

Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity



Regional Formation Handbook

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Introduction

This formation handbook has been compiled to achieve two main objectives. The first is to provide a framework to promote formation standards to be followed by all local fraternities within Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity. The second is to serve as support material for the local Fraternities' formation program.

An extensive body of literature on Secular Franciscan formation and spirituality already exists and this document is not intended a substitute for any formation material. The booklet entitled 'Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States' prepared by the National Formation Commission is highly recommended reading for all fraternity members. It presents the necessary ingredients of an effective and successful formation program. This Regional Formation Handbook has borrowed extensively from the above-mentioned booklet. Article 19 Paragraph 4 of the Statutes of the National Fraternity of Secular Franciscan Order stipulates that all Formation programs 'will be conducted according to norms established by the National Fraternity Council'. The reading of the norms established by the National Fraternity Council is of highly informative value and the responsibility of all fraternity members.

Since the local Fraternity is normally the first place a prospective member will approach to discern his/her calling to the Franciscan way of life and it is at the local Fraternity he/she will be welcomed and spiritually fed, it is paramount that the local Fraternity is fully prepared to fulfill the formation function. It is the intention of the authors that this document will lay down the foundations upon which a comprehensive and effective local fraternity formation program can be elaborated with the complete participation and support of all the members of the local fraternity.

References

The information presented in this formation handbook was derived from a variety of resources, including:

Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity Formation Guideline, September 9, 1995

Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, October 1955

For Up To Now (FUN) Manual, March 2011

Regional Formation Director Handbook, 2018

Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, 2012

Franciscan Family Connections, Revised Edition, 2011

Other various Regional presentations and Troubadour articles

In many cases, the materials used in this handbook that were derived from the above referenced resources were either summarized or modified to fit the needs of the Region.

Formation

Vision of Formation

Our rule of life as contained in the Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (OFS) Rule, Article 4, is 'to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people'. Secular Franciscan formation implies a 're-founding' of our life according to the call to live 'the gospel life' that we have received from God upon joining the OFS. Formation involves a lifelong commitment to conversion (metanoia) in the spirit of St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Elizabeth, St. Louis and all the Franciscan Blesseds and Saints. Since St. Francis' model was Jesus Christ, Franciscan formation is centered upon the person of Christ Himself.

Characteristics of Formation

Formation is transformative! Formation is not simply a matter of assimilating knowledge and as such is not a class or a lecture. Formation is more than reading formation materials and sharing life experiences. True and authentic formation involves radical, interior change! Everyone in formation, both initial and ongoing formation, is expected to grow in faith and love of God, humanity and all creation. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Secular Franciscans are animated to fully embrace Gospel values and integrate them into our daily lives. Ninety-nine percent of formation takes place outside the monthly gatherings and formation sessions. Formation is put into action in the real world, in our families, our workplace and our community as we are called to go forth and build up the Kingdom of God.

Although the formation experience will bring the prospective member to a fuller understanding of his/her vocation through a period of instruction and praxis, it does not end with the Candidate's profession, but continues as daily transformation of our being in the imitation of the life of Jesus Christ.

Formation intends to fulfill three basic roles:

1. to bring the person to a fuller 'realization of his/her human and Christian development'
2. to deepen the person's faith so that enlivened by the Holy Spirit he/she may live in closer 'union with the Father in Christ the Lord'
3. for each person to live his/her faith more fully within the Catholic Church and assume his/her mission in the world and in the Church, according to his/her secular state in life

These elements must be present in all initial and ongoing formation programs for formation to be authentic and effective. The goal of formation is conversion, not just knowledge. Its objective is a personal union with the Lord Jesus in the tradition and spirituality of the Franciscan family.

For the Formator

A Formator is someone who is involved with the formation program in the fraternity. A Formator:

- Is convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society, has a broad and encompassing vision
- is open to dialogue, and ready to give and receive help and collaboration
- Is a fully formed Secular Franciscan, possessing the knowledge, but aware that all of us are “works in progress”
- Is committed to service, holds oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity
- Does not try to do this ministry alone
- Coordinates the efforts of the team, and asks for feedback from the Council and Fraternity
- Sees to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of formationsessions; seeks to inspire by his/her own witness
- Helps others see the significance of his/her call
- Makes the commitment of time, is organized and prepared
- Understands and appreciates adult learning
- Possesses good communication skills – especially listening, reflecting
- Understands that growth is possible, but perfection belongs to God
- Practices ongoing daily conversion, and never lets his/her work extinguish the spirit of prayer and contemplation
- Trusts, hopes, believes and endures

Responsibilities of the Formation Director

The ministry of Formation Director is an important one in the life of the fraternity, whose primary duties are to organize and animate the formation activities in the fraternity including both initial and ongoing formation. Since formation is the responsibility of the entire fraternity, the Formation Director does act not alone or in isolation. Rather, the Formation Director draws upon the resources and strengths of everyone in the fraternity, including the Spiritual Assistant and the Fraternity Council, to deliver a robust and dynamic formation program.

The General Constitutions of the OFS (Article 52.3) outline the following duties of the Formation Director:

- To coordinate, with the help of the other members of the council, the formative activities of the fraternity
- To instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initial formation, and the newly professed

- 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

It is important to note that although the position of Formation Director can be a daunting one, it is one that a person does not, and should not, do on his/her own. Item A of Article 52.3 above clearly states that the work of the Formation Director is accomplished "...with the help of the other members of the council...". Consistent communication should occur between the Formation Director and the Fraternity Council regarding planning both initial and ongoing formation activities, as well as the progress of those in initial formation.

It is also critical that the Formation Director work closely with the fraternity's Spiritual Assistant. One of the primary roles of the Spiritual Assistant is to work with the fraternity in the area of formation, especially with those in initial formation. The Spiritual Assistant is a valuable resource and support for the Formation Director and should be included in all phases of the formation process. The Spiritual Assistant should interview each inquirer before the Rite of Admission and each candidate prior to the Rite of Profession.

As the National Regional Manual for Regional Directors of Formation so clearly states: "What is important is that at every OFS gathering an opportunity be given to expand our knowledge and share our experiences of living the Franciscan charism." (Regional Formation Director Handbook, 2018, pg. 5).

The Formation Team

It is strongly suggested that each fraternity establish a Formation Team to work collaboratively with the Formation Director, particularly with initial formation activities. Article 37.4 of our General Constitutions states: "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." It is the responsibility of each member of the fraternity to assist in formation.

Members of the Formation Team assist the Formation Director in guiding the formation process. Team members must be willing to accompany those in formation on their journey, supporting them as they discern their vocation to Franciscan life. By sharing their challenges and rewards of living the Gospel life, the members of the Formation Team provide an invaluable service to the fraternity.

The Formation Team works collaboratively in meeting the formation goals of the fraternity. This might include:

- Facilitating communication among the members of the fraternity
- Participating in the various regional formation workshops
- Organizing the Initial and Ongoing Formation Session for the fraternity being attentive to the unique needs of the newly professed within the fraternity

Effective Formation Teams

Effective Formation Teams are critical to the health of the fraternity's formation program. An effective Formation Team:

- Allows each member to provide knowledge and skills
- Learns how to manage conflict
- Evaluates performance of the group
- Provides feedback and support to the group
- Puts group harmony above individual needs
- Is flexible and open to new experiences and ideas

Checklist for an Effective Formation Team

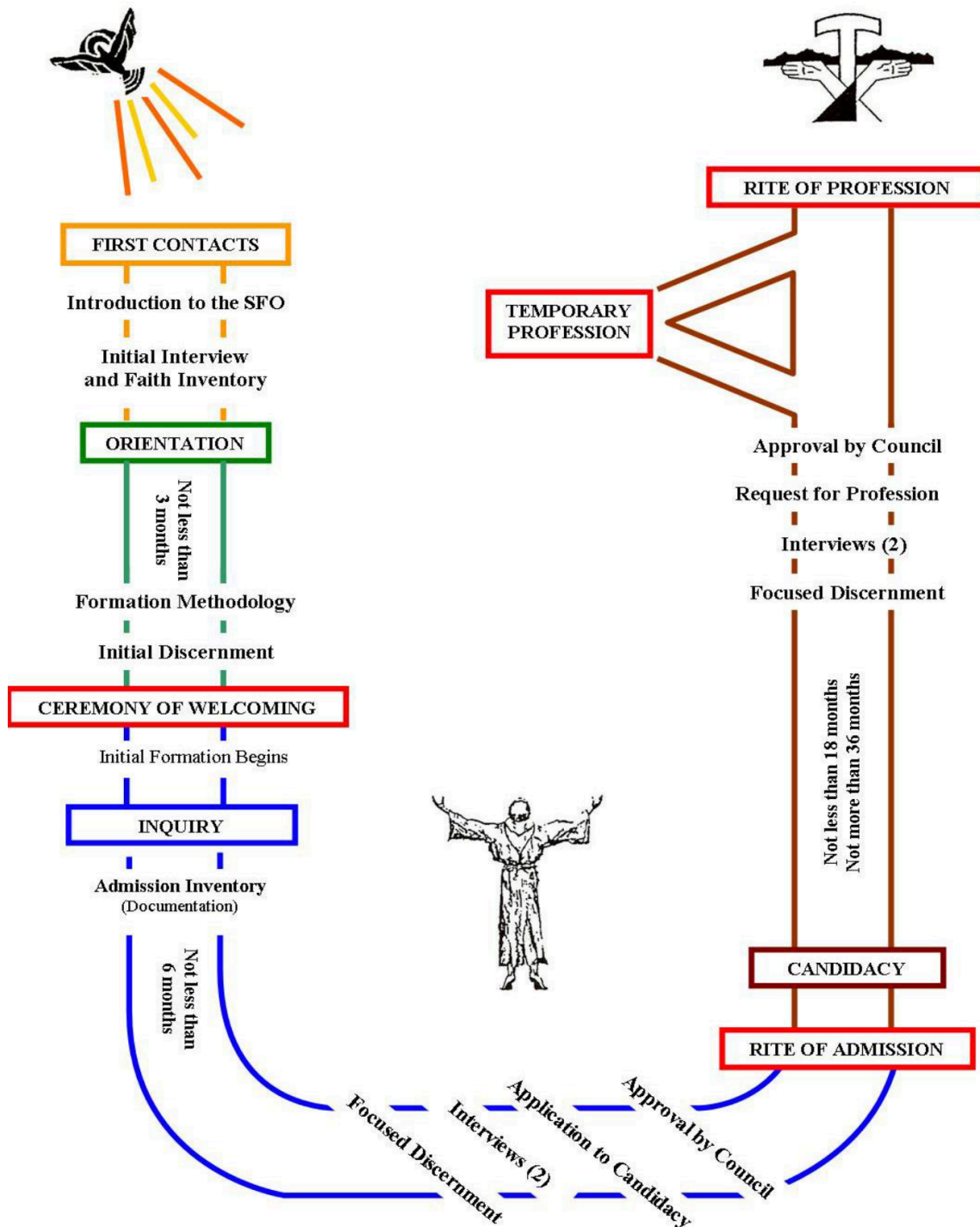
- Are the Formation Team's goals being met?
- Is each member actively participating?
- Is feedback encouraged and freely given?
- Is the entire Formation Team involved in decision making?
- Is respect and trust evident in inter-personal relationships?
- Are differences suppressed or expressed? How is it expressed?
- Do members freely share their talents, skills, knowledge and experiences?
- When mistakes are made, are they treated as a source of learning or a reason for criticism?

The Spiritual Assistant

The Spiritual Assistant is a key member of the Formation Team. A Spiritual Assistant's presence at formation meetings is important. If he/she cannot attend every meeting, the majority of formation sessions should be blessed by his/her presence. The Formation Director/Formation Team conducts the sessions. The Spiritual Assistant contributes to the formation of the newcomers, sharing insights and experiences that bring a gift to the formation meetings. The entire Formation Team is called to do the same. Interaction and dialogue enable newcomers to recognize their need to both listen and share, prepares individuals to contribute at regular fraternity gatherings, strengthens relationships in the fraternity and facilitates putting gospel values into practice.

Pathway to Profession

The “Pathway to Profession” is an outline of the structure of the Initial Formation process. It is your work to flesh it out and implement it in your fraternity. So, take time to become familiar with the process, goals, and the spirit of formation in the OFS.



First Contacts

People are attracted to the Franciscans by a variety of means and are often drawn to explore a possible vocation to the OFS. As Franciscans, we should always offer a warm welcome to all who are interested in pursuing a Franciscan vocation.

First Contact
is not longer than 3 months

The timing and circumstances can widely vary. We may meet with each perspective member individually, invite them to attend a fraternity gathering, or sponsor an open house type gathering in order to introduce them to the OFS. The perspective member can visit the fraternity for up to three months before they enter Orientation.

Orientation

The goal of the Orientation phase is to determine the prospective member's basic disposition to Franciscan Charism & life in fraternity. Topics for the Orientation phase includes:

- Introduction to the Franciscan Family
- Orientation in the OFS
- The Church, the Layperson and Lay Spirituality
- Basic Catholic Doctrine
- The lives of St. Francis and St. Clare

Orientation
is not less than 3 months and not longer than 12 months

Initial Interview and Faith Inventory/Assessment

Each person comes to the fraternity bearing his/her own special gifts. The Initial Interview is an opportunity to ask questions about the person, his/her life in the Church, his/her evangelical and apostolic life, understanding of community and desire for inner renewal. (see Guidelines for Initial Formation, pg. 25).

The initial interview takes place in the context of a conversation. Information should be recorded. See "Guidelines for Interviews" and "Interview Guide for Prospective Members". The formator should review the requirements listed in Article 19 of the National Statutes to insure that the prospective member is qualified.

Initial Faith Inventory

A faith inventory or assessment is conducted during Orientation. The prospective member must be a fully initiated Catholic, having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist and Confirmation and in good standing in the Church. Discern the necessity of a review of Catholic teachings in light of Vatican II Christology and ecclesiology. Some important questions to consider at this time include:

- Does the individual have a good understanding of the Catholic faith and are committed to practicing the faith?

- Do they attend Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of Obligation?
- Do they frequent the Sacrament of Reconciliation?
- Do they understand and believe in the Real Presence in the Eucharist?
- Do they read Scripture often?
- Do they pray often? What are their favorite methods/forms of prayer?
- Do they have a good mix of apostolic activity and prayer life?
- Are they active in their parishes?
- How much do they know about St. Francis and St. Clare?
- Why are they attracted to the Franciscan lifestyle?

This list is not meant to be exhaustive or complete, rather, it should be used as guidance in getting to know the prospective member better, and in discovering in what areas they might need further education and development during their Initial Formation.

There are many reasons why the prospective member may not continue his/her journey during Orientation. For instance, they may have job or family commitments that prevent them from attending the fraternity meetings or Initial Formation sessions at this time. The fraternity should respect their decision and be open to welcoming them back in the future.

Initial Formation

Article 23 of the Rule states that, "... admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule." Article 37 of the General Constitutions states, "Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the Profession of the Rule." Initial formation is the time of discernment and education leading inquirers and candidates to profession as members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

The purpose of initial formation in the Secular Franciscan Order is more than the giving and receiving of information. It is the period of initiation into our way of life—It is a period of listening, reading, dialogue, discernment and prayer. It is a period of personal transformation assisted by what we hear, see and experience in fraternity and through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. It is a period of prayer and discernment for both the person who desires to enter the Order and for the local fraternity who will receive him or her as a member. It is important to remember that the person desiring to enter the Order, being led by the Holy Spirit, assisted by the formators and influenced by the fraternity, is responsible for his/her formation.

Phases of Initial Formation

Initial Formation is preceded by Orientation and the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming. The time of Initial Formation is broken up into two distinct phases:

- Inquiry (a time not less than 6 months long). During this period the person begins to discern the call to the Secular Franciscan Order and acquires a preliminary understanding of vocation and the Franciscan Charism.

- Candidacy - This period follows the Rite of Admission and continues for a minimum of 18 months, but not more than three years. The Candidate continues his/her discernment through further learning, participation and collaboration in fraternity life.

Please see the FUN Manual and The Franciscan Journey for a complete and detailed discussion of Inquiry and Candidacy in the OFS.

Inquiry Phase

Following Orientation and the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming, Inquiry is the first phase of initial formation. It is a time of seeking and choosing, a time of continuing discernment of a Franciscan vocation. Guided by the Holy Spirit, the Inquirer will deepen his/her understanding of the relationship of the OFS to the Church and the First and Second Orders. The Inquirer will also recognize the Rule and Constitution's call for conversion to Gospel values.

Inquiry

Inquiry begins with the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming.

Inquiry is not less than 6 months.

Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming

The Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming takes place following the directives in the OFS Ritual, found in both the Preface, page 4, and within the ceremony, page 9. A book on the "life of Francis" that is presented during the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming is suggested reading as part of the Inquiry phase of formation.

Topics Covered During Inquiry

During Inquiry, formation focuses on the Franciscan aspect of our spirituality.

Formation topics for the Inquiry phase typically include:

- Inquiry in the OFS
- Vocation
- Our Identity as a Secular Franciscan
- Lay Spirituality
- The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order
- Charism of St. Francis and St. Clare
- Mission of the Order
- Scripture in the OFS Life
- The OFS Rule and Constitutions
- Journey of Francis
- Your Own Journey towards Profession

Faith Inventory (Sacramental Documents)

The following documents should be obtained early in the Inquiry phase:

- Baptism Certificate, annotated with dates of other sacraments
- If married provide verification of validity.

- Decree of Nullity of Marriage, if applicable.
- If ordained, provide copy of letter verifying faculties.
- Two letters of recommendation, one being from the Inquirer's pastor.

NOTE: It is recommended that all information forms, records, correspondence, letters of recommendation and other notes be kept in a confidential file folder for each prospective member. Due to the sensitive nature of these records, they must be stored securely in the fraternity archive.

Interviews

The Inquirer should be interviewed during the Inquiry phase. The purpose of these interviews is to:

- Answer any specific questions the Inquirer may have.
- Provide encouragement and support.
- Evaluate the progress the Inquirer has made in his/her spiritual formation since his/her initial contact with the fraternity
- Ascertain if the Inquirer wishes to continue on to Candidacy.
- Ascertain the Inquirer's readiness for the Rite of Admission.

Two interviews are scheduled with the Inquirer – one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant and one (two are preferred) by another member of the council, preferably the Formation Director or Minister. These interviews may be conducted in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant and several council members present. For further information on the interview see Appendix A - Guidelines for Interviews.

Application to Candidacy

As the time of Inquiry is drawing to a close, the Inquirer requests admission to Candidacy by a formal act in writing, often a letter, to the Minister of the local fraternity. The Candidate should be encouraged to express his/her thoughts about the Secular Franciscan way of life and the personal desire for a commitment to this way of life. This letter may be brief, but should be an authentic expression of the individual's vocation to this way of life.

Approval by Council

The Council, having come to know the Inquirer, has a serious responsibility to prayerfully and thoroughly consider whether the Inquirer is called to become a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. The importance of discerning this early in the formation process cannot be over emphasized for the good of both the Inquirer and the fraternity.

After the interview, the Council will vote, in secret, to decide upon the Candidate's application to Candidacy. The Council will respond to the Inquirer both orally and in writing as to their decision. Their decision will also be kept on file in the fraternity's archive.

Candidacy Phase

Candidacy is a period of interiorizing and integrating the Gospel life to prepare the Candidate for a lifetime commitment to live the Rule of the OFS. The time spent in Candidacy should be sufficient to adequately cover the foundational material in For Up to Now (FUN). Candidacy is not less than 18 months, but not more than 36 months.

Candidacy

Candidacy is the second phase of Initial Formation.

Candidacy is not less than 18 months and not longer than 36 months

Rite of Admission

- The Rite of Admission is not scheduled until after the Council approves the Inquirer for Admission. Adequate planning is needed to ensure this Rite be celebrated with dignity.
- The Rite of Admission takes place following the directives in the “Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order,” found in both the Preface, page 4, and within the ceremony, page 11.
- Immediately after the Rite of Admission the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.
- The Candidate receives a copy of the OFS Rule and a Tau as part of the Rite of Admission. These two items signify that the Candidate has now moved into a new phase of Formation in the OFS and has new responsibilities towards the fraternity on the Order.
- Candidacy begins following the Rite of Admission to Candidacy.

Topics Covered During Candidacy

Formation topics for the Candidacy phase typically include:

- Development of the Order
- OFS Rules of 1223, 1289, 1883 and 1979
- The OFS Constitution
- Vatican II
- Focus on Christ, Encountering Christ
- Rebuilding the Church
- Conversion and Penance
- Franciscan Prayer Life
- The Theology and Spirituality of St. Francis
- Mary, the Mother of God and our Mother
- Franciscan Poverty, Detachment and Freedom
- Franciscan Theology and Spirituality
- St. Clare of Assisi
- Loving others and Christian Service
- Catholic Social Teaching
- Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
- Fraternity
- Connections to the OFM, Poor Clares and the Third Order Regular (TOR)
- Profession

Interviews

The Candidate must be interviewed during the Candidacy phase prior to Admission into the OFS. The purpose of these two interviews is to:

- Ascertain how the Candidate has progressed.
- Answer any specific questions the Candidate may have.
- To provide encouragement and support.
- To discuss openly and honestly the Candidate's decision to become professed or not to be professed.
- To ascertain readiness for Permanent Commitment (Profession) in the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To impress upon the Candidate the seriousness of Permanent Commitment (Profession) in the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To assure the Council that the Candidate's decision to become professed is based upon sound judgment and spiritual motivation.

Two interviews are scheduled with the Candidate – one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant and one conducted by one or more members of the council, preferably the Formation Director or Minister. These interviews may be combined in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant, the Fraternity Council and the Formation Team. For further information on the interview see Appendix A - Guidelines for Interviews.

Taking Stock before Profession

Prior to Profession, the Candidate should consider the following questions below. These questions should be used as a guideline to help the Candidate write a letter to the Council explaining why he/she wants to be professed as a Secular Franciscan. The Candidate need not answer every question, but the questions highlighted in **RED** must be addressed by the Candidate.

- How has your relationships with people changed? Give examples
- What changes have you made in your prayer life?
- What changes have you achieved in regard to serving the poor and growing in a sense of stewardship?
- How have personal changes affected your family life? Church life? Single/married life? Work life?
- How can the structures of our Secular Franciscan life (Rule and Constitutions) help you to strengthen your relationship with God and the fraternity?
- What qualities are you developing in order to show a Franciscan spirit in dealing with other people?
- What is the goal of a call to the OFS? How does profession affect society and the larger church?
- How has the formation process helped you in preparing for profession?
- What suggestions do you have to strengthen the formation program?
- What are your hopes for ongoing formation after you are professed?
- At this point, how do you feel about making profession?

Request for Profession

Prior to Profession, the Candidate writes a personal “Request for Profession”. As part of this request, the Candidate should describe his/her thoughts and feelings at this time of commitment and ask to become a Professed member of the Order.

Approval by Council

The Council, having come to know the Candidate has a serious responsibility to prayerfully and thoroughly consider whether the Candidate is called to become a member of the Secular Franciscan Order. They should identify for positive indications of the Candidate’s vocation to the OFS and a commitment to live the Rule.

After the interview, the Council will vote, in secret, to decide upon the Candidate’s application to Candidacy. The Council will respond to the Inquirer both orally and in writing as to their decision. The choices before the Council at this time are:

- Recommend Profession
- Recommend delay of Profession
- Temporary Profession
- Denial of Profession

The Fraternity Council will inform the Candidate of their decision in writing. The decision will be kept on file in the fraternity’s archive.

Rite of Profession

The Rite of Profession is not scheduled until after the Council approves the Candidate for Profession. The Rite of Profession takes place following the directives in the Ritual of the OFS, found in both the Preface 3.3, page 5, and within the ceremony, page 18. It is important that both the preface and the ceremony are reviewed.

Profession into the Secular Franciscan Order is an act of personal consecration that is both public and ecclesial. Therefore, this celebration takes place in the context of the Mass and celebration of the Eucharist.

Immediately after the Rite of Profession the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

Rite of Temporary Profession

This Rite generally takes place in a fraternity setting and is not done in conjunction with the celebration of the Eucharist. The candidate and fraternity council may mutually agree the candidate will benefit from an extended period of discernment and formation, prior to making a commitment to profession into the Secular Franciscan Order. This time period is not to extend beyond one year.

Ongoing Formation

Ongoing Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order is lifelong, conducted both individually and in the context of fraternity gatherings, with the purpose of intensifying the spiritual life of the Secular Franciscan. Ongoing Formation accompanies the Secular Franciscan other faith journey, invigorates his/her Franciscan discipleship and fosters spiritual maturity in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Church. Formation takes place at all levels of the Order: the local fraternity, the regional fraternity, the national fraternity and the international fraternity.

The purpose of Ongoing Formation is to support the professed member in continuing the process of conversion and continual growth in his/her commitment to live the gospel life. As the member of the Secular Franciscan Order, called by God to holiness through the special Charism of St. Francis, he/she must continually nurture the seed of his/her vocation.

Ongoing Formation should be approached from two angles: first, from the members responsibility to his/her own spiritual development and second, from the local Fraternity as a conduit for Formation.

Each fraternity member is called to actively co-operate with the sanctifying grace that God gives through the Holy Spirit. Each fraternity member assumes a personal responsibility by 're-founding' his/her life upon the pillars of Faith: prayer, conversion, and witness. The local Fraternity should seek to provide suitable opportunities for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life. The Formation Team is encouraged to organize reflections and studies that deepen the professed members knowledge and experience of Franciscan history and spirituality. Days of recollection retreats, community celebrations, lectures and workshops, communal prayers, films, engagement within the Order, and apostolates should be offered on a regular basis.

Topics for Ongoing Formation

Topics of interest for Ongoing Formation to the Fraternity's life may include:

- The Pauline Rule
- The Volterra Letter or Prologue to the Rule
- Writings of St. Francis, St. Clare, St. Bonaventure and other Franciscan Saints and Blesseds
- Franciscan history and literature
- Sacred Scripture and Ecclesiology (including the Catechism of the Catholic Church)
- Papal Encyclicals and documents of Vatican II Council
- Pastoral Statements from National Conference of Catholic Bishops
- Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order
- General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order
- National Statutes and Regional Guidelines
- Catholic Social Teaching
- The social commitment and outreach of Secular Franciscans in the world
- Franciscan Intellectual Tradition (<https://www.franciscantradition.org>)
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Formation Friday

Another good source for ongoing formation is the “Formation Friday” posts from the National Formation Commission. These posts cover a variety of topics and are meant to be used in your fraternity’s ongoing formation program. You should be receiving these posts from the Regional Formation Director via email. If you are not receiving these posts, please contact the Regional Formation Director.

Here’s an example of a “Formation Friday” post

General Constitution, Article 24 - 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.

- Respect for life at conception

At the moment of conception and in the womb; help for moms to get prenatal care

- Respect for the early years of life

Young children need a stable family life; good, healthy food and medical care

- Respect for the growing years

Commitment to educate our young people; promote healthy friendships, provide religious education

- Respect for the teenage years

Parental /adult example of how to live a healthy, Catholic life. How to choose friends; how to become involved in good works.

Franciscans should find ways to assist youth programs in the parish or local area.

- Respect for the life of family members as they “leave the nest.”

Maintain communication and contact with those who no longer live in the family home

- Respect for the life of the elderly.

Reaching out to the elderly—even those who are not our family members. As Secular Franciscans we also maintain fraternity with those who have passed to eternal life.

For discussion or to reflect on in your journal.

What are some ways you and your fraternity can help to promote respect for life in the areas mentioned above?

In addition to working to end abortion, what other areas would you pick for your personal efforts? What talents could you offer?

Best Practices for Formation

Developing and delivering a successful formation program can be challenging. Thankfully, there are many resources available to guide your Formation Team. The following section describes some “best practices” that can be used in both ongoing and initial formation program in your fraternity.

Respectful Communication

One of the key success factors in a formation program is respectful dialog. Franciscans come from all walks of life with a wide range of viewpoints. The fraternity is committed to Franciscan courtesy in all fraternal gatherings and events. To help facilitate con-structive dialog in your fraternity, everyone should be treated with RESPECT:

- R** = take RESPONSIBILITY for what you say and feel without blaming others
- E** = use EMPATHETIC listening
- S** = be SENSITIVE to differences in communication styles
- P** = PONDER what you hear and feel before you speak
- E** = EXAMINE your own assumptions and perceptions
- C** = keep CONFIDENTIALITY
- T** = TRUST ambiguity because we are NOT here to debate who is right or wrong

These guidelines for respectful communication should be shared with and agreed upon by everyone in your fraternity. Even though we may disagree with each other on occasion, everyone should respect the opinions of others.

Discernment

Throughout our lives we’ve all had to make decisions. Some decisions are easy to make and don’t require a lot of time and effort on our part. Other decisions, such as getting married, changing jobs, moving to another state, or answering a religious vocation, are tougher because they may have a large and long lasting impact on our life. These life changing events require careful prayer, consideration and guidance from the Holy Spirit in order for us to make a wise decision on how to proceed.

Discernment is a decision-making practice that honors the place of God's will in our lives. It is an interior searching in which we seek to align our will with God’s will. Discernment requires time, prayer, and reflection in order for us to learn where God is leading us. Here are some tips that can help you when you need to discern God’s will in your life.

Availability and Openness - When you begin to discern God’s will, the first step is to ask yourself if you are open to God’s will. Is God calling me and am I free to answer

God's call? We must be open to God's plan for us and be willing to act upon that calling. If we are not open to God's will, then we will stumble and may make a poor decision.

Prayer - Prayer is essential to discerning God's will and wisely acting upon God's call. We must make time to pray for the strength we need to discern and follow God's will in our life. One simple prayer often used for discernment is St. Francis' Prayer Before the Crucifix:

Most High glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me right faith, sure hope and perfect charity.
Fill me with understanding and knowledge that I may fulfill your command.

There are many other simple prayers that can also be used for discernment, but the Prayer Before the Crucifix is part of our Franciscan tradition and has been used by many to discern God's will. You can also use your favorite passage from Sacred Scripture as a prayer during discernment.

Talk with Someone You Respect - God often speaks to us through the wisdom of others. It is a good idea to seek out the advice of someone you know and respect to help you discern God's will. It may be a close friend or relative, a parish priest, a friar, or anyone else you know and trust. Remember that you are seeking his/her wisdom to help you make a decision; they are not there to make the decision for you.

Solitude - Although it is a good idea to seek out the wisdom of someone when making a decision, it is also important to take some time to be alone with your thoughts and let God speak to you. Know that God has a plan for you and His plan is driven by His love for you. Be honest with God. Tell Him your deepest desires and fears and take the time to listen to His answer in the silence of your heart. You may consider spending time in front of the Blessed Sacrament during this portion of discernment.

Patience - Be patient. Some decisions take longer than others. It is rare to make a life changing decision over night.

Discernment is ongoing and may become part of a person's daily spiritual practices. We should always seek to discern God's will in our life and act according to His plan for us. The more we practice discernment, the more it will enrich our relationship with the Trinity and lead us closer to Jesus. Put your trust in the Holy Spirit to guide you and help you to follow God's will.

Theological Reflection

The formation program needs to provide a solid spiritual foundation; a balance of learned facts and lived experiences. It should facilitate an experience of God – and that experience needs to be supported, nurtured and celebrated within fraternity!

There are many issues in our world that require careful examination and an authentic Catholic/Franciscan response. There are ways to effectively review and evaluate our response. One such way is Theological Reflection. The Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission encourages all fraternities to incorporate Theological Reflection into his/her formation program as a method of dialogue regarding the questions of our time.

Theological Reflection consist of the following steps:

1. **Preparation:** A well prepared reflective session is essential. What specific question are you pondering? Gather background material, i.e.: What does the USCCB say about this issue? Does the Catechism of the Catholic Church deal with this issue? Does Vatican II address this? What does our Rule and Constitution express?
2. **Personal experience:** Begin the session with an introduction of the issue to be explored then give time for the individual to pause to think about his/her own experience of life that may bear on the topic. If the issue is given to the fraternity ahead of time, give time for the members to reflect upon his/her thoughts and responses.
3. **Mutual Conversation:** Use group discussion to review the supporting materials. This may be handled in multiple smaller groups for a large fraternity. Mutual invitation is a great way to begin the session. The RESPECT guidelines also may enhance the reflection time. When this phase is done well it inspires creative thinking and leads to transformation of the person.
4. **Transformative Action:** What flows from mutual conversation becomes the lens we use for setting a course of action. Our charism animates definitive action in transforming our lives to live the Gospel and the Rule.
5. **Evaluate:** It is essential to evaluate our efforts. Are we true to our Rule and the Church's teaching? Did we meet the needs of others as intended or did we impose on them our need to do something? Have our efforts contributed to the vision and mission of the OFS and the Catholic Church? How is God calling me now? Begin the reflective process again.

Theological Reflection is a skill that develops over time.. Many issues may be reflected upon in this manner with your fraternity. If used on a regular basis, Theological Reflection can be a powerful method for integrating the Rule in our life and life in the fraternity.

Appendix A - Guidelines for Interviews

What is an Interview?

An interview is a face to face meeting between individuals for a specific purpose, such as an evaluation of one of the individuals.

It is essentially a dialogue between persons to share ideas, ask questions, give information, and to clarify certain points. It is important to remember that an interview is not an interrogation or concealing session.

Why Conduct an Interview?

The purposes of an interview for the Secular Franciscan Order are:

- To welcome the prospective member
- To briefly explain the purpose of the Secular Franciscan Order and the commitment involved.
- To ask the prospect his/her understanding of the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To inquire of his/her motivation to look into the Secular Franciscan Order.
- To answer any questions the prospect or candidate may have.
- To ascertain eligibility of the prospect/candidate.
- To explain the Phases of Orientation, Inquiry and Candidacy
- To stress that final entrance into the Secular Franciscan Order is a mutual, dialogical process and that his/her interest alone does not guarantee automatic admission.

Who may conduct the interview?

Ordinarily, the Director of Formation and/or the Spiritual Assistant of the Fraternity should interview both the prospects and candidates. Certainly, it should be someone on the Formation team. However, in certain circumstances, the following might also be considered:

- a. The Minister/President of the fraternity;
- b. A specially-appointed council member;
- c. The inquirer or candidate instructor;
- d. A specially-appointed Fraternity Member.

When should the Interview occur?

The interview should be arranged for a mutually convenient time. The interview should be neither rushed, nor should it drag on. The focus of the interview should remain on discerning the prospects interest and eligibility to become a Secular Franciscan Order. Ordinarily, 30 to 60 minutes should be sufficient time for an interview.

Where should the Interview occur?

The interview should take place in a clean, comfortable, and quiet room. Privacy and confidentiality are essential.

On-going Discernment

The initial interview is important and provides basic information about a prospect. However, On-Going discernment of the prospective member by members of the Formation Team; Council and Fraternity Members is also a very important part of the entire formation process. Often things not learned in the initial interview will become apparent as the prospect/candidate interacts with the other members of the Fraternity, both good things as well as some negative things.

Interviewing should take place before all the major steps in the formation process, which is, before becoming a candidate, at regular intervals during candidacy, prior to permanent commitment or profession.

Interview at the end of the Inquiry phase

The purpose of the interview at the end of the inquiry phase is to:

- a. Ascertain if the Inquirer wishes to continue on to the Candidacy phase.
- b. Answer any specific questions the inquirer may have regarding the content studied in the next phase.
- c. Provide encouragement and support

If the Inquirer wishes to continue a more detailed application should be filled-out, and returned to the Formation Director.

Interview Mid-way through the Candidacy Phase

The purpose of the interview mid-way through the Candidacy phase is to:

- a. Ascertain how the candidate is progressing; to answer questions; to provide encouragement and support.
- b. Help the candidate prepare for commitment in the Secular Franciscan Order.

This would be an appropriate time for the Spiritual Assistant to interview the candidate to help with any spiritual concerns.

Interview at the end of the Candidacy Phase:

The purpose of the interview at the end of the Candidacy phase is to:

- Ascertain if the candidate wishes to be professed.

- Discuss openly and honestly the candidate's decision either to become professed or not to become professed.

Should the candidate indicate a wish to profess, the Application for Profession (which would have been filled out prior to the interview) could be discussed to:

- Impress upon the candidate the seriousness of Permanent Commitment in the Secular Franciscan Order.
- Help the candidate better internalized the decision.
- Assure the Formation Team that the candidate's decision to become professed is based upon sound judgment and spiritual motivation.

The situation may arise when the Fraternity Council and Formation Director discern that he/she is not yet ready for profession. The interview would be the appropriate place to discuss this matter with the candidate.

NOTE: It is strongly recommended that at least one of the interviews should be with the Spiritual Assistant of the Fraternity

- It permits the Spiritual Assistant to get to know the candidate personally.
- It allows the candidate the opportunity to ask questions of a/or moral nature.
- It broadens the evaluation perspective. Another person in addition to the Formation Team is evaluating the suitability of the Candidate for admission into the Secular Franciscans Order.

Confidentiality

It is recommended that all applications, interview observations, correspondence, phone conversations should be kept in a confidential file folder for each candidate. This will help the Fraternity Council to make their decision about accepting the candidates for profession.

Qualities of an Interviewer

The qualities of an interviewer are the qualities of a good Formation Director, as well. Ideally, the interviewer should possess as many of these qualities as possible:

- 1) **ENTHUSIASM.** The interviewer should be enthusiastic about being a Secular Franciscan, and should be familiar with the Secular Franciscan vocation and Charism.
- 2) **PRAYERFUL.** The interviewer must be a person of prayer.
- 3) **KNOWLEDGEABLE.** The interviewer should have a basic knowledge of the Doctrines and Catholic faith, should be familiar with the documents of

Vatican II, especially as they relate to Lay Spirituality; and a good understanding of Franciscan spirituality.

- 4) **GOOD LISTENER.** Being a good listener is absolutely essential to a good interviewer. Interrupting and contradicting during an interview should never take place.
- 5) **COURTESY & WARMTH** “Going for an interview” for most people is stressful. Personal warmth, enthusiasm, and courtesy are important elements in making prospect/candidate feel comfortable.
- 6) **OPEN & ACCEPTING ATTITUDE.** Every person we meet is a son or daughter of a Great King. That attitude should permeate the entire interview. Christian common sense is essential. The interviewer must accept all candidates as they are. Every effort should be made by the interviewer to curtail any tendency toward stereotyping the candidate or making judgments based on candidate’s speech, dress, behavior, or ethnic background.
- 7) **HONESTY.** There is no substitute for honesty. If an interviewer does not know the answer to a question, the interviewer should simply say so, and then make an effort to find the answer.

The Interview Process

Interviews are never exactly alike since no two individuals are alike. Consequently, the art of interviewing is learned from constant practice. It is important that the interviewer try to improve interviewing techniques by evaluating after each interview with questions such as:

- What was good about the interview?
- What could I have done to make it the interview better?
- What skills need more practice?
- What skills do I need to acquire?

It is important that the interviewer keep records. A file might be made for each prospect/candidate where applications, interview material, and observations might be kept. All record keeping should be done immediately after the interview, never during the interview.

Conducting the Interview

The following are suggestions for conducting the interview;

BEGINNING

- a. Warmly greet the prospect/candidate.
- b. Introduce self; interviewer might briefly share something about self-how long Secular Franciscan, apostolate, etc.
- c. Explain the purpose of the interview.

MIDDLE

The middle part of the interview is the heart of the interview. It is during this part of the interview that the interviewer should be especially sensitive and observant. If the prospect/candidate is shy, the interviewer should be supportive, not impatient. Sometimes gentle questions about the prospect/candidate's family or parish activities will help the candidate gain confidence and "open up".

- a. I see in your application the reason that you would like to become a Secular Franciscan Order is.....Could you tell me more about your reasons?
- b. Do you have any questions about the Secular Franciscan Order or Fraternity?
- c. Tell me a little about your self.

ENDING

- a. Thank the prospect/candidate for coming to the interview, and for showing interest in the Secular Franciscan Order.
- b. Invite the prospect/candidate to the next Fraternity meeting. (or Orientation meeting or Inquiry Session.)
- c. Interviewer should give own phone number and address so that prospect/candidate might reach interviewer if he/she has any further questions.

Interview Follow-Up

For initial interviews, following-up is essential in the forming and maintaining of good relationships. Some helpful suggestions are:

- Phone the prospect about a week following the interview; ask if he/she has any further questions. Firm up plans to attend the next meeting or event.
- A written note expressing thanks to the prospect for interest and a reminder of the date, time, and place of the next meeting is also very welcome.
- If the prospect does not show up at the next meeting, a phone call would be appropriate to inquire why.

For interviews during the various phases of Formation, a short written note with a message from the writings of St. Francis or St. Clare and a thank you for the candidate's time and interest would be an appropriate follow-up.

Appendix B - Forms

This section contains the following forms to be used by the fraternity during Initial Formation.

1. Membership Application Form - filled in by the prospective member
2. Interview Guide - used by the Interviewers
3. Admission to Candidacy Form - filled in by the Inquirer
4. Official Request for Admission - filled in by the Inquirer
5. Fraternal Gathering and Formation Attendance form - filled in by the Minister and/or the Formation Director
6. Request for Profession - filled in by the Candidate
7. Certificate of Profession - filled in by the Minister and Spiritual Assistant/Friar Witness

Membership Application Form

Secular Franciscan Order Our Lady of the Angels Regional Fraternity

Name of Fraternity: _____ Location: _____

Date of Application: _____

Name of Applicant: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address of Applicant: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Home Telephone: _____

Office Telephone: _____

Cell Phone: _____

e-mail: _____

Parish of Applicant: _____

Parish Address: _____

(If the parish to which you belong is not the parish where the fraternity is located, please provide a letter from your pastor indicating that you are a practicing Catholic in good standing.)

Baptism Date: _____

Parish of Baptism: _____

Parish Address: _____

Confirmation Date: _____

Parish of Confirmation: _____

Parish Address: _____

Marital Status: ☐ single ☐ married ☐ widowed ☐ divorced

(If divorced, was the marriage annulled by the Church? _____)

Marriage Date: _____

Parish of Marriage: _____

Parish Address: _____

Ordination Date: _____

Is there a copy of Letter verifying faculties on file? _____

Occupation: _____

What involvements or ministries are you involved with at your parish?

To what other organizations do you belong, civic or religious? (If you belong to another Religious Order, e.g. Lay Carmelites, Third Order Dominican, Benedictine Oblate, you cannot belong to the OFS).

What interests you about the Secular Franciscan Order? (Use back of form, if needed)

Next of Kin/Contact Information

Name of Contact _____

Contact Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip _____

Phone number: _____

Relationship to Applicant (Spouse, Parent, etc.): _____

Information and documentation verified by:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Office _____ (Minister, Spiritual Assistant, etc.)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Interview Guide

The following is an interview guide for prospective members of the Secular Franciscan Order. This information is to be obtained through dialogue and is NOT to be "filled out" by the interested person!

(All information is to be held in strict confidence.)

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone (H) _____

Phone (cell) _____

E-mail _____

Date of Birth _____

Place _____

Occupation _____

Name of parish _____

Address _____

FAMILY INFORMATION

Spouse's Name _____

Names and ages of children _____

EDUCATION

RELIGIOUS FORMATION

What is the extent of your formal Religious Education?

Have you continued educating yourself in the faith since you left school? Yes No

In what ways? (e.g., Bible Classes, Days of Recollection, Adult Religious Education Programs)

How often, how recently?

SACRAMENTAL INFORMATION and OTHER PERTINENT DOCUMENTS

Please supply copies of certificates for your reception of these sacraments (when applicable):

Baptism Confirmation Eucharist Matrimony Decree of Nullity

Divorce Decree of Nullity

MISCELLANEOUS

Do you or have you ever belonged to a Religious Order? Yes [Explain] No

To what groups or organizations do you belong?

How are you active in your parish community?

How are you active in your local community?

How do you occupy your leisure time (hobbies, talents)?

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

How did you first hear of the Secular Franciscan Order?

What draws your interest to St. Francis?

What drew you to this fraternity?

How willing and able are you to participate in the monthly formation sessions and the fraternity gatherings?

How supportive is your family of your decision to explore the possibility that you may have a calling to the Secular Franciscan Order?

What do you expect from the Secular Franciscan Order?

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

COMMENTS

EMERGENCY CONTACT INFORMATION

PERSONAL/SPIRITUAL REFERENCES

Please supply a letter of reference from your pastor or spiritual director and another person to serve as character references.

[Revised by Deacon Dave & Thérèse Ream, O.F.S., July 2017]

Admission to Candidacy

Please write a “letter” to the Council requesting Admission to Candidacy. We would like you to include the following information: (You can respond to each bullet point or write in paragraphs. Whatever is easier for you. Use an extra sheet if necessary.)

Your responses are confidential and will ONLY be shared with the Council.

Why do you want to become a Secular Franciscan?

Has your reason for wanting to become a Secular Franciscan changed since you first joined us? How?

Why is it important for you to be with the fraternity each month? Why is it important to call or email a reason if you are not going to attend?

Is being with the fraternity each month what you expected? Better? Worse?

What did you expect from our formation sessions? Do you think you are learning what you need to know?

Any suggestions for our formation sessions? Any suggestions for the fraternity gatherings?

What do you understand the commitment to the Secular Franciscan Order to be?

Tell us why the commitment to life in fraternity is important to you.

What positive contribution do you feel that you are making (or will make) to the fraternity?

Has your prayer life changed since you came to the fraternity? For the better? How? Worse? How?

Would you be disappointed if for some reason you could not continue with us?

Please include anything else (ideas or questions) you would like us to know.

Candidate Name: _____

Date: _____

Official Request for Admission

Official Request for Admission to the Secular Franciscan Order

I have come to see in the Secular Franciscan Order a way of life that appeals to me.

I would like to continue studying this way and learn more about it.

Therefore, I request to be received as a Candidate, to experience this way of life more intensely, and prepare for a future life commitment in the SFO.

I understand that my request for admission is subject to the approval of the Fraternity Council.

I realize that I may withdraw at any time prior to Profession.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Fraternity Gathering and Formation Attendance Form

Fraternity Name: _____

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Code
A - Absent
E - Excused
P - Present

Visitor/Orientation

Year _____ First Attended _____ (date)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												

Inquirer

Year _____ Welcoming Ceremony _____ (date)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												
Formation												

Year _____

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												
Formation												

Candidate

Year _____ Rite of Admission _____ (date)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												
Formation												

Year _____

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												
Formation												

Year _____

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Gathering												
Formation												

Request for Profession In the Secular Franciscan Order

Date _____

Dear _____,



We welcome your decision to continue your journey in the Secular Franciscan Order. Your period of Initial Formation has been a time for serious reflection on the Franciscan way of life, how you may be called to live this life, and to look toward a possible lifetime commitment.

We invite you now to reflect on your decision. Try to make a good evaluation of yourself and how you feel called to the Franciscan life. You have received a list called “Taking Stock” which should help you with this task. We ask you to include your reflections in a letter addressed to our Minister. That letter and the signed statement below will be submitted to the Minister and Council whose responsibility it is to vote on your acceptance for the Rite of Profession. (See General Constitutions Article 41.1)

If you feel led to continue with lifelong profession, please sign at the bottom of this page.

Request for Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order

Prompted by the grace of God, I seek to live the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the way of St. Francis of Assisi. This I desire to do within the Secular Franciscan Order. Therefore, I request to make a lifetime profession to live in fraternity according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. I understand that my request for profession is subject to approval of the Fraternity Council.

Signature

Date

Certificate of Profession to the Secular Franciscan Order (O.F.S.)

_____ Full Name

Admitted on _____ (Date)

Has made **Permanent Profession** and was received into the

Fraternity of _____

in _____

City State

on _____ (Date)

Signature _____ Signature _____

Name (Print) _____ Name (Print) _____

OFS Minister of Profession _____ Friar Witness _____

Appendix C - Resources

The National Formation Commission suggests that each new Regional Formation Director be given the following resources. New Regional Formation Directors should be advised that these resources are the property of the Region and should be passed along to their successors.

1. The OFS Rule
2. (available at <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>)
3. The General Constitutions of the OFS (available at <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>)
4. The National Statutes of the National Fraternity of the OFS in the USA (available at <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>)
5. Our Lady of the Angels Regional Guidelines (available at <https://www.ourlady-oftheangelsregion.org>)
6. Our Lady of the Angels Regional Directory (This directory contains the names, addresses, phone numbers and emails of the council members of each fraternity, including the local fraternity Director of Formation and Spiritual Assistant. Please contact your fraternity Minister for further information)
7. Our Lady of the Angels Regional Formation Handbook (this document, available at <https://www.ourladyoftheangelsregion.org>)
8. Guidelines for Initial Formation (available from Smokey Valley Printing, PO Box 189, Lindsborg, KS 67456, 785-227-2634)
9. Elements of Initial Formation (available from Smokey Valley Publishing)
10. FUN Manual (available online at <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/> or by calling 636-281-2129 for a hardcopy)