



2026

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

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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

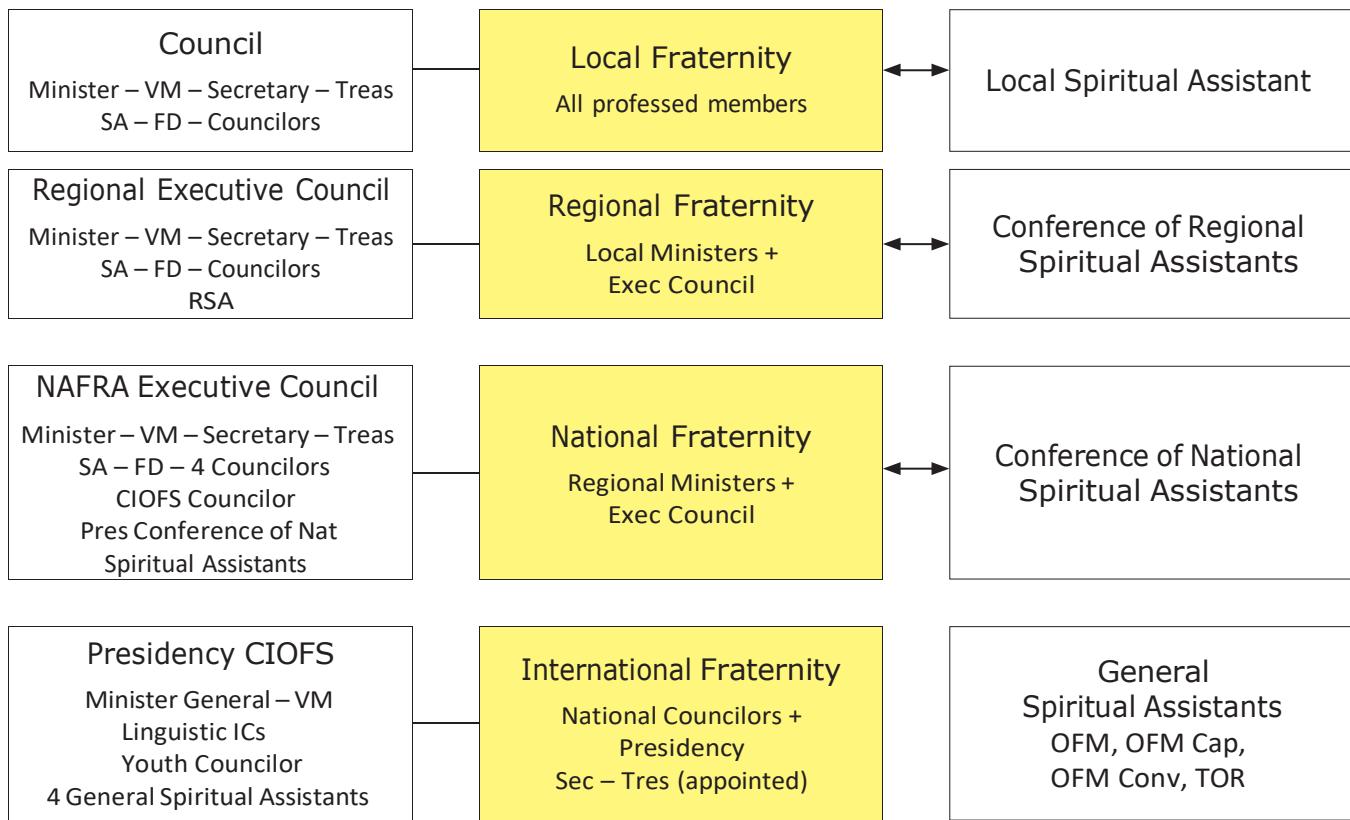
However, many additional specific expectations are embedded in the other articles of the *SFO Constitutions*, such as:

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 Masseo 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!

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Updated:

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-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.

¹ 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

Month	Fraternity Gathering Activity	Other Activities
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 on COMMITTEES

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

BIRTHDAY REMEMBRANCE FOR MEMBERS

(Send out cards to members)

Name

Phone #

Email

HELP CLEAN AND STRAIGHTEN UP AFTER THE MEETINGSNamePhone #Email

FORMATION INSTRUCTORSNamePhone #Email

TELEPHONE COMMITTEE**(Call people when there are changes to meetings, etc.)**NamePhone #Email

LECTORSNamePhone #Email

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

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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**

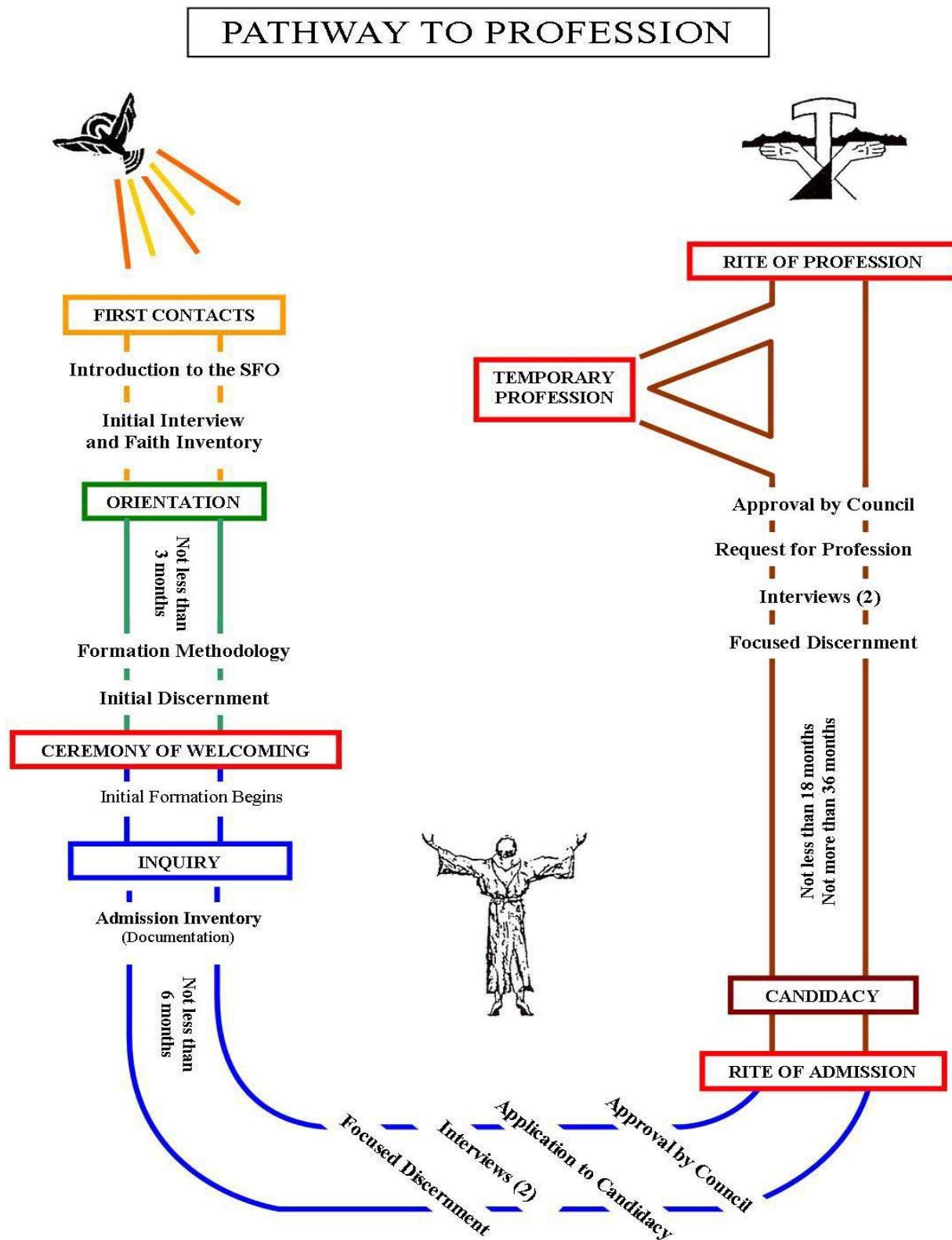
(Optionally, depending on a person's readiness, a Temporary Profession may be made for one year and renewed up to three times, after which a Permanent Commitment is made.)

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.



APPLICATION FORM AT TIME OF INQUIRY

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

Phone (H) _____ E-Mail _____

Occupation _____ Marital Status _____

Date of Birth _____

Name of Parish _____

Address _____

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?

2. What draws your interest to St. Francis?

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

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

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

6. What are your hobbies, special interests?

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

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

9. Describe your understanding of “vocation.”

References:

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

❖ Pastor and/or Spiritual Director

❖ Character Reference

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:

(Inquirer's Signature)

(Date)

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

(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

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) _____

Name (Print) _____

Minister of Profession

*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. 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 exists.

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.

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



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;

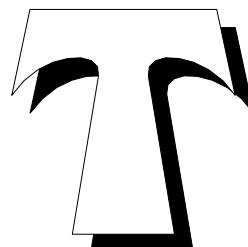
The secretary will send the date of death, the deceased former home address, and other necessary information to the **Regional Database Manager** as soon as possible. This information will be updated in the National Database.

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

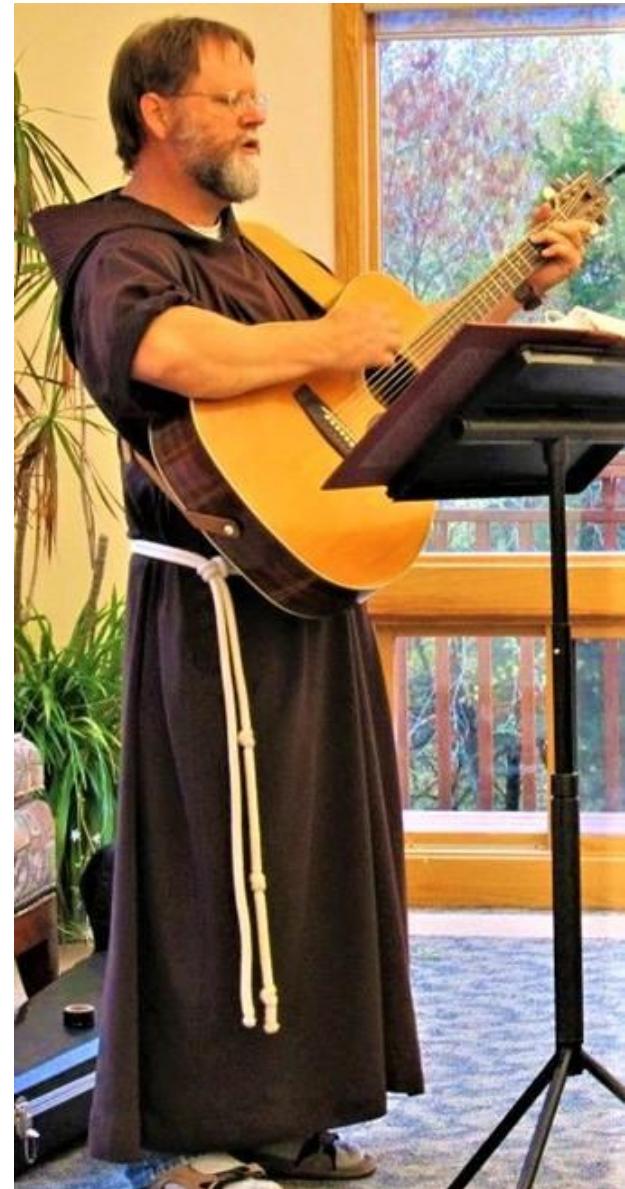
Each fraternity is bonded to a province of either the OFM, OFM Conventual, OFM Capuchin, or Third Order Regular (TOR).

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.

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

* **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.

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:

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?

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

17. What are your concerns, needs or problems?

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

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

20. What are the fraternity's future goals?

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 councilor's home address) _____**

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. ARE RECORDS KEPT ELECTRONIC? Note: If no, skip to #2			
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. ARE RECORDS FOR THREE YEARS PRESENT?			
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. REVIEW THE CHECK BOOK REGISTER:			
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. BANK STATEMENTS:			
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		
5.	CONTRIBUTIONS RECEIVED: 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?		
6.	REPORTS: 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?		
7.	NON-FINANCIAL ASSETS: 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?		
8.	LOCATION OF RECORDS: 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		

St. Margaret of Cortona Region
Audit Questionnaire for Fraternity Financial Records

Fraternity Treasurer: _____

Fraternity Name/Location: _____

Date of Audit: _____

Printed Name and Signature of members reviewing records

Name	Fraternity	Date

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

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?

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

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:

Other Comments:

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.

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
MINISTER**

BALLOT #1

BALLOT #2

BALLOT #3

VICE MINISTER

SECRETARY

TREASURER

[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

OFFICE	BALLOT #1	BALLOT #2	BALLOT #3
---------------	------------------	------------------	------------------

FORMATION DIRECTOR

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

COUNCILOR

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

COUNCILOR

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

COUNCILOR

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Presider

Print Name _____

Friar Witness

Print Name _____

Secretary of Elections

Print Name _____

Teller

Print Name _____

Teller

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.

From the “Celebration of the Fraternity” – Chapter of Elections Reference Guide from Saint Margaret of Cortona Region”

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.

O.F.S. Affiliate Educational/Instructional Plan

Referenced authority:

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 O.F.S., 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 O.F.S., 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” (*O.F.S. 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.

Prepared by the National Formation Commission (NFC)

Presented to the National Fraternity Council at Chapter,

October 2008; Revised by NFC 10/20/2010; Revised again by NFC, 2019

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. The interested individual is encouraged to attend gatherings for [at least] six months prior to request.
- A sponsor (a professed O.F.S) 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.

Instructional Preparation

- The sponsor and affiliate in process meet monthly to complete 12 sessions from a primary resource approved by the local Fraternity Council. A few suggestions:
 1. Bodo, Murray, *Enter Assisi: An Invitation to Franciscan Spirituality*
 2. Bodo, Murray, *The Way of St. Francis: The Challenge of Franciscan Spirituality for Everyone*
 3. Bohrer, John, & Stoutzenberger, Joseph, *Looking to St. Francis: The Man from Assisi and His Message of Hope for Today*
 4. Foley, Leonard & Weigel, Jovian, *Live Like Francis* [This is extremely well done!]
- Concurrently with beginning the 12 sessions, the person seeking affiliate status is presented with and asked to read some selections on the life of St. Francis of Assisi. A few suggestions:
 1. Bodo, Murray, *Francis: The Journey and the Dream*
 2. Bodo, Murray, & Saint Sing, Susan, *A Retreat with Francis & Clare of Assisi: Following Our Pilgrim Hearts*
 3. Englebert, Omer, *St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography*
 4. Jörgensen Johannes, *St. Francis of Assisi*
 5. North, Wyatt, *Saint Francis of Assisi: A Life Inspired*
 6. Stoutzenberger, Joseph & Bohrer, John, *Praying with Francis of Assisi*
 7. Thoman, Bret, *Saint Francis of Assisi: Passion, Poverty & The Man Who Transformed the Catholic Church*
- With recommendations by the sponsor and the Formation Director, the Local Minister, along with the Council, decides whether to approve 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, potluck, picnic, but not a Mass or a Rite), and a simple certificate of affiliation is presented.
- In addition, a medal of St. Francis may be presented, but not the Tau or Tau jewelry (which are reserved for the members of the Order). [If the Fraternity has been placed under the patronage of a particular Franciscan saint, a medal honoring that saint may be presented to the person at the time of affiliation.]

Renewal of Affiliation

- [Affiliation is by its nature temporary.] The affiliate must express a desire to remain as an affiliate and make a written request for renewal every 2 years.
- If approved, a renewal ceremony occurs, similar to the initial welcoming.
- An affiliate continues to grow through prayer, study, and immersion into the life of the local fraternity.

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

Wake and Burial Wishes of _____

As a Secular Franciscan, I wish to have the following arrangements made in the event of my death:

REQUESTS	YES	NO	OTHER/Specify
Secular clothing and Tau cross			
Wake Service with Secular Franciscans			
OFS remembered in will			
Honor Attendants			
Franciscan Burial Shroud			

Family Contacts

Name:	Relationship
Address:	
Telephone Number:	
Name:	Relationship
Address:	
Telephone Number:	

Inform Funeral Director/Family Members**Yes****No**

Of your membership in the Secular Franciscan Order		
If OFS should be printed on your memorial cards		
If OFS should be suffixed after your name in the newspaper		
If OFS should be printed on your burial stone		

Readings	Selected Music
First Reading:	Processional:
Second Reading:	Offertory:
Franciscan Reading:	Communion:
	Recessional:

Inform Family Members:

Name of Church _____

Where to give or who should receive your Franciscan memorabilia: books, Liturgy of Hours, ring etc. Luncheon or gathering after service? Place _____

I understand that these requests are not legally binding

Signature _____ **Date** _____
 (Print name in full) _____

After completing this form, please share copies with your family and with your Fraternity Minister.

Used with permission from Carol Onuffer, OFS, Regional Minister of St. Kateri Tekakwitha Region



St. Margaret of Cortona OFS Region

Suggestions about the Funeral and Wake Service for Secular Franciscans

For everything there is a season, and for most of us, there comes a time when we begin to give our passing and funeral some thought and planning. As Secular Franciscans, many want to acknowledge our Order and the meaningfulness of our vocation in our lives.

The following are suggestions about incorporating a Franciscan funeral and/or wake along with a Catholic Funeral Mass.

A Franciscan funeral is a Catholic Funeral Mass and committal service that ***emphasizes the Franciscan belief that death is a “gateway to total union with God,” celebrating the deceased’s passage to eternal life rather than focusing solely on loss.***

A Franciscan funeral follows the standard Catholic funeral rites with key aspects including the selection of scripture readings and music, often with a theme of Christ’s resurrection and the blessings of life, and an emphasis on Christian hope and trust in God’s promises for the departed.

How it Differs

- While a Franciscan funeral follows the standard Catholic rites, the spiritual emphasis is distinct. It carries the specific Franciscan faith that death is not a harsh ending but a door to ultimate union with God, mirroring the life and desires of St. Francis. ***It carries the specific hope that, like St. Francis himself, the deceased has achieved full union with God.***
- It has a unique emphasis on the ***Franciscan values of simplicity, hope, and the joyful belief that death is a transition to eternal union with God.***

The celebration is one of faith where the community expresses its hope in the resurrection and supports one another through shared belief in Christ’s promises.

Key elements of a Franciscan-style funeral

A focus on Hope over mourning: Unlike traditional services that emphasize grief, the Franciscan approach frames death as a “passing to a new and more fruitful life”. This is inspired by Saint Francis of Assisi, who referred to death as “Sister Bodily Death” and viewed it as the gateway to his ultimate goal of total union with God.

1. **The Vigil (Wake):** A gathering of the community for prayer and support. For a Secular Franciscan, this may include a specific “Service for a Secular Franciscan who has gone to God”. The “Canticle of Creature/Creation” may be included, as St. Francis wrote this before his own death.
2. **The Funeral Liturgy (Mass):** The central celebration that reaffirms the belief in resurrection. The homily focuses on the Paschal Mystery—the death and resurrection of Christ—rather than serving as a eulogy.
3. **The Rite of Committal:** The final act of committing the body or cremated remains to its resting place. It is a moment for final goodbyes and expressing hope in the resurrection.

(Continued – Suggestions about the Funeral and Wake Service)

Emphasis on simplicity: The Franciscan tradition prioritizes simplicity and humility. This might be reflected in a preference for a simple casket and a funeral service that focuses on prayer rather than lavish displays. It is common to see that simple pine coffins are chosen, or simple urns if one is cremated.

Symbolism of resurrection: The service uses several symbols to represent the hope of new life, including:

- A white garment (pall) placed over the casket to symbolize the deceased's baptism. The Tau Cross, San Domiano Cross, Cross Arm Tau Cross, or other Franciscan symbol may be displayed.
- The use of holy water and incense.
- The placement of the Paschal Candle near the casket.

Use of eulogies: While eulogies are discouraged during the Funeral Mass, family members or friends may offer brief, approved remembrances either after Holy Communion or during the Vigil Service/Wake.

Burial and cremation

- Burial preference: The Catholic Church still recommends the custom of burying the body as a sign of faith in the resurrection.

Cremation is permitted: The Church allows cremation as long as it is not chosen for reasons contrary to Christian teaching. However, the cremated remains must be treated with the same reverence as a body.

- Proper interment of ashes: Cremated remains are not to be scattered or kept in a home. They should be buried in a sacred place like a cemetery or placed in a columbarium.

How to plan

Many Franciscan communities, like the Secular Franciscan Order, have specific funeral resources or services. To properly arrange a funeral according to these customs, a family should work with a local Catholic parish or a Franciscan friary and the deceased's Secular Franciscan Fraternity to ensure the rites are conducted appropriately.

Rita Colleran, OFS
Regional Formation Director

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

Wake Service for Deceased Member



Below is a suggested format for a Wake Service. Please feel free to personalize it as needed for the deceased and those concerned.

Minister: "Welcome, my sister Death! "With these words, our Seraphic Father, St. Francis, indicated his disposition toward that which causes fear and sorrow among much of the human family. The reality and tragedy of death cannot be ignored on the human level, and yet, as Christians, we believe that death has "lost its sting" through the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. As Franciscans, we believe even more strongly that "it is in dying that we are born to eternal life."

In view of this faith stance, death takes on an entirely new meaning. Thus, we celebrate the passing of a brother/sister to a new and more fruitful life in the company of the saints. While we express our feelings of loss, we continue to hope and trust in the promises of Christ. Death teaches us to cling to the cross of the Lord with the knowledge that having "been conformed with Him in His death, we will be conformed with Him in His resurrection from death. (Cf. Phil 3:10-11)

For our father Francis, life was to search and strive for union with Christ through faith. Death was for him not a harsh reality, but the door through which he passed toward his ultimate goal, total union with the Father. What Francis sought through faith on earth, he achieved totally after death. The celebration of the death of a Franciscan shows forth the same faith as that which Francis possessed: our belief that death is the gateway to total union with God.

Minister: In the name of the Lord, Amen. Grace and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

All: May God be praised for His mercy to us, and may we experience His consolation now in our sorrow and be strengthened and enabled to share His love with all people.

(*The placing of the Secular Franciscan Order Rule Book*)

Minister: Our brother/sister was washed clean in baptism and nourished with the Body and Blood of the Lord in the Eucharist. As a Secular Franciscan, he/she was united more closely with the Lord and with us through the observance of our way of life. As he/she strove to follow this Rule of Life, may the Lord now take him/her to Himself and grant him/her a place among His saints in glory.



Hymn: Prayer of St. Francis - (All are invited to sing)

1. Make me a channel of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring Your love.
Where there is injury, Your pardon, Lord. And where there's doubt, true faith in You.
2. Make me a channel of Your peace. Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope.
Where there is darkness, only light, and where there's sadness, ever joy.
3. Oh, Master, grant that I may never seek, so much to be consoled as to console. To
be understood as to understand. To be loved as to love with all my soul.
4. Make me a channel of Your peace. It is in pardoning that we are pardoned. In
giving of ourselves that we receive, and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

Minister: As we contemplate the mystery of death and how it has affected our fraternity in the passing of our brother/sister, let us listen to the account of our father Francis passing to the Lord.

Reader: (*From the Major Life of St. Francis by Brother Bonaventure.*)

As the moment of his death drew near, the saint had all the friars who were there called to his side; he spoke to them gently with fatherly affection, consoling them for his death and exhorting them to love God.

He mentioned especially poverty and patient endurance and the necessity of holding to the faith of the holy Roman Church and gave the Gospel preeminence over any other rule of life. The friars were grouped about him, and he stretched out his arms over them in the form of a cross, because he loved that sign, and blessed all the friars, both present and absent, in the power and in the name of the Crucified. Then he added, "I bid you goodbye, all you my sons, in the fear of God. Remain in Him always. There will be trials and temptations in the future, and it is well for those who persevere in the life they have undertaken. I am on my way to God, and I commend you all to His favor." When he had finished his inspiring admonition, he told them to bring a book of the Gospels and asked to have the passage of St. John read, which begins, "Before the Pascal feast began." Then, as best he could, he intoned the psalm, "Loud is my cry to the Lord, the prayer I utter for the Lord's mercy," and recited it all down to the last verse. Too long have honest hearts waited to see You grant me redress."

At last, when all God's mysteries had been accomplished in him, his holy soul was freed from his body and assumed into the abyss of God's glory, and Francis fell asleep in God.

One of the friars, a disciple of his, saw his soul being borne on a white cloud over many waters to heaven, under the appearance of a radiant star. It shone with the brightness of sublime sanctity, full of the abundance of divine wisdom and grace which had earned for him the right to enter the home of light and peace, where he rests with Christ forever.

(A period of silent reflection)

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

Most High, all-powerful, all good, Lord! All praise is Yours, all glory, all honor, and all blessing. To You alone, Most High, do they belong. No mortal lips are worthy to pronounce Your name.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through all that You have made, and first my Lord Brother Sun, who brings the day; and light You give us through him. How beautiful is he, how radiant in all his splendor! Of You, Most High, he bears the likeness.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Moon and Stars; in the heavens You have made them bright and precious and fair. All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Brothers Wind and Air, and fair and stormy, all the weathers' moods, by which You cherish all that You have made.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Water, so useful, lowly, precious and pure. All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Brother Fire, through whom You brighten up the night. How beautiful is he, how joyful! Full of power and strength.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Earth, our mother, who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

All praise be Yours, my Lord, through those who grant pardon for love of You, through those who endure sickness and trial. Happy those who endure in peace, by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Reader:

Woe to those who die in mortal sin! Happy those she finds doing Your will! The second death cannot harm them. Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks, and serve Him with great humility.

All: All praise be Yours, my Lord, through Sister Death, from whose embrace no mortal can escape.

Gospel Reading: Matthew 5 1-12 - **The Sermon on the Mount:**

Jesus saw the crowds and went up on a hill, where He sat down. His disciples gathered around Him, and He began to teach them:

“Happy are those who are spiritually poor; the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to them!”

“Happy are those who mourn; God will comfort them!”

“Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!”

“Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; God will satisfy them fully!”

“Happy are those who are merciful to others; God will be merciful to them!”

“Happy are the pure in heart; they will see God!”

“Happy are those who work for peace: God will call them His children!”

“Happy are those who are persecuted for my sake; the Kingdom of heaven belongs to them!”

(A period of silence)

Minister: (General Intercessions)

The Lord Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in Me, even if they die, will live, and every living person who puts faith in Me will never suffer eternal death.

Let us pray to Him for our brother/sister _____. Lord Jesus, you raise those who sleep in death to life. Give _____, our brother/sister Life Eternal.

All: Lord, have mercy

Minister: You washed our brother/sister clean in the waters of baptism and sealed him/ her with the seal of the Holy Spirit. Bring him/her to a place of light and refreshment in Your Kingdom.

All: Lord, have mercy

Minister: Our brother/sister was fed with Your Body and Blood, may he/she find a place at the table with You at the heavenly banquet.

All: Lord, have mercy.

Minister: Our brother/sister was united with us in the Franciscan Family. Grant him/her all that was promised by our father Francis.

All: Lord, have mercy

Minister: Remember us, Lord, when You come into Your Kingdom and teach us to pray.

Our Father, Who art in heaven, Amen.

Minister: Lord Jesus Christ, we trust in You, and hope in Your glorious resurrection. Hear our prayers for our brother/sister _____, whom You have called to Yourself and grant him/her eternal life. We praise and glorify You who live in perfect Trinity and simple Unity with the Father and the Holy Spirit forever and ever.

All: Amen

Minister: Before we take leave of our brother/sister _____ for the last time, let us bless him/her with the Blessing of St. Francis.

(All raise your right hand toward the casket together, pray)

All: May the Lord bless you and keep you. May He show His face to you and be merciful to you. May He turn His countenance to you and give you peace. May the Lord bless you, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen

Minister: Our prayer for our brother/sister _____ has ended. Let us go now, and until that time when the Lord shall gather us all into His kingdom, let us live in His peace.

All: Thanks be to God

A booklet format of this wake service can be found at:

<https://saintmargaretofcortona.org/franciscan-wake-service-2/>

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.¹
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 Order² 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.³
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.⁴
5. The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church.⁵ 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.

¹ See Can. 210; 214; *Lumen Gentium* 40.

² 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."

³ 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.

⁴ See *General Constitutions SFO* [85.2](#). When the Constitutions are cited without any other specification, the reference is to the present text.

⁵ 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;⁶
 - 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.⁷

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.⁸

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.

⁶ See Can 225, and the Discourse of Pope John Paul II to the SFO, September 27, 1982 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, September 28, 1982.

⁷ See Can. 275 ff, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 12; 14; 15 ff.

⁸ 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,⁹ 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 Spirit¹⁰.

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.

⁹ See *Rule of 1221*, Chapt. 22; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 51.

¹⁰ 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."¹¹

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.¹²

¹¹ *Rule* of 1223, Chapt. 10.

¹² *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.¹³
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 Hours¹⁴.
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

¹³ See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff.

¹⁴ *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.¹⁵ 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.¹⁶

¹⁵ *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.*

¹⁶ 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 witness¹⁷ 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"¹⁸ 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.¹⁹
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.

¹⁷ See *Rule* 1221, 17,3; *Legend of the Three Companions* 36; *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 53.

¹⁸ [Lumen Gentium](#) 35.

¹⁹ 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.²⁰

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.

²⁰ 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.²¹ 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.

²¹ 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"²² 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.²³

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.

²² *Apostolicam actusositatem* 30.

²³ 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.²⁴
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.²⁵

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.

²⁴ See Constitutions 3.3; *Testament* 14.

²⁵ 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.²⁶
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.²⁷ 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.

²⁶ See Can. 316.

²⁷ 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.²⁸
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.²⁹
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 each³⁰ 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.

²⁸ See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 18.

²⁹ See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 13 ff.; Part I, Chapter II.

³⁰ 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.³¹
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 reposess any remaining goods, its own library, and records.

³¹ 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.³²
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;³³
 - 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

³² See [Constitutions 90.2](#).

³³ 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.³⁴
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;³⁵
 - 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:

³⁴ See [Constitutions 81.1](#).

³⁵ 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 month 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 Church³⁶ 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.

³⁶ 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 Ritual³⁷ 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.

³⁷ 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 TOR³⁸.
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.

³⁸ 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.³⁹
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 circumstances⁴⁰.
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.

³⁹ Cfr. [Constitutions 51.1c; 63.2g; 67.2g](#).

⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹ 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 functioning⁴².
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

⁴¹ Lumen Gentium 12.

⁴² Christus Dominus 11; Can. 396; See 2 Celano 10; 1 Celano 18.

as well as to the social activities existing in the diocese.⁴³ 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 co-ordinators of the various forms of apostolate in the local Church.⁴⁴
2. The fraternities are subject to the vigilance of the Ordinary in so far as they perform their activities within the local Churches.⁴⁵

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

⁴³ See Can. 311.

⁴⁴ See Can. 394; 756; 775 ss.

⁴⁵ 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

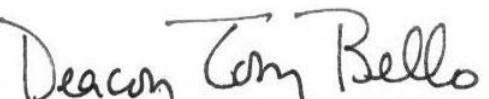
1. These *National Statutes* may be amended by two-thirds vote of the National Fraternity Council provided that a copy of the proposed amendment is distributed to the National Fraternity Council at least 60 days before the vote on said amendment is to be taken.
2. All such amendments are subject to the approval of the Presidency of CIOFS.

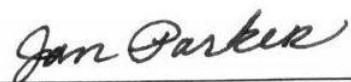
ATTESTED AS APPROVED ON OCTOBER 18, 2002 BY THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY COUNCIL, SFO-USA.

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 BI 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 "Memorale 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.

