



National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States

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Subject: Fraternal Accompaniment Guidelines

Secular Franciscans gather in small groups as one aspect of living out the OFS Rule. These small groups are called fraternities. Each fraternity is officially established through a process delineated in Canon Law. Thus, a Franciscan fraternity is “a visible sign of the Church, a community of love.” Brothers and sisters make efforts to build fraternities, form new vocations and communicate with the broader Franciscan family or community. A Franciscan fraternity “should be a privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.” (Rule, Art. 22).

Occasionally the members of a fraternity struggle with attaining or maintaining these goals. Situations occur when help, support or interventions are necessary and requested by members of the Order.

If a fraternity **council** finds itself in such a situation, the fraternity may ask the next higher level to assist. The next higher council would arrange for a competent person to accompany the council.

Fraternal accompaniment is a process of supporting, encouraging, sharing, mentoring, and “walking with” brothers and sisters in another fraternity for the purpose of:

1. assisting them in becoming “whole” again as a vibrant fraternity or
2. if after an appropriate length of time, determining if deactivating the fraternity is appropriate.

[**Note:** Deactivation is done through coordination with the Provincial Spiritual Assistant of the Province to which the fraternity is bonded not by the regional fraternity.]

Examples of what constitutes a struggling fraternity include:

1. A fraternity has fewer than five members and is no longer growing.
2. Fraternities struggle to meet due to age and illness of members.
3. Fraternity council members do not get along, and their personality and internal issues are affecting their ability to function.
4. Fraternity council members are not fulfilling their duties.
5. The fraternity is unable to elect a new council due to unavailability of nominees or lack of quorum present.
6. Members of the fraternity consistently quarrel and are divisive. An unwelcome atmosphere dominates gatherings, and the council has been unable to restore serenity.

Fraternal accompaniment may apply to Regional Fraternities also.

Steps for fraternal accompaniment include:

1. The council of the fraternity or a member identifies the problem and notifies the council of the next higher level.

2. The council of the next higher level meets with the local fraternity to better define the issue and identifies a fraternity council to accompany the fraternity.
3. The appointed people spend time building trust and communicating with the members of the struggling fraternity engaged in this fraternal accompaniment.
4. Together with the help of the next higher level, they design a plan of action with timelines.
5. Once finalized, the person accompanying the fraternity that is struggling provides regular reports on the progress to the next higher level and the local fraternity.
6. If a Regional Fraternity is the one being accompanied, the National Executive Council will accompany the Regional Fraternity.

Some options for fraternal accompaniment include:

1. Functional Changes such as appointing a working fraternity council when the council of the struggling fraternity is no longer functioning.
2. Disciplinary Actions such as addressing a personality conflict that is affecting the fraternity in a negative way.
3. Training
 - a. Address ways to draw vocations and strengthen formation.
 - b. Address the lack of servant leadership in council members who are not fulfilling their duties.
 - c. Offering conflict resolution training, Servant Leadership training and role-playing.
 - d. Share an on-going formation workshop on the specific problem area. Assist those with implementing the new skill/information.

Fraternal accompaniment may last no more than a total of four years.

References for Fraternal Accompaniment:

- 1. Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order**, Arts. 1, 9, 20, and 22.
- 2. OFS General Constitution** (2020, edition) GC Article 31.1
- 3. Statutes of the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order**,

Fraternal Accompaniment, Article 57

- 1) The Council of the next higher level may provide for the fraternal accompaniment of a Fraternity in difficulty.
- 2) Once willing to offer fraternal accompaniment, the Council of the next higher level:
 - a. designates a secular Councilor or, alternatively, a neighboring Local Fraternity that:
 - i. will offer formation in cooperation with the local assistant.
 - ii. reports regularly in writing.
 - b. establishes the duration of this accompaniment for a maximum of three years, which may be extended by one year.
- 3) For the duration of the accompaniment, the Council of the next higher level carries out or delegates a partnering local fraternity council to carry out all the functions of the local Council, including decisions on Admissions and Professions, keeping the REC apprised of all activities
- 4) The National Statutes may establish further provisions.

4. Handbook of Franciscan Servant Leadership

5. Guide for Deactivation of a Local Secular Franciscan Fraternity, offered by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) and the National Executive Council (NEC) February 21, 2022, pages 1-3.