a formation text. It is a resource for the formators. At present, we suggest The Franciscan Journey by Lester Bach OFM Cap as a text for the people in initial formation. The formation team develops a well-tuned formation program. The team guides newcomers in a formation process that enables their growth in the Franciscan spirit.

The sponsoring fraternity council (which includes the SA) evaluates the progress of the newcomers. When they discern that they are prepared to move on, the sponsoring fraternity council approves newcomers to move to inquiry and later to candidacy. A ritual is used for the steps of welcoming and admission (**Pages 7 to 11** in the [2020 Ritual](#)). The sponsoring council votes on the acceptance of candidates for permanent profession. The minister of the sponsoring fraternity accepts the profession of the new people.

4. Throughout their period as the sponsoring fraternity council, they guide the newly forming group, doing what is necessary to initiate people into the OFS rule and life. They welcome them to join the sponsoring fraternity at gatherings. They invite them to regional meetings, workshops or similar events. They encourage their participation in apostolic activities and working with Church and social issues that are part of regional or local fraternity life. As far as possible, the sponsoring council offers opportunities to enrich leadership skills among the members of the newly forming fraternity.

5. As the candidacy period of initial formation nears its end (at least 6 months before that time) the sponsoring fraternity council invites the Regional executive council to conduct a fraternal and pastoral visitation of the newly forming group. The REC assesses the newly forming group's readiness to become an emerging fraternity.

6. At this point, the sponsoring council consults with the members of the emerging fraternity and recommends people (to REC) to form a council to serve as leaders of the emerging fraternity. The recommendations are sent to the REC for approval. The REC then approves the emerging-fraternity's council members for a term of three years. During this period the sponsoring fraternity mentors the council (including the SA) - preparing them for the fraternity's future after canonical establishment.

7. Near the end of the three-year period, the new council seeks approval from REC for the canonical establishment of the emerging fraternity. A regional visitation must be held. The sponsoring council and the emerging fraternity's council collaborate in the preparations for the canonical establishment.

8. About a year after its canonical establishment, the new fraternity may hold its first elections.

## # PROCESS FOR ESTABLISHING A NEW FRATERNITY

COMMENT: People wishing to establish a new fraternity need at least five people as candidates. (It would seem more realistic to have closer to 10 people. With only 5 permanently professed people, the fraternity will all be councilors with no fraternity members for them to serve). The REC responds to the initial request by assigning an established fraternity and its council to serve as the sponsoring fraternity to a newly forming group. The total process of preparation to become a canonically established fraternity can take up to 6 years.

# OFS = Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis

### Documentation

1. The fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of St. Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High reveals the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion.

2. [Rule 20](#) The "OFS is divided into fraternities of various levels," the purpose being to promote, in an orderly form, the union and mutual collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence in both the local and universal Church. The OFS shall also support the commitment of the fraternities in their service to the world and specifically to the life of society.

3. The brothers and sisters gather in local fraternities established in connection with a church or religious house, or in personal fraternities, constituted for specific and valid reasons recognized in the decree of establishment.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [28.1, .2, .3](#)

2. [Rule 20](#) These fraternities, that each have their own juridical personality in the Church, should acquire, if possible, a civil juridical personality for the better fulfillment of their mission. It is up to the national councils to give guidelines concerning the motivations and the procedures to be followed.

[Ibid](#) - Article 29.2

1. [Rule 21](#) "On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (President)." These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular council. The council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity; to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out an election.

[Ibid](#) - Article 31.1

1. [Rule 22](#) The canonical establishment of the local fraternity belongs to the competent religious major superior at the request of the brothers and sisters concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the higher level to which the new fraternity will be related according to the national statutes. The written consent of the local Ordinary is necessary for the canonical establishment of a fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the 1st Order or the TOR.

2. For the valid establishment of a fraternity, at least five perpetually professed members are required (Please note that we encourage more, perhaps about ten perpetually professed members - cf. Comment at the top of this page). The admission and profession of the first brothers and sisters will be received by the council of another fraternity or by the council of a higher level which will have provided for their formation in appropriate ways. The acts of admission and profession and the decree of establishment are preserved in the records of the fraternity. Copies are sent to the council of the higher level.

[Ibid](#) - Article 46.1, .2

1. [Rule 23](#) Each local fraternity, the primary cell of the one OFS, is entrusted to the pastoral care of the religious Franciscan Order that canonically established it.

2. A local fraternity may pass to the pastoral care of another religious Franciscan Order in the ways determined by the [National Statutes](#).

[Ibid](#) - Article 47.1, 2

2. The provisions of Articles [46](#) and [47](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) shall govern the canonical establishment of new fraternities and determine the Franciscan friar province which assumes pastoral care. (cf. [Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS](#) - article 6.1 and article 11.2)

[National Statutes](#) - Article [18.2](#)

### Beginning a fraternity

People who wish to establish a new OFS fraternity contact the Regional Executive Council of the area. These individuals initiate the process of establishing a new fraternity with the guidance of the Regional Executive Council of their area. After serious dialogue with the requesting group(s), the REC gives or withholds its approval. If approval is given, the following steps are to be taken.

1. The REC attaches the newly-forming group to a sponsoring fraternity council. A member of the new group is selected to be a non-voting liaison to meetings of the sponsoring fraternity council. If no fraternity is available, the REC assumes the role of the sponsoring fraternity.

After the initial steps are taken, and the newly-forming group has achieved some cohesiveness (After orientation - a short time before candidacy), contact with the Provincial or Provincial Spiritual Assistant of a 1st Order/TOR Province is made. This will be the Province to which the fraternity will be bonded. When a Provincial or PSA accepts the altius moderamen for the newly-forming group, a spiritual assistant is appointed to the newly-forming group. This is done early in the process so that the new people become familiar with the SA as a part of fraternity life.

2. The sponsoring fraternity's formation team and council proceed with the process of orientation and initial formation in the manner they would for their own fraternity. The formation team members and some councilors should regularly attend and guide the formation sessions. Other councilors can take turns attending these sessions. Getting to know the newcomers is important and assists in discerning the vocation of new people. In a practical way, the [National Statutes](#) (Article [19](#)) provide the length of time for the various phases of formation. The time-frames in b), below, apply if you use *The Franciscan Journey* as your formation book. If more time is needed for any phase - TAKE IT!

a) Minimum - Orientation - 3 months / Inquiry - 6 months / Candidacy - 18 to 36 months - Total = 27 to 45 months

b) Using *The Franciscan Journey* - Orientation - 3 months / Inquiry - 6 months / Candidacy - 24 months - Total = 33 months

The formation team can extend any phase when there are good reasons to do so. It is better to take more time rather than rush through the sessions. Initial formation is more than an intellectual exercise. Formation team members need to observe personal changes in newcomers: in their opinions, theological perceptions, ways of viewing life, dealing with emotions, relating to others, and embracing Franciscan values in daily life. Members of the council can 'assist' in the formation session's dialogue and aid in the discernment process. As time passes, newcomers engage in the ministries of the sponsoring fraternity and attend the sponsoring fraternity's regular gatherings. It helps newcomers to experience fraternity life. If the REC is the sponsor, they need to work out the implementation of the above requirements.

3. During formation, the sponsoring fraternity members develop relationships with the new people. The formation team and council approve newcomers to move into the various stages of initial formation. Use the rituals at the beginning of each phase (cf. [2020 Ritual](#) - pages [7](#) to [11](#)). When candidacy nears completion (within 4 to 6 months), each candidate is instructed to write a letter to the council of the sponsoring fraternity. They request profession (or not) and give reasons for their request. At about 6 to 7 months before the end of candidacy, the sponsoring fraternity invites the REC to make a fraternal and pastoral visitation of the newly-forming group. The REC experiences the newly forming group's growth and receives information and personal contact. It will help them make informed decisions about the future of the newly forming group, leading to their identity as an emerging fraternity.

As the time for Profession draws near, the sponsoring fraternity prepares and provides time for a retreat or some other spiritual program to prepare the candidates for profession. The minister of the sponsoring fraternity receives their profession. The record of profession is kept in the appropriate register of the newly-forming fraternity. There ought to be at least five permanently professed Franciscans in the fraternity. (Remember the caveat in the notes at the top of page 38 concerning the number of perpetually professed).

### The Emerging Fraternity

1. After the pastoral and fraternal visitation, the REC determines the readiness of the newly forming group to become an emerging fraternity. The sponsoring fraternity (Having consulted the members of the emerging fraternity), recommends people to be members of the council of the emerging fraternity. The REC receives the recommendations of the sponsoring fraternity council (after they have consulted the members of the emerging fraternity). REC then appoints a council of the permanently professed members of the emerging fraternity. The new fraternity council picks the official name for the fraternity if this has not yet been done, The REC notifies the PSA of the Province to which the emerging fraternity is bonded.
2. The council of the emerging fraternity enters into a written agreement for the altius moderamen with the friar province previously chosen i.e. the friar province to which they are bonded. This confirms what has already been done. But it is done by the council of the emerging fraternity and not the council of the sponsoring fraternity.
3. The friar provincial minister or PSA informs the local bishop about the emerging fraternity and its future status as a canonically established fraternity in his diocese.
4. The Regional Executive Council informs the National Executive Council and CNSA of the existence of the emerging fraternity as well as its name, where it meets, and who is the contact person for the fraternity.
5. For the next three years the emerging fraternity functions like a fraternity. While still attached to the sponsoring fraternity, it functions on its own, mentored by the sponsoring fraternity as needed. It has regular council and fraternity gatherings, promotes vocations to the OFS, has an initial formation program, provides opportunities for interaction at its regular gatherings as well as interacting with other fraternities in the region. The members attend regional or district meetings and fully participate in the life of the OFS. The council deals with issues, makes semi-annual reports to the REC and sponsoring fraternity, handles financial matters as well as paying its "fair share." This three-year period serves as an internship in functioning as a fraternity. The sponsoring fraternity continues its mentoring role as needed. The emerging fraternity's council provides a written semi-annual report to the sponsoring fraternity and the regional executive council. The emerging fraternity is not yet canonically established!

During this three-year period candidates for profession are evaluated by the emerging fraternity's council. This council then makes a recommendation to the sponsoring fraternity's council for acceptance to profession. Upon the sponsoring fraternity's council's approval for profession, the minister of the sponsoring fraternity (or his/her delegate) receives the profession of the candidates. The record is kept in the register of the emerging fraternity. The words of profession in the [2020 Ritual](#) (Page 12-16) must be used by all fraternities. Usually, profession is done at a Eucharist unless no priest is available. In that case, a suitable ritual is designed for the profession but without changing the profession formula in the ritual.

6. Near the end of the three-year period, the emerging fraternity council invites the Regional executive council and Regional Conference of Spiritual Assistants to conduct a fraternal and pastoral visitation of the emerging fraternity. The PSA of the province which assumed the altius moderamen may also be invited to visit. The visitors ascertain the viability of the emerging fraternity, its faithful observance of the OFS Rule and [General Constitutions](#), its compliance with regard to minutes of meetings, the register of professions; financial records and the manner of conducting formation sessions - both initial and ongoing, and the co-ordination between SA and council. With this approval, the emerging fraternity council, through a written request to the REC (and the PSA), seeks the canonical establishment of the fraternity.



### The Canonical Establishment

The Regional Executive Council acts on the request of the emerging fraternity to be canonically established.

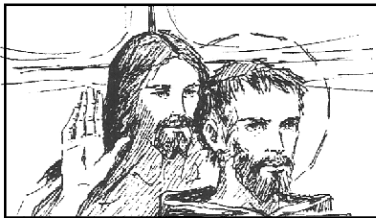
- a. The REC provides the necessary information and requests and obtains from the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (through their secretary) the formal document of establishment, making four (4) copies thereof. The regional minister signs and dates the four copies and sends them to the appropriate friar provincial minister or PSA, together with the written request to canonically establish the fraternity.
- b. The friar minister provincial or PSA gives his approval and signs and dates the four copies. He sends the documents to the bishop (Ordinary) of the diocese where the fraternity will be located. He asks the Bishop to give his approval and sign the documents. The Bishop returns the signed documents to the PSA or Provincial who proceeds with the canonical establishment of the fraternity with the proper documentation and ritual celebration.
- c. Meanwhile, the emerging fraternity arranges for the ceremony of canonical establishment in conjunction with the REC, the sponsoring fraternity, the friar minister provincial or PSA of the province to which the fraternity is bonded and, if customary, the Bishop of the Diocese.

The ceremony of canonical establishment is celebrated according to the ritual (Page 44ff in the old ritual book). During the ceremony, the document of establishment (4 copies) is signed and dated by the friar minister provincial (or his PSA) and by the witnesses.

One copy is sent to the REC to be kept in the regional archives; one copy is sent to the provincial minister of the friar province with the altius moderamen; a copy is sent to the diocesan chancery for filing; one copy remains in the records of the newly canonically established fraternity in accord with Article [49.1](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#).

- d. The regional minister informs the National Executive Council of the canonical establishment of the new fraternity with all pertinent information.
- e. After one year as a canonically established fraternity, it conducts its first elections and proceeds as a fully recognized fraternity of the region. The regional minister (or appointed delegate) conducts these elections which are witnessed by the Regional Spiritual Assistant or his/her delegate.

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They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the OFS:

- + Rule 7 - in a continually renewed journey of conversion and of formation;
- + Rule 4.3 - open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situations, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
- + in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [8.2](#)

## # GUIDELINES FOR A CELL GROUP IN A FRATERNITY

Where the situation and the needs of the members require it, sections or groups which gather members having particular needs, common interests, or the same choices may be established within the fraternity under the guidance of one council.

Such groups can give themselves specific norms relative to their meetings and activities, firmly remaining faithful, however, to the requirements that arise from membership in the one fraternity. National statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [34](#)

Establishment of sections or cells

- a. Should one or more groups desire to establish permanent sections within a local fraternity based on particular needs or common interests, they may do so subject to the direction of the local Fraternity Council (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [50.2.d](#)) so long as they continue to participate fully in the local fraternity's fraternal and apostolic life. The Regional fraternity will receive notice of the formation of such groups.
- b. Such sections remain subject to the local fraternity as constituent parts of it. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [34](#))

[National Statutes](#) - Article [18.5.a and b](#)

We (CNSA) make the following recommendations for cells or sections within one fraternity.

1. A cell group may include people who wish to meet more than once a month in a more home-like setting or who may be linked to a special apostolate or ministry.
2. A cell group exists for the good of its members and the local fraternity. The cell people continue to support the activities and financial needs of the local fraternity as well as attending at least some of the regular gatherings of the local fraternity. The cell is part of the local fraternity. It may be good to spell out these issues in a written document when a cell is started. It is too easy for cell members to begin to withdraw from local fraternity life instead of nourishing it.
3. Initially, the local fraternity council may appoint someone to lead the cell group. After the group is firmly established, the members may choose individuals (taking turns) to lead the cell or section. Such action helps to develop leadership. A local fraternity council may determine that one member of the cell becomes a non-voting member who attends the local Fraternity Council meetings as mutually determined.
4. A cell should see itself as contributing to the vibrancy of the local fraternity. This can only be accomplished if the members of the cell attend the local fraternity's gatherings with some regularity. It is important for cell leaders and the fraternity council to maintain both good communication and good relationships. It is ONE FRATERNITY and it expects all its members to contribute energy, ideas, support and financial "fair share" to the local fraternity.
5. Problem issues shall be mediated through common dialogue between the cell and the local fraternity council - the sooner, the better.
6. Should the cell wish to become an independent fraternity, they dialogue with their fraternity council and devise a plan for achieving this goal. Read the process for establishing a new fraternity in this Handbook (Page [38](#) ff). Follow the directions that apply to your situation. This process takes time, but it is time well spent.

It was not liturgy that drew me. It was not theology or doctrine (I didn't know anything about that);  
it was the witness of Catholic Christians who were really making a difference  
in people's lives that made me interested in the Catholic Church.

[In my own Words](#) - Thea Bowman FSPA - Page 31

## # SOME OPTIONS FOR A STRUGGLING FRATERNITY

COMMENT: A fraternity can be struggling to survive in a number of ways. If it is determined that it can no longer actually survive as a functioning fraternity, there are a number of options open to the members and the fraternity itself. Some possibilities are listed here.

1. The members of a struggling fraternity may have the fraternity de-activated and transfer their membership to an active fraternity and become fully participating members of that fraternity.
2. The members of a struggling fraternity may have their fraternity deactivated, transfer their membership to an active fraternity, ordinarily participate in the activities of that fraternity, but maintain some self-autonomy by gathering occasionally on their own, in accordance with article [34](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) (cf. below). Dialogue with the chosen fraternity can determine guidelines for this.
3. The members of the struggling fraternity may have their fraternity de-activated, and transfer to an active fraternity, but establish themselves as a cell or satellite of an active fraternity in the spirit of Article [34](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) and according to the norms or guidelines established by the regional fraternity. They may have one of their members attend the council meetings of the active fraternity as a non-voting member, representing the needs of the cell or satellite.

### Article 34

Where the situation and the needs of the members require it, sections or groups which gather members sharing particular needs, common interests, or the same choices may be established within the fraternity under the guidance of the one council.

Such groups give themselves specific norms relative to their meetings and activities, firmly remaining faithful, however, to the requirements which arise from membership in the one fraternity. National statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups.

### Article 18

#### 5. Establishment of sections or cells

- a. Should one or more groups desire to establish permanent sections within a local fraternity based on particular needs or common interests, they may do so subject to the direction of the local Fraternity Council (cf OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [50.2d](#)), so long as they continue to participate fully in the local fraternity's fraternal and apostolic life. The Regional Fraternity will receive notice of the formation of such groups.
- b. Such sections remain subject to the local fraternity as constituent parts of it. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#)- Article [34](#))

[National Statutes](#) - Article [18.5a, 5b](#)

4. It is possible that none of the above scenarios fit an individual fraternity. When a fraternity is de-activated the members of that fraternity remain full-fledged secular Franciscans. They may choose to join a nearby fraternity or be unable to attend any gatherings of any fraternity. The REC then makes certain that they are cared for. The REC may do that through personal action or by inviting a local fraternity to keep in touch with these seculars who can no longer attend gatherings. The key goal for the REC is to keep the relationship alive. Your concern lets these seculars know that they are important and that you continue to show that through your loving care for them.





## # DE-ACTIVATING A FRATERNITY

COMMENT: Fraternities sometimes come to a point when they can no longer function as a vibrant fraternity. Various reasons contribute. Sometimes, the members grow older and can no longer attend regular gatherings. Sometimes, there is no one to serve on a fraternity council. Sometimes, the burden of operating like a full-fledged fraternity is more than the members can handle. Fraternities may isolate themselves from regional structures and attempt to function independently. Reasons such as these may lead to the realistic decision by the Regional Executive Council to ask the PSA to de-activate the fraternity.

1. In the case of cessation of a fraternity, the patrimonial goods of the same, the library, and the records are acquired by the fraternity of the immediately higher level.

2. In the case of revival (re-activation) according to canonical laws, the fraternity will repossess any remaining goods, its own library, and records.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [48.1, 2](#)

## COMMENTS:

1. When a canonically established fraternity is no longer viable, for whatever reason, it can be declared de-activated by the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the Province to which the fraternity is bonded. This is done in collaboration with the Regional Executive Council and Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants or an individual RSA.

2. The official de-activation may follow this procedure:

- a. The Conference of Regional Assistants and the Regional executive council make a pastoral and fraternal visit to the fraternity. They dialogue with the members about the options available to the fraternity, of which de-activation is one. They ask the members of the fraternity to consider the options prayerfully and to communicate their decision within 60 days of the fraternal and pastoral visitation. The fraternity informs, in writing, the Regional Executive Council and the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (or Assistant if there is only one) of their decision.
- b. The Regional Executive Council records the decision and its recommendation from the visitation. This information is forwarded to the PSA of the province to which the fraternity is bonded. The recommendation of the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (or Assistant if there is only one) is likewise sent to the appropriate PSA.
- c. The PSA, if he agrees with the recommendation, issues the decree of de-activation to the fraternity minister with copies sent to the regional minister and the local bishop. If he decides NOT to de-activate the fraternity, he initiates a dialogue with the REC and the fraternity until a final decision is reached and implemented.

3. The common fund and other assets are either disposed of according to the decision of the remaining members or put in an interest-bearing escrow account managed by the Regional Executive Council. A copy of the document of establishment of the fraternity and date of its de-activation, plus a list of active members, is sent to the archives of the friar province, the regional fraternity, and the appropriate diocese.

4. When a fraternity is de-activated, the juridic person of the fraternity remains intact for 100 years after the last fraternity member dies. Such a fraternity can be revived if new members wish to re-activate it, and it can function as a fraternity. The PSA of the province who de-activated the fraternity can re-activate it if all requirements are met. (cf. Canon 120 - Page 82 in this Handbook)

5. While de-activation touches the responsibilities of a fraternity, it does NOT remove the individual responsibilities that come from profession in the OFS. The individual members remain committed to the OFS way of life. They maintain that commitment, gathering together if possible, or transferring to a nearby local fraternity, maintaining communication with the Regional Executive Council, and offering whatever support they can to the OFS. Their commitment to the OFS way of life remains intact.

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## # RE-ACTIVATING A FRATERNITY

1. According to [Canon Law](#) (canon [120](#) - cf. Page [82](#)), a canonically established fraternity of the OFS remains "alive" and cannot be dissolved until 100 years after the death of its last member. Therefore, any fraternity that has been de-activated may be re-activated during this period of 100 years in the following manner:

- a. by at least five (preferably more cf. Page [38](#) - Comment) permanently professed members of the fraternity.
  - b. by a new group of at least five (preferably more) permanently professed members who are willing to assume the juridic personality of the fraternity and responsibility for the fraternity.
2. To re-activate the fraternity a minimum of five (preferably more) professed members are needed.
- a. They meet together and fulfill the necessary requirements just as though they were a newly forming group and then become an emerging fraternity according to the guidelines for establishing a new fraternity (cf. page [38](#) ff in this Handbook).
  - b. Upon the discretion of the Regional Executive Council, the maximum period of re-activation may be shortened.
  - c. If the fraternity to be re-activated was suspended, any requirements of the probation or censure must be fulfilled before the process of re-activation can officially begin.
  - d. The members formally request the Regional Executive Council, in writing, to be officially re-activated as an already canonically established fraternity. The Regional Executive Council makes a fraternal and pastoral visitation. If they approve the request, the regional minister verifies the canonical establishment of the fraternity and asks the PSA, of the Province to which the fraternity is bonded to issue the written decree of re-activation. Copies are sent to the fraternity, the regional executive council, and the local bishop.
  - e. The Regional Executive Council returns all remaining goods of the fraternity as well as remaining financial assets and records to the re-activated fraternity.
  - f. A ceremony of re-activation is celebrated liturgically and socially.

N.B.

#1. If those wishing to form a new group already belong to a fraternity and are professed, they submit a written request to their fraternity asking to start a new group. The local fraternity council acts on the request and if approved, the minister of the fraternity informs the Regional Executive Council of this action. The REC approves the group to become a newly forming group or a re-activated fraternity.

#2. If those wishing to form a new group do not belong to an existing fraternity or are not professed, they submit a written request to the Regional Executive Council. If approved, the newly forming group is assigned a sponsoring fraternity within the regional area. If any people who are part of the new fraternity are permanently professed and belong to a fraternity, the minister of the sponsoring fraternity informs that fraternity and seeks the person's official transfer to the sponsoring fraternity. This process is also true for professed members wishing to separate from an existing fraternity. If no local fraternity can sponsor the group, the Regional Executive Council accepts the role of sponsoring fraternity.

#3. Though the documents mention that at least five professed members are needed either to begin a fraternity or to re-activate one, common sense indicates that it is more realistic to have closer to ten professed members in both cases. Otherwise, every one (5) would be on the council of the emerging fraternity and there would be no members to serve - a case of a council with no one for them to serve.

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# GUIDELINES FOR SUSPENDING  
A CANONICALLY ESTABLISHED FRATERNITY  
or suspending individual fraternity members

A canonically established fraternity can be suspended for the following reasons:

- a. because of repeated and prolonged default of the members in their corporate obligations for life in a fraternity or observance of the Rule or fidelity to the Franciscan Charism. (What applies to an individual applies also to a fraternity):

The repeated and prolonged default in the obligations of the life of the fraternity and other conduct in serious opposition to the Rule have to be discussed by the council in dialogue with the person at fault. Only in the case of obstinacy or relapse may the council decide, with a secret vote, to suspend someone. It communicates its decision in writing to the person concerned.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [56.2](#)

- b. serious opposition or obstinacy toward the mandates of the OFS Rule, General Constitutions and particular statutes.
- c. the communal public rejection of the faith or the communal defection from ecclesiastical communion.
- d. a communal act which is grave, external, imputable, officially documented, and juridically proven. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [58.3](#)):

The brother or sister who publicly rejects the faith or defects from ecclesiastical communion, or upon whom an excommunication is imposed or declared, by the fact itself ceases to be a member of the Order. This does not mean, however, that the council of the fraternity should not discuss the matter with the person concerned or offer fraternal help. The council of a higher level, upon request of the council of the local fraternity, collects the proofs and officially declares that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [58.3](#)

2. The suspension of a fraternity is officially incurred in the following manner.
  - a. The conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (or assistant if there is only one) take the initiative to conduct a pastoral visitation and the REC conducts a fraternal visitation;
  - b. As a result of the visitation(s), if the reasons for suspension are not corrected by dialogue & personal presence, the Regional Executive Council issues three warnings signed by the regional minister and the president of the Conference of Regional Assistants (or assistant if there is only one), each one at least three months after the preceding;
  - c. If the warnings produce no positive results, the Regional Executive Council discerns whether to request suspension from the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the friar province to which the fraternity is bonded. They record their discernment in the REC minutes.
  - d. The regional minister communicates, in writing, the request and advice of the Regional Executive Council to the appropriate Provincial spiritual assistant;
  - e. The Provincial spiritual assistant of the friar province to which the fraternity is bonded enacts the decree of suspension and sends it to the suspended person, the fraternity minister, and copies to the regional minister and the local bishop.
3. When a fraternity is suspended:
  - + Provisions will be made, assisted by the regional executive council, for active fraternity members to transfer membership to the nearest active fraternity (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [55](#)).

If a brother or sister, for any reasonable cause, desires transfer to another fraternity, he or she first

informs the council of the fraternity to which he or she belongs, and then makes the request, including the reasons for the transfer, to the minister of the fraternity to which he or she wishes to belong. The council makes its decision after having received the necessary information, in writing, from the fraternity of origin.  
OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [55](#)

- + Article 56.2 of the OFS General Constitutions (below) is to be followed for the temporary suspension of individual members of the fraternity from life in fraternity.

The repeated and prolonged default in the obligations of the life of the fraternity and other conduct in serious opposition to the Rule have to be discussed by the council in dialogue with the person at fault. Only in the case of obstinacy or relapse may the council decide, with a secret vote, to suspend someone. It communicates its decision, in writing, to the person concerned.

- + Article [58.2, .3, .4](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#) (below) is to be followed for the definitive dismissal of an individual member of the fraternity from the OFS.

2. In case of serious causes, provided that they are external, imputable, and juridically proven, the minister or the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the brother or sister concerned and keep the council informed. The brother or sister is given time to reflect and to discern, eventually with the help of an external and competent expert. If the time set aside for reflection passes without any result, the council of the fraternity requests the council of the higher level to dismiss the brother or sister from the Order. The request must be accompanied by all the documentation relevant to the case. The council of the higher level will issue the decree of dismissal after having collegially examined the request with the relevant documentation and having verified observance of the directives of the Law and the Constitutions.

3. The brother or sister who publicly rejects the faith, or defects from ecclesiastical communion, or upon whom an excommunication is imposed or declared, by the fact itself, ceases to be a member of the Order. This does not mean, however, that the council of the fraternity should not discuss the matter with the person concerned or offer fraternal help. The council of a higher level, upon request of the council of the local fraternity, collects the proofs and officially declares that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order.

4. The decree of dismissal or the declaration that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order, in order to become effective, must be confirmed by the national council to whom all documentation will be sent.

- + The goods of the suspended fraternity, its library, and records are acquired by the regional executive council and kept in the regional fraternity's archives.

1. In the case of cessation of a fraternity, the patrimonial goods of the same, the library, and the records are acquired by the fraternity of the immediately higher level.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [48.1](#)

- + The common fund and other assets of the suspended fraternity are to be put in an interest-bearing escrow account managed by the regional executive council.

- + A copy of the document of establishment (with the date of suspension recorded on it) and a copy of the last list of active members are to be sent to the archives of the friar province to which the fraternity is bonded, to the archives of the regional fraternity, and to the archives of the diocese.

- + The local Ordinary of the diocese where the fraternity has been established is to be notified of the suspension and the reasons for it by the Provincial Spiritual Assistant or the Provincial minister.

CNSA - February 21, 1994 (Revised - 2005)

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### Spiritual assistance and its role in the OFS

The [Rule](#) of Paul VI (1978) takes a decisive step, moving from submission of the OFS to the First Order and the TOR to a life-giving union with each other. "In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church." After stressing the "organic union of all Catholic fraternities," the particular characteristics of their secular life, and their autonomy, the Rule once again mentions "communion and co-responsibility" in the charism of the common Seraphic Father, calling for "suitable and well-prepared religious for spiritual assistance." from the four religious Franciscan families.

The text of the Pauline [Rule](#) begins by recalling that the Secular Franciscans are not an appendage but an integral part of the Franciscan Family. It ends with a request for spiritual assistants to the superiors of the First Order and the TOR, as something flowing from one and the same charism.

The [General Constitutions](#) of the OFS, definitively approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic life, reaffirm and clarify these concepts in article 85: "As an integral part of the Franciscan Family and called to live the charism of Francis within the secular dimension, the OFS has particular and close relations to the First Order and the TOR." By reason of these bonds, which have existed for centuries, the Church has entrusted to the superiors of the Franciscan religious Orders the *altius moderamen* mentioned in canon 303, in other words, the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS.

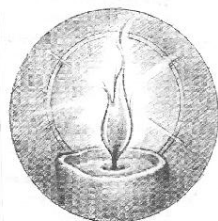
Manual for Spiritual Assistants - General Spiritual Assistants - Section IV - #1.2

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If at times the provincial ministers or the assistants are ignored by the Secular Franciscans, this is not the fault of the OFS or the Church, which recognizes it as an international and public association of the faithful. It could be the fault of individual Secular Franciscans who are arbitrarily interpreting the innovations that have taken place, or it could be the fault of the provincial ministers and assistants themselves, who do not know the Church's legislation concerning the OFS or are unwilling to enforce it.

It can happen that the Secular Franciscans are opposed to a spiritual assistant because he acts like the old spiritual assistant of a Third Order Fraternity, thinking that the local OFS Fraternity "belongs" to him or to his Order. A priest will certainly meet opposition if he has failed to grasp the difference between a spiritual director of the old Third Order and a spiritual assistant of today's OFS. But this does not give the Secular Franciscans the right to exclude him from meetings of the fraternity council. If they have problems with him, they should report their difficulties to the OFS regional council ...

Ibid - Section IV - # 2.2.2



#TRANSFERRING A FRATERNITY TO THE Altius  
Moderamen OF ANOTHER FRIAR OBEDIENCE (Province)

COMMENT: As the presence of friars in particular areas changes, grows, or diminishes, it is wise to consider the transfer of the altius moderamen (higher direction) of a fraternity to the care of another friar Obedience (Province) who may be able to serve the Seculars. Fraternities may also transfer for other reasons. Here is the process to follow.

1. The minister of the fraternity wishing to transfer to the care of another friar province writes both to the provincial spiritual assistant of the province of origin and the receiving province detailing the reasons for the transfer. He/she also provides copies of pertinent information and includes a copy of the Document of establishment or a verification of canonical establishment of the fraternity.
2. The same fraternity minister, with the consent of the council of the fraternity asks the regional minister and the regional spiritual assistant(s) of the region (to which it presently belongs), to write letters of recommendation to the provincial spiritual assistant of the friar province to which the fraternity desires to transfer.
3. The provincial spiritual assistant of the friar province to which the fraternity is bonded writes to the provincial spiritual assistant of the receiving province, giving his consent for the transfer. The provincial spiritual assistant of the receiving province then gives his consent for the transfer in writing.
4. If the provincial spiritual assistant of the receiving friar province accepts the transfer of the altius moderamen, he issues an official letter, in the name of the friar provincial minister, to accept responsibility for the altius moderamen of the fraternity and appoints a spiritual assistant for the fraternity (if needed), having consulted the concerned fraternity council.
5. It is important to inform the REC of any region involved as well as informing NEC and the person who maintains the database of the change.

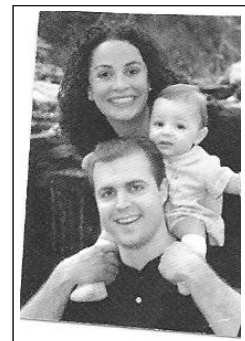
CNSA - July 31, 1995 / Revised - 2005 & 2012

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## HOPE

God is the foundation of hope; not any god, but the God who has a human face and who has loved us to the end, each one of us and humanity in its entirety. His Kingdom is not an imaginary hereafter, situated in a future that will never arrive; His Kingdom is present wherever he is loved and wherever his love reaches us. His love alone gives us the possibility of soberly persevering day by day, without ceasing to be spurred on by hope, in a world which by its very nature is imperfect. His love is at the same time our guarantee of the existence of what we only vaguely sense and which we nevertheless, in our deepest self, we await; a life that is "truly" life.

Saved In Hope (Spe Salvi) - Benedict XVI -  
Paragraph 31





## CHAPTER THREE

ISSUES & REFLECTIONS  
CNSA

COMMENT: The following pages contain recommendations and reflections of the CNSA and from other resources on issues brought to our attention both by spiritual assistants and secular Franciscans. Obviously, the CNSA recommendations can be changed or adjusted by CNSA. Changes made by CNSA in the future will be edited into these pages. These are common-sense recommendations and reflections. They are NOT laws!

1. Usually, these recommendations are the result of a considerable amount of discussion among the members of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, as well as research the topic. When new situations arise, there may be a need to change the CNSA recommendations. Working together we can keep this HANDBOOK as an up-to-date resource for spiritual assistants as well as other members of the OFS.
2. If national, regional, and local councils or other Secular Franciscans recognize a need to change some of these recommendations, we expect that they will initiate a dialogue with CNSA. The elements of daily life do not remain forever the same. It is a normal part of "assisting" one another that new information or experiences will require changes or adjustments. Both CNSA and the people who desire to change something can help by sharing ideas and reasons with one another. Dialogue will keep us on the same page as we share information and insights with one another.
3. Our dialogue about issues in this Handbook reflect the same attitudes and ideals that govern all of our relationships. We follow a Trinitarian spirituality that focuses on ways and means to maintain relationships while we make changes in practices or processes in our Franciscan life. Respect is called for. Dialogue is expected. Understanding is our goal. We work together to make our fraternal life more faithful to the OFS Rule. Prayerful dialogue is something that is normal for Franciscans. In a spirit of dialogue, we can share our Franciscan vision through both words and example with other people. We do this with a loving heart, realizing how true it is for people to say of us: Look how they love one another!

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Almighty, eternal, just, and merciful  
 God, give us miserable ones the grace  
 to do for You alone  
 what we know You want us to do  
 and always to desire what pleases You.  
 Inwardly cleansed, interiorly enlightened,  
 and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit,  
 may we be able to follow  
 in the footprints of Your Beloved Son,  
 our Lord Jesus Christ,  
 and, by Your grace alone,  
 may we make our way to You,  
 Most High, Who live and rule  
 in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,  
 and are glorified God Almighty,  
 forever and ever,  
 Amen

A Letter to the Entire Order  
Francis of Assisi - The Saint - Vol I - Page 120-121



Artist - Silvio Amelio  
 Assisi



## PRISON MINISTRY

2008 - Revised 2012

It is the mind of the CNSA that:

1. ministry to prisoners is a ministry for OFS members. We encourage such ministries to those who are called to it. Many forms of Christian education and relationships can be offered to people in prison to deepen their sense of worth. However, it is NOT our OFS task to bring them to formation nor profession in the OFS;
2. individuals who are in prison can learn about our charism. But the time for their initial formation in the OFS should come after their release. Then, they are free to begin the needed formation for entrance into the OFS in a fraternity of their choice (cf. #4 below);
3. it is difficult for individual persons in prison to be part of a common formation program within the Franciscan community or engage in apostolic ministries. Common fraternal life is very important for formation. We strongly recommend that persons in prison NOT enter OFS initial formation or become professed members of the OFS while they are in prison. They can, however, learn the values of a Franciscan life that the Holy Spirit may bring;
4. when individuals are in prison for life, the friendship and love of OFS members is a beautiful gift to them. It can lead them to the desire to embrace the Franciscan Spirit in prison, living the spirit of Francis in ways available to them. We generally would not recommend that they make profession in the OFS. Walking with them and supporting their continuing journey is our way to show them love. We trust our loving God to gift them with the gifts needed to live the Franciscan Spirit in prison. Profession in the OFS is not necessary for them to be touched with the Franciscan Spirit. The supportive presence of secular Franciscans in the prison ministry will be an important relationship for them.

Edited Text from 2008

Secular Franciscans are encouraged to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to those in prison in whatever way is most effective in local circumstances. When isolated individuals honestly and sincerely express an affinity to the Way of St Francis of Assisi, they may associate themselves informally with a OFS community until such time as they are released from prison and are free to enter the OFS. Then they can engage in the entire formation program, discern their vocation, and become full-fledged members of OFS in the same way that others do.

COMMENT: Prisoners can learn about St. Francis, practice and even live a Franciscan spirit in prison without entering the OFS. The requirements of prison life make it difficult for people in prison to experience regular fraternal life in an OFS fraternity. The regular support and love of secular Franciscans is important for their growth and for deepening their sense of personal worth. We encourage Secular Franciscans, who are called to this ministry, to minister with love and compassion. Let that love lead them to help prisoners recognize the call of Jesus and the Gospel. We need not expect them to enter initial formation while they are in prison. Making profession in isolation from fraternal life does neither the prisoner nor the fraternity any favors. Profession obligates the fraternity to offer continuing support to the prisoner wherever he/she may be. The fraternity may not always be able to offer such support.



Difficulties can arise if the person in prison is moved to another facility or released from prison. It may be impossible to continue the kind of support that was originally given. The prisoner may choose to live elsewhere after release from prison. If the individual senses a vocation to the OFS, he/she can freely enter the initial formation program of an accepting fraternity. During initial formation, they discern their vocation the same as any other applicant. We trust our loving God to lead them to new ways of living. If they respond to God's love,

God will certainly bless their efforts to live a Christian life.





## QUALITIES TO CONSIDER

when electing or appointing formation directors

+ With thanks to Anne Mulqueen OFS:

1. Formation directors and team members are dedicated to their ministry and consider it a response to the call of the Spirit and the expressed need of the fraternity they serve. They are familiar with the Franciscan charism and can interpret the charism in the light of the signs of the times and the needs of the Church and society today.
2. Formation persons possess, or know where to find, the information to share with others. They have the qualities needed for their ministry of formation. The For Up to Now *FUN Manual* is a natural part of the resources for formators and assists formators in their work. (It is NOT a text for newcomers to the OFS!)
3. Formation persons experience the transforming power of the Gospel in their lives. They communicate both information and abstract concepts clearly and experientially. Formation persons are aware of their own experiences and motives and are careful not to impose their opinions and expectations on others as a sort of "dogma." Sharing is open-ended as a way to assist newcomers to understand the Franciscan way of life.
4. Formation persons need to have time to prepare for and conduct formation sessions. Local formators know that a major goal of formation is to incorporate the candidates into fraternity life and help them to a personal embrace of the Franciscan spirit in all they say and do.
5. Formation persons are able to correct misinformation in a respectful manner that does not injure a candidate's self-esteem or dignity.
6. Forming persons at all levels, communicate with the spiritual assistant, the fraternity council, and the whole fraternity. They collaborate in their ministry. Formation persons share important and creative endeavors with the higher councils (regional and national), and to 1st Order/TOR major superiors.

### A CHECKLIST in choosing good resources for formation. Qualities of a good text

- A) Good texts will have references to Vatican II, the 1978 Rule, the General Constitutions, the National Statutes, the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS. The OFS texts can be found in the book: The Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order. Leaders should have a copy of The Essential Documents of the OFS available as a resource.
- B) Resources should convey clear information on the nature of the secular Franciscan vocation with clarity about the permanent and secular aspects of this vocation. It should be pointed out that formation is a never-ending process. Initial formation is only the beginning of a secular Franciscan's lifetime journey to God. Learning about and applying the OFS Rule in daily life is a regular requirement.
- C) Resources refer to the essential elements of formation: a) the Gospel; b) the OFS Rule; c) Franciscan writings; d) Church documents, especially Vatican II; e) the subsequent Church documents on the role of the laity in the Church; f) resources that provide opportunities to apply acquired insights and knowledge into practice in daily life, transforming the lives of people in formation.
- D) Resources need clear examples of secular Franciscan spirituality and apostolic involvement, especially regarding social and Church issues in modern times. It emphasizes that our vocation commits us to living the Gospel in fraternity, in a communal way of life, rather than a life of private piety lived in isolation from other secular Franciscans.
- E) Resources accentuate how, in daily life, we follow Francis and Clare of Assisi: a) through a process of ongoing conversion; b) in community; c) as secular people; and d) in life-giving union with all Franciscans. Initial formation texts should reflect on the rites and ceremonies experienced during initial formation.



## EUCHARIST and the MONTHLY GATHERING

COMMENT: This text comes from Benet Fonck OFM in response to a question about whether it is required that the Eucharist be celebrated at every regular gathering of the local fraternity.

November 7, 2001

It is true that Article 14.2 of the [General Constitutions](#) (states: The Eucharist is the center of the life of the Church. Christ unites us to himself and to one another as a single body in it. Therefore, the Eucharist should be the center of the life of the fraternity. The brothers and sisters should participate in the Eucharist as frequently as possible.

It is also true that Article 53.2 states: They should come together periodically (emphasis mine) as an ecclesial community to celebrate the Eucharist in a climate which strengthens the fraternal bond and characterizes the identity of the Franciscan Family.

And the footnote to Article [42.3](#) indicates that profession ought to take place during the Eucharist.

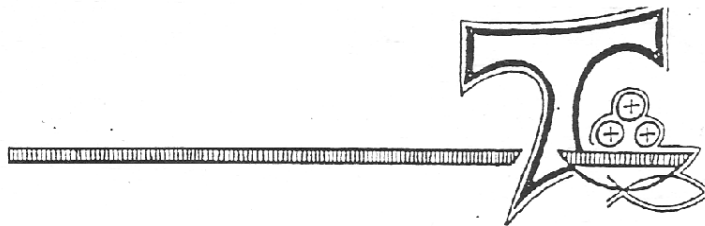
Yet, Article 24 of the OFS Rule points out: To foster communion among the members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community... (and) should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life in fraternity.

So, Article 53.1 builds on this idea by stating: The Fraternity must offer its members opportunities for coming together and collaborating through meetings to be held with as great a frequency as allowed by the situation and with the involvement of all its members. The [General Constitutions](#) picks up on the idea of ongoing-formation in Article 44.2: The fraternity has the duty to help its own members with programs of continuing formation: a) to listen to and meditate on the Word of God, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel, b) to reflect on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions; c) to realize and deepen the Franciscan vocation.

What does all of this say? Though the Eucharist is central in the lifestyle and mind-set of the Secular Franciscans and ought to be part of the fraternity's gathering on a periodic or occasional basis, like at professions or special events, it is not meant to be a part of the regular and frequent meetings of the fraternity because that has a different objective all together. The objective - according to both the [Rule](#) and the [General Constitutions](#) - is what the French call a review of life or a faith-sharing based on the Word (not Eucharist) to nourish and strengthen the apostolic, ecclesial, and Franciscan dimensions of OFS life.

Peace

*Benet Fonck OFM*





## PERMANENT DEACONS

1. CNSA recommends that OFS deacons or priests ordinarily not serve as ministers of fraternities.
2. CNSA encourages deacons/priests, if suitable and well-prepared, to be willing to serve as spiritual assistants to fraternities.

February 25, 1998

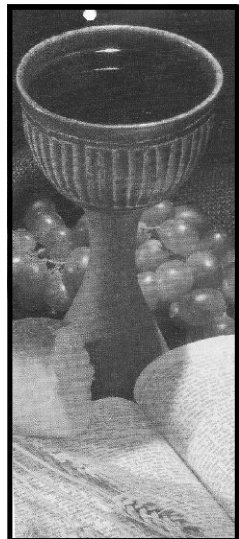
COMMENT: Deacons (and other clergy), who are secular Franciscans, are able to be elected to office as a minister or other offices of a fraternity or to be appointed as a spiritual assistant. However, permanent deacons and diocesan priests (working in parishes or diocesan offices) have a primary duty to the diocese and the Bishop of the diocese in which they minister or (for deacons) to the pastor in a parish where they minister. The workload is often dependent on the bishop and/or pastor and his view of the diaconate. Hence, each situation requires personal attention by councils and nominating committees. If the workload is heavy, it can be difficult for a deacon or diocesan priest to serve as a minister or SA of an OFS fraternity. A fraternity expects their minister to have a focus on service to the fraternity. If they are appointed as spiritual assistants, the same expectations exist. It is a difficult role if the time of a deacon or priest is heavily occupied in fulfilling diocesan or parochial responsibilities. In addition, deacons and priests must be suitable and well prepared for becoming a SA to the OFS.

It is permissible for a permanent deacon or diocesan priest to serve as a local or regional minister. In these cases it is wise, with honest dialogue, for councils and/or nominating committees to prayerfully discern (with the deacon or priest) whether the OFS ministry can be competently fulfilled in a particular case. Discernment is a positive action to discover whether this particular individual will be able to competently serve in a particular OFS ministry or not. Otherwise, both the person who serves and the fraternity that is served may find themselves in a difficult situation. Gentle dialogue and honest sharing on all sides can achieve a realistic conclusion. Every situation is different and must be explored so that people are not overburdened by their ministries nor kept from the ministries to which they are called.

If it becomes apparent that the role of SA becomes too burdensome, the individual can resign, informing the PSA. If the resignation is accepted, the fraternity council can then make a written request to the PSA (of the province to which the fraternity is bonded) for a new SA, indicating the reasons for the request.

Adjustments made by CNSA in 2012

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Receive the oblation of the holy people,  
to be offered to God.  
Understand what you do,  
imitate what you celebrate,  
and conform your life  
to the mystery of the Lord's cross.

Prayer at Ordination Rite



## SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS &amp; ELECTIONS

A spiritual assistant, whether a Franciscan friar or not, by virtue of his/her appointment, is the link of union between the OFS and the 1st Order and TOR. The spiritual assistant is a guarantor of the Franciscan charism and spirituality in the name of the friars. An OFS spiritual assistant does not represent the secular Franciscans. A member of a particular religious congregation or diocesan clergy does not represent their Order or the diocese. Rather, they serve as a link to the Franciscan 1st Order/TOR. They serve as a sign of communion between the Franciscan 1st Order/TOR and the OFS. This requirement of the Church reflects what the Church calls the *altius moderamen*.

According to Article 89.2, .3, .4 of the OFS [General Constitutions](#), anyone (friar, man or woman religious, diocesan cleric or Secular Franciscan) properly prepared and appointed by the provincial minister or PSA is a local spiritual assistant with full rights and obligations. Being a witness for elections is not limited to these people. But often, they may be the first to be considered.

Who can be a witness? A friar or non-friar spiritual assistant can be delegated to witness elections in the name of the Church and the Franciscan family. Spiritual assistants from the Franciscan Family may be delegated for this role (cf. Article [76.2](#) of OFS [General Constitutions](#)). Permanently professed members of the OFS, competent and in good standing, can also be delegated as a witness for elections.

An important point: Ordinarily, a secular Franciscan SA is not permitted to witness elections for his/her own fraternity of membership. If, because of urgency or necessity, a professed member of the OFS is delegated to witness elections in his/her own fraternity of membership, he/she foregoes the right to active and passive voice in those elections. They cannot cast a ballot nor be elected to a position of leadership at that particular elective chapter.

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From the Documents:

2. The elective assembly, or chapter, will be presided over by the minister of the immediately higher level or by his or her delegate, who confirms the election.

The president or the delegate cannot preside over the elections in his or her local fraternity, nor the elections of the council of a higher level, of whose council he or she is a member.

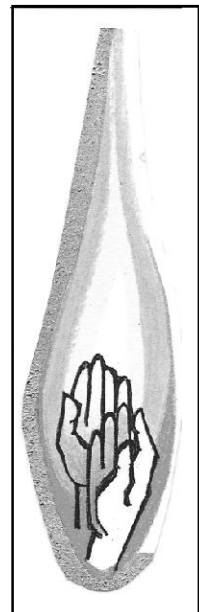
The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the TOR.

A representative of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR presides at and confirms the elections of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

3. The president of the chapter and the assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.

4. The president of the chapter designates, among the members of that chapter, a secretary and two tellers.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [76.2, .3, .4](#)



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## WITNESSING ELECTIONS

1. The presider for local elections is the minister of the immediately higher level (OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [76.2](#)) or his/her delegate. For regional elections, it is someone from the National Executive Council. For national elections, someone from the Presidency presides. In each case the SA of the next higher level serves as witness in elections -or- delegates, in writing (to the delegate and the concerned minister), a competent, permanently professed OFS member, in good standing, as witness.

A) The required quorum for elections is an absolute majority (one more than half) of permanently professed members of the fraternity who are present and able to vote. (Quorum - cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) Article [77.4](#)).

B) Active excused members who are unable to attend need not be counted in tallying the total number required for a quorum.

C) Permanently professed members of the fraternity who are in good standing and are physically present have the right to vote.

D) Absentee ballots are NOT allowed.

E) A spiritual assistant who is a member of the council holding elections may NOT be elected to any other office on the council of the fraternity they assist, nor do they vote in the elections ([USA National Statutes](#) - Article [18.3](#)).

2. The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the 1st Order and the TOR. (Article [76.2](#) of the OFS [General Constitutions](#)). The ordinary witness of a local council election is the regional spiritual assistant. This duty can be delegated to another competent member of the Franciscan family. Delegation is given in writing. A copy is sent to the delegated person and to the minister of the fraternity holding elections.

3. A witness should read Articles [79](#) to [82](#) in the [OFS General Constitutions](#). Article 82 points out offices that are incompatible: a. the office of minister at two different levels; b. the offices of minister, vice-minister, secretary, and treasurer at the same level. The witness opens the elections with prayer. The OFS Ritual may be used, or the witness can develop a prayer form. The witness reminds the membership to vote for competent people for each office. Elections are not a popularity contest but a serious discernment of people competent for the office in which they seek to serve.

The witness works with the two tellers to make certain the ballot count is correct. The witness assists in correcting inconsistencies in the balloting. The ballots are counted three times by the two tellers:

- a) Before passing out the ballots, count out the total number of ballots needed for those who are present and free to vote. Then, verify the accurate number for an absolute majority. After this count the ballots are distributed;
- b) After collecting the ballots, they are counted to verify that an accurate number have voted;
- c) On the third count, the two tellers alternate in reading the names of those receiving votes. The number of votes should agree with the number of ballots distributed. The secretary writes the nominee's name and vote tally where it can be seen by all.

4. The election results for each office is proclaimed to the fraternity by the election's secretary. (cf. Page [42](#) – in the old [Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order](#)). The presider then asks the nominee if he/she accepts the election. If so, that particular election is finished. If no election is achieved, the same process of balloting continues two or three times. On a third ballot, only the two top vote-getters are on the ballot. If there is a tie after the third ballot, the person oldest by profession is elected. If still tied, the oldest by age. For the election of the councilors, please read: [General Constitutions](#) - Article [78.3](#) on next page.

When the elections are finished, the witness signs the appropriate documents. He/she verifies the legality of the elections. Copies are sent to the appropriate persons (Regional secretary and regional SA as well the local fraternity SA and the PSA of the province to which the fraternity is bonded.) The newly elected individuals now form the fraternity council. Former council members hand over all pertinent material to their successors.

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- + Information concerning the election of the Minister and Vice-minister:
  - \* The minister and vice-minister may be elected for two consecutive terms of three years. For a third & final successive election, a majority of two-thirds of the votes must be obtained on the first ballot. The outgoing minister cannot be elected vice-minister. (cf. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [78.1, .2](#).)
- + Information concerning the election of the rest of the council:
  - \* For the election of the councilors, after a first ballot without an absolute majority, a relative majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is sufficient, unless the particular statutes require a greater majority. OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [78.3](#)
  - \* Councilors may be elected for consecutive terms of three years. For a third consecutive term, a two-thirds majority on the first ballot is necessary. Councilors are elected individually and not as a group!
  - \* Persons (nominees) not elected to any of the first elected offices may be nominated for other offices for which they are competent. The outgoing minister cannot be on the ballot for vice-minister.
- + The installation of the newly elected officers takes place after the elections are concluded. The installation rite can be found in the [2020 Ritual](#) on pages **24-25**. OFS members may be appointed by the previous council to prepare the rite of installation. Allow for time after the elections to prepare the installation rite. At the installation rite, the former councilors, who have not been re-elected, hand over all the materials of their office to the newly elected councilors. Former councilors may not retain any official material.

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Their service,  
which lasts for a definite period,  
is marked by a ready and willing spirit  
and is a duty of responsibility  
to each member and to the community.

OFS [Rule 21](#)



*St. Francis in the Stream of Life*  
Anneta Duveen OFS





## JOB DESCRIPTION EXECUTIVE SECRETARY FOR CNSA

Job descriptions for CNSA secretary and treasurer. Texts originally approved by CNSA at their meeting in Phoenix, AZ - January 16, 2003; revised in Durham, NC on September 18, 2007; revised at the CNSA meeting in Jacksonville, FL on February 1, 2012.

1. The executive secretary (hereafter = ES) collaborates with the friar CNSA secretary in fulfilling this job description. The executive secretary serves for a term of two years. The term can be renewed by mutual agreement between the ES and CNSA. The authority for decisions of CNSA belongs to the appointed members of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants.
2. The ES keeps notes of the CNSA meetings and sends copies to each CNSA member. The ES communicates with the friar secretary of CNSA to check the accuracy of the notes before sending them.
3. The ES, in collaboration with CNSA, prepares the annual report of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistant's ministry. The executive secretary of CNSA gives a copy of the report to the members of CNSA and sends a copy to: A) the NEC; B) the General Spiritual Assistants in Rome; C) any others as directed by CNSA (E.g. PSA, RSA). Each CNSA member can personalize this report and send it to their major superiors.
4. ES expenses for attending the three annual meetings of CNSA is borne by the CNSA treasury as are other costs connected with the job. The secretary seeks these funds from the CNSA treasurer. When in doubt about expenses, the CNSA deals with the issue collaboratively or through its president.
5. The ES prepares the agenda and schedule for CNSA meetings in collaboration with the president of CNSA. The ES (with the approval of CNSA) seeks places in which to meet and deals with logistical arrangements i.e.: A) Transportation from the airport to sites, B) Materials needed at the meetings. C) Contacts local fraternities who may wish to meet with the CNSA or provide a social evening. D) Requests the regional minister(s) to invite SA's to meetings called for by CNSA.
6. For longer PSA & RSA meetings, the ES handles the logistics for the gathering (cf. #5) The ES contacts local fraternities who may provide an opportunity to meet for dialogue with the CNSA.
7. The ES deals with the correspondence of CNSA, consulting with CNSA president as needed.
  - a. Requests for regional visitations and elections
  - b. Forwards incoming mail to proper CNSA member
  - c. Accepts and/or forwards correspondence from Provincial and Regional Spiritual Assistants to CNSA members as is appropriate.
  - d. Responds to correspondence as required.
8. The ES is involved in archival storage and record-keeping of appropriate material.
9. The ES keeps a record of the establishment of fraternities and the documents associated with the establishment of a fraternity. This may be achieved through appropriate technological means.



Basilica of St. Francis  
in Assisi



## JOB DESCRIPTION TREASURER FOR CNSA

1. The treasurer of CNSA is appointed by CNSA for a two-year term and may be reappointed after dialogue between the treasurer and CNSA.
2. The CNSA treasurer keeps an accurate record of income and expenses for CNSA. He/she writes the checks for CNSA expenses. This includes payment for room and board for CNSA members at our meetings which are held three times a year. The treasurer pays other expenses as directed by CNSA.
3. Room and board as well as travel expenses for CNSA's executive secretary and treasurer are paid from CNSA funds when they attend CNSA meetings.
4. The office expenses of the CNSA executive secretary are paid from CNSA funds. They include: copying, paper, mailing/postage, phone calls, and other legitimate office expenses. The executive secretary submits bills for payment or for re-imbursement to the CNSA treasurer.
5. All and only expenses approved by CNSA are paid by the CNSA treasurer. All requests for funds shall be addressed to the treasurer by the CNSA executive/friar secretary or president in turn. Expenses listed in #2, 3, and 4 are considered ordinary expenses and are approved by CNSA.
6. The CNSA treasurer shall submit an annual financial report to CNSA at the meeting closest to the end of the fiscal year (December 31). The treasurer also prepares the CNSA budget for the upcoming year. This is shared for approval by CNSA. A competent outside person or firm shall audit the CNSA financial records once every three years unless CNSA directs otherwise.
7. The names of all four members of CNSA shall be on the bank card for signing checks. The treasurer and CNSA secretary shall have a CNSA check book. This permits payments that require immediate attention. In such cases it is reported to the CNSA at the meeting closest to the date of payment or CNSA is informed through technical means.
8. Financial problems are brought to the attention of CNSA as soon as they occur.
9. The name and address of the CNSA treasurer shall be on the information given to the bank as well as on CNSA checks. The name of the bank and our account information is shared with the members of CNSA.







## THE SANTA CLARA STATEMENT 1972

+ Goals Committee - Lay Franciscan Congress - Santa Clara, CA - August 13-19, 1972

COMMENT: Though this statement was made before the OFS Rule of 1978 was published, it carries the spirit of that **1978 Rule** in its words. The Goals Committee of the Santa Clara Congress in 1972 offer a fine vision of the OSF way of life. This work of the Holy Spirit gives us fine insights for today.

Come alive in the Spirit! was the theme and the challenge of the Lay Franciscan Congress held at Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA, August 13-19, 1972. Almost 500 Franciscans, mostly laymen and women, met to pray and study ways of living the Gospel in the present time of history.

The Spirit came upon the early Franciscan movement, enriched it with new life, and gave it power to renew the Church in St. Francis' time. Those who took part in this congress at Santa Clara came together with the belief (faith) that the Church today is experiencing a new movement of the Holy Spirit. They searched to find where the Spirit wishes to lead the Franciscan family today.

After listening to experts in various fields, the participants formed small groups on each day of the congress to reflect on the lectures and to form goals for the continued renewal of the Franciscan lay movement. At the end of each day, the suggestions of all the groups were gathered and crystallized. The following Statement of Goals shares these insights. It offers insights that are worth your time and meditation. The values need to take flesh in our lives: in cathedrals and boardrooms; in big-box stores and Mom and Pop stores; in families and working groups; at swimming pools and suppers; in college reunions and in unexpected meetings with friends. In short - everywhere we happen to be!

### WE ACKNOWLEDGE WHERE WE ARE

There is disunity and turmoil in our society. As Franciscans, we have an answer to this condition in the very Faith we profess. But we have failed to translate this Faith from a mere profession to a way of life.

- + We have not been honest with ourselves in living our Faith.
  - a. The fear of being different;
  - b. The inconvenience which Faith-action causes;
  - c. The fear of change;
  - d. The fear of insecurity which change brings.

All these have prevented us from having the courage of our convictions.

- + Our lives have not been a witness to our Faith which holds the answer to our social problems. We have not been living the Gospel fully.

### OUR BASIC THRUST

To begin,with, therefore:

- + We shall not retain the old for the sake of the old, nor embrace change for the sake of change. Rather, we shall open our lives to the encounter with Christ and its insecurity as did the rich young Francis when he embraced the leper.
- + We shall be positive about the solution of social problems, not negative nor condemnatory.
- + We shall express our opinions to our neighbors and to those with whom we come into contact, in humility and charity, in order to help mold their thinking.
- + We shall select one particular issue, using our own personal initiative and without disregarding other issues, and we shall do what we are able in our circumstances to help solve that particular problem.

## THE ROOTS OF OUR RESPONSE

In the tradition of St Francis, our response to the world and the time in which we live:

- + Acknowledging that the Holy Spirit is the Source of all our creativity, both personal and communal.
- + It gives joyful glory and praise to God through a continuous and growing prayer life;
- + It constantly assumes a posture of metanoia, i.e. personal repentance which corrects our direction;
- + It fosters Christ-centered, personal, frequent communal experiences to rediscover and translate the Gospel into everyday living;
- + It seeks to be sensitive to the needs of others, both within and without the Franciscan community.

It is our fraternal goal to cooperate with the Spirit in coming to a closer relationship with God through prayer, and with people through presence. Our prayer and presence will be more open, joyful, personal, sensitive, frequent, Gospel-centered and repentant.

## STEWARDSHIP, SERVANTHOOD

Our life and possessions are not our own, but God's gift. Ours is a stewardship, not an ownership. Hence:

- + We must be ready to give of ourselves in truly personal service to our brothers and sisters - not as lords, but as servants;
- + We are united in our determination to resist the exploitations and greed of consumerism, while some of us differ as to whether this servanthood is incompatible with the standards and consequences of Capitalism itself;
- + We must be prophetic witnesses against the materialism of our society and light the lamp of Evangelical Poverty in order to project the spirit of Christian servanthood;
- + Finally, we affirm the need for intimate prayer based on Scripture and of intimate closeness to Christ if, instead of becoming slaves to the economic system, we are to participate in the servanthood of God and his Christ.

## PEACE - RECONCILIATION

We lay Franciscan brothers and sisters acknowledge that peace, reconciliation, poverty, obedience to the Church and service to others (especially to the poor and oppressed) are essential values of the Franciscan family. As we live the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they are essential both personally and corporately. Therefore:

- + We commit ourselves to that continuing change of heart which will allow us to hear the cry of the poor, the oppressed, and the afflicted;
- + We acknowledge our need to probe the causes of the social injustices of our day. We have a need to bring genuine awareness to the actual situation of our oppressed brothers and sisters. We need to come to know our relationship to these causes;
- + We propose to act in order to find creative solutions on behalf of our deprived and oppressed brothers and sisters; for example, by our participation in government by voting; by writing to our legislators and the editors of papers; by participating in meetings and

rallies expressing public opinion, by supporting honest and capable candidates in various practical ways.

We commit ourselves to identify the causes of disunity and disorder so we can help reverse the process by which people are divided. We commit ourselves to reverse the process by which barriers have been created among people. We are committed to reverse the process by which we have maintained a class system detrimental not only to our social life but to our spiritual life as well.

We are committed to the liberation of every person, for we know that if we are not for and with the oppressed and afflicted, we are their oppressors.

We acknowledge responsibility:

- a. For concern about the issues of world justice and peace;
- b. For educating ourselves to the sins of exploitation and violence;
- c. For awakening our government and our society to injustice and ever perpetrated:
  - + in the administration of justice for the poor;
  - + in abortion and abuse of the right to life;
  - + in unjust and discriminatory welfare and tax laws;
  - + in denial of adequate housing;
  - + in unjust treatment of prisoners;
  - + in the injustice of war.

As Franciscans we need to embrace with our hearts - non-violence, reconciliation, and peace.

### THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

We call the Franciscan family to be a new creation in the Church and the world, as community and servant.

We rejoice that young people find the Franciscan way attractive. Together with them we are committed to creating a climate for the pursuit of a Franciscan understanding of our times.

To this end, educational programs will be developed with special emphasis on the charism of Francis, the Sacred Scriptures, and the social issues of today.

For Lay Franciscans to be formed in the likeness of Jesus Christ in the fraternity, more frequent meetings are necessary, along with the kind of guidance which demands a genuine response to the Franciscan way;

In response to love for the Church, we will join in parish activities that will foster the growth of the Church as a community, involving ourselves in a special way in the liturgical renewal;

In response to the needs of the elderly members of our fraternities, we will assure ourselves that the elderly members are adequately housed, even to the extent of our sponsoring sheltered care or nursing homes;

We acknowledge the poverty of our relationship with the First and Second Orders of St. Francis and the TOR, with religious of the Third Order, and with other lay fraternities.

- + We will take steps to build communities among the whole Franciscan Family, sharing with each other in a variety of ways.
- + Together with them we will organize for the impact which is possible for Franciscans as a broad movement to make on our world today.
- + In order to build community, we will encourage the attempt of members of some fraternities to achieve communal living wherever there is a serious desire to live this style of life.

We acknowledge that the goals of the Franciscan movement allow for great diversity in prayer forms and styles and that the brothers and sisters should accept each other in this regard as they are called to pray to the Lord.

Thus, the goals of the Catholic charismatic movement, namely, repentance, faith, commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and openness to the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the glory of the Father, are goals essential to the life of the Church and are in harmony with the personal and communal vocation of Franciscans.

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This is what the parable means.  
The seed is the word of God.

The seed along the footpath  
stands for those who hear it,  
and the devil comes and carries off the  
word from their hearts for fear they  
should believe and be saved.

The seed sown on rock  
stands for those who receive the word  
with joy when they hear it,  
but have no root;  
they are believers for a while,  
but in the time of testing, they give up.

That which fell among thistles  
represents those who hear,  
but their growth is choked  
by cares and wealth and the pleasures of life,  
and they bring nothing to maturity.

But the seed in good soil represents those  
who bring a good and honest heart  
to the hearing of the word,  
hold it fast, and  
by their perseverance yield a harvest.

Luke 8: 11-15 (REB)



## CONCLUSIONS OF THE OFS GENERAL CHAPTER 2002

COMMENT: At the conclusion of a broad debate conducted in the course of a week of intense work, the 2002 General Chapter indicated a series of themes and areas of priority which the Presidency, in its task of guiding and animating the Order in the whole world, would have to concentrate its commitment at least until 2008., and perhaps, beyond 2008. NB: These themes and priorities have long-range effects. The OFS is encouraged to give them serious attention and put them into action at each level of the OFS.

### 1. FORMATION.

- + This received the most attention. We invite a broader exchange of formation materials among the fraternities of the world.
- + We support projects to study and initiate adequate formation programs throughout the world. Eastern Europe has such projects. Africa, for example, is in need of such projects.
- + National fraternities should support and assist the Secular Franciscans who, for serious and justified reasons, are isolated from their local fraternities.
- + In the light of positive changes in the General Constitutions concerning spiritual assistance, the formation of spiritual assistants, both religious and lay, will have to be strongly supported and favored, by offering particular help to the First Order and Third Order Regular. (Remember that this is being said in 2002).

### 2. PRESENCE IN THE WORLD.

The chapter is concerned that many fraternities confine themselves to their own boundaries rather than opening themselves to the larger Franciscan world.

- + We call on all Secular Franciscans to involve themselves in the areas of justice, peace, and safeguarding creation (JPIC);
- + Fraternities are called to reflect on the Spirit of Assisi so that the spirit of Assisi might become incarnated throughout our Franciscan world;
- + The OFS is committed to involvement in public life and in the world of labor. This must be rooted in fraternity life in whatever way it is possible. We are expected to be a concrete and authentic leaven in society wherever we go;
- + A commitment in favor of the family, its defense, and the recognition of its importance in the life of every society, nation, and culture. The family has an irreplaceable value. It is the stronghold of every fraternity in the world.

### 3. FRANCISCAN YOUTH

The reality of Franciscan Youth requires great attention. There may be problems in its relationship to the OFS, YuFra and spiritual assistance. There is a lack of uniformity in the guidelines for youth. Dealing with young people is a vital ingredient of our Franciscan life. We neglect it to our peril. Every national fraternity is called upon to address the issue of Franciscan Youth. (Spoken in 2002! - can we catch up?)

- + We seek concrete suggestions regarding the establishment of Franciscan youth where no organization exists;
- + Offer suggestions to assist National Fraternities that do not have a Franciscan youth organization.
- + The former documents on YuFra (1995) need updating, and we encourage the preparation of a formation manual dealing with the formation of Franciscan Youth as well as those who may wish to enter the OFS;

- + There is a need to intensify, improve and revitalize the relationship between the OFS and YuFra;
- + The relationship between YuFra, the OFS, and spiritual assistance needs a healthy enrichment so that it may blossom and support the growth of Franciscan Youth groups;
- + There is a need to develop specific age criteria for YuFra members.

#### 4. FINANCES

The fair share that supports fraternities on all levels is one of the signs of commitment to the OFS. It shows clearly the vital communion among all the Secular Franciscans and their concern for the Order. Economic support is both needed and, rightfully, expected from all fraternities.

- + We look for the economic support that allows the Councils at all levels to accomplish their essential work.
- + We need to consider new financial instruments and ways to support the international fraternity.
- + New criteria need to be developed for the annual contribution of each country in favor of the International Fraternity.
- + Funds need to be collected for the purchase of a headquarters building for the International Fraternity. A specific means for this funding needs to be developed.

#### 5. SPIRITUAL ASSISTANCE

This issue is of vital importance. A life-giving union within the Franciscan Family requires the presence of suitable and well-prepared spiritual assistants. Programs to prepare people for this role are an important feature of our present situation regarding spiritual assistance to the OFS.

- + The OFS offers its help in the formation of spiritual assistants, especially for lay SA's;
- + Special help is needed for individuals who offer spiritual assistance to YuFra groups. A specific program needs to be developed to assist anyone who serves YuFra.

#### 6. COMMUNION IN THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

Franciscans, both lay and religious, belong to one family. We need to work hard to make that family communion a reality throughout the world.

- + We seek an intensive dialogue among the various branches of the Franciscan family.
- + We propose developing some common initiatives to achieve this life-giving union.
- + We urge development of a sense of equality among all members of the Franciscan Family.







LETTER OF THE  
CONFERENCE OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY  
2005

COMMENT: This letter was written on Pentecost, 2005, by the Ministers General of the 1st Order/TOR;

The OFS Minister General; The Praeses of CFI-TOR:

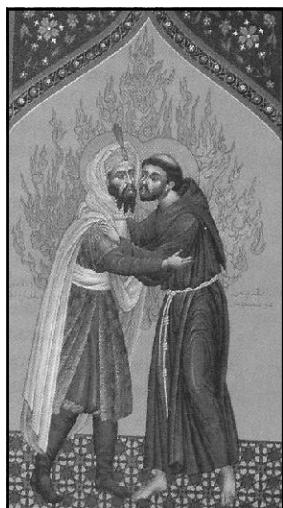
Jose Rodriquez OFM - Joachim Giermack OFM Conv - John Corriveau OFM Cap - Ilija Zikovic TOR;  
Encarnacion del Pozo OFS - Sr. Carola Thormann CFI-TOR

On the occasion of Pentecost - 2005  
"Instruments of Peace"

4. A careful reading of our sources not only presents us with the early movement of the "Minors" as a true and proper message of peace and reconciliation, but it allows us to identify some essential attitudes in order to carry out a process of peace and reconciliation even today in a situation made inflexible through discord and struggle by:

(cf. Little Flowers of St. Francis - 21)

- + maintaining God as the center of activity;
- + proceeding always with strength and wisdom in communion;
- + identifying the true causes of violence and calling them by their real name;
- + promoting conversion and reconciliation of all parties;
- + seeking to heal and restore relationships rather than resolving disputes;
- + re-establishing justice as the basis of real peace;
- + recognizing that all social relationships are asymmetrical and that every situation of conflict implies imbalance and an evil use of power;
- + remaining disarmed (cf, Memoriali Propositi 16);
- + rejecting the demonizing of one of the parties and recognizing all as brothers and sisters;
- + facing up to conflict actively, being exposed personally to danger, and allowing oneself to become involved.



These attitudes present a real and proper path for promoting peace to us and require acting without arrogance or force. Such behavior is only possible, however, on the basis of unconditional confidence in God. Only by maintaining His Spirit and His Authority at the center of one's activity can the attempt at reconciliation and pacification have any hope of success. Accepting such a service in favor of peace is not without its dangers or difficulties. The Franciscan, therefore, does not walk alone, but in vital and mutual communion with the worldwide fraternity and the Church, a communion which gives support and encouragement. Proceeding in unity, the Brothers and Sisters can and must recognize, with prophetic courage, the true causes of every form of violence and call them by name. The violence cannot be hidden or minimized. Only by knowing how to recognize and by accepting to heal the evil, can a process which will lead to conversion and reconciliation of all the parties involved be initiated and, in the end, it must be sought to re-establish justice as the basis for constructing true peace, because only in this way can the mediations used to achieve reconciliation have a lasting future.

Instruments of Peace - Conference of the Franciscan Family - #4 - Pages 6-7



## REFLECTIONS ON EVANGELIZATION

RE: INTERNATIONAL OFS CHAPTER -  
2011The New Evangelization (Term originally used by John Paul II)

- \* The "new evangelization" is the courage to forge new paths in responding to the changing circumstances and conditions facing the Church in her call to proclaim and live the Gospel today.
- \* The "new evangelization" is primarily a spiritual activity capable of recapturing in our times the courage and forcefulness of the first Christians and the first missionaries.
- \* A "new evangelization" also means to have the boldness to raise the question of God in the context of these problems, thereby fulfilling the specific character of the Church's mission and showing how the Christian perspective enlightens, in an unprecedented way, the great problems of history.
- \* The "new evangelization" calls us to engage in dialogue with this world, not remaining confined to our communities and our institutions, but accepting the challenge to take part in these realities so as to speak and bear witness in these sectors, from the inside. This is the form of Christian "martyria" in today's world, engaging in dialogue even with the recent forms of militant atheism or extreme secularism, whose purpose is to eliminate the subject of God from human life.
- \* A "new evangelization" means that the Church must convincingly sustain her efforts at uniting all Christians in a common witness to the world of the prophetic and transforming power of the gospel message. Justice, peace, living with others, and the stewardship of creation have characterized ecumenism over the decades.
- \* The "new evangelization" is an invitation to Christian communities to place greater trust in the Spirit who guides them in the course of history. In this way, they can overcome the temptation of fear.
- \* "New Evangelization" means, then, to work in our local Churches to devise a plan for evaluating the previously mentioned phenomena in such a manner as to transmit the Gospel of hope in a practical way.
- \* "New Evangelization" means personal renewal of Paul's burning sentiment proclaiming: "If I preach the Gospel, this is no reason for me to boast, for an obligation has been imposed on me and woe to me if I do not preach it!" (1 Corinthians 9: 16 - NEB)

"Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him." It is not, therefore, a matter of inventing "a new program." The program already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved, and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a program which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication.

Quotations from "Evangelized to Evangelize" - International OFS Chapter, Brazil - 2011 - Page 1-2

"Duc in altum!" An enthusiastic work of pastoral remodeling is waiting for us. It is a work where we are all involved. The Holy Spirit in person - who made Francis' heart to be illuminated by His flame, who also identified him with the mystery of Jesus, poor and crucified, in fraternal communion with all creatures, and who entrusted him the greatest mission of repairing the Church - has called the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth. The Spirit has taken us to his own at the moment of our OFS Profession or our commitment to Franciscan Youth, and has sent us to the entire world in the name of the Church. "I have done my part, let Christ show you yours!" (Legenda Major - 14,3)

Ibid - "Conclusion" - Page 6

Some Thoughts on Evangelization (Paul VI)

41. Without repeating everything that we have already mentioned, it is appropriate first of all to emphasize the following point: for the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an



authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses." St. Peter expressed this well when he held up the example of a reverent and chaste life that wins over even without a word those who refuse to obey the word (1 Peter 3:1). It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus - the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

On Evangelization in the Modern World - Evangelii Nuntiandi - Paul VI - Paragraph 41

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### Franciscans and Evangelization

The task of evangelization proves to be simpler when those who possess authority and power within the Church exhibit trust and confidence in the working of the Holy Spirit among all of the People of God. For obedience to ecclesial structures and programs must always be related to the impulses of the Spirit of God, who works not only in structures but also, and more significantly in people. Blind subservience must not have a place in a Church governed by the Holy Spirit, especially among those who are called to the process of rebuilding God's house. On the other hand, the Franciscan-inspired person does not raise his or her opinions, insights, or experiences to newly and individually infallible statements. The Franciscan impulse is not to make statements but to live a life that imitates Francis' call to be peacemakers among the people. Francis was a man of profound courtesy, a virtue desperately needed by anyone who wishes to follow his way.

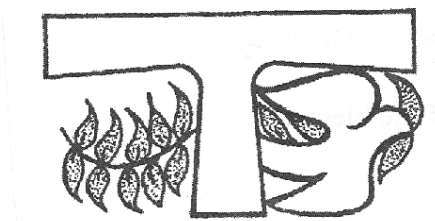
The Franciscan mission within the Church does not consist in defending the faith against outside forces; there are other groups with that charism within the Church. The Franciscan challenge is to accept Francis' call to heal and to mend and to call according to the Gospel. ...

Build With Living Stones - Franciscan Institute - St. Bonaventure University - Unit 14 - Pages 5 & 7

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The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son.

God is Love - Benedict XVI - Paragraph 19





## THOUGHTS FROM VATICAN II

COMMENT: We are blessed with the guidance of the documents of Vatican II. We'll share some of the ideas in two Vatican II documents: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church - [Lumen Gentium](#) (Promulgated by Pope Paul VI on November 21, 1964). Constitution on the Church in the Modern World - [Gaudium et Spes](#) (Promulgated by Pope Paul VI - December 7, 1965). It is impressive to recognize how well the Holy Spirit prompted the authors of these documents in preparing us for the decades that would follow.



Franciscans will find guidance in them for today! There is much to embrace in these documents as well as the other documents of Vatican II. Spiritual assistants are encouraged to study the documents and encourage others to do the same. The few quotations on these pages offer a sample of the wisdom in *Gaudium et Spes*. What is true of [Gaudium et Spes](#) also applies to the other documents of Vatican II.

Spiritual assistants study these documents for personal learning and to share insights with secular Franciscans. SA's are in a good position to encourage secular Franciscans to become familiar with these texts. The words of [Gaudium et Spes](#) on these first pages (Pages 69 - 70) are from the official translation. The texts that follow (Pages 71 - 72) are the same texts as translated in the book: [Vatican II in Plain English](#) by Bill Huebsch (Vol 2 - The Constitutions). Huebsch's 3 volumes of Vatican II documents can help people read the documents and understand them. I used both translations on these pages to offer you a glimpse of both. You can choose whichever translation you find most helpful and readable in perusing the documents of Vatican II.

[Gaudium et Spes](#): (Paragraphs 3 and 4 - Official translation)

3. Therefore, this sacred synod, proclaiming the noble destiny of man and championing the godlike seed which has been sown in him, offers to mankind the honest assistance of the Church in fostering that brotherhood of all men which corresponds to this destiny of theirs. Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.

4. ... Today, the human race is involved in a new stage of history. Profound and rapid changes are spreading by degrees around the whole world. Triggered by the intelligence and creative energies of man, these changes recoil upon him, upon his decisions and desires, both individual and collective, and upon his manner of thinking and acting with respect to things and to people. Hence, we can already speak of a true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man's religious life as well.

... Never has the human race enjoyed such an abundance of wealth, resources and economic power, and yet a huge proportion of the world's citizens are still tormented by hunger and poverty, while countless numbers suffer from total illiteracy. Never before has man had so keen an understanding of freedom, yet at the same time, new forms of social and psychological slavery make their appearance. Although the world of today has a very vivid awareness of its unity and of how one man depends on another in needful solidarity, it is most grievously torn into opposing camps by conflicting forces. For political, social, economic, racial and ideological disputes still continue bitterly, and with them the peril of a war which could reduce everything to ashes. True, there is a growing exchange of ideas, but the very words by which key concepts are expressed take on quite different meanings in diverse ideological systems. Finally, man painstakingly searches for a better world, without a corresponding spiritual advancement.

COMMENT: How do Franciscans make a difference among people who may be prompted by greed, profit, fear, anxiety, or competition? The Holy Spirit calls us to bring gospel hope to people. People may be more concerned with paychecks than with loving the neighbor. People can be more concerned with personal needs than with a concern for people around the globe. Our call is to find what will move Franciscans to invest energy in favor of the needs of people on planet Earth! But as someone put it:

If not us, who? The task is daunting, but our Franciscan vocation clearly requires that we become: instruments of peace; of hope and faith; compassion and forgiveness; of seeking unity rather than separation. Our world is often torn apart by the very things that were supposed to bring happiness. Ads tell us what we can purchase to achieve satisfaction only to learn that some of our new tools have a short life-span. They are replaced by newer, faster, smaller, sometimes more complicated or more short-lived than before. Yet sales and Black Fridays draw us to buy more "things." We search for the latest, the newest, the technologically better, the cheaper "things." But our lives seem much the same even when we have more "things" - which we may desire but not really need. Franciscans try to face these issues with fresh insights and new ways to discover the source of joy.

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[\*Gaudium et Spes\*](#) (Paragraphs 5, 6, 8 - official translation)

5. This scientific spirit has a new kind of impact on the cultural sphere and on modes of thought. Technology is now transforming the face of the earth and is already trying to master outer space. To a certain extent, the human intellect is also broadening its dominion over time; over the past by means of historical knowledge; over the future, by the art of projecting, and by planning.

... At the same time, the human race is giving steadily increasing thought to forecasting and regulating its own population growth. History itself speeds along on so rapid a course that an individual person can scarcely keep abreast of it. The destiny of the human community has become all of a piece, where once the various groups of men had a kind of private history of their own.

Thus the human race has passed from a rather static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one. In consequence, there has arisen a new series of problems, a series as numerous as can be, calling for efforts of analysis and synthesis.

6. By this very circumstance, the traditional local communities such as families, clans, tribes, villages, various groups and associations stemming from social contact, experience more thorough changes every day.

8. ... Within the individual person there develops rather frequently an imbalance between an intellect which is modern in practical matters and a theoretical system of thought which can neither master the sum total of its ideas nor arrange them adequately into a synthesis. Likewise, an imbalance arises between a concern for practicality and efficiency, and the demands of moral conscience; also very often between the conditions of collective existence and the requisites of personal thought and even of contemplation. At length there develops an imbalance between specialized human activity and a comprehensive view of reality.

As for the family, discord results from population, economic and social pressures, or from difficulties which arise between succeeding generations, or from new social relationships between men and women.

COMMENT: It is impressive that these ideas were being spoken to the Church in the 1960's - about a half century ago. We Franciscans live in the middle of this social milieu. We are called to bring a sense of security and hope to people whose fears are multiple and whose security apparently cannot be bought with fences or walls, or security systems, or soldiers or armies, or tools of destruction. We may fear these things knowing that the evil they can do to others can also be done to us. We fear that it will be difficult to avoid such consequences. On the other hand, the good things we do to others can also be done to us. So what goal fits our Franciscan charism? How can we sow a gospel spirit to people who might (I say "might"), also do good to us? We can embrace the ways of peace and unity and do it regularly! If ALL of US do it, and radical conversion happens in our lives, we might be able to bring a measure of security to this confusing world - based on God's faithful love.

It will require more than words and books and TV shows and pictures on iPods. It will also require a life that is lived according to faith and our calling as Franciscans. We choose the daily path of being

faithful to our Franciscan vocation. Perhaps even a small taste of conversion will make us hungry for more. YOU make that decision! Give it a try! As a spiritual assistant who embraces Vatican II insights, you may suggest to others the wisdom of the documents. The texts which follow are the same texts but translated by Bill Huebsch: [Vatican II in Plain English](#) (3 volumes) - Vol 2 - The Constitutions - (Ave Maria Press). The accuracy and read-ability of the translation make them a good text for study.

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[Gaudium et Spes](#) (Paragraph 3 and 4 - Huebsch's translation):

3. We now offer to the world the honest assistance of the Church in fostering human harmony which is our destiny. In this, we follow our teacher, Christ, who came to give witness to the truth and to serve and not to be served.

4. One of those signs is the profound and rapid change that is everywhere. Riding on the intelligence of the human race, the creative energies of people have produced unprecedented social transformation. As we might expect, this transformation has also brought serious difficulties.

... Never has the human race enjoyed more wealth, yet a huge number of people are tormented by poverty, illiteracy, and want. Never has there been such human freedom in the world, yet new forms of social and psychological slavery also make their appearance alongside it. Never has the world been so close to the brink of unity and interdependence, yet new and opposing

camps threaten this possibility. There is even the frightening prospect of a war of total destruction! Never before has the drive for a better world been more on the minds of men and women, yet there is not a corresponding spiritual advancement to give it meaning and guidance. As a result, many people are burdened with uneasiness even as they enjoy the benefits of modern life. We humans must respond to all of this; indeed, we cannot escape doing so.

COMMENT: Notice how we are called to create not just an abundance of "things" to meet various needs, but we are also called to produce an abundance of "meaning" in using these "things." We have plenty of "things" but not always a spiritual meaning to guide their use. The OFS Rule (1978) offers guidance to Franciscans in dealing with the meaning of "things" in their lives.

[Gaudium et Spes](#) (Paragraphs 5, 6, 8 - Huebsch's translation)

5. Today's spiritual hunger results, in part, from a much more scientific approach to understanding the world. Technology is transforming the world, not to mention outer space! And to a certain extent, the human intellect is even beginning to control time: the past by means of historical knowledge, the future by means of projecting and planning.

... At the same time, the human race is now considering the regulation of its own population growth. History speeds along on so rapid a course that one can scarcely keep abreast of it, and we humans have now passed from a rather static understanding of reality to one much more dynamic and evolutionary.

6. By this very fact, local groups, such as families, clans, or villages, are rapidly being transformed. Ideas and social conditions that have lasted for centuries are quickly being replaced in our time by new concepts of social organization.

8. ... One's intellect, for example, may be thoroughly modern, while one's theory of meaning is more traditional, and no joining of the two seems possible. Or one's concern for practicality and efficiency is in tension with one's moral conscience. Or the demands of collective existence conflict with one's need for personal thought and even contemplation. Furthermore, the family is in tension with pressures from many sides: population control, economic realities, or social demands. Likewise, tensions emerge among nations when some are so wealthy and others so poor. All of this leads to mistrust, division, and hardship, and humans are at once the cause and the victims of it all.

[Gaudium et Spes](#) - Vatican II - Paragraphs 5, 6, 8

COMMENT: The perception of reality by the members of Vatican II (1960's) is amazing in their perception of the reality of our world in the 21st century! These short segments from one document reveal insights that can guide us in understanding our world and its people. Such understanding has a direct impact on the way we choose to live our Franciscan lives. Spiritual assistants will find material in Vatican II texts that can be part of both initial and ongoing formation. It is the Ecumenical Council closest to us in time and worthy for us to take time to peruse rather than resist.

In this context, the OFS [Rule \(1978\)](#) shows a profound insight in responding to Vatican II as the Rule of 1978 was being written. We are blessed with a Rule that brings us a special way of loving our God, our neighbor, and ourselves, serving all three with love. Notice how we are called to love the "others."

Thus, in the "spirit of the Beatitudes," and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power (OFS [Rule 11](#)).

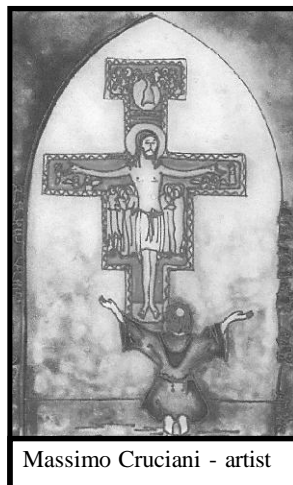
Witnessing to the good yet to come and being obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters (OFS [Rule 12](#)).

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ (OFS [Rule 13](#)).

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Blessed John XXIII was elected Pope on October 28, 1958. In his 41/2 years as Pope, and through Vatican II, he brought the Church into conversation with the 20th century and beyond. He became a member of the OFS on March 1, 1896 (by Fr. Luigi Isacchi). His profession of the Rule of 1883 was on May 23, 1897. He said of his profession: We like to thank our Lord for this grace which happily coincided with the act whereby we began ecclesiastical life (Tonsure). He was ordained in 1904 and worked in many ministries, including representing the Holy See in Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and France. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (John XXIII) shared these words: See everything, overlook a great deal, correct a little. Prudent is he who can keep silent that part of the truth which may be untimely, and by not speaking it, does not spoil the truth of what he said. He died on June 3, 1963, at the age of 82. His cause for canonization is in the hands of the Franciscan postulator General.

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Massimo Cruciani - artist



Let us refer all good to the Lord,  
 God Almighty, and Most High,  
 acknowledge that every good is His,  
 and thank Him,  
 from Whom all good comes,  
 for everything.  
 May He, the Almighty, and Most High,  
 the only true God,  
 have, be given, and receive  
 all honor and respect,  
 all praise and blessing,  
 all thanks and glory,  
 to Whom all good belongs,  
 He Who alone is good.

[Francis of Assisi - The Saint](#) - Vol I - Page 76





## BEATITUDES AND FRANCISCANS

### Devotions and social action

We challenge spiritual assistants in their call to share Franciscan spirituality with the members of the OFS. Reflecting on the 1978 OFS Rule we find in each article issues that are gospel-oriented. Some are obvious. For others, we need to engage in ongoing formation. Each article of the Rule invites Franciscans to understand that articles of the Rule are not only gospel-oriented but also gospel-difficult. Taking the Rule seriously requires prayer, dialogue, and action to discover how to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Franciscans go from Gospel to life and life to Gospel. Their baptism calls them to seek an encounter with the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters. Article #11 has some serious requirements for Franciscans.

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that, according to the Gospel, they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

Thus, in the spirit of the "beatitudes," and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possessions and power.

[1978 OFS Rule - 11](#)

As SAs and secular Franciscans meditate on Rule 11 and reflect on their personal application of the article, they may discover areas of life that need conversion. The OFS Rule calls for a number of qualities that should shine through our lives. Ready and willing, like Jesus and Mary, to choose a poor and humble life, trusting in the Father. Having made the choice, our task is to figure out what poor and humble means for OFS members and how we can show our trust in the Father - every day!

Article 11 mentions that Christ loved created things, giving sensitive attention to created things without "owning them" just for himself. Quite a task! We possess many "things" in closets and on shelves, in drawers and on coffee tables, and even in rented storage places. To develop a spirit of detachment from temporal goods is no easy task. What is meant by "detachment?" How does it look in life? Once I understand the word, what do I do with all my "stuff?" How does my heart change? I recognize a responsibility to be a good steward of all my "stuff." What does that mean? I develop ways to deal with "stuff" so it builds community life and not just my own security blanket. It wouldn't be difficult to ignore Article 11 while I search for an easier article to explore. That creates another problem. We professed to live the entire Rule, not just segments. So now what?

If one article requires such serious reflection, I understand why ongoing formation is so important. It tells me that fraternity life is not just repeated gatherings that start to look the same. We may limit our dialogue to talk about things that make us feel good. Instead, we could add to our gatherings a call to account for our way of living the OFS Rule. A Franciscan life is not just filled with joy and nice things - May God be praised! But real joy requires, as part of the call (Article 11), that we are poor and humble, that we recognize that we are stewards and not owners. That the things we have are for us but also for the benefit of God's children - the common good.

[Article 11](#) dares us to embrace the spirit of the beatitudes - whatever that means. What is it that the Beatitudes expect us to en flesh in our lives? We are called to understand the words of Jesus and what we hope to accomplish through the spirit of the Beatitudes. Jesus says that people are blessed for things we would often not consider important. Being blessed means people are given special favors, are fortunate, are the lucky ones. Notice that the "blessed ones" don't seem to be those in authority nor those who have lots of earthly success e.g. the Romans, the Pharisees or Sadducees, or others who wield authority. The Beatitudes seem to call people without power to be blessed. Jesus shares a perspective that is not society's perception of successful people. Jesus' idea of faithfulness is spelled out in the Beatitudes. To be poor in spirit, to be gentle, to be people whose hearts are pure, etc. This is joined to a willingness to model the qualities of blessedness in daily life.

Being a person who lives in the spirit of the Beatitudes may not be an easy goal to reach. Such people are not readily praised and respected in our society. Society often considers them to be people from the wrong side of the tracks. They are not held up as models for children nor examples of how to enjoy life. In fact, there is an unspoken rejection, that may not be verbalized but shows itself in gestures and walking away and silence. People who live the spirit of the Beatitudes are not always welcomed. Here is Matthew's list of the beatitudes given by Jesus.

Blessed are the poor in spirit; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Blessed are the sorrowful, they shall find consolation. Blessed are the gentle; they shall have the earth for their possession. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst to see right prevail; they shall be satisfied. Blessed are those who show mercy; mercy shall be shown to them. Blessed are those whose hearts are pure; they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers; they shall be called God's children. Blessed are those who are persecuted in the cause of right; the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Blessed are you when you suffer insults and persecution and calumnies of every kind for my sake. Exalt and be glad, for you have a rich reward in heaven; in the same way they persecuted the prophets before you.

Matthew 5: 2 - 12 (REB)

In all honesty, does this description of beatitude-people sound like a description of an all-American person? Will Beatitude people wear the right clothes? Live in the right neighborhood? Have the right job? Drive the right car? Win political campaigns? Someone who knows how to use the perks of power? Who knows how to use religion to achieve a place of power? Or what? It seems that counter-cultural is a weak way of describing the beatitude person.

The strength for living the beatitudes comes from God. The Holy Spirit is sent so that the first disciples and those who followed could be faithful in the face of rejection by secular and religious authorities. The example of Peter makes this clear. Before and during the passion he could not understand how suffering and death could possibly be the way to get a new movement started in Israel. He even denied his friendship with Jesus to evade persecution.

After the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter, the original denier, dared to say to the religious authorities after his arrest in the temple (for speaking about Jesus): And Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit said: "Rulers of the people and elders, if it is about help given to a sick man that we are being questioned today, and the means by which he was cured, this is our answer to all of you and to the people of Israel: it was by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, and whom God raised from the dead; through him this man stands before you fit and well. This Jesus is the stone, rejected by you the builders, which has become the cornerstone." ... they were astonished at their boldness (and after consultation among themselves they returned to Peter and John). They called them in and ordered them to refrain from all public speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied: "Is it right in the eyes of God for us to obey you rather than him? Judge for yourselves. We cannot possibly give up speaking about what we have seen and heard." (Acts 4: 8-14, 18-20 - REB)

To live in the spirit of the beatitudes is not done through our own power, but the power of the Trinity who dwell in us. Perhaps that is why the OFS Rule also says: As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. (OFS Rule 8).

A spiritual assistant is called to be a gentle, sharing presence in fraternity life. He/she realizes that achieving the good the OFS Rule invites us to model can only happen with the guidance, power, and wisdom of the Holy Spirit who dwells in us. Neither can we simply invest in adoration and attend Eucharist without also imitating Jesus' self-giving to our neighbor in need. Our way is not an either/or approach, but rather a both/and approach - both prayer and action!

Many popular devotions have a public and social character. They are a constant reminder of the social dimension of the Gospel. God has created us as social beings by our very nature. We always live in a relationship of interdependence with others and always have a responsibility to work for the common good of our society.... As John Paul II put it: "it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good." ... because we are all really responsible for all."

Popular Devotional Practices - Statement of USCCB - Page17 (2003)



## ROLE OF THE LAITY Mostly from Vatican II

### The Laity

2. The Church was founded so that by spreading Christ's kingdom throughout the world to the glory of God the Father, every man and woman may share in the saving work of redemption, and so that through them the entire world may be truly directed towards Christ. Every activity of the mystical body, with this in view, goes by the name of the apostolate, which the Church exercises through all its members, though in various ways. In fact, the Christian vocation is, of its nature, a vocation to the apostolate as well. In the organism of a living body no member is purely passive; sharing in the life of the body each member also shares in its activity. The same is true of the body of Christ which is the Church, the whole body "when each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth." (Ephesians 4:16). Between the members of this body there exists, further, such a unity and solidarity (cf. Ephesians 4:16) that members who fail to do their best to promote the growth of the body must be considered unhelpful to the Church and to themselves.

Vatican II - Apostolicam actuositatem - Paragraph 2 - Official translation

3. Lay people's right and duty to be apostles derives from their union with Christ their head. Inserted as they are in the mystical body of Christ by baptism and strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit in confirmation, it is by the Lord himself that they are assigned to the apostolate. If they are consecrated a royal priesthood and a holy nation (cf. 1 Peter 2:4-10), this is so that in all their actions they may offer spiritual sacrifices and bear witness to Christ all the world over. Charity, which is, as it were, the soul of the whole apostolate, is given to them and nourished by the sacraments and especially by the Eucharist.

Ibid - Paragraph 3 - Official translation

... Only the light of faith and meditation on the word of God can enable us to find everywhere and always the God "in whom we live and exist." (Acts 17:28); only thus can we seek his will in everything, see Christ in everyone, acquaintance or stranger, make sound judgments on the true meaning and in relation to our final end.

... lay spirituality will take its particular character from the circumstances of one's state in life - married and family life, celibacy, widowhood - from one's state of health and from one's professional and social activity. Whatever their circumstance, all have received suitable talents, and these should be cultivated, as should also the personal gifts they have from the Holy Spirit.

Similarly, lay people who have followed their particular vocation and become members of any of the associations or institutions approved by the Church aim sincerely at making their own forms of spirituality proper to these bodies.

They should also hold in high esteem professional competence, family and civic sense, and the virtues related to social behavior such as honesty, sense of justice, sincerity, courtesy, moral courage, without them there is no true Christian life.

Ibid - Paragraph 4 - Official translation

### Benedict XVI speaks on the role of the laity

The synod frequently spoke of the laity and thanked them for their generous activity in spreading the Gospel in the various settings of daily life, at work and in the schools, in the family, and in education. This responsibility, rooted in Baptism, needs to develop through an ever more conscious Christian way of life capable of "accounting for the hope" within us (Cf. 1 Peter 3:15). In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus points out that "the field of the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom" (Mt 13:38). These words apply especially to the Christian laity, who live out their specific vocation to holiness by a life in the Spirit expressed "in a particular way by their engagement in temporal matters and by their participation in earthly activities. The laity need to be trained to discern God's will through a familiarity with his word, read and studied in the Church under the guidance of her legitimate pastors.

Verbum Domini (The Word of God in the Life & Mission of the Church) - Benedict XVI - Paragraph 84





## REFLECTIONS

Lester Bach OFM Cap

It is a privilege and a serious responsibility to be part of the Franciscan Family. We are not born into this Franciscan Family. Rather, we are called by the Holy Spirit to follow the charism of St Francis of Assisi. The Holy Spirit gives the call freely. None of us can say we deserve it. We can only be thankful that we received it. With the call comes the responsibility for a total embrace of the spirit of St Francis. It requires a lifelong openness to personal growth in understanding more fully and embracing with greater commitment this special call. Members of the Franciscan Family assist one another in their search for a faithful response to Francis' spirit. Whether we belong to the First Order, the TOR, the Second Order, the OFS, or other branches of the Franciscan Family, we are linked by a common call of the Spirit. To be unfaithful to this commitment to follow Francis is a serious violation of our Franciscan call.

Franciscan documents contain many words that point out the relationships we have within our Franciscan family. Words like life-giving union and vital reciprocity indicate the kind of gift we offer one another. There is no exception for any member of the Franciscan Family. We are responsible to support, animate, encourage, dialogue, and collaborate with one another to achieve the vision of Francis in our lives. The First Order and TOR Constitutions support our faithfulness in achieving the goal of our common Franciscan charism. For example, read these words from the Capuchin Constitutions:

Let us cooperate with the Secular Franciscans that their fraternities may progress as communities of faith endowed with a special effectiveness for evangelization, as well as in the formation of individual members. Thus, they may spread the Kingdom of God not only by the example of their life but also by various kinds of apostolic activity.



Capuchin Constitutions (1990) - Article 152.2

In another place, the Capuchin Constitutions offer a specific motive for the entire Franciscan Family to "work together." The other 1st Order/TOR Constitutions contain similar supportive ideas.

Within the ambit of the Franciscan Family, the Secular Franciscan Order occupies a special place that both shares and promotes its authentic spirit, esteemed as necessary for the fullness of the Franciscan charism.

Capuchin Constitutions(1990) - Article 95.1

But quoting documents is not the same as embracing the vision to be lived by members of the Franciscan family. If documents could make us holy, we would amaze the world! It is only when words on paper are given flesh in Franciscan hearts and actions that we build (and rebuild) the Kingdom of God on earth.

The perspective with which we interpret life comes from incarnational theology. We believe that God is LOVE. As such, the actions of God flow from his nature, i.e. a loving nature. Coming among us in Jesus is an action of outgoing love, offering us a human form for God's love. Jesus is the model of the love of God translated into human affairs. While not neglecting the reality of judgment, we choose to believe that even in judgment, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit act out of love.

Jesus comes with love, not condemnation. Jesus reveals the truth shared by the Father. The Trinity reveals the life we will live when, in faith, we accept the word that Jesus proclaims. Franciscans are motivated and guided by the words of Scripture, which are fundamental ingredients of our lives. God is love. God's call invites us to offer alternatives to greed, violence, and exploitation that are too common among people. The Franciscan way seeks forgiveness and dialogue, not unforgiveness and bitterness. We seek reconciliation rather than revenge. Gospel values help us see with clearer vision, to act with greater courage, and to offer positive alternatives to people issues. Like Francis, we seek justice that blossoms from love rather than injustice that comes from revenge, unforgiveness, or greed. We unceasingly work for peace, knowing that it is always needed. Peace (Shalom) creates an environment where people can live in a way that is both human and humane. Franciscans are in the forefront in establishing the justice that allows peace to exist. God's love, made present through the Holy Spirit, enables us to

offer Jesus' vision of peace to all people. The Franciscan Family shows how life is lived when the Gospel is taken seriously. The Franciscan spirit teaches us to live the Gospel and offer a concrete example for people to see and, hopefully, to follow.

**Spiritual Assistants** (whether they are religious, clergy, OFS men and women, or people from other communities), assist OFS members to achieve the goal given to them by Jesus through his Church. Spiritual Assistants make present the family influence in the life of the OFS. They relate not only to the OFS but to the First Order/TOR. SAs encourage relationships with the 2nd Order women as well as Third Order religious communities. SAs assist the OFS but also receive assistance from the OFS and the Franciscan family.

Spiritual assistants, even those who do not belong to the Franciscan religious family, serve not only the OFS but also the Provinces of the First Order or TOR that appoint them. Their assistance reflects a dedicated spirit of service to local, regional, national, or international councils.



People who believe in Jesus and embrace the life of the Spirit, find that learning never ceases. Franciscans realize that ongoing formation is an ordinary part of life for the Franciscan Family. We face new challenges, new situations, new popes, new parish situations, differing understandings of Church teaching, new life situations, and a host of things that require us to enrich our understanding of the faith and social issues. Franciscans delight in new insights - and God always has "more" for us. Ongoing formation, whether we are spiritual assistants or OFS members, is just that - ongoing!

I have told you these things while I am still with you; but the advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have told you.

[John](#) 14:25-26

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them: "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord - and you are right, for that is what I am. So, if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ... If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

[John](#) 13:12-17

3. Rule 2 From the beginning, the Secular Franciscan Order has had its own proper place in the Franciscan Family. It is formed by the organic union of all the Catholic fraternities whose members, moved by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves through profession to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis, in their secular state, following the Rule approved by the Church.

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [1.3](#)

4. The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care and spiritual assistance of the Secular Franciscan Order, because it belongs to the same spiritual family, to the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular (TOR). These are the "institutes" who are responsible for the "altius moderamen," referred to by Canon 303 of the code of Canon Law. (cf. Page 83 in this Handbook)

OFS [General Constitutions](#) - Article [1.4](#)

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Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance.  
 Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance.  
 Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice.  
 Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness.  
 Where there is fear of the Lord to guard an entrance, there the enemy cannot have  
 a place to enter. Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment,  
 there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.

Admonition XXVII - [Francis of Assisi - The Saint](#) - Vol I - Page 136-137



## DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

### Understanding the situation

COMMENT: Many of us are familiar with the debates that take place during a political campaign. The goal is often to make the "other guy or gal" look bad, or foolish, or uninformed, or not competent for the job. Sometimes, the truth gets mangled in the middle of these debates. People seek to come out the "winner" and get elected. But politicians do not have a copyright on this kind of debate. Many, perhaps all of us, want to "win." It's the all-American way! We are not concerned about how the "other" got to thinking the way he or she does. We just know that they are "wrong" and we are "right." That permits us to use any means to make our point and separate us from these awful people who are ignorant, mis-led, poor decision-makers, unfaithful Christians, or whatever is usable to keep them from winning the debate.

I think we see enough of this to know it when we see it or when we ourselves are participants. In our OFS life, we DO NOT enter into debates that separate us but dialogue that keeps us together - even when we disagree. Here is a simple outline of the differences between debate and dialogue. Our Franciscan way of life calls us to dialogue so we can maintain a relationship even when we legitimately disagree on issues. This is not easy when society regularly looks to have a "Winner and a Loser." Choosing dialogue is often counter-cultural but full of gospel values that call for maintaining relationships.

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
The goal of debate is to "win" the argument by affirming one's own views and discrediting other views.	The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views.
People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their beliefs.
People critique the experiences of others as distorted or invalid.	People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.
People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.	People appear to be somewhat open to expanding their understanding of the issue.
People speak based on assumptions made about others' positions and motivations.	People speak primarily from their own understanding and experience.
People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.	People work together toward common understanding.
Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side.	Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief.

cf. [Dialogue for Difficult Subjects](#) - Lisa Schirch & David Camp - Page 9

It is normal that Franciscans disagree on some issues. How we deal with disagreement is what is important. Our goal is to understand how the "other" came to their conclusions. When we understand their pattern of thought we have a better understanding of the "Other." That allows a relationship to persist even when we disagree. But if we declare ourselves the winners or the wiser, the "other" is the loser or ignorant. The "other" will often (not always) have no desire to maintain a relationship with us.

COMMENT: As the book [Dialogue for Difficult Subjects](#) puts it, effective dialogue may require a facilitator if the material requires it. The facilitator guides the discussion, creating good ground rules to

keep things on target. The guidance of the facilitator keeps the conversation in a true dialogical process. The facilitator does not decide who won as in a debate. Neither does the facilitator decide who is right or wrong. The facilitator creates an atmosphere where both sides hear the "other" and understand their point of view. Both sides listen in order to understand the "other."

Most of us face the temptation to prepare our response while the "other" is talking. Or we may be evaluating what we hear instead of listening in order to understand. In such cases, we only partially listen and may miss important elements of the conversation. Listening requires us to put aside our ideas and beliefs for the moment and focus on the words and experiences the "other" reveals. Such listening gives us a clearer understanding of how the "other" came to his/her conclusions. A good listener actually hears what is being said without judging it but seeking to understand it.

From a spiritual point of view, this manner of listening requires an "abandonment" of our personal viewpoint for the moment. We allow ourselves to HEAR the words and ideas of the "other" and deepen our understanding of their point of view. After such listening, we may or may not agree. But we have a clearer understanding of the ideas and experiences that led the "other" to their conclusions. We expect the same "abandonment" in the "other" who listens to "our" reasons for the conclusions we have reached.

There are qualities that hinder understanding. Anyone who believes he or she already knows the whole truth will not see the need for dialogue. We then ignore the ideas or experiences of the "others" and separate from them. We only communicate if the "others" are ready to listen to "our" truth. We do not give them the same courtesy. Functioning this way is NOT dialogue. When we think we are "right," what's to learn? Dialogue disappears in rigid stubbornness. Dialogue works best when we are open to learn about the ideas and experiences that led the "other" to their conclusions. We accept the fact that we can learn from each other. We acknowledge that no one knows everything.

It is helpful to realize that an atmosphere of listening is similar to a contemplative stance. In contemplation, we hand ourselves over to the Trinity. We do not control our contemplative time - the Trinity does. We are "there" and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, letting the Trinity do what they wish during this quiet time. It is a time for God to be free to do whatever God wishes for us. It might be called "abandonment." It gives the Trinity the freedom to work in our lives. Our Franciscan spirit calls us to LISTEN to God. In a similar manner, in dialogue, we respectfully "listen" to the "other." Their words give us a better knowledge and understanding of the "other," and a relationship remains.

Ilia Delio shares some appropriate ideas in her book [Clare of Assisi, a Heart Full of Love](#):

In the cross of Jesus Christ, Clare realizes that God does not hold back anything for himself but rather gives himself completely to us. Divine revelation is the movement of God to poverty. The One who is rich in love comes down to where we are, takes on our humanity, and extends his arms on the cross to embrace us in love. In the mystery of the cross, therefore, Clare sees that God is self-giving and self-gift. God gives everything to us in the gift of the Son or, in Clare's words, the "beloved Spouse." God loves us to such a degree that we might say that God "throws it all away" out of love to be God for us.

[Clare of Assisi - a heart full of love](#) - Ilia Delio - Page 3

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... Called like St. Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.

[OFS Rule 6](#)

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. ...

[OFS Rule 19](#)





'Francesco' began his conversion with nothing but his trust in God and his readiness to follow the voice from the cross - "Repair my church ..."

The first work that blessed Francis undertook, after he had gained his freedom from the hands of his carnally-minded father was to build a house of God.

He did not try to build a new one but he repaired an old one, and restored an ancient one.

He did not tear out the foundation, but he built upon it, always reserving to Christ his prerogative, although unaware of it, for no one can lay another foundation, but that which has been laid, which is Christ Jesus.

Celano - The First book  
Francis of Assisi - The Saint  
Vol I - Page 196

Franciscans are called to build on the foundation of the Kingdom of God - our Savior, Jesus Christ, whom the Father sent among us.

Francis did not allow anything to diminish his joyous desire to evangelize by living the Gospel. He did not try to escape the consequences of the desire given to him by God. Nor should we!

When Sister Death came near, he welcomed her with open arms. He had done what was his to do - and he did not waver in that desire which gave him peace and all good.

Pace et Bene.



## CODE of CANON LAW References

COMMENT: These texts from the Code of [Canon Law](#) are simply available for research if something from OFS documents relates to Canon Law. It is not exhaustive, but only meant to be helpful.

### Canon 113:

1. The Catholic Church and the Apostolic See have the nature of a moral person by divine law itself.
2. Besides physical persons, there are also in the Church juridic persons, that is, subjects in canon law of obligations and rights which correspond to their nature.

### Canon 114:

1. Juridic persons are constituted either by prescriptions of law or by special concession of the competent authority given through a decree; they are aggregates of persons or of things ordered towards a purpose congruent with the mission of the Church and which transcends the purpose of the individuals that make it up.
2. The purpose spoken of in #1 are understood as those which pertain to works of piety, of the apostolate or of charity, whether spiritual or temporal.
3. The competent ecclesiastical authority is not to confer juridic personality except upon those aggregates of persons or things which pursue a truly useful purpose and all things considered, have resources which are foreseen to be sufficient to achieve their designated end.

### Canon 115:

1. Juridic persons within the Church are aggregates of either persons or things.
2. An aggregate of persons, which cannot be constituted unless it consists of at least three persons is collegial if its members determine its action through participation in making its decisions, whether by equal right or not, according to the norm of law and its own nature; otherwise, it is non-collegial.
3. An aggregate of things or an autonomous foundation consists of goods or things, whether spiritual or material and is directed by one or several persons or a college according to the norm of its law and its statutes.

### Canon 116:

1. Public juridic persons are aggregates of persons or things which are so constituted by the competent ecclesiastical authority that, within the limits set for them in the name of the Church, they fulfill a proper function entrusted to them in view of the common good, in accord with the prescripts of law; other juridic persons are private.
2. Public juridic persons are given this personality either through the law itself or by a special decree of the competent authority expressly granting it; private juridic persons are given this personality only through a special decree of the competent authority granting this personality.

### Canon 117:

No aggregate of persons or things, intending to obtain juridic personality, can achieve it unless its statutes have been approved by the competent authority.

### Canon 118:

They alone represent a public juridic person and act in its name who are acknowledged to have this competence whether by universal or particular law or by its own statutes; they represent a private juridic person who have been given the competency by statutes.

### Canon 119:

With regard to collegial acts, unless provision is made otherwise by law or statutes:

1. If it is a question of elections, that action has the force of law which, when a majority of those who must be convoked are present, receives the approval of an absolute majority of those who are present; after two indecisive ballots, the choice is between the two candidates who have obtained the greater number of votes, or, if there are several (with the same number),

upon the two who are senior by age; after a third ballot, if the tie remains, the one who is senior by age is considered elected.

2. If it is a question of other matters, that action will have the force of law which, when a majority of those who must be convoked are present, receives the approval of an absolute majority of those who are present; if after two ballots it is a tie vote, the presiding officer can break the tie by his or her vote.

3. What touches all as individuals must be approved by all.

#### Canon 120:

1. A juridic person is of its nature perpetual; nevertheless, it is extinguished if it is legitimately suppressed by a competent authority or has ceased activity for a hundred years; a private juridic person is furthermore extinguished if the association is dissolved according to the norm of its statutes, or if, in the judgment of the competent authority, the foundation itself has ceased to exist according to the norm of its statutes.

2. If even one member of a collegial juridic person survives, and the aggregate of persons has not ceased to exist according to its statutes, the exercise of all the rights of the aggregate devolves upon that one member.

#### Canon 121:

If aggregates, whether of persons or things, which are public juridic persons, are so joined that out of all of them one aggregate is constituted, itself enjoying juridic personality, this new juridic person obtains the goods and patrimonial rights proper to the prior ones, and it also takes upon itself the obligations with which they have been burdened; however, the intention of the founders and donors and acquired rights must be respected, particularly as regards the allocation of goods and fulfillment of obligations.

#### Canon 122:

If an aggregate which has public juridic personality is so to be divided so that a part of it is united to another public juridic person, or that a distinct public juridic person is established from the separated part, it is the obligation of the ecclesiastical authority which is competent to make the division, having observed before all else the intention of the founders and donors, acquired rights, and approved statutes, to see to it personally or through an executor.

1. that things held in common which are capable of division, both goods and patrimonial rights as well as the debts and other obligations, are divided among the juridic person concerned with the proportion based on equity and justice, taking into account all the circumstances and the needs of each;

2. that the use and usufruct of those common goods which are susceptible to division accrue to each juridic person, and that the obligations proper to them fall upon each, to be determined in like manner with proper regard for the due proportion based on equity and justice.

#### Canon 123:

Upon the extinction of a public juridic person, the allocation of its goods, patrimonial rights, and obligations, is ruled by law and by statutes; if these give no indication, they go to the juridic person immediately superior, with due regard for the will of the founders or donors and for acquired rights; upon the extinction of a private juridic person the allocation of its goods and obligations is regulated by its own statutes.

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#### Canon 298:

1. In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, in which the Christian faithful, either clergy or laity, or laity and clergy together, strive by common effort to promote a more perfect life or to foster public worship or Christian doctrine or to exercise other apostolic works, namely to engage in efforts of evangelization, to exercise works of piety or charity and to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit.

2. The Christian faithful should enroll especially in associations which are created or praised or

recommended by competent ecclesiastical authority.

**Canon 301:**

1. Competent ecclesiastical authority alone has the right to erect associations of the Christian faithful that set out to teach Christian doctrine in the name of the Church or to promote public worship or which aim at other ends whose pursuit by their nature is reserved to the same ecclesiastical authority.
2. Competent ecclesiastical authority, if it judges it expedient, can also erect associations of the Christian faithful in order to attain directly or indirectly other spiritual ends whose accomplishment has not been sufficiently provided for by the efforts of private persons.
3. Associations of the Christian faithful which are erected by competent ecclesiastical authority are called public associations.

**Canon 303:**

Associations whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction (*altius moderamen*) of that same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name.

**Canon 304:**

1. All associations of the Christian faithful, whether public or private, by whatever title or name they are called, are to have their own statutes which define the end of the association or its social objective, its headquarters, its government, the conditions of membership and by whom its policies are to be determined, according to the needs or utility of time and place.
2. They are to choose a title or name for themselves which is adapted to the usage of their time and place, selected especially in view of their intended purpose.

**Canon 305:**

1. All associations of the Christian faithful are subject to the vigilance of competent ecclesiastical authority, whose duty it is to take care that integrity of faith and morals is preserved in them and to watch lest abuse creep into ecclesiastical discipline; therefore, that authority has the right and duty to visit them in accord with the norm of the law and statutes; such associations are also subject to the governance of the same authority according to the prescriptions of the following canons.
2. Associations of any kind whatever are subject to the vigilance of the Holy See; diocesan associations and also other associations to the extent that they work in the diocese are subject to the vigilance of the local Ordinary.

**Canon 306:**

In order for a person to enjoy the rights and privileges, indulgences, and other spiritual favors granted to the association, it is necessary and sufficient that the person has been validly received into it and not legitimately dismissed from it, in accord with the prescriptions of the law and the proper statutes of the association.

**Canon 307:**

1. The reception of members is to be done in accordance with the norms of law and statutes of each association.
2. The same person can be enrolled in several associations.
3. Members of religious institutes can enroll in associations in accordance with their own law with the consent of their Superior.

**Canon 308:**

No one who has been legitimately enrolled may be dismissed from an association except for a just cause in accordance with the norm of law and the statutes.

**Canon 309:**

Legitimately constituted associations have the right, in accordance with the law and the statutes, to issue particular norms respecting the association itself, to hold meetings, to designate moderators, officials, other officers and administrators of goods.



**Canon 311:**

Members of institutes of consecrated life who preside over or assist associations in some way united to their institute are to see to it that these associations give assistance to the works of the apostolate in a diocese, especially cooperating, under the direction of the local Ordinary, with associations which are ordered to the exercise of the apostolate in the diocese.

**Canon 312:**

1. The authority competent to erect public associations is:

- (1) the Holy See for universal and international associations;
- (2) the conference of bishops in its own territory for national associations, that is, those which are directed by their founding purpose toward action in the whole nation.
- (3) the diocesan bishop in his own territory for diocesan associations but not the diocesan administrator; however, these associations are excepted for whose erection the right has been reserved to others by apostolic privilege.

2. The written consent of the diocesan bishop is required for the valid erection of an association or a branch of an association in a diocese, even if this is done in virtue of apostolic privilege; however, the consent given by a diocesan bishop for the erection of a house of a religious institute also allows for the erection in the same house or church attached to it, of an association proper to the institute.

**Canon 313:**

A public association as well as a confederation of public associations is constituted by a juridic person by the decree by which it is erected by competent ecclesiastical authority in accord with the norm of canon 312; it also thereby received a mission to pursue the ends which it proposes for itself in the name of the Church, to the extent that such a mission is required.

**Canon 314:**

The Statutes of any public association as well as their revision or change require the approval of the ecclesiastical authority which is competent to erect the association in accord with the norm of canon 312 #1.

**Canon 315:**

Public associations on their own initiative can begin undertakings in keeping with their character, and they can direct them in accord with their statutes, but under the further direction of the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, #1.

**Canon 316:**

1. One who has publicly rejected the Catholic faith or abandoned ecclesiastical communion or been punished with an imposed or declared excommunication cannot be validly received into public associations.
2. Those legitimately enrolled who fall into situations mentioned in #1, after a warning to be dismissed from the association, observing the association's statutes, and reserving the right of recourse to the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, #1.

**Canon 317:**

1. Unless otherwise provided in the statutes, the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, #1, has the right to confirm as moderator of a public association the person elected by the association or to install the one presented or to name the person by his own right; the same ecclesiastical authority also names the chaplain or ecclesiastical assistant, having heard the major official of the association where this is expedient.
2. The norm stated in #1 is also valid for associations erected outside their own churches or houses by members of religious institutes in virtue of apostolic privilege; however, in associations erected by members of religious institutes in their own church or house, the nomination or confirmation of the moderator and chaplain belongs to the superior of the institute, in accord with the statutes.
3. In associations which are not clerical, lay persons can exercise the office of moderator; the chaplain or ecclesiastical assistant shall not assume that role unless the statutes provide otherwise.

4. Those who exercise leadership in political parties are not to be moderators in public associations of the Christian faithful which are directly ordered to the exercise of the apostolate.

Canon 318:

1. In special circumstances where grave reasons require it, the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, #1, can designate a trustee who is to direct the association temporarily in the name of the authority.
2. The one who named or confirmed the moderator of a public association can remove the moderator for a just cause, having heard both the moderator and the major officials of the association in accord with the norm of the statutes; however, the one who named the chaplain can remove him in accord with the norms of canons 192-195.

Canon 319:

1. Unless another provision has been made, a legitimately erected public association administers the goods which it possesses in accord with the norm of the statutes under the higher direction (*altius moderamen*) of the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, #1, to whom the association must render an account of the administration each year.
2. The association must also render to the same ecclesiastical authority a faithful account of offerings and alms which it collects.

Canon 320:

1. Associations erected by the Holy See can be suppressed only by the Holy See.
2. Associations erected by a conference of bishops can be suppressed by the same conference for grave reasons; associations erected by a diocesan bishop can be suppressed by him, also associations erected through an apostolic indult by members of religious institutes with the consent of the diocesan bishop.
3. A public association is not to be suppressed by competent authority without having heard its moderator and other major officials.

Canon 327:

Lay members of the Christian faithful are to esteem greatly associations established for the spiritual purpose mentioned in Canon 298, and especially those which propose to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit and in this way greatly foster an intimate union between faith and life.

Canon 328:

Those who preside over associations of the laity, even those associations erected in virtue of apostolic privilege, are to see to it that they cooperate with other associations of the Christian faithful, where it is expedient, and willingly assist the various Christian works especially in the same territory.

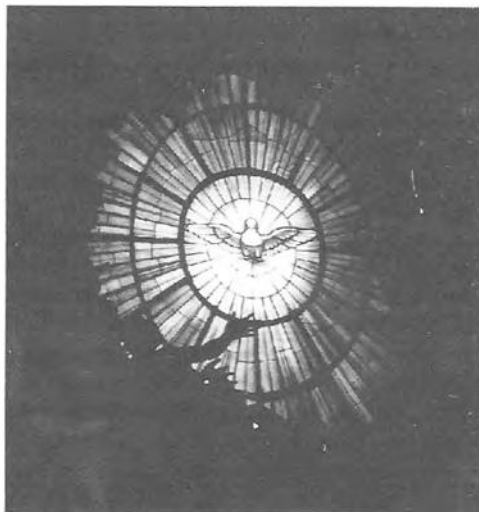
Canon 329:

Moderators of associations of the laity are to see to it that the members of the association are duly formed for the exercise of the apostolate which is proper to the laity.

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The Human life is sacred because from its beginning  
it involves the creative action of God and remains forever  
in a special relationship with the Creator, who is its sole end.  
God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end;  
no one can under any circumstances claim for himself  
the right directly to destroy an innocent human being.

Catechism of the Catholic Church - no 2258: citing: The Gift of Life (*Donum Vitae*), no 9



### Blessed John XXIII

1. *Be filled with hope and faith.* Do not be prophets of gloom. "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward God's superior and inscrutable design."
2. *Discover ways of teaching the faith more effectively.* "The greatest concern of the ecumenical council is this; that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously."
3. *Deepen the understanding of doctrine.* Authentic doctrine "should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and the literary of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine and deposit of the faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."
4. *Use the medicine of mercy.* "Errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently, she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation."
5. *Seek unity within the Church, with Christians separated from Catholicism, with those of non-Christian religions, and will all men and women of goodwill.* "Such is the aim of the second Vatican Ecumenical Council which ... prepares, as it were, and consolidates the path toward that unity of mankind where truth reigns, charity is the law and whose extent is eternity."

*United State Catholic Catechism for Adults - USCCB - Pages 21-22*

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*The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in the family circle.  
It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world  
and open to every group of the faithful.  
In these fraternities, the brothers and sisters strive for perfect  
charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge  
themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis  
by means of this rule approved by the Church.*

[1978 OFS Rule 2](#)

[National Statutes](#)    [Rule](#)    [General Constitutions](#)