

**THE RULE,
GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS
AND RITUAL
OF
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
2001**

[Rule](#)

[Constitutions](#)

**The General Constitutions are also available in [Portuguese](#), [Polish](#),
[Vietnamese](#), and [Korean](#)**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I: The Secular Franciscan Order (Art. 1-7)	1
Chapter II: Form of Life and Apostolic Activity (Art. 8-27)	3
Title I: The Form of Life (Art. 8-16)	3
Title II: Active Presence in the Church and in the World (Art. 17-27)	6
For a Just and Fraternal Society (Art. 18-23)	6
In the Family (Art. 24-25)	8
Messengers of Joy and Hope (Art 26-27)	8
Chapter III: Life in Fraternity (Art 28-103)	10
Title I: General Orientations (Art. 28-36)	10
Title II: Entrance into the Order and Formation (Art. 37-45)	13
The Time of Initiation (Art. 38)	13
Admission to the Order (Art. 39)	13
The Time of Formation (Art. 40)	14
The Profession or Promise of Evangelical Life (Art. 41-43)	14
Continuing Formation (Art. 44)	15
Promotion of Vocations (Art. 45)	15
Title III: The Fraternity at Various Levels (Art. 46-75)	16
The Local Fraternity (Art. 46-48)	16
The Fraternity Council (Art. 49-50)	16
The Offices in the Fraternity (Art. 51-52)	17
Participation in the Life of the Fraternity (Art. 53-54)	18
Transfer (Art. 55)	19
Temporary Provisions (Art. 56-57)	19
Definitive Provisions (Art. 58-60)	19
The Regional Fraternity (Art. 61-64)	20
The National Fraternity (Art. 65-68)	21
The International Fraternity (Art. 69-75)	22
Title IV: Election to and Termination of Offices (Art.76-84)	25
Elections (Art. 76-80)	25
Vacant Offices (Art. 81)	26
Incompatible Offices (Art. 82)	26
Resignation of Office (Art. 83)	27
Removal (Art. 84)	27
Title V: Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance of the SFO (Art. 85-91)	28
Title VI: The Fraternal Visit and the Pastoral Visit (Art. 92-95)	31
The Fraternal Visit (Art. 93)	31
The Pastoral Visit (Art. 94-95)	32
Title VII: The Franciscan Youth (Art. 96-97)	33
Title VIII: In Communion with the Franciscan Family and the Church (Art. 98-103)	34

RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Translation approved by the Franciscan General Ministers
in their meeting of March 19, 1979.

LETTER OF THE FOUR MINISTERS GENERAL OF THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

To the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order
on the occasion of granting the rule approved for them by the Holy See

We joyfully inform you that the Holy See, by means of the Apostolic Letter *Seraphicus Patriarcha*, dated 24 June, 1978 and “under the ring of the Fisherman,” has approved the revised Rule of the Franciscan Secular Order which abrogates and takes the place of the preceding Rule of Pope Leo XIII.

It is to Pope Paul VI that we owe this splendid gift, which he bestowed shortly before he left this earth. He loved you. Many times, indeed, he demonstrated his love for the Secular Franciscan Order and addressed to you unforgettable words, as in June of 1968 and in 1971 on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of *Memoriale Propositi*.

Since March 7, 1966, when the Sacred Congregation for Religious granted permission to begin updating legislation for the Secular Franciscan Order, the journey has been long and arduous.

We wish to underscore the work accomplished by the brothers and sisters and by the fraternities through the National Councils, through such publications as *Way of Life* and *Journeys*, and by the tireless work of the Presidency of the International Council since its establishment in 1973.

Such work was of primary importance in seeking the ways of the Spirit and most efficacious in recognising the presence and the vitality of the Franciscan charism in the people of God in our day.

The Rule that we present to you today is not only the fruit of this labour. The Church consigns it to you as a norm of life.

Notice first its evangelical content; welcome the Franciscan message that it contains and the guidance it offers you in living according to the holy Gospel.

The hope of renewal hinges upon returning to the origins and to the spiritual experience of Francis of Assisi and of the brothers and sisters of penance who received from him their inspiration and guidance. It is this that accounts for the inclusion of the *Letter to the Faithful (recensio prior)* as a prologue, as well as the constant references to the teaching and example of St. Francis. This renewal also depends upon openness to the Spirit in the signs of the times.

Supported by this foundation, you should put into practice the invitation of the Rule to be creative and exercise co-responsibility.

This creativity, in certain cases, should express itself in the forms of statutes. Indeed, number 3 of the Rule states as a general norm: “Its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.”

We, the Franciscan Ministers, with all our Friars are ever ready and open to offer you all our assistance so that we may walk together in the way of the Lord.

With these sentiments we are pleased to present the revised Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order to the Presidency of the International Council and through this Council to all secular Franciscans who will receive it as a norm of life.

Rome, October 4, 1978.

Fr. Constantine Koser, OFM, Min. Gen.

Fr. Vitale M. Bonmmarco, OFMConv., Min. Gen.

Fr. Paschal Rywalski, OFMCap., Min. Gen.

Fr. Roland Faley, TOR, Min. Gen.

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order
is Approved and Confirmed
Pope Paul VI

In perpetual remembrance — The Seraphic Patriarch Saint Francis of Assisi, during his life and even after his beautiful death, not only attracted many to serve God in the religious family founded by him but also drew numerous members of the laity to enter his communities while remaining in the world as far as possible. Moreover, to use the words of our predecessor Pius IX: “it seems . . . that there was never anyone in whom there shone forth more vividly and who resembled more the image of Jesus Christ and the evangelical form of life than Francis. Accordingly he who was called the *Herald of the Great King*, was rightly hailed as *Another Christ* for he presented himself to his contemporaries and to future ages as Christ returned to life. Consequently, he still lives as such in the eyes of men and will continue to live for all ages to come.” (Encycl. *Rite Expiatis*, April 30, 1926: AAS, 18, 1936, p. 154). We are happy that the “Franciscan Charism” today is still a force for the good of the Church and the human community, despite the infiltration of doctrines and tendencies that alienate people from God and from the supernatural. With praiseworthy initiative and with common accord the four Franciscan families have striven for ten years to prepare a new Rule for the Franciscan Third Order Secular, or as it is now called, the Secular Franciscan Order. This was necessary because of the changed conditions of the times and because of the teaching and encouragement given them by the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, our dearly beloved Sons, the four Ministers General of the Franciscan Order, have requested that we approve the Rule presented to us. Following the example of some of our predecessors, the latest being Pope Leo XIII, we have willingly decided to grant their request. In this way, we nurture the hope that the form of life preached by that admirable man of Assisi will gain a new impetus and will flourish vigorously. Having consulted with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which has diligently examined and carefully evaluated the text, we approve and confirm with our apostolic authority and sanction the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, provided that it agrees with the copy in the archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, beginning with the words “The Franciscan Family” and ending with “according to the norms of the Constitutions.” By this Letter and our apostolic authority, we abrogate the previous Rule of what was formerly called the Franciscan Third Order. Finally we decree that this letter remain in effect now and in the future, regardless of anything contrary.

Given at Rome at St. Peter’s, under the ring of the Fisherman, on June 24, 1978, the 16th year of our pontificate.

John Cardinal Villot
Secretary of State.

Prologue: Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance

In the name of the Lord!

Chapter One

Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. *Mk.* 12,30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. *Mt.* 22,39) 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” (cf. *Is.* 11,2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. *Jn.* 14,23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (cf. *Mt.* 5,45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Mt.* 12,50).

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 fulfil “the will of the Father who is in heaven” (*Mt.* 12,50).

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. *I Cor.* 6,20) 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 (cf. *Mt.* 5,15).

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, loveable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. *Jn.* 10,15) and prayed to the Father saying:

"Oh holy Father, protect them with your name (cf. *Jn.* 17,11) whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours and you gave them to me (*Jn.* 17,6). 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 (cf. *Jn.* 17,9). 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 (cf. *Jn.* 17,20) that they may be holy by being one as we are (cf. *Jn.* 17,11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom (cf. *Jn.* 17,24; *Mt.* 20,21)."

Chapter Two

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 (cf. *Jn.* 8,41); slaves of the devil whose sons they are and whose works they do.

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” (*Ps.* 107,27) and “cursed are those who turn away from your commands” (*Ps.* 119,21). 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 (cf. *Mk.* 7,21). 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” (2 *Chr.* 1,12) which they thought they had will be taken away from them (cf. *Lk.* 8,18; *Mk.* 4,25), 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 (cf. *Jn.* 4,16) 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” (*Jn.* 6,64).

And those who will not do this will have to render “an account on the day of judgement” (cf. *Mt.* 12,36) before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom.* 14,10).

Translated by Marion A. Habig, OFM

Chapter One

The Secular Franciscan Order¹

1. The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church², 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 Assisi³. 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 Church⁴.
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 Church⁵.
3. The present rule, succeeding *Memoriale Propositi* (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

Chapter Two

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 people⁶. 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 abundantly⁷. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel⁸.
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.

¹ Also known as the Secular Franciscan Fraternity or, its earlier designation, the Franciscan Third Order, with the initials T.O.F.

² Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 43

³ Pius XII, Discourse to the Tertiaries, 1/7/1956

⁴ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

⁵ Can. 702,1 [314]

⁶ *I Celano* 18,115

⁷ *Jn.* 3,16; 14,6

⁸ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30

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 creativity⁹.

7. United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance”¹⁰, 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 daily¹¹.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace¹².

8. As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do¹³.

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 family¹⁴. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently¹⁵.

10. Uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfil the duties proper to their various circumstances of life¹⁶. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions¹⁷.

11. Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life¹⁸, 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 power¹⁹.

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 sisters²⁰.

⁹ Paul VI, Discourse to the Tertiaries, 19/5/1971

¹⁰ First Rule – T.O.F.

¹¹ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 8; Decree on Ecumenism, 4; Const. Ap. “Paenitemini”, preamble

¹² Vatican II, Decree on Priestly Ministry, 18

¹³ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

¹⁴ 2 *Celano*, 198

¹⁵ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 67; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

¹⁶ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41

¹⁷ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 42

¹⁸ First Letter of St. Francis, 5

¹⁹ *Rom.* 8,17; Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 7

13. As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters²¹, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ²².

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 Christ²³.

14. Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, 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 service²⁴.

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 faith²⁵.

16. Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community²⁶.

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 Christ²⁷.

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 child²⁸.

18. Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High”²⁹, 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 pardon³⁰.

Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others³¹.

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 Father³².

²⁰ Admonitions of St. Francis, 16; First Letter, 70

²¹ *Rom.* 8,29

²² 2 *Celano* 85; First Letter, 26; First Rule, 7,13

²³ First Rule, 9,3; *Mt.* 25,40

²⁴ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 31; Const. Church in the Modern World, 93

²⁵ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 14

²⁶ Vatican II, Church in the Modern World, 67; First Rule 7,4; Second Rule, 5,1

²⁷ Rule of Leo XIII, II,8

²⁸ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30

²⁹ 1 *Celano* 80

³⁰ Rule of Leo XIII, II,9; Legend of the Three Companions 14,58

³¹ Admonitions of St. Francis, 21; First Rule, 7,15

³² Vatican II, Const. on Church in Modern World, 78

Chapter III

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 Church³³. These various fraternities are co-ordinated 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 constitutions³⁴. 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 members³⁵.

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 sisters³⁶. 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 rule³⁷. 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 statutes³⁸. Profession by its nature is a permanent commitment³⁹. 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 constitutions⁴⁰.

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 fraternity⁴¹. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them⁴².

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 councils⁴³.

³³ Can. 687 [309]

³⁴ Can. 697 [309]

³⁵ Pius XII, Discourse to the Tertiaries 1/7/1956

³⁶ Can 694 [307]

³⁷ First Rule of T.O.F., 29-30

³⁸ *I Celano* 22

³⁹ First Rule of T.O.F., 31

⁴⁰ Canon 696 [308]

⁴¹ Canon 697 [309]

⁴² First Rule of T.O.F., 23

⁴³ First Rule of T.O.F., 20

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 constitutions⁴⁴.

“And 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.”

(Blessing of St. Francis – Testament)

⁴⁴ Second Rule of T.O.F., c. 16

**GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS
OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

CONGREGATION
FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Prot. n. T. 144-1/2000

DECREE

The Conference of General Ministers of the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular has presented to the Apostolic See for approval, the text of the Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, previously approved by the General Chapter of the same Secular Franciscan Order, celebrated in the month of October 1999.

After careful examination of the above mentioned text of the Constitutions, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, by this present Decree *approves and confirms the text*, according to the copy written in Italian, conserved in its Archives, all requirements of law being observed.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Vatican, December 8, 2000,
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Eduardo Card. Martínez Somalo
Prefect

+ Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti, C.P.
Secretary

LETTER OF THE CONFERENCE OF GENERAL MINISTERS OF THE FIRST ORDER AND THE TOR

Rome, January 1, 2001
Feast of Mary, mother of God

Dear Sister Emanuela,
the Lord give you peace!

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has on December 8, 2000, issued the Decree (Prot. n. T. 144-1/2000) of approval of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, as revised by the General Chapter of the SFO at Madrid in October 1999 and subsequently submitted by the President of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

Now, also in name of the other general Ministers, I am entrusting the approved text of the Constitutions to you, and through you, to all brothers and sisters of the SFO. The common vocation of the whole Franciscan family, from its very beginning in the overpowering spiritual experience of Francis and Clare, is "to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel". The Constitutions reveal themselves to be an ever more important help to incarnate this one vocation in the rich variety of its manifold expressions, wherever and whenever the Lord sends us. They are not just "one more document" or the final stage of a journey, but an essential and dynamic instrument helping us to delineate our identity and to structure progressively our life and our vocation as Franciscans. The work of reflection and revision by so many brothers and sisters all over the world and the approval by Holy mother Church, commit us to make these Constitutions the central axis of our life's project according to the gospel.

In name of the Church and of the general Ministers, I express this wish to all Secular Franciscans: that you may be convincing witnesses of the evangelic fire which inflamed the whole existence of Francis and Clare of Assisi, and made them models of a fully given and thus completely realized life.

Your brother,

Giacomo Bini, ofm
President of the
Conference of General Ministers
of the First Order and the TOR

PROMULGATION OF THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Rome, 6th February 2001

Circ. 21/96-02

To the national Councils of the SFO
To the international Councilors of the SFO

Object: Promulgation of the amended general Constitutions
approved by the Decree of the Congregation for ICLSAL
of the 8th of December 2000.

Dear brothers and sisters,

the general Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, intended to apply the renewed Rule of 1978, were approved by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life through the Decree of the 8th of September 1990, for six years in order to be tried out. Before the end of this period, the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO, through the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and TOR, asked for an extension of the time of trial, taking into account the time necessary to translate the Constitutions into the other official languages of the International Fraternity and, then, into the languages of each country. The Congregation acceded to the request and conceded an extension of three years.

During this period of time, the Constitutions have been studied and put into practice by the Fraternities of the SFO on all levels and, little by little, have marked them with the characteristics of the *secularity, unity and autonomy* of our Order. Not all has been easy and some aspects have still to be assimilated fully in order that, at the dawn of the Third Millennium, the SFO should really become “an army that can be in the vanguard in the Church and in the world to build a more human and Christian society” as Cardinal Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for ICLSAL wished in 1990.

The experience gained has shown the substantial validity of the general Constitutions of 1990 and only some aspects required revision. The work which had to be done was started in time by the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO and was carried out through ample consultation involving all the national Fraternities and international Counsellors as well as the Presidency itself and some experts belonging to the SFO or assigned by the Franciscan General Ministers.

In the General Chapter of Madrid (23-31st October 1999) a text was proposed that gathered and co-ordinated the suggestions and petitions received, and also presented alternative proposals when there was no possibility of finding an univocal formulation from among those that the national Fraternities had expressed. The text presented to the Chapter was inspired by the following criteria:

- adhesion to the common law and the law proper to the SFO,
- respect for the text approved in 1990 by the Holy See,
- organizational flexibility,
- cultural and linguistic adaptability.

The General Chapter has attentively and profoundly examined the text presented, together with the oral and written interventions made during the work of the Chapter.

The result of the discussions and votes cast, article by article and on each of the amendments, was presented on the 21st of December 1999 to the Conference of the Franciscan General Ministers who, after a final revision by experts in canon law of the four Curia's, forwarded the text on the 1st of August 2000 to the Congregation for ICLSAL for approval. The Congregation has approved the text by the decree bearing the date of the 8th of December 2000, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

And now, brothers and sisters of the SFO, on the 6th of February 2001, the approved General Constitutions are promulgated and consequently should be observed from the 6th of March 2001. It rests on each one of us to ensure that they are “spirit and life”, an instrument of consolidation and growth of our Order so that with full sail (“Duc in altum”), we can go on with hope, according to the exhortation given by the Holy Father to all Christians with the Apostolic Letter “Novo Millennio ineunte” at the end of the Great Jubilee of 2000. We also, secular Franciscans, are called to be witnesses, that is to say, martyrs for Christ, in the original meaning of the word, during the new millennium.

It wasn't by chance that we chose the date of the 6th of February for the promulgation of the amended General Constitutions. On this date we commemorate the Proto-martyrs of Japan, witnesses per excellence, with 17 Franciscan Tertiaries crucified in Nagasaki, along with Peter Baptist, Paul Miki and their other companions. We know very little about these distant brothers of ours, apart from their unwavering will to remain firm in faith, to continue witnessing to the Gospel by their very lives, whatever the cost.

During the past century there have also been secular Franciscans who have manifested, with the sacrifice of their lives, their fidelity to baptism and resistance to evil, anchored in the faith. We remember our brother Ceferino Giménez Malla, victim of the persecution of religion during the Spanish civil war (1936-1939), who was beatified on the 4th of May 1997. We remember the Servant of God Frantisek Nosek, a politician from Bohemia and a secular Franciscan, another victim of communist violence. We also remember Juvénal Kabera, Minister of the SFO Fraternity of Kigali, assassinated during the massacres of the tribal wars in Rwanda. These are only some examples, but for them also the recent words of the Holy father remain true: “It has been thanks especially to the brave witness of lay faithful, not seldom to the point of martyrdom, that the faith has not disappeared from the lives of entire peoples”.

Perhaps we will not be asked to give witness by shedding our blood, but we will certainly be asked to give witness by being coherent and firm in the fulfillment of our baptismal promises, renewed and re-affirmed through profession in the SFO. In virtue of our Profession, the Rule and the application that the General Constitutions make of it represent for each one of us the point of reference for daily experience, beginning with a specific vocation and precise identity. On this basis we need to re-shape our existence and find a project of life (Franciscan evangelical radicalism) and a place of Church communion (the Fraternity), in which it should be possible for us to “learn the purpose and the way of living, loving, and suffering” (*Const*, art 10).

With this desire, the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO, having received the approved General Constitutions, transmits them to the whole Order so that, as with the Rule, they be studied, loved and lived.

Emanuela De Nunzio
Minister General of the SFO

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 Church³.
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 Law⁴.
5. The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church⁵. 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.
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).

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.

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 activities⁶;
 - for the secular clergy, by offering to the people of God the service which is properly theirs, in communion with the bishop and the presbytery⁷.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 seat⁸.

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.

Article 6

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.

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 4,3* 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 4,3* 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.

Article 11

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

¹⁰ See *Dei verbum* 10.

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 God¹².
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 sisters¹³.

¹¹ *Rule of 1223*, Chapt. 10.

¹² *Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda* 22 ff.

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

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 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.

¹⁴ *Ritual SFO*, Appendix 26, 27.

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 her¹⁵.
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 love¹⁶.

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 realities¹⁹.
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.
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

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.*

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 exclusions 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 time²⁰.

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.
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.

²⁰ See *Gaudium et Spes* 67; *Laborem exercens* 16 ff.

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 love²¹. 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.
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

²¹ See *Gaudium et Spes* 78.

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 creatures²³.

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 actuositatem* 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 communion²⁴.
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 establishment²⁵.

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.

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.

²⁴ See *Constitutions* 3,3; *Testament* 14.

²⁵ See Can. 518.

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 vocation²⁶.

²⁶ See Can. 316.

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 Ritual²⁷. 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 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.
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

²⁷ See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 10 ff.; Chapt. I.

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 years²⁸.
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 Ritual²⁹.
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.
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;

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.

- 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 repossess any remaining goods, its own library, and records.

The Fraternity Council

³¹ See Can. 312.

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 right³².
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 sisters³³;
 - 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 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 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:

³² See *Constitutions* 90,2.

³³ See *Constitutions* 39, 3; 41, 1.

- 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 vacant³⁴.
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 fraternity³⁵;
 - 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.

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.

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 characterises 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, possibly 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 request 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 exonerate the council of the local fraternity from discussing the matter with the person concerned and offering 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 co-ordinated 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 co-ordinate 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 be represented in the international council and to assume the responsibility for the expenses involved;
- h. to discuss and approve the annual report to 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 co-ordinate 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 regional 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 harmonise 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 fulfil 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 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 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.
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.

³⁶ See Can. 164 ff.

Article 78

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 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 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 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.

Vacant Offices

Article 81

³⁷ See *Ritual SFO*, Part II, Chapt. II.

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 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 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, if necessary, 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 possibility of 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, co-ordination, 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 foster the interest of their own religious in the SFO and ensure that suitable and well-prepared persons are appointed for the service of spiritual assistance.
2. It is the specific competence of the major superiors, in 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 authorisation 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 a general assistant from the respective general minister;
 - b. the national council requests a 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 an 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 an 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 an 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 possibly 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 vocation³⁹.
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 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 spiritual 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 realise their apostolic commitment, aware that in the diocese the Church of Christ is truly functioning⁴².
2. The secular Franciscans should fulfil with dedication the duties with which they are occupied in their relations to the local Church. They should lend their help to activities of the apostolate 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

⁴¹ *Lumen Gentium* 12.

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

⁴³ See Can. 311.

of the diocese. They should be ready to collaborate with other ecclesial groups and to participate in pastoral councils.

3. Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and the witness of building fraternity sincerely and openly are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love. They should be recognized in it by their "being", from which their mission springs.

Article 101

1. The secular Franciscans should collaborate with the bishops and follow their directions in so far as they are the moderators of the ministry of the Word and of the Liturgy and the coordinators of the various forms of apostolate in the local Church⁴⁴.
2. The fraternities are subject to the vigilance of the Ordinary in so far as they perform their activities within the local Churches⁴⁵.

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.

⁴⁴ See Can. 394; 756; 775 ss.

⁴⁵ See Can. 305; 392.

RITUAL OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

English translation approved August 5, 1985 by the
Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship
Prot. 956/85
+ Vergilius Noè
Tit. Archb. of Voncaria
Secretary

SACRA CONGREGATIO
PRO SACRAMENTIS
ET CULTU DIVINO

Prot. n. CD 1615/85

**THE FRANCISCAN FAMILIES
OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

At the request of Very Reverend Father José Angulo, Minister General of the Third Order Regular of St Francis, in the name of the Ministers General of the Franciscan Families and of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, by letters issued on the 5th day of *October 1983*, by Virtue of the faculties given to this sacred Congregation by the Supreme Pontiff JOHN PAUL II, we gladly approve or confirm the text of the Ritual of the *Secular* Franciscan Order written in the Latin language and attached to this Decree.

The confirmation granted by the Apostolic See is to be mentioned in the printed text. Moreover, two samples of the same printed text are to be forwarded to this Sacred Congregation.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the offices of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, on the 9th day of March, 1984, in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption.

(Joseph Card. Casoria)
Prefect

+ Vergilius Noè
Tit. Archb. of Voncaria
Secretary

Part I:

Rites for Entering the Secular Franciscan Order

Preface

I. The Nature of Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order

1. Many men and women, married and single, and many members of the diocesan clergy are called by God to follow the way of perfection of the gospel life after the example and manner of Francis of Assisi, to share his charism, and to make it present in the world. They promise to follow Jesus Christ and to live the gospel in fraternity by entering the Secular Franciscan Order. In this way they manifest the priceless gift of baptism and realise it in a fuller and more fruitful way.

2. The Church has always esteemed highly this form of life prompted by the Holy Spirit “for the good of the Church and the human community”¹. By means of the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV, Leo XIII and Paul VI, the Church has made sure that this form of life is suitably adapted to her needs and expectations in the conditions of changing times.

3. The Secular Franciscans, gathered together in fraternity and in oneness of spirit with all the People of God, celebrate the mystery of salvation, revealed and communicated to us in Christ, with prayers and thanksgiving, and by renewing their commitment to a new life.

II. The Normative Nature of the SFO Ritual and its Adaptation

4. The Constitution “Sacrosanctum Concilium” states: “Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is maintained, the revision of liturgical books should allow for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands”². In accord with this criterion, the Secular Franciscan fraternities scattered throughout the whole world, conscious that experience itself has a specific value, want to continue to bring to completion in any people and in any given culture the mystery of the Incarnate Word, the Saviour of all people.

5. The rites and prayers presented in these celebrations are inspired by the traditions of the Secular Franciscan fraternity and by the rituals being used experimentally in the various nations. They need to be adapted to the mentality and to the different circumstances of the fraternities scattered in so many parts of the world.

6. It is the task of the SFO National Councils particularly to carry out this work of adaptation.

The rites which refer to admission and profession are to be taken as normative with regard to the essential elements which will be indicated as such in each rite.

¹ PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter “Seraphicus Patriarcha” (24 June 1978), in AAS 70(1978)454.

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy “Sacrosanctum Concilium”, n. 38.

7. The SFO Ritual should manifest the gift of the Spirit proper to the Secular Franciscan Order and also its commitment to the gospel life, in a way that is suitable for any nation and in any cultural context.

On the one hand, this implies the assimilation of the valid cultural elements of each region, and, on the other hand, it presumes fidelity to the Secular Franciscan vocation and to its universality, that is, to unity among all the fraternities with the Church.

III. The Rites that Accompany the Steps of SFO Life

8. The steps by which the new members and the candidates are incorporated into the Secular Franciscan Order after a time of inquiry and preparation are the time of formation of at least one year; and profession of the rule or commitment to the gospel life. The renewal of profession is added to these.

The whole fraternity is involved in this gradual journey.

9. Through the priest and the president (minister), who represents the fraternity, the Church accepts the commitment and the profession of those who profess the life and rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. By her public prayer the Church entreats the help and grace of God for them. She imparts her blessing over them, and accompanies their commitment or profession with the eucharistic sacrifice.

1. Rite of Admission

10. The rite of admission, which precedes the time of formation, should be simple and plain. It is appropriate that this entrance take place within the celebration of the Word of God with the fraternity present.

11. The elements that should be clearly and evidently highlighted for the candidate are the following:

- a. the request and the will to experience the gospel life, like Francis of Assisi;
- b. having in mind that the request is related to a possible future commitment to live this way of life, with the help of a fraternity, in communion and harmony with the whole Franciscan Family.

12. Present at this rite are:

- a. the candidates;
- b. a priest who is SFO spiritual assistant or the superior of a Franciscan religious community to which the secular fraternity is especially connected and who presides over the liturgical rite. In case of necessity another priest can be delegated.
- c. the president (minister) of the fraternity who receives the new members in the name of the fraternity council³. The president (minister) should occupy a significant place in the celebration to bring out the meaning of the office.
- d. the formation director or the delegate for formation, where there is one;
- e. the local fraternity.

If, for good reasons, the rite of admission is celebrated without the presence of a priest, the president (minister) presides at the celebration as well as receiving the candidates for the time of formation.

A fraternal social gesture of welcome to the newcomers can precede or follow the rite of entry, as an expression of joy and a pledge of fraternal support.

³ SFO RULE, art. 23

2. The Rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life or Profession

13. Since by its very nature profession is a public and ecclesial act, it should be celebrated in the presence of the fraternity. It is fitting that the profession be made during the celebration of the Eucharist or at least within an appropriate celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

14. The nature of commitment to the gospel life is:

- a. the renewal of one's consecration and promises made at baptism and confirmation. This means dedicating oneself to God through his People with all the consequences flowing from it, up to the present moment, in order to live in union with God and to hold firm to his plan of salvation, by means of a consecration that is to be lived in the world;
- b. the desire to live the gospel by following St. Francis of Assisi;
- c. incorporation into the Secular Franciscan Order, which is the harmonious union of all the members who promise to live the gospel after the example of St. Francis of Assisi, while remaining in their secular vocation;
- d. the desire to live in the world and for the world. In this regard, profession aims to be a gospel leaven and also a commitment to collaborate in building a more fraternal world. Members of the diocesan clergy by their profession confirm the appropriate pledges and promises of their specific episcopal, presbyteral or diaconal vocation.
- e. the desire to live the gospel for the whole of one's life. This dimension is the expression of a person's generosity in sharing the fullness of one's innermost being, and also the acceptance of the risks that are inseparable from any human choice that is so permanent and important;
- f. the candidate's confidence, supported by the help of the SFO Rule and the fraternity. For the candidate will feel led and helped by the Rule approved by the Church and will experience the joy of sharing the journey of gospel life with many brothers and sisters, from whom one can receive something and to whom a person can also give something. Being incorporated into the local fraternity, which is an integral part of the Church, he/she will contribute toward rebuilding the whole Church.

15. The elements considered above should be united in a single formula of profession, or even be expressed in the form of a dialogue. Some of these fundamental concepts, such as service of God and of his Church, simply cannot be expressed explicitly in a formula, since they are repeated constantly throughout the whole celebration, or they may always be presupposed in the very act of commitment to the gospel life.

16. The commitment to the gospel life is received by the president (minister) in the name of the Church and of the fraternity. The priest presides over this rite as the witness of the Church and of the Franciscan Family.

17. In exceptional circumstances, when a lack of priests calls for it or makes it necessary, the candidates pronounce their profession before the fraternity. The president (minister) of the fraternity presides at the celebration of the Word (or has another preside), if the circumstances require it, and also receives the profession, while the professed members of the fraternity act as witnesses.

3. The Rite of Annual Renewal of Commitment to the Gospel Life or Profession

18. Profession or permanent commitment can be preceded and prepared for by a temporary promise or commitment, renewed annually, but not extended beyond three years, since it is a preparation for permanent commitment.

19. This option is offered for pedagogical reasons, namely, to facilitate a suitable and gradual formation and entry of members into the Secular Franciscan Order. For that reason, the renewal is made with the same frame of mind in order to respond to the goal of this pedagogical preparation.

20. The rite of annual renewal can be performed in a celebration of the Word of God with a very simple formula. The readings and the whole rite may be arranged to suit the circumstances. If it is performed in some kind of liturgical celebration, the celebrant may give a short homily.

Chapter One

Rite of Admission into the Secular Franciscan Order

1. The rite of admission, which precedes the time of formation, begins with a suitable hymn.
2. The rite is to be simple and performed within the fraternity.

Description of the Rite

3. It is fitting that the rite of admission take place within an appropriate celebration of the Word of God.

Opening Rites

4. The rite begins with the sign of the cross and with a few words of greeting from the presiding priest.
5. Then an admonition is given by one of the members or by the priest himself, in these or similar words:

The Lord has called us
to live the gospel way of life in fraternity,
as he showed it to St. Francis of Assisi.
He brings us together today
to receive those who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
have asked to be admitted into the Secular Franciscan Order
and want to begin their time of formation
which will culminate in their profession
or commitment to the gospel life.
We will now renew our faith in the Holy Spirit
and call on him:
May he give us the grace
to encourage and sustain their proper formation
and to walk with them to attain their goal.

6. After the admonition, the priest says:

Let us pray.
Lord our God,
you have sent your Son Jesus Christ
to be for us the way, the truth, and the life.
Grant that these your people
who are asking to be admitted
into the Secular Franciscan Order,
and all of us,

may hear the words of the gospel fully
and may observe them attentively.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

7. Before the first reading these words of exhortation of St. Francis may be read from the *Letter to All the Faithful* (14:2-3):

Let us hear the Word of God
in the spirit of our blessed father Francis
who encourages us:
“In that love which is God,
I beg and implore you to hear these fragrant words
of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love,
putting them into practice with all gentleness
and observing them perfectly.”

8. First Reading: Rom 6:3-11 “*Let us live a new life*”

9. Responsorial Psalm: Ps 23:1-2,3-4,5-6

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

The Lord’s is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all its peoples.
It is he who set it on the seas;
on the waters he made it firm. *R.*

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure heart,
who desires not worthless things,
who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbour. *R.*

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord
and reward from the God who saves him.
Such are the men who seek him,
seek the face of the God of Jacob. *R.*

10. Second Reading: Mk 1:12-15 “*Repent, and believe the Good News*”

11. The celebrant gives a brief homily. According to circumstances he can invite the participants to share their reflections on the Word of God.

Rite of Admission

12. One of the candidates in the name of all (or all together) expresses their desire to enter the Secular Franciscan Order. The president (minister) receives their request in the name of the fraternity. This can be done in the form of a dialogue, in these or similar words:

President (Minister):

Would those who are asking to be admitted into the fraternity
please come forward, namely, N.N.

Candidates:

We here present ask to enter this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order,
so that we may live more intensely and faithfully
the grace and dedication of our baptism
by following Jesus Christ
according to the teachings and example of St. Francis of Assisi.
In this way we intend to be of service to all through our secular state of life
for the glory of God and to fulfil his plan of love in behalf of all people.

President (Minister):

This fraternity is pleased to accept your request.
I, therefore, receive you into the Secular Franciscan Order
so that you may begin your time of formation
and experience our Franciscan life.

Priest Celebrant:

The Church and the Franciscan Family
accept and confirm your sincere intention.
May the Lord allow you to persevere in this desire
and to be a leaven of gospel life within the world.

All: Amen. Thanks be to God.

This acclamation can be replaced by a hymn or a suitable gesture, according to local custom.

Presentation of the Gospel and the Rule

13. The president (minister) or the celebrant, according to local custom, presents the Gospel and the Rule to each one, saying:

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this:
to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi,
who made Christ the inspiration and the centre
of his life with God and with people.
May this too be your way of life.

14. According to local custom, the president (minister) may give the distinctive sign of the Order (the Tau emblem or another one) to each member.

15. The General Intercessions and the Lord's Prayer follow.

16. Then the minister (president) addresses the new members of the fraternity in these or similar words:

N.N., the Secular Franciscan Fraternity of N.N.
very gladly promises to help you in your journey
with friendship, prayer, and the witness of its life.
You, on the other hand, strengthen our fraternity in numbers,
by virtue of your presence and participation,
and through the sharing of your special gifts.
You are most welcome!

17. The members exchange a sign of peace. Meanwhile a suitable hymn is sung.

Blessing

18. The rite concludes with the Blessing of St. Francis:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

All: Amen.

May his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

All: Amen.

May he look upon you with kindness, and give you his peace.

All: Amen.

May the Lord bless you, ± the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Chapter Two
Rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life
or Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order
Within the Mass

- 19.** The rite that is described in this chapter is celebrated during the Mass.
- 20.** The Mass formula to be used may correspond to the liturgy of the day; or, if the rubric permit, the votive Mass of St. Francis or of St. Louis King or St. Elizabeth of Hungary may also be chosen. With regard to the hymns and exhortations during the celebration, the text of Chapter Two of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order should be kept in mind, as well as the biblical texts that support the SFO way of life.
- 21.** The president(minister) of the fraternity receives the profession at a suitable place in the sanctuary. Places for those to be professed are to be arranged in the sanctuary so that the whole liturgical action can be clearly seen by the whole congregation.
- 22.** All that is necessary for celebrating the Eucharist and for the rite of profession is to be adequately prepared beforehand.

Entrance Rite

- 23.** After the people and the fraternity members have assembled, and everything is properly prepared, the entrance hymn of the Mass is sung while the priest proceeds to the altar. Those to be professed arrange themselves in the places designated for Them.
- 24.** After the celebrant's greeting, a fraternity member or the priest himself gives an admonition in these or similar words:

We are assembled as a community
to take part in the eucharistic sacrifice.
In this celebration of the Eucharist
N.N. are going to make their profession
of the gospel life in the Secular Franciscan Order.

While giving thanks to the Father through Christ
for all the gifts we have received from him,
we have a special reason for gratitude today:
the gift of his grace which he has given
to those about to be professed to live in the world
according to the spirit of the Beatitudes
and also the gift of his grace
which he has given to the whole community
by adding new members to the fraternity.

Especially today, after the example of Christ

and in union with his own act of thanksgiving,
we are invited to present ourselves before the Father
as living sacrifices of praise for the life of the world.

25. Mass continues in the usual way. It might be appropriate to amplify the penitential rite in order to highlight the pervading spirit of penance.

Liturgy of the Word

- 26.** Everything is done as usual in the Liturgy of the Word, with the exception that:
- a. the readings can be taken either from the Mass of the day or from the texts offered in Appendix I, part 1;
 - b. the Creed may be omitted.

Profession or Commitment to the Gospel Life

Request:

27. After the reading of the Gospel the celebrant and the people sit. Those who are to be professed stand. The president (minister) of the fraternity invites those who are to be professed to present themselves and to express their intention publicly. The candidates can do this either singly, each in one's own words, or else by means of one candidate speaking in the name of all. In this case, the request may be made in these or similar words:

We ask to be admitted to profession
of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.
The experience during our time of formation
has strengthened us in our conviction
that the Lord is calling us
to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
by following the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

President (Minister):

The fraternity accepts your petition
and is united with you in your prayer.
May the Holy Spirit confirm in you the work he has begun.

Homily or Talk:

28. Those to be professed are seated, and a homily is given. The biblical readings as well as the commitment to the gospel life and its theological implications are fittingly explained.

Questioning:

29. After the homily those to be professed stand. The celebrant questions them in these or similar words:

Celebrant:

Before this fraternity and the other members of the People of God gathered here, I ask you to express your will:

Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,
which is at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?

Candidates, replying all together:

Yes, this is what I want.

Celebrant:

You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God
and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel
together with all people of goodwill.
Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?

Candidates:

Yes, this is what I want.

Celebrant:

You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.
Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community
and fulfil its mission among all people?

Candidates:

Yes, this is what I want.

President (Minister)

The local fraternity is a visible sign of the Church,
a community of faith and love.
Together with all the members you now pledge yourselves
to spend your efforts to make the fraternity
a genuine ecclesial assembly and a living Franciscan community.

Prayer for Divine Grace:

30. Then the celebrant prays for divine help, saying:

Let us pray.

And in a manner customary to the community all pray in silence for a while. Then:

Lord, watch over these your servants.
May the Spirit of your love penetrate their hearts,
so that your grace will strengthen them
to keep their commitment to the gospel life.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen.

Profession or Commitment to the Gospel Life:

31. After the prayer, two professed members stand beside the president (minister) of the fraternity, acting as special witnesses. Those to be professed approach the president (minister) one at a time and read the formula of profession before him/her:

I, N.N.,
by the grace of God, renew my baptismal promises
and consecrate myself to the service of his kingdom.
Therefore, in my secular state (*or:* as a member of the diocesan clergy)
I promise to live all the days of my life (*or:* for one year)
the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order
by observing its rule of life.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit,
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and our holy father Saint Francis,
and the fraternal bonds of community always be my help,
so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.

32. After the formula, the president (minister) adds:

Thanks be to God!
As the president (*or:* minister) I receive you
into this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order.
Your membership in the fraternity is a cause of great joy
and hope for the members of this community.

33. When all the candidates have made their profession and the president (minister) has accepted it, the celebrant speaks to them in these or similar words:

I confirm your commitment in the name of the Church.
Our Seraphic Father himself encourages you
in the words of his Testament:
“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,
and all the powers of heaven and all the saints.

34. If tradition to the local culture calls for it, suitable emblems of the Secular Franciscan Order can be presented here.

35. When all this is finished, the members present may come forward to congratulate each newly professed with an appropriate sign of peace and goodwill. Meanwhile, a suitable hymn may be sung.

Conclusion of the Rite of Profession:

36. The rite is concluded with the General Intercessions.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

37. While a hymn is sung at the Presentation of the Gifts, some of the newly professed members may appropriately present the bread, wine, and water for the eucharistic sacrifice.

38. At communion it is fitting that the Eucharist be received under both species.

39. At the end of the Mass, the solemn blessing “throughout the year” may be given. It is placed first in the restored Roman Missal, and it is the Blessing of St. Francis, as found at the end of Chapter One (n. 18).

Chapter Three

Annual Renewal of Profession

- 40.** The president (minister) of the fraternity and two witnesses must be present for the renewal of profession or the commitment to gospel life. It is very appropriate, however, that the whole fraternity take part in this rite as much as possible.
- 41.** The rite is to be performed within some kind of liturgical celebration and in a very simple way (cf. Preface, n. 20)
- 42.** If the rite is performed within a celebration of the Word of God, the readings may be taken from Appendix I, part 1.

Admonition Before the Rite of Renewal

- 43.** Before the celebrant proceeds to the renewal of profession, he addresses those present in these or similar words:

Moved by the power of the gospel,
we all experience the call always to begin again
and to bring about a continuing inner conversion,
so that we may be conformed to Christ
and with him be given over to the service of the Father
and of our brothers and sisters as well.
In this journey toward an ongoing change of heart,
perseverance is a gift of God.
Let us pray, therefore, that,
as we make progress in loving one another,
we will remain faithful to the end.

All reply to the celebrant's words:

O Lord,
look kindly upon those whom you have called
to the holiness of gospel life in the Secular Franciscan Order.
Grant them the grace to fulfil their commitment to the gospel life
which they have embraced with spirit and generosity.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Renewal of Commitment

- 44.** Those renewing their commitment to the gospel life may use formula n. 31 above or this one following:

I, N.N.,
renew for one year my commitment
to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,

after the example of St. Francis of Assisi,
according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Then the celebrant adds in these or similar words:

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,
and all the powers of heaven and all the saints.

All: Amen.

Acceptance of the Renewal of Commitment

45. After the formula, the president (minister) of the fraternity says:

As the president (minister) of the fraternity,
I accept the renewal of your profession.
All our brothers and sisters unite with you
in thanking God for this gift.

Conclusion of the Rite

46. The rite concludes with the General Intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, and the following prayer:

Hear our prayers, o Lord,
and grant that these our brothers and sisters,
who spend their daily lives in the service of others,
may imbue their earthly affairs with a genuine gospel spirit.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Chapter Four

On the Anniversary of Profession

47. It is a praiseworthy custom to celebrate the twenty-fifth and the fiftieth anniversary of profession in the Secular Franciscan Order. If this jubilee is celebrated within the context of the Eucharist, the Mass corresponding to the liturgy of the day may be said, with the prayers “In Thanksgiving”, according to the rubrics. The Masses mentioned in n. 20 above may also be used.

Admonition after the Homily

48. After the homily, the president (minister) of the fraternity or one of the other members present gives an admonition in these or similar words:

Today with great joy we are celebrating
the twenty-fifth (*and/or*: fiftieth) anniversary
of N.N in the Secular Franciscan Order.
During these years, they have made a sincere effort
“to make present the charism of their seraphic Father
in the life and mission of the Church”
and to build a more fraternal and evangelical world
so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.”
Let us, therefore, join in their thanksgiving
and in their commitment to an ongoing change of heart.

Renewal of Commitment

49. The members who are celebrating their jubilee renew their commitment in these or similar words:

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 fervour 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.”
Amen.

50. After the renewal of commitment, the celebrant offers this prayer:

Lord our Lord, Father of all,
we thank you for the love and goodwill
that you have shown toward your people.
And so we ask you
to help our brothers and sisters, who today celebrate
their anniversaries in the Secular Franciscan Order,
to fulfil their commitment to the gospel life
which they once took upon themselves.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen.

Conclusion of the Rite

51. The rite is concluded with a sign of congratulations shared by all. Meanwhile, the “Canticle of the Creatures” or another suitable hymn is sung.

Part II:

Prayers for Fraternity Meetings

Preface

1. Local fraternity gatherings as well as meetings of regional, national, and international councils are held in the Secular Franciscan Order.
2. The goals of these gatherings and meetings are indicated in the Rule, namely, to promote charity among the members and to foster their Franciscan and ecclesial life⁴.
3. There are different kinds of gatherings within a fraternity: sometimes for prayer, other times for planning work or accomplishing projects, and still other occasions for fraternising and socialising.
4. The following gatherings of the fraternity are required by statutes:
 - a. a time for getting to know one another as brothers and sisters;
 - b. a time for hearing the Word of God and sharing it⁵;
 - c. a time for study and work (when opportunities arise);
 - d. a time for the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and The Liturgy of the Hours.
5. In all of these, there is ample room for the creative initiative of the council and members of the fraternities.
6. The prayers given here are taken mainly from the writings of St. Francis.

⁴ SFO RULE, art. 22, 24.

⁵ SFO RULE, art. 5.

Chapter One

Opening and Closing Prayers for Fraternity Meetings

1. The prayers suggested in the following number are given only as a sample.

Opening prayers

2. When the members have gathered together in a suitable place, before any business is taken up, the one chairing the meeting may begin the community prayer in a manner similar to this:

Chairperson:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Chairperson:

Most high, all powerful, good God,
praise, glory and honour and all blessing are yours.

All:

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,
and serve him with great humility.

Chairperson:

Let us pray.

All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God,
all good, supreme good, total good, you who alone are good:
we give you all praise, all glory, all thanks,
all honour, all blessing and every good.
So be it. So be it.

All: Amen.

or:

Let us pray.

Most high, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of our hearts
and give us right faith, firm hope and perfect charity,
with wisdom and insight, o Lord,
that we may accomplish your holy and true will.

All: Amen.

3. A short reading may follow, from Sacred Scripture (Appendix I, part 1). or from the writings of St. Francis (Appendix I, part 2).

Closing Prayers

4. If it is opportune, there may be a time for spontaneous prayer or for intercessions for the general needs of the Church and the particular needs of the fraternity. Then the chairperson may use the prayer of St. Francis, as follows, or another of his/her own choice.

Chairperson:

Let us pray.

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God:
grant us in our misery that we do for your sake alone
what we know you want us to do,
and always want what pleases you;
so that, cleansed and enlightened interiorly
and fired with the flame of the Holy Spirit,
we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and so make our way to you, Most high,
by your grace alone,
you who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever.

All: Amen.

or:

Let us pray.

Most generous God,
you are the giver of peace and the lover of charity.
Grant to us your people true harmony with your will
and help us to overcome all temptations that could disturb our peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

5. If a priest is present, he may give St. Francis' Blessing to Brother Leo (cf. Part One, n. 18).

Chapter Two

Celebration of the Fraternity's Chapter of Elections

6. After the invocation of the Holy Spirit and a short reading from the Sacred Scriptures (Appendix I, part 1) or from the writings of St. Francis (Appendix I, part 2), the one presiding at the elections offers this prayer:

Almighty, most high and supreme God, Father,
holy and just, Lord, King of heaven and earth:
we give you thanks for yourself.
Of your own will you created all things spiritual and physical,
and made us in your own image and likeness,
and gave us a place in paradise,
through your only Son, in the Holy Spirit.
We trust in you and we ask for your light
so that we may choose those
who will properly serve our fraternity through their leadership.
Help us to select those who are able
to animate and guide us by their example,
their virtues and prudent decisions
so that the gospel of Jesus in the spirit of St. Francis
may come alive in our community.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

7. The elections follow in accordance with the Constitutions. When the election process is finished, those elected give witness to their Franciscan vocation and to their readiness to be of service.

8. After all this is completed, the one presiding at the elections says to those newly elected:

May the God of hope
bring you such joy and peace in your faith
that the power of the Holy Spirit
will remove all bounds to hope (Rom 15:13)

All: Blessed be God forever!

The one presiding continues:

Let us pray for those who have been elected.
Through their service of animating and guiding the fraternity,
may we all live our faith more deeply,
witness to Christ more bravely,
and work to prepare the kingdom of God.

All join in this prayer:

Most generous Father,
grant, through the dedicated efforts of our new leaders
who have been called to serve our fraternity,
that all of us may know you better, and make you known to all.
May we live more vigorously the gospel way of life
that you inspired through Francis of Assisi.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter Three

The Establishment of a New Fraternity

9. The rite described in this chapter is performed in a suitable place.
10. The one who has the faculty to establish a fraternity canonically presides at the ceremony.

Introduction

11. After a word of welcome and a brief introduction from the president (minister) of the fraternity, article 22 of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order is read:

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.

12. The one presiding at the establishment of the new fraternity offers the following prayer:

Let us pray.
O Lord our God, as we gather here in your name,
may our lives together in fraternity
help us to experience the presence of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
so that our joy in St. Francis may come to fulfillment.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading

13. Then there is a reading from the Bible; Rom 12:4-13 is suggested.

Reading and Signing of the Document of Establishment

14. After the scripture reading, the document of the establishment of the new fraternity is now formally read and signed. Also, the names of the members of the fraternity are recorded, as well as the leaders who constitute the council of the new fraternity.
15. When this is finished, it is appropriate to read a short text from St. Francis' "Letter to All the Faithful".
16. On this occasion some appropriate words can be offered either by the one presiding at the establishment or by a regional or national leader present.

Prayer in Common and Conclusion

17. A prayer can be offered in common after the style of general intercessions, which is concluded with the following prayer:

Our Father, almighty God, source of love and unity:
grant that this new fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order,
united and animated by the Holy Spirit,
may be ready to hear your Word and keep it.
May all its members pray together with one mind and heart.
May they find in the community
the strength and inspiration to bring about a more fraternal world
and to carry the message of joy and peace to everyone.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

18. It is appropriate to conclude with a hymn to Our Lady.

Appendix

Part One

Optional Texts for the Celebration of the Commitment to the Gospel Life

A. First Reading

1. Gal 6:14-18
"The only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."
Brothers and sisters: The only thing I can boast about...
2. Eph 1:3-10
"He determined that we should become his adopted sons through Jesus Christ."
Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...
3. Col 3:9-17
"Put on love over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them."
4. 1 Pt 2:9-17
"Always behave honourably among pagans."
Brothers and sisters: you are a chosen race ... (as far as) fear God.
5. Jac 2:12-18
"If good works do not go with faith, it is quite dead."
Brothers and sisters: talk and behave...
6. 1 Cor 12:4-11
"The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose."
Brothers and sisters: there is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit ...

B. Responsorial Psalm

7. Ps 15:1-2a,5,7-8,11
R. (5a): O Lord, you are my inheritance.
8. Ps 97:1-4
R. Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp, for he has made known his salvation.
9. Ps 132
R. Let us love one another, for love is from God.
10. Ps 36:3-4,5-6,30-31
R. The law of the Lord is in the heart of the just.
11. Ps 24:2-5,8-10
R. Make me walk in your truth, o Lord.
12. Ps 91:2-3,6-7,13-14
R. (6a): How great are your works, o Lord!

C. Alleluia and Verse Before the Gospel

13. Phil 1:21
Life to me is Christ, but then death would bring me something more.
14. Mt 11:25

You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever and revealed them to mere children.

15. Col 3:14-15

Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts.

16. Lk 10:1,9

Start off now; tell the towns, "The kingdom of God is very near to you".

17. Jn 15:8

It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.

18. Ps 132:1

How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!

D. Gospels

19. Mt. 5:1-12

"How happy are the poor in spirit, the gentle, the merciful."

20. Mt 11:20-30

"You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever and have revealed them to mere children."

At that time: Jesus began to reproach the towns...

21. Mt 12:46-50

"Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."

At that time: Jesus was still speaking to the crowds.

22. Lk 10:1-9

"Start off now; I am sending you."

At that time: The Lord appointed ...

23. Jn 15:1-8

"It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit."

At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine ..."

24. Jn 17:20-26

"May they be one in us, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."

At that time: Jesus was praying, and he said, "I pray not only for these..."

Part Two

Franciscan Readings

25. At fraternity gatherings, especially at the ordinary meetings of the fraternity and at the celebration of the chapter of elections, it is a good idea to have on hand the writings of St. Francis or other writings taken from the early Franciscan sources, in order to provide topics and ideas for the members to reflect upon.

Here only a few of the writings of St. Francis of Assisi are indicated:

- a. "The Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters in Penance";
- b. "Letter to All the Faithful";
- c. the "Unconfirmed Rule of 1221", chapters 22 and 23;
- d. prayers and hymns from the "Office of the Passion"

Part Three

Liturgical Prayer

For the Members of the Secular Franciscan Order

26. According to the SFO Rule (art. 8), the members of the Secular Franciscan Order are to join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of Christ.

27. These prayers may be:

- a. Morning and evening prayer from The Liturgy of the Hours, either in common or in private. These celebrations are to be preferred at the fraternity meeting.
- b. A shortened form of The Liturgy of the Hours according to forms adapted to the local Churches.
- c. The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- d. The office of the Passion written by St. Francis of Assisi
- e. The office of the twelve Our Fathers in one of its many versions that have been enriched with short biblical readings and also adapted to the structure of The Liturgy of the Hours, especially since this form of prayer still thrives in many parts of the world and is a useful way of praying in everyday circumstances.

Indulgences of the Secular Franciscan Order¹

SACRA PAENITENTIARIA APOSTOLICA
SECTIO DE INDULGENTIIS

Prot. 4/72

Holy Father,

The Interobediential General Council² of the Secular Third Order of Saint Francis of Assisi³ humbly asks for a revision of the indulgences given by the Holy See to the members of the Secular Third Order, in accordance with the norms of the Apostolic Constitution «Indulgentiarum doctrina» of January 1, 1967, n. 14.

And God etc.

January 22, 1972

The Sacred Penitentiary, by virtue of the special and explicit faculties given by the Holy Father, benignly concedes a plenary Indulgence to the members mentioned above, provided they make or renew, at least privately, their promise to observe faithfully the Statutes of their association⁴, having dutifully fulfilled the usual conditions (confession, communion and prayer to the intention of the Supreme Pontiff):

1. on the day of their admission and of their profession, and at the conclusion of an official visitation;
2. on the feast-days of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Saint Francis of Assisi; Saint Louis, King; Saint Elizabeth; Blessed Luchesius; Saint Clare; Saint Margaret of Cortona and all the Saints of the Three Orders of Saint Francis.

The present decision will be in force immediately and perpetually, without any time limit.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

In name of his Eminency

G. Sessolo, Regent
M. Venturi, Secretary

¹ These indulgences, still valid today, were granted to the Secular Franciscan Order in 1972, six years before the SFO Rule was approved by Pope Paul VI on June 24, 1978. All footnotes are added by the translator to explain words no longer in common use.

² The predecessor of the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO.

³ The Secular Franciscan Order.

⁴ In other words: To obtain the plenary indulgence, the members of the SFO should renew their Promise of Evangelical Life (Profession of the SFO Rule) in addition to confession, communion and prayer to the intention of the Pope.

