**OFS / YOUFRA**

**ACTIVE PRESENSCE IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD**

**(Manual for spiritual assistants OFS/YOUFRA** Chapter III**; OFS GGCC,** chapter II, article 17 to 27 Rule OFS 14

**INTRODUCTION:**

There is no better way to explain what do we mean by active presence of the OFS/YouFra in the Church and in the world than that of drawing our attention to the true identity of Secular Franciscans, as being Penitents and Seculars who are called to ‘***commit themselves through their profession to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis, in their secular state following the Rule approved by the church’***. (cf. Rule chapter 1 art.2 & can. 702,1 [314]

At times it seems as if the seculars themselves have lost their true identity. They tend to take the concept of sharing a charism to the extremes, limiting themselves into devotional aspects of Franciscan spirituality and then questioning themselves if they should get involved in social and political issues.

In some parts of the world some Secular Franciscans continue to focus into the importance of outward sign of belonging to the Franciscan Order than focusing more into social, economic and political issues and on how can they become true witness of the Gospel life in secular environment. The tangible presence of Franciscan is that of living their Charism in its Secular manner and it should continue to have its own place in the family whereby they are called to strive for perfect charity in their own secular state…

In article 17,18 OFS GGCC, & OFS Rule, the Role of the OFS members in the church and in the world is very clear. Each OFS has to understand that by being actively present in the church and in the world, it means to take seriously the ‘call to work together in building up the Church and to be real witnesses and instruments of the Church’s mission.” Such mission has to be done “in the environment in which they live and service for building up the kingdom of God within the situation of this world.” In other words, all OFS members have to make sure that they are actively present and involved in the local Church and in the world.

Secular Franciscans are called to make their own contribution inspired by the person and message of Saint Francis of Assisi, towards a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities. (GGCC art. 18 e Gaudium et Spes 31)

* The Vatican II once again has higlighted the meaning, the value and the importance of getting involved in the mission of the Church in a very practical way. In his Apostolic Exhortation ***Evangelii Nuntiandi,*** Pope Paul VI wrote: ‘Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization…to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but already present and active in the affairs of the world.
* Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering.
* The more Gospel-inspired lay people there are engaged in these realities, clearly involved in them, competent to promote them and conscious that they must exercise to the full their Christian powers which are often buried and suffocated, the more these realities will be at the service of the kingdom of God and therefore of salvation in Jesus Christ, without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded. ’(EN 70)
* As sharers in the role of Christ as priest, prophet, and king, the laity have their work cut out for them in the life and activity of the Church. Their activity is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors is often unable to achieve its full effectiveness. In the manner of the men and women who helped Paul in spreading the Gospel (cf. Acts 18:18, 26; Rom. 16:3) the laity with the right apostolic attitude supply what is lacking to their brethren and refresh the spirit of pastors and of the rest of the faithful (cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18). Strengthened by active participation in the liturgical life of their community, they are eager to do their share of the apostolic works of that community. They bring to the Church people who perhaps are far removed from it, earnestly cooperate in presenting the word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction and offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporalities of the Church more efficient and effective. (Apostolicam Actuositatem, POPE PAUL VI, ON NOVEMBER 18, 1965, #10)
* The Rule and Constitutions emphasize that “the vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members.”(CCGG 2.1; Rule 1)

**THE FRANCISCAN TRILOGY**

St. Francis did not deliberately want to find three Orders as we know them today. However, he allowed himself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, as a result the three Orders slowly grew without Francis having a specific prescribed project for them. Hence, St. Francis gave to his three Orders one Rule that of living in a perfect observance of the Gospel according to their conditions of life. The three Orders, however, are on the same level of importance, in the need to recognize each other spiritually interdependent and in need of mutual help. Anyone who joined the first, second and third Order comes to be part of a **COMNUNIONAL REALITY**, wanted by God for the restoration of the Church. Although the three Franciscan Orders are institutionally autonomous and independent, their existing independence is not conditioned by their entire existence since their vital spiritual needs, their mutual support clearly negate the idea of easy self-sufficiency.

(Cf. Benedetto Lino)

**FRANCISCAN TRILOGY** is the first (and only) religious experience, preordained to apostolic life, born contextually and coordinated involving all states of life. The whole Franciscan family, i.e; First, Second and ‘Third Order (OFS).

* It is a triple family that includes all the members of God’s people, men, women, lay people, religious, priests, called to conform fully to Christ in a particular way of living the Gospel values in a specific charism.
* All three Orders are heirs of the mission that God entrusted St. Francis and are all called to carry out the Franciscan charism.

**It is always important to bear in mind that we are not referring to the Franciscan penitential movement as a third order because it started after the first and the second, but because of its mixed structure.[[1]](#footnote-1)** The Secular Franciscan Order today is a Public Association of the Faithful which has its own Presidency Council, not a Third Order, according to Canon Law(116;301,3;312;313)

**NB:** Historically the idea of three distinctive Orders was a theory began by St. Gregory the Great (535-604) trying to reinforce the idea of hierarchy whereby the level of dedication to achieve perfection began from **minimum to maximum level**. Through the years these levels were categorized distinctively. In 1161 for instance, we find the Order of Knight of St. James, which was approved by Alexander III, divided into three Orders:

**First Order for married knights**

**Secondo Order for Knights with perpetual continent.**

**Third Order for Chaplains and tutors**.

Then in 1201 the Umiliati from Lombardi extended the scope of the 3 orders to everyone, and no longer exclusively for the Knights. However, at the Pope Innocent III request, they **reverse** the **hierarchy from the maximum to the minimum**:

• **First order for clerics and nuns;**

**• Second order for lay brothers and sisters;**

**• Third order for committed lay people, men and women who remain in their homes and are free to contract marriage**.

**The 1st Order to revive the apostolic life;**

**The 2nd Order to restore new vigor to the contemplative life made of prayer and sacrifice;**

**The 3rd Order to heal family and social life from within with people committed to living gospel values ​​in the world**. (Cf. Benedetto Lino)

***\*Common founder;***

***\*Same Charism; same mission in diverse state of life, interdependent and complementray;***

***\* independent and united e vital interconnection.***

* **The First Order,** Francis was the founder who gave it, its name, wrote its Rule and guided it as general minister.
* The essential components of the apostolic project of the Franciscan Penitents has been inspired by God to Francis, thus taking on typical characteristics that are the secular and secular projection of the apostolic religious experience of Francis, just as the **Second Order** (*Poor Clares***)** are in their projection into the cloistered female monastic lifestyle.
* **The Secular Franciscan Order** has its own way of living the Franciscan charism and their relationship with the Friars Minors and Poor Clare, that of a ‘**life-giving union with each other’(Rule OFS 1)**
* To participate more effectively in the mission of the church both laity and religious need to foster a proper cooperation and exchange of gifts since both are being inspired by the same spiritual vision.
* **In such communion and cooperation two principal models can be distingueshed.**
* **\*Sharing of gifts/exchange gifts**
* **\* Sharing a charism**
* **The First Order** it is an Order with a centralized government, and not bound to any particular territory but extending to the whole world. The governing power is in the hands of the general minister, at the service of the whole Order.
* **The Second Order, Francis** accepted Clare and her sisters into the circle of his Order. They, however, were excluded from the itinerary apostolic life. New monastic houses were established for them with a promise of loving care and special solicitude on the part of the First Order. They were fully autonomous with its own form of life.
* **The Third Order, or Order of the brothers of Penance, as was then called,** although it is commonly said that Francis did not found the Order of Penitents since the movement already existed, Francis, revived what existed before, however, spared no efforts to give directions to those who, after being touched by his message wished to do penance and then followed the gospel way of life which Francis was living. Francis supported them and they become an autonomous and independent Franciscan Order. Thus, the new penitents wished to link their penitential renewal to the name and spirituality of St. Francis.
* From the renewed commitment of these new penitents, the Order of the Franciscan Penitents flourishes in the hands of St. Francis. The Franciscan penitents thus assume the typical characteristics that are the secular and secular projection of the apostolic religious experience of Francis, just as the Poor Clares are its projection into the monastic cloistered female world.
* Francis, although not explicitly, established the three Orders, institutionally autonomous and independent. Their autonomus existence does not depend on the existence of the larger body. Their spiritual vitality, however, requires that they support each other **“in life-giving union with each other.”(Cf. Rule OFS 1)** in which the Church is lived as communion and efforts are joined in a spirit of “**cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church’s mission**” in order to render more effective our **“response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts. (Vita Consacrata 54)**

**FRANCIS THE PROTAGONIST**

* The Franciscan Trilogy historically is attributed to Francis. Clare being intrigued and captivated by the way of life that Francis had embraced she decided to follow the same life style, although remaining autonomous, still in her Rule she safeguarded the link to the Franciscan family.
* The Franciscan Third Order also grew up in the field tilled by Francis and many other Franciscan seculars and regular. Within the First Order there grew up the three great branches of the **Observants, the Conventuals and the Capuchins** and each one **fully autonomus and proud to have Francis as their one and only Seraphic Father.**
* The Secular Franciscan Order, as now called is set up as an organic union of all the Catholic fraternities in the world divided into local, regional, national and international fraternities.
* Religious and lay people who ***share a charism***, have a relationship and have closer participation in the life of a religious institute. Hence the ‘laity are invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission’(cf. ***Vita Consacrata 55)***
* The Secular Franciscan Order not only have a relationship with Franciscan religious but expand their sharing of charism with ‘those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to share its experiences and activities. (GGCC art. 103.1)
* Their relationship with religious is fully experienced through Spiritual Assistance from the First Order and Third Order Regular, whom have pastoral responsibility and ensure fidelity to the Franciscan Charism and the Church.
* Through decades, both Catholics and non-Catholics who wanted to share in the charism of the OFS and participate in its life and activities has been increasing, therefore the presidency of the International Council of the OFS in 1995, felt the need to give some guidelines for associate membership in the OFS and for ‘friends of St. Francis».
* **Sharing a charism between** religious and lay people has its own beneficts and some setbacks.
* **Beneficts**- it brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspect of the charism

- it has produced fruits of holiness and great work of charity in the past and present.

* **Setbacks** - it affirms the religious as the real leaders over those sharing the charism

- deprives the seculars of their autonomy

- the seculars expecting the religious to be the leaders and models

- it is the cause of much misunderstanding and even conflicts between religious and secular Franciscans

**EXCHANGE OF GIFTS WITHIN FRANCISCAN FAMILY AND THE WORLD**

* In the Apostolic Exhortation ***Christifideles laici***, pope John Paul II, continue to stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church. (CL. 2)
* -**Exchange of gifts** – in the context of inter-related independent entities who are able to enrich each other and to be enriched by one another.
* - **The secular Franciscan** are called to have a sense of community with all God’s creation

- to cultivate the Franciscan spirit in families, bearing witness in the world to the love of Christ for his church.

- **Secular Franciscans** are active in different apostolate by being involved in charitable work and many other projects in which they share the Franciscan values.

- One of the oldest hospitals in Madrid is owned and run by the local OFS fraternity of San Francisco el grande.

- Many other projects like old age homes owned and run by local OFS fraternity in various countries and also, they collaborate in other programs run by other organization. (Cf Manual for spiritual assistant, chapter III, pg66)

* **The Assistant and religious**

-they both benefit from the exchange of gift in **spiritual level** and social **level**

**Spiritual level=** it helps both religious and Seculars to become more conscious of their own specific calling in the church.

= inspiring the Secular Franciscans to be more enthusiastic above knowing and loving God.

**Social level** = assistant is to inspire the Seculars to engage in politics and economics based on the Gospel.

= the assistant exchanges the gift of charism by educating youth, listening to the elders, preparing young people for the Sacrament of marriage, etc.

= Secular Franciscans also can help the religious in their apostolic activities and charitable ventures and vice versa.

**RELATIONSIP BETWEEN OFS, RELIGIOUS AND THE CHURCH**

* The best way to nurture a good relationship has to base on mutual and fraternal appreciation of the fact that ‘for as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. (1Cor 12:12)
* The understanding and appreciation of this reality can inspire the religious and secular to have a true communion where there is a life-giving and mutual relationship base upon:
* Respect and love for the different forms of the single Franciscan charism.
* Support of one another in the vocation to rebuild the Church.
* The church has entrusted five specific ministries or apostolic activity to the OFS
* 1-**Justice and peace** **3- the family** **5-hope and joy**

**2- the world of work 4. Creation**

The friars are to participate in these ministries showing their willingness to support one another as members of the same family in the vocation to rebuild the church and to make the charism of our common Seraphic father in the life and mission of the Church. (cf. OFS Rule 1 & manual for spiritual assistants, chapter III pg67)

* The best way to enhance a health relationship as Andrea Boni, OFM puts it, ‘requires the combined action of the friars of the First Order, the penitents of the Third Order and the contemplative sacrifice of the sisters of the Second Order’.
* it is a responsibility of the entire Franciscan family to engage in a coordinated salvific activity as a corporeal communion if they want to fulfil a task given by God to rebuild his house (cfr Manual for spiritual assistance OFS/YouFra, chapter III, pg67)
* The fundamental bases for the active presence of the OFS in the Church and in society first and for most is to deepen our understanding about our baptismal calling.
* All the baptized share in the **common priesthood** of Christ participating in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and king.
* In **Kingly service** that all the baptized share with Christ, they are called to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity
* **This kingly service** extends to all creatures, since it belongs to the laity in particular to restore to creation all its original value.

**LAITY IN THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH**

* **«**the fraternities established in a parish church should seek to cooperate in the animation of the parochial community, in the liturgy and in fraternal relations. They should integrate themselves into the pastoral apostolate as a whole, with preference for those activities more congenial to the Secular Franciscan tradition and spirituality. » (GGCC art. 102.1)
* The laity also are call to holiness, they also aspire to the final purpose of the Church.
* The laity ‘must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life… the lay must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ.’ (***Christifideles laici 16***).
* The vocation to holiness, is therefore, intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the church and in the world.
* The involvement of the laity in the evangelization of the culture is indispensable.
* As lay Franciscan, through their baptism they are consecrated to the service of the Gospel according to the charism and example of St. Francis. Their Rule, General Constitutions and Ritual clearly describes and gives directives on how to fulfil the mission of the Church and for humanity. (Cf OFS GGCC 17.1; Rule OFS 2, 22, OFS Ritual-preface 1,12, 14d chapter 2, 29)

**All baptized are called to the mission of the Church**

* By being baptized it means also that you are sent to the world as witnesses and instruments of the church’s mission among all people. (cf. Rule OFS 6)
* Secular Franciscans must always be conscientized about the importance of mission at the level of local fraternities
* By serving as an OFS missionary. (**Some years ago, in Italy there was a Secular Franciscan Mission Center dedicated to raising mission awareness among the OFS, training and sending Secular missionaries where they worked alongside the friars and sisters` unfortunately it fell by the wayside.) many reasons …**
* The secular Franciscans who are truly living the Gospel, can give new life to their own parishes since it is within the parish that the OFS’s main work is done. Hence it should be from the church to the world.
* Like Francis, who took seriously God’s mandate to ‘***go and repair the Church’,*** all Secular Franciscans are to ‘extend the Church by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ beyond its institutional boundaries.’ (cf. manual for spiritual assistant, chapter III, pg 82) they are to continue to commit themselves to “rebuild the Church with the same tools with which it was constructed: Evangelization and witness of life.” (Ibid pg 67 # 1.5)
* The Seculars Franciscans in order to have an active presence in the church and in the world, they have ‘to rediscover the missionary dimension of their own Christian vocation. They are to nurture in themselves and in others a knowledge and love of the missions, and by offering in their families, in Catholic associations and in schools.’ (Cf. manual for spiritual assist, chapter III, pg84).

**OFS Involvement in the mission**

* Like all the baptized, secular Franciscan are called and sent to the whole world to teach the Gospel values, to proclaim Christ by their life and words.
* Each member should get involved in the mission of the church and that can only be successful when each OFS becomes part of the church and of the world. There should not be such thing is “them and us.” Since “in carrying out their own specific mission, Franciscans cannot regard themselves as being outside the Church and her mission. The recent Popes have urged the Franciscans “to take notice of their responsibilities” to renew their charism and mission”. The Church continue to call the laity to rediscover the missionary dimension of their own Christian vocation. (cf manual for spiritual assistants 2006/2012 pg 82).

**WORLD SURVEY OF ACTIVE PRESENCE OF NATIONAL FRATERNITIES**

**OFS GGCC Article 19:1,2 art. 22:2 & RULE 14**

**\*Australia**- Project Adoption –OFS supporting poor families in Kerala-India; St. Alphonsa home for disabled girls in the Trissur Archdiocese.

Run by Secular Franciscan, volunteers from the Holy Spirit fraternity in Waverley.

([www.ciofs.org/portal/en/library/presence-in-](http://www.ciofs.org/portal/en/library/presence-in-) the .../file

**\*Bosnia And Herzegovina-** Each fraternity has its own project like visiting elderly houses, elderly members of the Order; making projects of raising funds for those in need.

**\* Canada-** Canadian Food for Children

Coordinate by st. Anthony of Padua local Fraternity, Brampton, Ontario (ON)

Implementation of Regional JPIC action plan {Poverty and world trade; Resources-water and mining; human trafficking.

Twinning or sponsorship of Haitian children, the project is coordinated by the local fraternity of St. George de Jonquière

**Croatia –** The OFS members from the Region of Primorsko-Goranska run a project to help the homeless, which is highly sponsored by the Archdiocese of Rijeka and by number of individuals. There are two members of OFS that are fully engaged in this project but are also some volunteers who help the homeless to do some activities like sport, music and many other activities.

The first Croatian Magazine run by the OFS which is meant to help the homeless people to become aware of social inequalities, public opinion and social marginalization of the homeless.

**\*France-** Project circle of silence at Versailles: My undocumented brother and sister**.**

Awareness on social injustice inflicted on immigrants

Coordinated by Michel-Claude Girard and Patrick Gérault from Bro. Pacific local fraternity-PVC Region.

**\*Hungary-** Franciscan Missionary foundation for lower Carpathian Region

Involved in the Well for Africa project, also currently involved in the foundation of Franciscan Mission in Transcarpazia where they help poor families, the sick and people in need, educational programs.

Support the preparation and training of brothers and sisters who are involved in Caritas and religious education locally. Coordinated by the OFS National Council of Hungary.

\***Italy-** Project Qiqajon(Hebrew word, from the bible book of Jonah 4:6) educational program; day care center; coordinated by the Regional fraternity of lombardy. [http://www.qiqajon.org](http://www.qiqajon.org/) [www.ciofs.org](http://www.ciofs.org/) /…/presence…world/.../1068-survey-on-the-active

**\*Lebanon** – the national fraternity has a member responsible for the social mission. Annually they visit the old ages homes, prisons and some social institutions.

**\*Lithuania-** Run a project for Africa initiative to help OFS fraternities in Africa to build a well for water supply for all people.

\***Mexico –** Catholic cinema project (movies with moral values, about the saints. Blesseds or heroic acts.)

Coordinated by St. Clare of Assisi fraternity.

Supporting children of the Tarahumara colony; Spiritual Adoption Project.

Evangelization of brothers deprived of liberty(Prisoners**)**

**[www.ciofs.org/.../MEXICO\_PIWC\_survey\_2011\_CINE\_EN.pd](http://www.ciofs.org/.../MEXICO_PIWC_survey_2011_CINE_EN.pd)...**

\***New Zealand** – monte Cecilia –housing programme for homeless families: OFS assist with financial help and regular donations of food. (ciofs.org/vox francescana; [www.ciofs.org/.../presence.../1059-ofs-active-presence-in-w](http://www.ciofs.org/.../presence.../1059-ofs-active-presence-in-w)...)

**\*Spain**- the road to Emmaus association

Is a project run by the OFS Spain with an aim to help the immigrants and their objectives are:

Moral and spiritual formation; socio-professional and cultural formation; vocation training; job placement

Coordinated by the San Antonio de Padua OFS local fraternity.

**\*South Korea -** The Local fraternity of Busan runs a feeding scheme by providing daily meals to the elderly and homeless people**.**

OFM has major apostolate looked for homeless, OFS in Seoul provides food for that apostolate, they have 19 local fraternities take turns in providing food, for the entire year. Seoul regional fraternity combined run a house for senior citizens; Daejeon regional fraternity run a house for senior citizens and also Gangweon regional fraternity also help with the house run by OFM.

**\*USA-** national fraternity has service project where they filled a thousand draw-string bags with hygiene products, shoelaces, socks, snacks, drinks, and deliver them to Catholic charity to deliver to immigrants as they been released from detentions centers.

Local and regional involved in dozen of soup kitchen; 24/7 Eucharist adoration has been going on since 1992; prison ministries, i.e, working with prisoners bring them the work of God proving hope to them; national they have done major campaign during the fires in California (raising funds) ministry to the elderly( making sure that are properly cared for, secular Franciscan made sure that the elderly not left on the streets) Amazonrelief to the lepers- providing help to many projects.

**\*Venezuela-** Good Samaritan Civic Association (Acibuensa)

* Offer free care to alcohol dependents by providing food, shelter, outpatient medical care and spiritual assistance
* Coordinated by the OFS local fraternity of San José Obrero ‘St. Joseph the Worker’ (board of directors and a spiritual assistance).
* OFS members collect medicine around the world and donate to the sick and poor in Venezuela.
* They have two projects that are supported by Missionszentrale: nutritional help to more than 500 children from two Franciscan schools.

CONCLUSION

Much has to be done in order to help the OFS brothers and sisters to understand the meaning of being seculars and at the same time members of the body of Christ, the Church. Secular Franciscan should never forget that “they have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession” (Cf OFS Rule 6). Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words. For a proper awareness and understanding of a call to be engage in actively in the mission of the Church and of the world, OFS members ought to have a continuous reflection on what it means “from Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel” (Cf. Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30). Secular Franciscan should never be satisfied solely by being members but rather should recommit themselves in relieving what they have professed. Reliving their shared Charism in a very tangible and concrete ways within the Franciscan family, the Church and in the world.

1. Cfr. Testi e documenti sul Terz’ Ordine Francescano, a Cura di Lino Temperini TOR, Ed. Franciscanum 1991, pag 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)