

ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consillium Internationale

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Rome, 21st October 2003

Circ. 6/02-08

To SFO National Councils and
International Councillors

Beloved Brothers and Sisters,

The Lord give you his Peace!

As you have undoubtedly read in the CIOFS Bulletin, the Presidency, in its first March Meeting, has established a number of Commissions for the purpose of better serving the Order and its mission in every part of the world. One of these is, obviously, the Formation Commission.

The Commission is composed of the following persons:

Benedetto Lino OFS, CIOFS Presidency Councilor, Coordinator

Marie Odile Blanty OFS, International Councilor, France

Tibor Kauser OFS, International Councilor, Hungary, member of the CCFMC¹

Bro. Irudaya Samy OFM Cap, General Spiritual Assistant

Formation has received during the General Chapter the highest priority as can be seen from the Official Conclusions of the Chapter:

FORMATION

*This was by far the theme that received the most attention. The importance of formation has emerged as the essential element to guarantee an **authentic and deep sense of belonging**, rooted in a clear notion of **identity and knowledge of the true nature of the SFO** and of its **place in the Franciscan Family and in the Church**. The Chapter has manifested the urgency of finding new, original and efficacious ways to give to formation the **completeness and uniformity** which an Order, spread around the whole world, deserves to accomplish the fundamental role of mature and authoritative apostolate it is called to offer, in collaboration with the rest of the Franciscan Family.*

Thus, the future of the Order heavily depends on Formation.
It is, therefore, the task of a correct and complete Formation to:

¹ *Correspondence Course for Franciscan Charism Mission*. It is an inter-franciscan structure established for the

- Define precisely the **NATURE OF THE ORDER** and of our "**BEING**" **SECULAR FRANCISCANS**, to make present, credibly and efficaciously, the charism of our Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church;
- Create, develop and consolidate our **COMMON IDENTITY**, in a univocal and unitary manner, everywhere in the world, integrating it with the wealth of our respective cultural, historical, social and geographic diversities,
- Develop and consolidate the "**SENSE OF BELONGING**" to the Order, so as to render it, also collectively and throughout the world, that "model of organic, structural and charismatic union at all levels, so as to present ourselves to the world as a "community of love" (Rule, art. 26)" (John Paul II to Gen. Cap., 22 Nov. 2002).

We must make sure that the "**fundamentals**" of our being *christian, franciscan* and *secular* **be identical and expressive of that OFS, "one and unique"**, indicated by the Holy Father and, on this absolutely shared basis, be recognizable as such at all latitudes and in all conditions.

The Chapter, moreover, has made a number of precise requests to the Presidency in order to attain these goals, in the best and fastest possible way. This is what can be read in the Conclusions of the Chapter:

The Chapter asks the Presidency to stimulate a broader and more efficient sharing of the formation materials that have been developed in the various National Fraternities. The Presidency will take up the task of receiving the materials and offer them to all Fraternities especially to those who are in greater need of valid and satisfactory formation material.

This request originates from the fact that several National Fraternities have worked considerably and well, within their territories, to develop a complete and efficacious Formation, but not always has the fruit of this valuable work been made available to the other less privileged National Fraternities in the rest of the world.

We still lack a system and an established practice of sharing and, often, National Fraternities live as if they were islands in an archipelago, with few or no interconnections among themselves. So, it happens that next to some National Fraternities, who have developed advanced systems of Formation, there are many others who lack the minimum requisites, appropriate structures and suitable people to implement a Formation worthy of this name.

We must, therefore, facilitate an authentic **sharing** to assist those who are in need and, at the same time, to favour that **uniformity and consistency of fundamental formation** the Order needs.

This **sharing**, which in some cases, could advantageously become a true "fraternal adoption" or tutorship, becomes even more urgent and essential, for those countries, whose number is unfortunately increasing, where the spiritual assistance is difficult or impossible to obtain.

In order to accomplish what has been requested by the General Chapter we, therefore, ask

- **all of you** to inform us on the **status of development of your formation system and materials** and
- those, who have well developed formation materials to share, to kindly send us as soon as possible:

1. Formation materials used at all levels (books, manuals, guidelines, audio-visual aids, etc ...)
2. Any other element which you consider useful or particularly significant in respect of formation (celebrations schemes, specific rituals adopted for the typical liturgies of the Order etc)

Such materials will be studied and offered to other national Fraternities, especially those who have the same or similar linguistic expression and cannot afford to develop their own formation material and formators.

Please inform us also, in case formation books have been published through commercial companies, if and to what an extent, such books or materials can be freely used. Typically, the national Fraternities who have limited human resources, have limited or no financial resources and cannot afford to pay significant amounts to purchase commercial books.

While we look forward to receiving your formation material, we have the pleasure of sending you the long and rightly awaited "**GUIDELINES FOR FORMATION**" which had been prepared by the previous Presidency and of which we have simply completed the translation into the four official CIOFS languages.

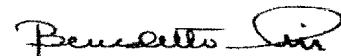
This is an important and valuable work on which our brother and sisters of the previous Presidency have worked, and to whom goes our warm and affectionate gratitude.

The Guidelines offer the essential guide to develop an effective and homogeneous formation.

It is then up to you to develop, locally, specific projects according to your culture, tradition and suitable methodology.

We look forward to hearing from you all soon and send you, also on behalf of the other members of the Commission fraternal wishes of

Pace e bene.



Benedetto Lino
Coordinator
Formation Commission

The Presidency of the International Council
of the Secular Franciscan Order

**GUIDELINES
FOR FORMATION
OF THE SFO**

ROME, 2001

LIST OF THE ABBREVIATIONS

Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order

Rule	<i>Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order</i> , Rome 1978
Consts	<i>General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order</i> , Rome 1991
Ritual	<i>Rituale Ordinis Franciscani Saecularis</i> , ICSFO, 1985

The Magisterium of the Church

- Documents of Vatican Council II

AA	<i>Apostolicam Actuositatem</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>
LG	<i>Lumen Gentium</i>
PO	<i>Presbyterorum Ordinis</i>

- Other Documents

CIC	<i>The Code of Canon Law</i> , Rome 1983
ChL	<i>Christifideles laici</i> .
CD	<i>Christus Dominus</i>
FC	<i>Familiaris consortio</i>
PDV	<i>Pastores dabo vobis</i>

Franciscan Documents

Adm	<i>Admonitions</i> .
1Lf	<i>Letter to all the faithful</i> , First draft.
2Lf	<i>Letter to all the faithful</i> , Second draft
Ltf	<i>Letter to the whole Order</i> .
Rb	<i>Regula Bullata</i>
Test	<i>Testament</i>

Biographies or Legends

1Cel	<i>First Life</i> , Thomas of Celano
2Cel	<i>Second Life</i> , Thomas of Celano
ML	<i>Major Legend</i> , Saint Bonaventure
SC	<i>Sacrum commercium</i>
MP	<i>Mirror of Perfection</i>

FOREWORD

In a very condensed form this document, offers to the National Councils, guidelines needed for “Formation”, in the “*Initial Formation*” stage as well as in that of “*Ongoing Formation*” in three dimensions: **human, Christian and Franciscan**.

The purpose of these Guidelines, is not to repeat what is already contained in the *Rule* and in the *Constitutions*, but intends to be a working document to accompany the Fraternity at all levels: local, regional, national and international, in the commitment to develop and grow in the call received from our Father to live the Gospel following the style of Francis of Assisi.

These Guidelines are only a help which the Council of the National Fraternity, with the Minister and the Director of Formation, have to determine, according to the needs of each person and each situation, the amount of time and the methodology to be dedicated to each of the three dimensions: **human, Christian and Franciscan**, to help the brothers and sisters to grow and attain maturity through dialogue and confrontation between the formators and those being formed, in order to attain a significant presence in the Church and in the world.

The local Fraternity and the ongoing or permanent formation, within which initial formation is adequately integrated, are the right place and space, which generate and form each vocation. Every Secular Franciscan, to be a credible Gospel witness, must also cultivate the specific formation of his/her profession.

Chapter I

Preliminary Notes

The Fraternity is the “privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members”¹.

In this context, formation is to help brothers and sisters to discover the novelty and vitality in their own call as a gift of the Spirit in following Jesus in the manner of Saint Francis of Assisi.

The life of the Secular Franciscan is considered as a way of global growth of the human and Christian person, in listening to God’s call and in constant conversion to His project, “going from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel”².

Formation is, then a way to facilitate the deepening of our response in our daily life, which becomes concrete in the dimensions of:

- ✓ *vocational discernment*: the process for attaining a clear, conscious and definitive decision concerning the Lord’s call.

¹ Rule 22.

² Rule 4.

- ✓ *assimilation of the charism*: as a formative journey which begins during initial formation, when the values of the Secular Franciscan charism are assumed and interiorized in the personal as well as in the fraternal level;

ongoing formation: as a useful means to perfect one's own identity and fidelity to one's life commitment. All recognize that this phase needs particular attention.

formation for formators and for those holding this responsibility: this is one of the greatest problems, because in them formation should be visible in order to be transmitted to the other brothers and sisters, in particular, to the new members of the Fraternity.

Francis was a man in permanent formation: "Let us begin, brothers and sisters, to serve the Lord our God..."³ and he was a master of Gospel life; through his example, his rule and his teachings: "He gave a Rule of life to all and indicated the way of salvation to each one according to his own situation"⁴

Etymologically «to form» means to give form to, to mould something or some person according to a determinate model, using the necessary and suitable means to attain that purpose.

In our case, "to form" concerns man as a being, perfectible up to the end of his life, by means of education, teaching and example.

We consider formation in general and specific Franciscan formation.

I. STAGES OF FORMATION

The formation of the Secular Franciscan, as indicated in the *Rule*⁵ and *Constitutions*⁶, consists of three stages: *Period of Initiation, Admission into the Order, Profession of the Rule*. Periods of time which constitute and characterize the *initial formation* and *ongoing formation*.

"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"⁷..

Initial Formation

Embraces both the *Period of Initiation* and the *Period of Initial Formation*, and serves

³ LM 1, 14.

⁴ 1C 37

⁵ Rule 23.

⁶ Constitutions 37-44

⁷ Const. 37.4

to test the authenticity and solidity of the candidate's vocation, and if the result is positive, to help the candidate to attain maturity in his choice of our way of life, which will be confirmed by *Profession*.

After the Profession it is advisable to have a period of *Formation for the newly Professed* (especially for those who have made their temporary profession) serving to develop and deepen the contents of initial formation.

Ongoing Formation

This takes place throughout life, with the purpose of offering the Secular Franciscans an ever growing richer and intensive spiritual life, accompanying them in the faith path, to consolidate their Franciscan discipleship, updating it continually in line with the teaching of the Church and to allow it to evolve in the daily interchange with our society.

II. FORMATION IN GENERAL

The subject who is being formed is a human being who as a whole person - body, psyche and spirit - tends towards an integral formation through suitable means in order to live as a member of society, of the Church and of the Secular Franciscan Order.

It consists of a “process” which acting as a dynamic reality becomes:

- ✓ a progressive and intelligent growth, which makes the individual capable of choosing the means to carry out his personal pace of maturity with the power of nature and grace;
- ✓ a harmonious and enlightening adherence, which involves all the faculties of the person concerned, making him capable to relate to the realities of his life and work;
- ✓ a systematic and integrated assurance, avoiding improvisation and fragmentation;
- ✓ a constant growth, capable of discernment and openness to renewal in order to attain the goal in the best possible way.

This involves:

- ✓ the teaching of doctrinal principles concerning the goal sought.
- ✓ being involved with those in formation, paying particular attention to the personality of each individual and their life story;
- ✓ continually comparing what is being learned with the experiences of daily life, in order to help the candidate to follow a real and personal path.

This demands from the formator:

- 1) *From the psychological point of view*

- ✓ maturity, balance and self-control;
- ✓ openness to dialogue;
- ✓ the capacity to apply what has been learnt and to transmit it.

2) *From the cultural point of view*

- ✓ knowledge of the doctrine to be taught and of the pedagogy of renewal.
- ✓ notions of methodology: concrete situations and good ways of communication.
- ✓ interest in keeping up to date and the ability to judge between reality and the objective to be attained.

3) *From the spiritual point of view*

- ✓ discernment
- ✓ uprightness
- ✓ fidelity to the charism
- ✓ life witness.

III. SPECIFIC FRANCISCAN FORMATION

To specific formation is applied the same criteria as to formation in general but giving a significant answer, according to the charism of Francis of Assisi, to the signs of the time, to personal and fraternal discernment, and to formation itself.

The candidate is one of the faithful who, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, asks to be admitted to the Secular Franciscan Order to live the Gospel as Saint Francis did, and to strive for perfect charity in the secular state of life.⁸

This formation aims at helping the Secular Franciscan to discover the vocation received and to respond to it generously, as member of the Church and as citizen, according to the spirit and life style of Saint Francis, in fraternity.

This includes:

1) *Knowledge:*

- ✓ of the fundamental notions about human nature, of the rights and duties of a « human being » and of a citizen of a particular country;

⁸ Rule 2; Const. 3

- ✓ of the fundamental principles of the Catholic faith, with particular reference to the study of Christology, Ecclesiology, and Social Teaching of the Church, in order to have a qualified and effective presence both in the Church and in the civil community⁹;
- ✓ of Saint Francis, Saint Clare, and other important Franciscan personalities, so as to give a truly Franciscan character to each one's presence in the context of the Franciscan Family.
- ✓ of the history of the SFO, the Rule, Constitutions and Statutes, to develop the sense of "belonging" to the Secular Order.

2) *Involvement:*

- ✓ of the person being formed, by arousing personal interest, so that the passing on of ideas is never reduced to pure and simple indoctrination, but always to develop the person's responsibility for his/her own formation¹⁰.

3) *Life Experience:*

- ✓ so that the effect of what has been taught is seen in daily life, our own and that of others¹¹.

This demands:

1. *Watchful attention,*

in supporting the action of the Holy Spirit in the person being formed, who is one "called".

2. *Capable guides (formators)*

who are witnesses and exemplary, trained and suitable¹².

3. *Fidelity*

to the Rule, to the Constitutions and to the other directives of the higher organisms of the Order and of the Church.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The methodology includes:

1) *Acceptance of the one to be formed*

- ✓ with the person's experience of life, aspirations, interests, points of view and horizons;

⁹ GS. 62

¹⁰ ChL. 63

¹¹ GS. 43; ChL. 59.

¹² ChL. 63

- ✓ with the person's real problems, capabilities and attitudes.

2) *Reliance*

- ✓ on what is good in each one
- ✓ on the real possibilities of growth
- ✓ on the wise use of free time.

3) *To promote*

- ✓ the involvement of those being formed.

4) *To transmit*

- ✓ ideas, information, knowledge of concrete arguments, seeking to combine the varying levels of knowledge of those being formed.

V. EVALUATION OF THE FORMATION

The evaluation is a tool which helps to appreciate the results of the formative process.

1) Examining

- ✓ the initial situation of the one being formed, and the result achieved with respect to the objectives.

2) Correcting

- ✓ if this is needed, the attitudes, the methods, the atmosphere, according to the needs and emerging difficulties.

3) Encouraging

- ✓ self-evaluation of the one being formed, in relation to his/her objectives and the problems in his/her life.

INITIAL FORMATION

The formative process:

Its aim is to deepen the values of the Secular Franciscan life, in order to have personal experience, energies which motivate from within and reveal attitudes; the deepening is done through prayer, studies, fraternal life, knowledge of the SFO, self examination, formative dialogue, spiritual accompaniment;

It demands from the formator a true “wisdom of the heart” and the ability for discernment to help people in formation in the development of human and spiritual requirements, in their own human capacity and their availability towards brothers and information on the Franciscan charism.

A. INITIATION STAGE

“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.

The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development are established by the national statutes.

It belongs to the Fraternity council to decide possible exemptions of this time of initiation¹³, and to grant the admission to the Order¹⁴.

1) *The aspiring member's reception*

evaluation of the motivations that bring him/her to accept the life project in the SFO and the attitudes to live in communion with the brothers and sisters;

reciprocal acquaintance between the Fraternity and the aspiring member¹⁵. Life in the Fraternity is the most efficient factor of formation: “living together” leads to mutual formation, and leads one to form by forming oneself and allowing oneself to be formed;

fundamental formative elements: life lived with generosity and joy, open fraternity and in constant development of reciprocal acceptance;

verification of knowledge of the basic fundamental truths of the faith and personal acceptance of them, that means “a re-examination of the faith”.

reflection on the importance of Baptism and the requirement to involve oneself seriously to discover and follow God's project;

¹³ Const. 38.

¹⁴ Cf Const. 39.

¹⁵ Cf Const. 38.1.

formation to personal and communal prayer, to the practice of the Sacraments and the openness to grace.

2) *Notions on Vocation*

Nature: God's gift, man's/woman's answer to His call; to communion with Him in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. The success and the fruitfulness of the vocation are proportional to the conformity of man's will to the will of God.

Dimension: **personal** (responsibility and direct involvement of the person), **fraternal** (responsibility of the fraternity and of those responsible for it) and **communal** (aspects of communion and community sharing, and of sharing with others).

Characteristics according to the Franciscan spirit and life style: fraternity, secularity, acceptance, openness, sharing . . .

Types of vocation: Abraham, Mary, the apostles, Francis . . .

3) *Contents*

- ✓ Elements of Christology.
- ✓ Life of Saint Francis;
- ✓ Elements of Franciscan spirituality;
- ✓ History of the Franciscan Family, with a particular reference to the Secular Franciscan Order;
- ✓ Rule of SFO, with references to its evolution throughout the centuries.

B. THE NOVITIATE

“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”¹⁶.

The aim of formation during this first stage is to initiate the candidate to attain his own maturity: *Human, Christian, Franciscan*.

It is the man who, “in the fullness of his own humanity”, becomes Christian; and wants to live his own “Christian humanism” through Francis's spirit taking in the Rule of the Franciscan Secular Order.

¹⁶ Const. 40.1.

The Secular Franciscan needs to tend constantly to the attainment of this Christian and Franciscan structure.

1) HUMAN DIMENSION

“Christ who is the new Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and his Love also fully reveals man to man; and makes his supreme calling clear”. And, he “who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself”¹⁷.

The formation in this dimension

a) emphasizes the truths regarding:

The candidate him/herself. The Secular Franciscans “should go forth as witnesses and instruments of the mission of the Church among all peoples”¹⁸, “let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of conversion”¹⁹ and “let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to each one’s situation in the various circumstances of life”²⁰;

The candidate within the family. “In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life”²¹;

The candidate and work. “Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community”²²;

The candidate and society. “Are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world”, let them exercise “their responsibilities competently”²³, in promoting “justice”, especially in the field of public life²⁴, and to be “peace bearers”²⁵.

The candidate and nature. “they should respect all creatures and they should strive to move to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship”²⁶.

b) commits to:

¹⁷ GS. 22.41; Rule 14.

¹⁸ Rule 6.

¹⁹ Rule 7.

²⁰ Rule 10; cf LG. 31.33-35; GS. 12-18.23; CD.30.

²¹ Rule 17; cf CG. 47-57; *Familiaris consortio*; *Apostolic Exhortation regarding the role of Christian Family in the modern world* 24/11/1983

²² Rule 16, cf LG. 36; GS 43.63-72

²³ Rule 14.

²⁴ Rule 15.

²⁵ Rule 19., cf LG. 21; GS. 12.73-78.91-93

²⁶ Rule 18.

a critical evaluation, for an ecclesiastical and civil commitment in the surrounding reality²⁷;
recognize the gifts received and to share them with brothers for common enrichment;
live in solidarity with the brother's daily problems;

2) *CHRISTIAN DIMENSION*

The formation in this dimension demands:

The path to conversion

- ✓ God as a gift.
- ✓ As “brothers and sisters of penance” let them conform their own life to the style of the path of conversion²⁸.
- ✓ Every man created by God is called to be regenerated by water and by the Holy Spirit (cf *Jn 3,5*) and to become son of God (cf *Jn 1,12*): “In Christ he is a new creation” (2 *Cor 5,17*).
- ✓ It is the new man created by God, in justice and holiness of truth (cf *Eph 4,24*), who lives the new life (cf *Rm 5,4*).
- ✓ Man passes from the image of God, characteristic of every man, to the likeness of God's Son in Christ, proper to the Christian²⁹.
- ✓ The Christian dimension demands a substantial enrichment of the human dimension in every one of its expressions: man, family, work, society.

Proper catechesis:

- ✓ Ecclesiology: with reference to the participation and the spiritual salvation mission of the Church and to insertion in the particular Church;
- ✓ Theology of the sacraments of the Christian initiation: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist;
- ✓ Christology: particularly concerning the participation in the triple office of Christ: priestly, prophetic, royal.

There is need:

²⁷ Cf GS. 53-62

²⁸ Rule 7.

²⁹ Cf Amm. 5; FF. 153.

- ✓ *To exercise the theological and cardinal virtues, as a leaven in the world*³⁰;
- ✓ *To grow continuously in daily conversion, in the listening of the Word of God, in the celebration of the Eucharist, in recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation;*
- ✓ *To commit oneself to cultural updating and spiritual growth;*
- ✓ *To be ready to have an active and qualified presence in society and in the local Church*³¹.

This involves:

*To translate the Gospel's values into life's behavior and in social rules*³²;

To be open to the new signs of the times in order to insert oneself in a society which has changed profoundly.

3) FRANCISCAN DIMENSION

The Franciscan vocation is an explicit, free and responsible evangelical choice, to live it and give witness of it in the Church and in the world with the strong and joyful sense of divine sonship incarnated by Saint Francis.

This dimension needs:

To know Saint Francis' writings in order to live his charism.

To study the spirituality and the Franciscan history to insert oneself in it.

To deepen the study of the Rule and the Constitutions to give greater importance to daily life.

The fundamental or principal elements of the Franciscan dimension are the following:

The Rule which constitutes the following:

a) *The form of Life*

on which the Franciscan vocation follows a journey of faith;

to pass from "the old man to the new man"³³; in the tension of continuous

³⁰ CFLG. 31.

³¹ Cf AA. 7.

³² Cf ChL. 60; GS. 43.

³³ Cf Rule 6.

conversion³⁴; and make Christ the inspiration and the center of life³⁵;

in order to live the Fraternity: in communion and sharing with the brothers to learn *to be together, pray together, plan together, and act together*³⁶;

to acquire the sense of responsibility and active belonging to the SFO and to the Fraternity, as a “visible sign of the Church”³⁷.

b) *The filter*

In their family³⁸.

At work³⁹.

In the social political commitment⁴⁰.

In the promotion of justice⁴¹.

In the building up of peace⁴².

In brotherhood with all creation⁴³.

c) *The guide*

In Francis’ spirit towards:

God, in the following of Christ⁴⁴;

Men, in order to build with them a more fraternal and evangelical world⁴⁵;

Created things, to use and to make them progress for everyone’s advantage⁴⁶;

Brothers and Sisters, who share the same vocation, to discover and live in

³⁴ Cf Rule 7.

³⁵ Cf Rule 4.

³⁶ Cf Rule 24.

³⁷ Cf Rule 1,6,22.

³⁸ Cf Rule 17; Const. 24.

³⁹ Cf Rule 16; Const. 21.1-2

⁴⁰ Cf Rule 14; Const. 22.

⁴¹ Cf Rule 15.

⁴² Cf Rule 19.

⁴³ Cf Rule 18.

⁴⁴ Cf Rule Prologue, part 1; 4-8; 10-12

⁴⁵ Cf Rule 13-17; 19.

⁴⁶ Cf Rule 11-12.

fraternity⁴⁷.

The Profession or promise of evangelical life

“The Profession is the solemn ecclesial act by which the candidate, remembering the call received from Christ, renews the baptismal promises and publicly affirms his/her personal commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to Francis’ example and following the Rule of the SFO”⁴⁸.

The spirit of penance

In the spirit of penance, characteristic of the Secular Franciscan⁴⁹, it is necessary to place oneself in an attitude of ongoing conversion⁵⁰.

Fundamental means to cultivate:

Listening to and celebrating the Word of God and the Eucharist;

revision of life, spiritual retreats and spiritual direction;

recourse to the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁵¹;

Christian fortitude in the difficulties of daily life⁵²;

solidarity in the interactions with brothers and sisters⁵³;

reduction of one’s own personal needs⁵⁴;

abstinence and sacrifices as a way of the Cross towards the Resurrection⁵⁵.

The Fraternity

The Franciscan Fraternity underlines:

Mutual appreciation, without weakness and exclusions, and the respect for all creatures, animate or inanimate.

The privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and

⁴⁷ Cf Rule 20-26.

⁴⁸ Const. 42.1; cf Rit. SFO. Part I, preliminary notes to the rite of the Profession nn. 13-15

⁴⁹ Cf Rule 7.

⁵⁰ Cf Const. 13.

⁵¹ Cf Const. 13.1.

⁵² Cf Const. 10.

⁵³ Cf Const. 13.2.

⁵⁴ Cf Const. 15.3.

⁵⁵ Cf Const. 12.2.

for enlivening the apostolic life of its members⁵⁶.

The Fraternity underlines the following aspects by which it is illustrated:

- a) **Doctrinal:** to value the roots which originate from Baptism and which are nourished by the Eucharist.
- b) **Spiritual:** to manifest the Father, revealed by Jesus, center of fraternal life, and the brothers and sisters as a gift of God⁵⁷.
- c) **Psychological:** to accept the differences of the brothers, the qualities and limitations as a variety and mutual complementarity.
- d) **Social:** to open oneself to the demands of the human values which are present in society, to be concerned with problems regarding humanity and society, and to express this by our behavior in life and in projects elaborated together.

C. THE FORMATION OF THE NEWLY PROFESSED

“Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual Profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary Profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years”⁵⁸.

“It is not exaggerated to say that the entire existence of the lay faithful has the aim to bring him to acknowledgment of the radical Christian novelty which flows from Baptism, sacrament of faith, so that he can live the commitments as a vocation given by God”⁵⁹.

Formation is “a continuous personal process of maturation in faith and in the configuration with Christ according to the Father’s will with the Holy Spirit’s guidance”⁶⁰.

These expressions show the way to an authentic formation.

Paradigm to bear in mind

The itinerary followed by Jesus (cf. Jn 16, 28).

“*I came from the Father*” (source, principle and end of every purpose);

“*and have come into the world*” (place of fraternal commitment according to the Father’s will);

“*Now I leave the world*” (sense of existence as a journey of continuity);

⁵⁶ Cf Rule 22.

⁵⁷ Cf Test. 14; FS. 116.

⁵⁸ Const. 42.2.

⁵⁹ ChL. 10.

⁶⁰ ChL. 57.

“and go back to the Father” (paradigm of our brotherhood).

1) The Starting Point: Baptism

Awareness of the radical nature of Baptism, which makes us “witnesses and instruments” of the Church’s mission among men⁶¹.

Francis:

lives deeply the Paschal Mystery of the death and the resurrection of Christ (the essence of Baptism), in full conformity with Him⁶². Determining role of the heavenly Father in his life: in Him his treasure, all his trust and hope⁶³, his spiritual family a gift from the Father to His Son⁶⁴.

To form to a trustful and filial surrender in the Father’s hands who has his own plan on each one.

The Rule:

Points out concretely the truth of Baptism: death and resurrection in Christ (beginning of a new life and of divine sonship); forms members of the Church and makes them share in his mission: the Profession renews and “re-actualizes” Baptism with a new sense of responsibility, reinforces the bond of union with the Church and qualifies the participation in the mission.

Develops the sense of divine sonship and the importance of the figure of the Father in the life of the newly professed so that he will continuously discover this essential relationship with Him, by following the Rule.

Shows the Father who gives His Son⁶⁵ and who encounters man with mercy in the Sacrament of Reconciliation⁶⁶, qualifies His commitment in man’s favour⁶⁷, waits for him in His house, where He will receive him for the definitive encounter⁶⁸. Qualified and significant attitudes of Jesus towards the Father: prayer⁶⁹, obedience⁷⁰, trust and poverty⁷¹, etc.

⁶¹ Cf Rule 6.

⁶² Cf 1C. 112-113.

⁶³ Cf ML. 2,4.

⁶⁴ Cf MP. 26.

⁶⁵ Cf Rule 4.

⁶⁶ Cf Rule 7.

⁶⁷ Cf Rule 13.

⁶⁸ Cf Rule 11, 19.

⁶⁹ Cf Rule 8.

⁷⁰ Cf Rule 10.

⁷¹ Cf Rule 11.

2) The Journey

The commitment is an indispensable condition to progress in the journey and to acquire a mentality of faith, so that this may enter into one's own life, and pervade it all, preventing it from conforming to the mentality of the world. (cf *Rm 12, 1*).

A) *THE CENTRALITY OF CHRIST IN LIFE*

Francis

His highest aspiration, his chief desire, his uppermost purpose was to observe faithfully the holy Gospel and with perfect vigilance to follow the teachings and the footsteps of Jesus Christ⁷². He was "another Christ", but he did not consider himself as having attained this and felt the need "to convert" himself daily⁷³.

The Rule:

to make Christ the inspiration and center of one's life with God and humanity: dynamic force, directional and enlightening, and gravitational point towards which all life converges.⁷⁴

to seek the person of Christ in the brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity⁷⁵;

to follow the humble and obedient Christ, the poor and crucified Christ, and witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions⁷⁶;

to contemplate his spousal love for the Church in order to live in fullness in his/her own state of life in order to be signs of an already renewed world in Christ⁷⁷.

B) *METHODOLOGY*

"From the Gospel to life; and from life to the Gospel"⁷⁸:

from the Gospel, to draw principles, light and energy for the behaviour in daily life to be leaven and permeate it with the evangelical message;

⁷² Cf 1C. 84.115; FC 466-467.521-522.

⁷³ Cf 1C. 103; FC. 500.

⁷⁴ Cf Rule 4.

⁷⁵ Cf Rule 5.

⁷⁶ Cf Rule 10.

⁷⁷ Cf Const. 17.

⁷⁸ Cf Rule 4.

from life, with its multiplicity of situations and variety of problems, to confront it with the Gospel, which is the principle of evaluation and operative choices;

so that the initial enthusiasm will not die out, to bring to the brothers and sisters new lymph, new inspiration, fresh air, new energies, new enthusiasm, conscious of their role in the Fraternity

3) The Goal

“The state of perfection in the necessary measure to become mature people, to reach to the very height of Christ’s stature” (*Eph 4,13*). Conforming to Him to the point of saying “yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given himself up for me” (*Gal 2,20*).

Francis

“His only desire was to be like Christ and imitate him perfectly, and he was found worthy to be adorned with the marks of his likeness; in his life he imitated the life of Christ and in his death he imitated his death bearing in his body the holy image of Christ”⁷⁹. It seemed that “Christ and Francis were one and the same person”⁸⁰. The path, the one taught by Christ: to do the Father’s will. “It is has always been and still is most dear to me and more sweet and more acceptable, that what pleases the Lord my God most, may happen in me and with me, for I desire always only to be found conformed and obedient and docile to his will in all things”⁸¹.

The Rule

It points out the entire journey of the faith of the Secular Franciscan as that of “a radical interior change” in order to arrive, according to the dynamic power of the Gospel, “to conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ”⁸². And to be with him, “the true worshipper of the Father”, making “prayer and contemplation the soul of all they are and do”⁸³. In this way his/her life is projected and lived in conformity to the heavenly Father’s will and carried out in its specific work, day by day, in union with Christ.

4) The Guide in the Journey

Is the Holy Spirit. He reveals and empowers to understand the “richness” of Christ and he introduces into the whole truth (cf *Eph 3,16-19*). He reminds the Christian that he is the son of God and he supports him/her in weakness (cf *Rm 8, 14-17.26-27*); he guides him/her to Jesus’ teachings and he introduces him/her to all truth (cf *Jn 14,26; 16,13-14*).

Francis

⁷⁹ ML. 14,4; FS. 1240.

⁸⁰ 2C. 219; FS. 814.

⁸¹ 1C. 107; FS. 504.

⁸² Rule 7.

⁸³ Rule 8.

Perfect imitator of Christ he was full of the Holy Spirit⁸⁴. And he said that in order to follow Christ's footsteps it is necessary to be purified, enlightened and enkindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit, and that the essence of the Franciscan life consists in having the Spirit of the Lord and its holy operation⁸⁵.

The Rule

Reminds the Secular Franciscan that his/her family of which he/she is a member, is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church⁸⁶; as is his/her vocation⁸⁷. To fulfill the vocation, to achieve the perfection within his/her secular condition, he/she will need to be led by the Holy Spirit who will guide him/her to the truth⁸⁸.

Chapter III

ONGOING FORMATION

To be a "follower" and to live in the Fraternity demands from each of the members of the SFO a continuous and progressive conversion. This demands an unfailing commitment in the daily "renewal" to grow and mature in the personal and fraternal dimension, and is a requirement of his own mission within the Church and in the contemporary world.

Ongoing formation tends, through a process of constant growth, of discernment, of openness to the Holy Spirit, of availability and of decision-making, to improve the quality of fraternal life, of participation in the mission of the Church, and to answer the challenges of the contemporary world, with creativity and decision....

Therefore, ongoing formation:

is a demand of the progressive development of the Secular Franciscan in a continuous journey towards "mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ" (*Eph 4,13*);

is to be faithful to the vocation and an encouragement in the journey of that daily conversion which will lead him to conform his thoughts and deeds to those of Christ⁸⁹, which is the distinguishing mark of "maturity" of the disciple of the Gospel;

⁸⁴ Cf ML. 11,2; FS. 1189.

⁸⁵ Cf 2R. 10,10; FS. 104.

⁸⁶ Cf Rule 1.

⁸⁷ Cf Rule 2.

⁸⁸ Cf Rule 4.

⁸⁹ Cf Rule 7.

finds its foundation and its original motivation in the dynamism of the received gift, the vocation, which the Franciscan has to follow in a coherent manner (cf *Eph 4,1*) to render it always safer (cf *2Pt 1,10*) under the Holy Spirit's action which strengthens in him the inner self making him understand the greatness of Christ's mystery and of his love (cf *Eph 3,16-19*).

Therefore, it is God himself, who enlivens his gift and pours out the extraordinary richness of grace and responsibility contained in it, for the personal and communal good. The Secular Franciscan, as a matter of fact enters the SFO "led by the Holy Spirit"⁹⁰, and it is the Holy Spirit who introduces him/her in Christ, the Truth, gift of the love of the Father and way to Him⁹¹. And Christ is Truth and infinite Gift.

It is understandable then, why Francis "did not even think that he had reached the threshold and persevering untiringly in his purpose of attaining a holy renewal, he hoped always to begin anew"⁹².

The reason for this demand is threefold:

- 1) *man's total growth*, which lasts throughout his entire life and can never be said to be complete;
- 2) *the importance of being* Secular Franciscan (-inner development-), and that of *doing* the mission (-outer development-);
- 3) *the Fraternity's place* in one own's life and activity.

Ongoing formation must lead the Secular Franciscan to:

"listen to and meditate on the Word of God, "going from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel"⁹³;

"reflect on events in the Church and in society, enlightened by faith and with the help of the documents of the Magisterium of the Church, consequently taking a coherent stand";

"discern and deepen the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of Saint Francis, Saint Clare and other Franciscan authors"⁹⁴.

1) This demands:

⁹⁰ Cf Rule 2.

⁹¹ Cf Rule 4.

⁹² 1C. 103; FS. 500

⁹³ Rule 4.

⁹⁴ Const. 44.3.

an intrinsic vital bond with initial formation, through adaptations, updating and modifications;

a general and total process of continuous maturation through the deepening of human, Christian and Franciscan dimensions and of their intimate and living specific connection;

a sense of responsibility before the new operative needs, new problems, the changing cultural and social situations;

a continuous updating in relation to the developing of Church and social realities.

2) *This guarantees:*

the fulfillment of the given formation and continually requalifies it, extends it, completes it and improves it creating the requirement to generate changes;

transformation of faith into Christian wisdom;

assimilation of the spirit and the style of Saint Francis in a valid proposal on the sense of life.

3) *This involves:*

an ongoing dialogue with the Church and society;

the search of adequate solutions to the needs, inspired by the Gospel, by the Magisterium of the Church and by the charism of the SFO;

the renewal of traditional activities, which demand new ways corresponding to the needs of modern times;

the search for new activities;

an intelligent and open comparison with other Church groups which are concerned with the problems of society.

Chapter IV

AGENTS AND PEOPLE IN CHARGE

“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 Spiritual Assistant”⁹⁵.

“The brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord”⁹⁶.

I. AGENTS

A) THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation, the principal agent of formation, the animator of fraternal life⁹⁷. He is the one who:

gives birth to new life and renders one participant in divine nature, and testifies that we are sons of God (cf *Jn 3,5-8; 2Pt 1,4; Rm 8,14-16*);

reveals and communicates the vocation to holiness (cf *Eph 1,4-5*), conforms us to Christ and makes us participate in his filial life (cf *Gal 4,6; 5,25*);

teaches what is necessary for the following of Christ (cf *Jn 14,26; 16,13-14*);

strengthens the inner man (cf *Eph 3, 16-19*);

enriches with gifts and graces for common advantage (cf *Cor 12, 4-11*);

gives strength to witness to Christ (cf *Acts 1,8; 8, 14-17; Lk 12, 11-12*);

comforts, advises, assists, supports in the various circumstances of life (cf *Jn 14, 16-17.26; Rm 8, 26-27*);

associates to the resurrection of Christ (cf *Rm 8,11*).

According to *Francis*:

his brothers and sisters are a gift from God, who were born by the power of the Holy Spirit who is considered the Minister General of the Order⁹⁸;

to follow Jesus Christ's footsteps means to be purified interiorly, enlightened and enkindled by the fire of the Holy Spirit⁹⁹;

⁹⁵ Const. 37.2.

⁹⁶ Const. 37.3.

⁹⁷ Cf LG. 12; Const. 11; 37.2.

⁹⁸ Cf 2C. 193; FS. 779.

⁹⁹ Cf 1LetF. 51; FS. 233.

the Holy Spirit leads to the knowledge of spiritual realities¹⁰⁰, unites the faithful soul to Jesus Christ and makes it his spouse¹⁰¹;

the new man has “the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation”¹⁰²;

The *Rule* describes the action of the Holy Spirit towards the candidate, as one:

of anticipation: it prepares the “family of reception”, the Franciscan one aroused by him within the Church¹⁰³;

of encouragement: “impels” him to enter in it to follow Jesus Christ in the manner of Saint Francis¹⁰⁴;

which gives light and strength: guides him/her to the truth, which is the mystery of Christ, in the Church, in liturgical activity, especially in the Eucharist¹⁰⁵, and even in the “cloister” of the world¹⁰⁶.

B) THE PERSON TO BE FORMED

The person to be formed or the professed is the main agent and centre, subject and object of formation. The outcome of the formative action is connected to his/her docility to the action of the Holy Spirit and to the constructive collaboration of the Fraternity.

The action of the Holy Spirit invites him/her to strive to attain perfect charity in his own secular state by living the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis¹⁰⁷, and his formative journey prepares him and supports him to adhere to the vocation, confirmed by the promise of evangelical life, or Profession, which marks his/her “belonging” to the SFO.

His/her commitment needs:

to analyze the reasons that impel him to live the Franciscan experience and to weigh and examine his skills and gifts;

to open himself with full availability to the light of the Holy Spirit and to the help of the people in charge;

¹⁰⁰ Cf 2C. 192; FS. 778.

¹⁰¹ Cf 1LetF. 1,8-10; FS. 178/2; 2LetF. 50-53; FS. 200.

¹⁰² 2R 10,8; FS. 104.

¹⁰³ Cf Rule 1.

¹⁰⁴ Cf Rule 2.

¹⁰⁵ Cf Rule 4-5

¹⁰⁶ Cf SC. 63; FS. 2022.

¹⁰⁷ Cf Rule 2.

to make use of evangelical discernment to accept the call of God in the various circumstances of life, in the crossroads of potentialities and of reasons for hope that they contain;

to develop one's own human qualities to build up a mature personality, human and Christian, the ability to open oneself to the civil and the ecclesial community, with witness to faith in life: family, professional, social, political.

to maintain openness, loyalty, respect, fidelity, coherence to all that helps personal growth and the Franciscan Fraternity.

II. PEOPLE IN CHARGE

People in charge have to be people capable:

to support without dominating;

to set conditions so that the person who is called can find his/her "form",

to develop an operative function and an evaluation function;

THE PERSON TO BE FORMED

It is the first person in charge of the ongoing formation in his/her relationship with God, with the members of the Secular Franciscan Fraternity and in his/her social and ecclesial mission.

THE FRATERNITY

The Fraternity, as a place where fraternal life is revealed and developed, "is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer, and example"¹⁰⁸, in order to make authentic Secular Franciscans of those people whom the Fraternity has engendered to Franciscanism.

THE COUNCIL AND THE MINISTER

The Council is the soul and the guide of the Fraternity, of which the Minister is the first person in charge¹⁰⁹.

It is the duty of the Council of the Fraternity¹¹⁰:

¹⁰⁸ Const. 37.3.

¹⁰⁹ Cf Rule 21.

¹¹⁰ Cf Const. 50.1.

to establish the program in conformity with the general directives;

to support the person in charge of formation and to follow the work in order to evaluate the results and also to be able to accept or not the candidate to the admission and to Profession;

to program the Fraternity meetings;

to obtain the updating and to foster the growth among members.

THE PERSON IN CHARGE OF FORMATION

The Master of formation has to be¹¹¹:

prepared and available, with communication abilities and he has to transmit cultural, theological, spiritual contents...;

rooted in the charism of the founder in order to make it present today according to new ecclesial and social demands;

aware of being “sent” by the Fraternity;

prompt to the insertion of the candidates in the Fraternity;

available to look after personal relationships with the individuals, with the assistant with the other people in charge of formation.

All this in a total gift of self which is the answer to the received trust and to the strong request for help.

THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANT

The Spiritual Assistant is a concrete sign of communion and of co-responsibility of the First Order and of the Third Order Regular towards the SFO¹¹². “The specific task of the assistant is to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and ongoing formation of the brothers and sisters”¹¹³.

The spiritual assistant shares the same ideal, participates in the same charism and in the same mission of Francis, lives and facilitates the vital and mutual communion¹¹⁴, and guarantees the integrity of faith and the ecclesiastical discipline¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ Cf Const. 52.3.

¹¹² Cf Rule 26.

¹¹³ Cf Const. 90.1.

¹¹⁴ Cf Rule 26.; Const. 89.3.

¹¹⁵ Cf Const. 85.2; *Constitution to spiritual and pastoral assistance to the SFO*, Rome 1992; PO 6; PDV. 16-17; CJC. 305

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