

Guideline: 2024-07

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Subject: Guidelines for Affiliates

General Comments: Applies to local fraternities.

Background: The OFS General Constitutions (Articles 53.5 and 103.1) and OFS-USA National Statutes (Article 18.13) provide for special forms of association with the fraternity for those who, without becoming a member of the OFS, want to participate in its life and activities. These individuals would be called "Affiliates."

Guideline:

1. Conditions for Attaining Affiliate Status

The reasons preventing full membership in the Secular Franciscan Order may vary. In some cases, the person is not a Catholic, in others he or she may, for personal reasons, be unable or unwilling to meet the requirements for full membership. The status of people who wish only to participate in the life of the fraternity, without juridical ties to the Order, is different from that of the professed members. On the one hand, it is important to ensure that the Franciscan charism is as open as possible to all; on the other hand, it is also important to ensure the identity of the OFS as an Order within the Catholic Church, consisting of people who have professed a Rule of Life, and whose fraternities are juridical persons under the Code of Canon Law. The presence of affiliates should not obscure this identity in the life of the fraternity.

- a. Roman Catholics and others in Communion with Rome.
 - i. In the case of a Catholic (in good standing with the Church) who wishes affiliate status, the reasons for choosing this type of commitment rather than membership through profession must be examined. If, in the case, there are factors in the interested person's personal life that make profession impossible, or if the person is prevented by psychological, cultural or other barriers from making profession in the OFS, affiliate status may be granted.
 - ii. Those seeking affiliate status must be able to undergo an affiliate formation program and live the life of the fraternity in a normal manner.
 - iii. Whatever the personal impediments to full membership may be, the local fraternity council should study and decide on each case on its own merits.
 - iv. Affiliate status may be pursued by those who have started the formation process for profession but found that they are unable to complete the studies. As stated previously, each case should be studied and decided by the local fraternity council on its own merits.
 - v. Someone who has been professed as a Secular Franciscan and definitively or temporarily withdrawn or been dismissed may not be an affiliate.
- b. Individuals who Belong to Other Christian Denominations.
 - i. In the case of individuals who belong to other Christian denominations, while this form of affiliation and participation in the life and activities of the fraternity opens great possibilities

- for ecumenism, it is important that both the professed members and the affiliates have a true ecumenical understanding of the situation.
 - ii. Affiliates are not to be regarded as prospective converts, but in the case of Christians from other denominations as representatives of their own ecclesial community.
 - iii. Affiliates must not consider an OFS fraternity as a place for non-committed involvement with the Catholic faith. Just as the professed members, affiliates must continue to deepen their understanding of their own faith. Only in this way can all members and affiliates develop an ecumenical spirit that is both enlightened and responsible.
 - iv. The presence of affiliates belonging to another Christian Denomination in a fraternity must challenge everyone to a deeper ecumenical understanding, which involves respect for both one's own Church and that of others. For this reason, affiliates should not be accepted in a Roman Catholic OFS fraternity if there is a Franciscan fraternity of lay people of their own denomination within a reasonable distance.
 - v. Affiliation must in no way obscure the Catholic and Franciscan nature of the fraternity.
- c. Non-Christian Affiliates. There could be special circumstances where a non-Christian could be an affiliate of the OFS. However, this affiliation must in no way obscure the Christian, Catholic and Franciscan nature of the fraternity.

2. Process of Affiliation

- a. There is no national formation program or formation materials specific to affiliation.
- b. Regions may develop their own specific guidelines, ensuring that the General Constitution and Statutes are adhered to.
- c. Individuals may participate if they have a desire to explore a call from God and support living out the Gospel life, following Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis.
 - i. Interested people need to be a minimum of 21 years of age.
 - ii. An interested individual attends fraternity gatherings for at least four (4) months, prior to submitting a request to start the affiliate formation program.
 - iii. The formation director and spiritual assistant may interview the person before the council decides whether to accept them in affiliate formation.
 - iv. A professed member of the fraternity is appointed by the Council to review with the interested individual information comparable to that typically covered in orientation to aid the interested individual in understanding fraternity life and Franciscan spirituality.
 - v. The period of formation before affiliation may range from a minimum of 6 months to a maximum of 12 months.
- d. After completion of affiliate formation,
 - i. The individual requests an interview with the formation director and spiritual assistant.
 - ii. If the consensus is that the individual is suitably formed, the individual submits a letter requesting affiliate status to the local minister.
 - iii. The local Council votes on whether to accept the request.
 - iv. If there is no spiritual assistant, the fraternity should request that a regional spiritual assistant or the provincial spiritual assistant find a suitable person to interview the person requesting affiliate status.
 - v. If accepted as an affiliate, the individual is notified by the minister. The initial affiliation is made for a period of two years, renewable every subsequent two years subject to approval by the Council.
 - vi. At a regular gathering of the fraternity, the acceptance of the affiliate is announced to the fraternity, and the fraternity warmly greets the affiliate. A simple certificate of affiliation can be presented. The affiliate is not presented with a Tau cross, as this is reserved for

- members of the Order.
- vii. If not accepted as an affiliate, the council notifies the individual.
- e. Affiliates share the experiences and activities of the fraternity, without the right to vote, and do not have voice in elections. (NS 18.13)
 - i. Affiliates are encouraged to contribute to the common fund.
 - ii. An affiliate of the fraternity continues to grow through prayer, study, and immersion into the life of the local fraternity.

3. Growing Beyond Affiliate Status

Should an affiliate, who is Catholic, subsequently seek to become a professed member of the OFS, all the requirements of the OFS formation process must be followed, beginning with the Time of Initiation (Inquiry), according to the local fraternity's schedule and practice. Regardless of duration, prior affiliate status does not shorten or alter the norms of the initial formation process leading to profession in the OFS.

General Constitutions, Article 53.5

The national statutes can indicate special forms of association with the fraternity for those who, without becoming a member of the O.F.S., want to participate in its life and activities.

General Constitutions, Article 103.1

Remaining faithful to their own identity, the fraternities will take care to make the most of each occasion for prayer, formation, and active collaboration with other ecclesial groups. They should welcome with pleasure those who, without belonging to the O.F.S., wish to share its experiences and activities.

National Statutes, Article 18.13 Affiliation with a local fraternity.

a. Those who, without belonging to the O.F.S., wish to participate in its life and activities (see GC Art. 53.5 and 103.1) according to Franciscan principles and teachings, may be welcomed by

the local fraternity, so as to make their communion living and effective. Individuals wishing to become affiliates should make their desire known by a written request to the local fraternity council, which makes a decision regarding the request.

b. These affiliate brothers and sisters will have no juridical bond with the Secular Franciscan Order and are, therefore persons welcomed to love and be loved "as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ" (O.F.S. Rule Art. 13). They may share the experiences and activities of the fraternity, without the right to vote.

c. In order that the identity of the fraternity not be altered, the number of affiliates may not exceed 40% of the number of active professed members of a fraternity.

d. Regional councils have the right to establish their own guidelines for the acceptance of affiliates.