

The
HANDBOOK
for
SPIRITUAL
ASSISTANCE
to the
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
USA



Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA)
United States of America
2026



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The Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order USA

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Dedication - Pope Saint John XXIII



Pope Saint John XXIII was elected Pope on October 28, 1958. In his 4 1/2 years as Pope, and through Vatican II, he brought the Church into conversation with the 20th century and beyond. He became a member of the OFS on March 1, 1896 (by Fr. Luigi Isacchi). His profession of the Rule of 1883 was on May 23, 1897. He said of his profession: We like to thank our Lord for this grace which happily coincided with the act whereby we began ecclesiastical life (Tonsure). He was ordained in 1904 and worked in many ministries, including representing the Holy See in Bulgaria, Turkey, Greece, and France. Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (John XXIII) shared these words: See everything, overlook a great deal, and correct a little. Prudent is he who

can keep silent that part of the truth which may be untimely, and by not speaking it, does not spoil the truth of what he said. He died on June 3, 1963, at the age of 82, and was canonized on April 27th, 2014. His feast is celebrated on October 11th.

Saint John XXIII, in his opening address to the Second Vatican Council, proposed a five-point plan to achieve the goal of Vatican II:

1. *Be filled with hope and faith.* Do not be prophets of gloom. "Divine Providence is leading us to a new order of human relations which by men's own efforts and even beyond their very expectations, are directed toward God's superior and inscrutable design."
2. *Discover ways of teaching the faith more effectively.* "The greatest concern of the ecumenical council is this: that the sacred deposit of Christian doctrine should be guarded and taught more efficaciously."
3. *Deepen the understanding of doctrine.* Authentic doctrine should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine and deposit of the faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another."
4. *Use the medicine of mercy.* "Errors vanish as quickly as they arise, like fog before the sun. The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently, she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than that of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation."

Seek unity within the Church, with Christians separated from Catholicism, with those of non-Christian religions, and with all men and women of goodwill. "Such is the aim of the second Vatican Ecumenical Council, which ... prepares, as it were, and consolidates the path toward that unity of mankind where truth reigns, charity is the law, and whose extent is eternity" (*United States Catholic Catechism for Adults*, USCCB, 2006, pp. 21–22).

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List of Abbreviations

AA	<i>Apostolicam actuositatem</i>
CCC	<i>Catechism of the Catholic Church</i>
CCL	<i>Code of Canon Law</i>
CIOFS	Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
CNSA	Conference of National Spiritual Assistants
CST	Catholic Social Teaching
FA:ED	<i>Francis of Assisi - Early Documents</i> (three volumes)
FFC	<i>Franciscan Family Connections</i>
GC	<i>General Constitutions of the OFS</i>
GS	<i>Gaudium et spes</i>
IS	<i>International Statutes of the Secular Franciscan Order</i> (2024)
LG	<i>Lumen gentium</i>
MSA	<i>Manual of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and Franciscan Youth</i>
NEC	National Executive Council
NS	<i>Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America</i> (2003)
OFS Rule	<i>Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order</i> (1978)
PSA	Provincial Spiritual Assistant
REC	Regional Executive Council
RSA	Regional Spiritual Assistant
SA	Local Spiritual Assistant
SSA	<i>Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS</i>

About this Revision

Several developments over the past nearly 20 years since it was last revised prompted the CNSA to undertake a third revision of the *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*. These developments include:

- a continuing shift from Friar and Religious to Secular Franciscan spiritual assistants;
- the call by spiritual assistants themselves for clearer procedural documentation, especially around the establishment of Secular Franciscan fraternities;
- the increased accessibility of materials on the internet, and the development of the new OFS-USA website and database.



The CNSA friars also considered how to preserve the legacy of our beloved mentor and brother, Fr. Lester Bach, OFM Cap., who passed into eternal life in February of 2020. Father Lester was the primary author of the second revision of this *Handbook*, and it is filled with Fr. Lester's pastoral guidance and wisdom. Rather than try to incorporate this legacy into the new revision, the friars sought to focus on the specific needs mentioned above. The 2012 revision of the *Handbook* will be preserved in the archives along with the rest of Fr. Lester's substantial body of work, much of which is still in use.

As a result, the new revision focuses more on how non-friar spiritual assistants can successfully represent the friar provinces in safeguarding the Franciscan charism and maintaining the vital reciprocity among the different branches of the Franciscan family, while not neglecting the needs of friar spiritual assistants.

This revision will provide clearer procedural documentation and implementation guidelines.

References will be made to the OFS-USA website, where updated policies, guidelines, and training materials may be found.

Appendix D: Resources for spiritual assistants is included to direct the reader to additional materials available on the internet or other media.

Pathway to the Pauline Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order – 1978

In 2018, the Secular Franciscan Order celebrated the 40th anniversary of the promulgation of the Pauline Rule.

The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) was the catalyst for reexamining the rule of life for the Third Order Secular. The Council itself grew from a movement in the Church to "return to the sources," which included a renewal of the Franciscan charism as well as a return to the Gospel and early Christian writings for a renewal in the entire Church. One expression of the Franciscan

renewal was the gathering of a Franciscan Congress at Santa Clara, California, in 1972, which expressed well our beginnings as the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

The increased attention to the Gospel broadly in the Church, and its impact in discussions like the Santa Clara Congress, is part of the background to the development of the Pauline Rule (named after Pope Paul VI) of 1978. While the immediately previous Leonine Rule (1883) focused on personal piety and acts, developments after Vatican II picked up on the desire to respond to contemporary issues in light of the Gospel (*Gaudium et spes*, para. 4; OFS Rule, art. 4).

We review these influences as we begin to unfold the dynamics of the Franciscan Family in this *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance*.

Secular Franciscans – Brothers and Sisters of Penance

Francis and his first companions presented themselves to the people of their day as “penitents of Assisi.” Once he and his companions had begun their itinerant penitential preaching, the result was the unexpected growth of the movement and the increase of those who wanted to serve God directly under Francis’s and his brothers’ guidance (R. Pazzelli, 102-03, *St Francis and the Third Order*). The “Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance” (FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 41) is found as the prologue to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Penance is a cornerstone of Franciscan spirituality and is a way of life. Metanoia—or penance, as conversion—is intended here as a constant in-depth and total turning toward the Father, in the light of Christ and by means of Him.

St. Francis of Assisi founded three orders with individual spiritualities:

- First Order: spirituality of minority;
- 2nd Order: spirituality of poverty;
- 3rd Order: spirituality of penance, is comprised of religious and lay men and women who bear the age-worn name “brothers and sisters of penance.” Men and women who live the Christian ideal in their homes are known as Secular Franciscans (OFS), and men and women living in community are known as Third Order Regular (TOR).

The life of penance expresses our response to God who calls us, in Christ, to salvation and perfection. A personal relationship with the living God is realized through conformity to Christ our brother, by means of lived experience (Kajetan Esser, OFM, *Love’s Reply*). It is true that penance is implicit in the baptismal vocation and therefore, all must live it in view of the Kingdom. But “the brothers and sisters of penance” follow it with maximum commitment, tending toward God with all that we have and with all that we are. It is a self-sacrificial love and devotion toward those we encounter.

Santa Clara Statement, 1972 – CNSA Commentary

The Franciscan Congress at Santa Clara, California, had the theme and challenge, “Come Alive in the Spirit,” to study ways of living the Gospel. Almost 500 Franciscans gathered, August 13-19, 1972, at a time when the Tertiaries were forming a national leadership and coordinating their response to the Vatican II call to return to the sources of our charism. The Congress issued a statement that emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit and the importance of conversion, personal

repentance, with Christ-centered, personal, and communal experiences to “rediscover and translate the Gospel into everyday living” in a manner both prayerful and sensitive to the needs of others.

While the Santa Clara statement was written about 50 years ago, our society still experiences some of the same disunity and turmoil that was the backdrop for their words. Some of the signs of the times are the same and even more stark today. Notable in their statement is the attitude that we should be formed by Christ, as Francis allowed himself to be formed when he encountered the leper; that we have a positive response to the turmoil and strife of the day, which we can express to others humbly and in charity; and that while each of us cannot solve every problem, it is good for us to work in one area or issue as long as we do not disregard other issues.

The statement calls the entire Franciscan Family to this conversion, applying it to how we approach the various social and spiritual ills of our time.

You can find the full text of the Santa Clara Statement on the CNSA Page of the OFS-USA National Website (<https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>).

Gospel to Life and Life to the Gospel

St. Francis of Assisi set out to live a life that was steeped in the Gospel. His first rule for the brothers who came to follow him was a collection of scripture passages. The Gospel was Francis’ way of life.

As Moses received the law on a mountaintop, so Jesus (the new Moses), proclaimed a more radical life and living perspective in His Beatitudes. The framers of the Pauline Rule strove to return to the original spirit of Francis in emphasizing the Gospel, particularly the Beatitudes, as the reference point for Secular Franciscan life.

The Beatitudes challenge Secular Franciscans to go beyond “appearances” and to embrace a counter-cultural life view. Rather than a prescriptive program of behavior, the OFS Rule of 1978 is a way of growth and conversion, in the spirit of the Gospel itself.

Introduction

The Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order seeks to provide both a practical reference and pastoral guidance for spiritual assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order.

We begin with the foundation and purpose of spiritual assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, rooted in the Code of Canon Law, and fleshed out in the legislation of the Order. This section lays out the key questions with regard to the *altius moderamen* and the OFS legislation that applies to each. The Handbook is organized according to these and related questions. This section can be used as a reference when reading through the descriptive sections on each topic.

1. What is the purpose of the *altius moderamen* (see Chapter 1)?

“The purpose of the *Altius Moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and union with the Franciscan family” (SSA, art. 2.2). The *altius moderamen* is the basis for the relationship between the First Order/TOR and the Secular Franciscan Order (CCL, c. 303).

2. How is the *altius moderamen* implemented in the First Order/TOR and OFS governing documents (Rule, Constitutions, and Statutes) (see Chapter 1)?

“Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute while in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name” (CCL, c. 303). The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care and spiritual assistance

Altius Moderamen and the Nature of Spiritual Assistance

The journey taken by the entire Franciscan family since Vatican II has led to a rediscovery and celebration of the origins of the entire family and of the place of the Secular Franciscan Order in it.

This rediscovery and return to our origins were encouraged, promoted, and supported by the Church—shown specifically in the approval of the Rule of 1978 for the Secular Franciscan Order by St Pope Paul VI, and the subsequent Constitutions and Statutes.

It is by virtue of this relationship between the First Order/TOR that the *altius moderamen* (higher direction or governance) is exercised in accordance with the Rule and General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order and in accordance with the specific Rules, Constitutions, and Statutes of the First Order/TOR. This is the directive of the Church to us and a challenge that requires ever greater cooperation between the Orders.

It is important to focus our attention on the vital reciprocity that should form the core of our relationship with one another and the spiritual assistance we are privileged to share with our secular sisters and brothers.

To assure “life-giving union” with the First Order/TOR, it is the responsibility of a friar province to provide spiritual assistance to a fraternity bonded to it.

(From “*The Nature of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS: Altius Moderamen and Collegial Assistance*,” Fr Michael Higgins, TOR and Benedetto Lino, OFS)

of the Secular Franciscan Order to the Franciscan First Order/TOR, because it belongs to the same spiritual family.

3. What is the nature of spiritual assistance to the OFS (see Chapter 1)?

“The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and with the Franciscan family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in initial and ongoing formation, and to express the fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS” (SSA, art. 2.3).

4. How is “vital reciprocity and 'life-giving union” fostered through spiritual assistance to the OFS (see Chapter 1)?

“The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God — laity, religious, and priests — who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi. In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church” (OFS Rule, art. 1).

5. What are the key responsibilities of the General and Provincial superiors in the First Order/TOR (see Chapter 2)?

“The general and provincial ministers exercise their office with respect to the OFS through:

- the erection of local Fraternities;
- the pastoral visits;
- the spiritual assistance to the Fraternities at the various levels.

They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate” (GC, art. 86.1).

6. What are the different levels of spiritual assistance based on the organization of the OFS, and what are their responsibilities (see Chapter 2)?

The main duty of the spiritual assistant is “to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to cooperate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters” (GC, art. 90.1).

“The spiritual assistant is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity to which he/she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. The spiritual assistant does not exercise the right to vote in financial questions” (GC, art. 90.2). The spiritual assistant cannot vote in elections (SSA, art. 12.3).

General Spiritual Assistants

“General Spiritual Assistants give their service to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS), form a conference (CGSA), and collegially see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS as a whole” (GC, art. 90.3a).

“It is the responsibility of the CGSA: a) to collaborate with the International Council and its Presidency in the spiritual and apostolic animation of the OFS and in a special way in the formation of the secular leaders; b) to co-ordinate, at the international level, the spiritual assistance to the OFS and the Franciscan Youth; c) to foster the interest of the friars and their Superiors in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth; d) to provide for the pastoral visits

of the National Councils of the OFS and the presence at the national elective chapters” (SSA, art. 17.3).

“The general assistant must keep his general Minister and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth” (SSA, art. 18.1).

“He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth, meet with local fraternities assisted by his own Order and keep constant fraternal contacts with the Assistants of his own Order” (SSA, art. 18.2).

National Spiritual Assistants

“National Spiritual Assistants give their service to the National [Executive] Council, see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS in the whole territory of the national fraternity and, at the national level, to the coordination of the regional spiritual assistants. If they are more than one, they form a conference (CNSA) and give their service collegially” (GC, art. 90.3b).

“The National Assistants of the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major superiors, after consultation with the respective National [Executive] Council. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms established together by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the national territory shall be followed” (SSA, art. 19.1).

“It is the responsibility of the CNSA, or to the national Assistant if there is only one: a) to collaborate with the National [Executive] Council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and the society of the country, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders; b) to provide for the pastoral visits of the regional councils of the OFS and to ensure a presence at the regional elective chapters; c) to coordinate, at the national level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the Assistants, and the fraternal union among them; d) to foster the interest of the friars in the OFS and Franciscan Youth” (SSA, art. 19.3).

“The national Assistant must keep the major Superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and Franciscan Youth in the country” (SSA, art. 20.1).

“He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to Franciscan Youth, meet the local fraternities assisted by his own Order, and keep fraternal and constant contacts with the regional and local Assistants of his own Order” (SSA, art. 20.1).

Regional Spiritual Assistants

“Regional Spiritual Assistants give their service to the Regional [Executive] Council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference (Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants [CRSA]) and (if fraternities are bonded to more than one obedience), they give their service collegially” (GC, art. 90.3c).

“The regional Assistants to the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the respective Regional [Executive] Council. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms

established jointly by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity shall be followed” (SSA, art. 21.1).

“It is the responsibility of CRSA, or to the regional Assistant if there is only one: a) to collaborate with the Regional [Executive] Council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society in the region, and in a special way, in the formation of the leaders; b) to provide for the pastoral visits of the local Councils of the OFS, and to ensure a presence at the local elective chapters; c) to coordinate, at the regional level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the Assistants and the fraternal union among them; d) to foster the interest of the friars of the OFS and Franciscan Youth” (SSA, art. 21.3).

“The regional Assistant must keep the major Superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and Franciscan Youth in the region” (SSA, art. 22.1).

“He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and Franciscan Youth, meet the local fraternities assisted by his own Order in the region, and keep constant fraternal contacts with the local Assistants of his own Order” (SSA, art. 22.2).

Local Spiritual Assistants

“Local Spiritual Assistants give their service to the local fraternity and its council” (GC, art. 90.3d).

“The local Assistant is appointed by the competent major Superior, according to the law of his own Order, having heard the Council of the fraternity concerned” (SSA, art. 23.1).

“The local Assistant fosters communion with the fraternity and between the fraternity and the First Order or the TOR. In harmony with the local Guardian or Superior, the Assistant sees to it that between the religious and the secular fraternities a real life-giving union with each other exists. He/she fosters the active presence of the fraternity in the Church and in society” (SSA, art. 23.2).

“The local Assistant, together with the Council of the fraternity, is responsible for the formation of the candidates and expresses his/her assessment of each of the candidates before profession” (SSA, art. 24.1).

“Together with the Minister, the Assistant discusses with the brothers and sisters in difficulty, who want to retire from the fraternity or who act in serious opposition to the Rule” (SSA, art. 24.2).

7. Who can be a spiritual assistant to the OFS, and who can appoint them (see Chapters 2 and 3)?

“As a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, the councils on various levels, in keeping with the constitutions, shall ask for suitable and well-prepared religious for spiritual assistance. They should make this request to the Superiors of the four religious Franciscan families, to whom the Secular Fraternity has been united for centuries. To promote fidelity to the charism as well as observance of the rule and to receive greater support in the life of the fraternity, the Minister, with the consent of the council, should take care to ask for a

regular pastoral visit by the competent religious superiors as well as for a fraternal visit from those of the higher fraternities, according to the norm of the constitutions” (OFS Rule, art. 26).

Who can be a spiritual assistant?

“To be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the Secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between his Order and the OFS, the spiritual assistant should be a Franciscan religious, member of the First Order or the TOR” (GC, art. 89.3).

“When it is not possible to give such a spiritual assistant to the fraternity, the competent major superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:

- a. religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
- b. diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the OFS;
- c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious” (GC, art. 89.4).

Who can appoint a spiritual assistant?

“The competent major superior, having heard the council of the fraternity concerned, appoints the assistant according to the norms of these Constitutions and the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order” (GC, art. 91.3).

“The Assistant is appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the council of the fraternity concerned” (SSA, art. 15.1).

8. What are the terms of office of a spiritual assistant (see Chapter 3)?

“The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve years” (SSA, art. 15.3).

9. What is a Pastoral Visitation, and what are the requirements (see Chapter 6)?

“The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion with the First Order and the TOR. It is also carried out in the name of the Church and serves to guarantee and promote the observance of the Rule and the Constitutions and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. The visit is carried out with respect to the organization and the law proper to the OFS itself” (GC, art. 95.1) (see also SSA, art. 14.1).

“The visitor will give special attention to programs, methods and experiences of formation, to the liturgical and prayer life, and to the apostolic activities of the fraternity” (GC, art. 95.4).

“The visitor will draw up a report of the visit carried out, appending it to the records in the appropriate register of the fraternity visited, and will inform the council of the level which has held the visit” (GC, art. 93.2).

Chapter 1

The *Altius Moderamen* and the OFS

What is the *Altius Moderamen*?

The term *altius moderamen* is Latin for “higher direction” mentioned in the *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 303:

“Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute while in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name.”

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) is classified as a “Public Association of the Faithful” covered by Canon 303, and is a self-governing order in its own right. Therefore, the *altius moderamen* for the OFS is focused on the pastoral and spiritual needs of the OFS, and faithfulness to the Franciscan charism.

“The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and with the Franciscan family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in initial and ongoing formation, and to express the fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS” (SSA, art. 2.3).

Vatican II, the OFS Rule of 1978, and the interpretation of Canon 303 for the OFS

How is Canon 303 implemented in the Franciscan family? Each General Minister of the First Order and TOR is responsible for appointing a General Spiritual Assistant for the OFS. These delegates of the General Ministers form the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

SSA, art. 9

1. The General Ministers exercise their office towards the OFS in accordance with the universal law of the Church, with their own Constitutions and with full respect for the specific laws of the OFS.

Spiritual Assistance

Assistant, from the Latin verb *adsistere*, means to stand beside, to stand near, to be present, to protect, to support, to help by means of one's own active participation. An assistant is one who is called, because of his or her competence, to help the person in charge or chief officer, who, in the case of the OFS, is the council with the minister at the various levels. (*Manual of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and Franciscan Youth*, Chapter IV, 3.5)

Co-responsibility and life-giving union

The *Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS* offer another way of expressing the First Order/TOR responsibility to the OFS for spiritual assistance.

The words: *co-responsibility* and *life-giving union* invite spiritual assistants to work with the Secular Franciscans as equals rather than through domination. *Life-giving union* requires a true familial sense, working together to achieve the goal of the Franciscan family both in the Church and in the world.

They have the faculty to establish, visit, and meet with local OFS fraternities, which are assisted by their own Order.

2. In relation to his own Order, it is the responsibility of each general Minister:
 - to appoint the general Assistant of the OFS, who, under the authority of the general Minister, looks after all things regarding service to the OFS.
 - if needed, to confirm or appoint the national assistants belonging to his own Order.

The Nature of Spiritual Assistance

A spiritual assistant guides or assists the fraternity in living the Gospel and the OFS Rule. The title “assistant” stresses that the spiritual assistant, while able to give instructions and direction, when necessary, should not make a lot of decisions for the fraternity. The spiritual assistant’s role is more oversight, to encourage and ensure that the fraternity is following a Franciscan spirituality not only in the spiritual messages it distributes but also in the manner of their gathering, governance, and interaction with others outside the fraternity. The spiritual assistant is not a director and should not be the resident expert.

Even in situations where the fraternity leadership is still learning, it is important that the assistant allow the leadership to make decisions (with the assistant’s input as needed or requested). Direction should point the council to learn how to function well together, not simply to execute the assistant’s plans, but to formulate their own plans and operate collegially to live out the Franciscan life together as a fraternity.

Spiritual assistants also help the fraternity to remain connected with the broader Franciscan family, both higher levels of the OFS and the other branches, especially the friar province bonded to the local fraternity, or at higher levels, those friar communities responsible for the spiritual assistance of the fraternity.

The spiritual assistant at any level serves on the council and collaborates with the members of the fraternity so that the OFS fulfills its role in the Church and the world.

The words *co-responsibility* and *life-giving union* invite spiritual assistants to work with the Secular Franciscans as equals rather than through domination. Life-giving union requires a true familial sense, working together to achieve the goal of the Franciscan family both in the Church and in the world.

As a job description of the spiritual assistant is developed, it must be adjusted to fit the different levels of the OFS administrative structure. There is always the “how” of implementing these articles at the different levels. But the basic role of the spiritual assistant is consistent. SAs are part of a Franciscan family that embraces the same charism and follows the same spirit shown by St. Francis of Assisi. We support all the members of the Franciscan family, assisting them to embrace a life-giving union that enables us to express, together, the spirit of Francis and Clare in the Church and the world. “How” we implement that spirit may differ at various times and at various levels, but the foundation is the same. A spiritual assistant is the supportive link between the OFS and the rest of the Franciscan family.

Spiritual assistants need to understand their role in fraternity life and with the council. They are not simply a passive presence, nor are they an overwhelming, aggressive presence. Like all council members, they share whatever will build up fraternity life and the Franciscan charism.

From *The Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS (2009) [SSA]*:

Article 1:

1. The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, in virtue of its belonging to the same spiritual family, is entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, to whom the Secular Fraternity has been united for centuries.
2. Religious and Secular Franciscans in fact, in various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, aim to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church and of society.
3. Therefore, as a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, religious superiors must ensure spiritual assistance to all the fraternities of the OFS.

Article 2

1. The spiritual and pastoral care is provided as a two-fold service:
 - a) the fraternal office of *altius moderamen* on the part of the major superiors;
 - b) spiritual assistance to the fraternities and their councils.
2. The purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and (life-giving) union with the Franciscan family.
3. The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and the Franciscan family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in the initial and ongoing formation of Secular Franciscans, and to express fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS.

Article 12

1. The spiritual assistant is the person designated by the competent major superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth.

Article 13

1. The principal task of the assistant is to foster a deeper insight into Franciscan spirituality and to cooperate in the initial and continuing formation of the Secular Franciscans.
2. In the Council of the fraternity and in elective and ordinary chapters, the assistant will be respectful of the responsibilities and role of the Secular Franciscans, giving them priority with regard to the guidance, coordination, and animation of the fraternity.
3. The assistant participates actively and votes in the discussions and decisions taken by the Council or by the chapter. He or she is specifically responsible for the animation of liturgical celebrations and spiritual reflections during the meetings of the council or chapter.

A spiritual assistant, whether a Franciscan friar or not, by virtue of his/her appointment, is the link of union between the OFS and the First Order and TOR. The spiritual assistant is a guarantor of the Franciscan charism and spirituality in the name of the friars. An OFS spiritual assistant does

not represent the Secular Franciscans. A member of a particular religious congregation or diocesan clergy does not represent their Order or the diocese. Rather, they serve as a link to the Franciscan First Order/TOR. They serve as a sign of communion between the Franciscan First Order/TOR and the OFS. This requirement of the Church reflects what the Church calls the *altius moderamen*. The spiritual assistant has other responsibilities as well. Here are some of the basic qualities of a spiritual assistant:

- A spiritual assistant must be knowledgeable about Franciscan spirituality as well as understand the Secular Franciscan way of life. Lacking this knowledge would make it difficult for an individual to truly "assist" as a spiritual assistant to a Secular Franciscan fraternity.
- A spiritual assistant needs skills in communicating Franciscan spirituality to the fraternity members and serving the fraternity council. Without this skill, it is difficult to see how a spiritual assistant could give much "assistance" to the fraternity. A spiritual assistant also needs basic "people skills." One way the provincial minister, or his delegate, discovers the presence or absence of people skills is by a personal interview with a nominee.
- A local spiritual assistant needs time and the ability to cooperate in the initial and ongoing formation of Secular Franciscans. It requires presence at initial formation sessions and the monthly gatherings where ongoing formation takes place. His/her presence is required at the regular fraternity council meetings. Obviously, he/she does not do all the work, but his/her presence is important to developing ways and means of contributing to fraternity life. Attendance at SA/OFS ongoing formation workshops is one way for SAs to keep up-to-date.
- A spiritual assistant "assists" the Secular Franciscans in living the OFS Rule. An SA needs to be a prayerful person. He/she needs prayerful experiences that enable him/her to assist Seculars to let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do (OFS Rule, art.8). The spiritual assistant needs sound knowledge of social issues in order to proclaim the Gospel by word and action in the world and the Church as the OFS Rule requires (cf. OFS Rule, arts. 14–19).
- A spiritual assistant must understand how a Secular Franciscan fraternity fits within the Franciscan family, the People of God called "Church," and how it serves society. He/she must realize that they serve the First Order and TOR, maintaining a life-giving union with all Franciscan family members.

"Recognition of the responsibility of the seculars must not be transformed into a passive attitude of 'leave it to them,' but must be an active attitude of promotion and collaboration so that the seculars might realize their vocation and proper mission" (MSA, Chapter IV, 2.1).

The Spiritual Assistant as Servant Leader – Accompanying an OFS Fraternity

From the beginning of the Franciscan movement, St. Francis instilled in the brothers the idea of servant-leadership, that those entrusted with leadership do so in the manner of Jesus. Spiritual assistants, along with those elected to fraternity councils, follow an example of servant leadership.

The Rule and General Constitutions of the OFS specify the duties of the fraternity council, specifically that it is responsible for animating and guiding the fraternity. The SA is a member of the council and serves to accompany the council as they plan and make decisions for the fraternity. They assist the fraternity, rarely by directing, but rather by guiding and supporting the fraternity and its council to live out the Franciscan charism. In cases where the fraternity or its leadership insists on deviating from our charism, both the higher level fraternity and the friar province(s) may intervene in accordance with OFS legislation. This involves fostering a spirit of fraternity, promoting spiritual growth, and ensuring the fraternity's activities align with Franciscan values and teachings. The SA needs to build strong relationships with the fraternity, the Franciscan family, and the Church.

Franciscan servant-leadership for the spiritual assistant takes on a pastoral nature. Whether the SA is a priest, religious brother or sister, deacon, or Secular Franciscan, the SA is a person of prayer, a witness to Gospel values, and lives the Gospel life. The SA fosters Franciscan values and the spiritual growth of the fraternity. The servant-leadership of the SA is demonstrated in their support, encouragement, and guidance of the council and fraternity in matters of discernment. The SA animates the spiritual, liturgical, and prayer life of the fraternity.

An essential quality of the SA as servant-leader is the ability to listen with a prayerful ear. The SA acts with compassion in difficult situations. They help the fraternity discern its path, encouraging dialogue and listening to the Holy Spirit. In essence, a Franciscan spiritual assistant is a “co-journeyer”, walking alongside the fraternity, guiding them with wisdom and compassion, and empowering them to live out their Franciscan vocation in the world.

In Admonition IV, St. Francis writes: *“I did not come to be served, but to serve, says the Lord”* (see Matt 20:28).



Saint Francis of Assisi (detail)
Cimabue

Basilica of St. Frances, Assisi, Italy
Public domain

Chapter 2

Levels of Spiritual Assistance in the OFS

Just as each local fraternity needs a spiritual assistant, the fraternities at “higher” levels also each have a spiritual assistant. In our country, local fraternities are gathered into a regional fraternity; regional fraternities are gathered into the national fraternity. Not all countries have the intermediate stage of regional fraternities, but instead gather local fraternities directly into a national fraternity. At each higher level, spiritual assistant(s) are assigned by the relevant groups of friars: regional, national, and general spiritual assistants.

In addition, in the USA, the delegate of the provincial minister for ministry with the Secular Franciscans is often referred to as the provincial spiritual assistant. This friar is usually delegated by the provincial minister to ensure the canonical responsibilities of the provincial minister are met at local and regional levels and within the province: to appoint and oversee spiritual assistants at the local and regional levels, to establish fraternities, to encourage the friars to be aware of and to serve the OFS, and to facilitate the relationship between the province and its bonded fraternities.

At the international level, each of the four obediences of friars—OFM, OFM Conventual, OFM Capuchin, and TOR—is responsible for providing a friar to serve as *general spiritual assistant*. The General Minister of each obedience appoints their representative, and these four friars comprise the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.

Since each of the four obediences of friars is present in the USA, the provincial ministers of each obedience must jointly decide—by whatever means they choose—to appoint a friar to represent their obedience as a national spiritual assistant. These four friars comprise the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants.

For each regional fraternity, the relevant friar provinces are those bonded to fraternities that belong to the regional fraternity. Provincial ministers of the same obedience are jointly responsible for selecting a spiritual assistant to serve the regional fraternity on behalf of their provinces. Again, the provincial ministers may determine how to make this selection in any way they decide to. Often, the selection at this level is done by their delegates for the OFS ministry. The regional spiritual assistant need not be a friar. GC 89.4 describes others who can be assigned if a

Who can be appointed SA if a suitable friar is not available?

GC, art. 89.4: When it is not possible to give such a spiritual assistant to the fraternity, the competent major superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:

- a. religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
- b. diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the OFS; (Note: The International Statutes of the Secular Franciscan Order (2024) prohibit an OFS member from serving their own fraternity at any level. [IS, art. 78.2])
- c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.

friar is not available. International Statute (2024) 78.2 states that Secular Franciscans cannot serve their own fraternities, therefore they cannot be appointed to be a regional spiritual assistant in their own region. They can, however, be assigned to serve in another OFS region. The general ministers of the four friar obediences have determined that the national and general spiritual assistants must be friars from their respective obediences. Where more than one obedience is represented in a region, the regional spiritual assistants form a conference that operates collegially, as do the spiritual assistants at the higher levels (SSA, art. 21.2). This means that they jointly share responsibility for the pastoral visitations across the region and can divide their responsibilities in whatever manner works for them, not limited by the obediences that appointed them.

Example: There are two TOR provinces in this country. In the St. Louis Regional Fraternity, where each of these provinces is bonded to local fraternities, these TOR provincial ministers alternate in providing a friar to serve as regional spiritual assistant.

Example: Three Capuchin provinces were bonded to fraternities in the St. Bernadine Regional Fraternity. One of these provinces had a spiritual assistant available to serve as a regional spiritual assistant, so the provincial spiritual assistant from that province called the other provincial spiritual assistants, and with their agreement, wrote a letter of appointment on behalf of all three provincial ministers to appoint this candidate.

These “higher” levels of fraternities in the OFS exist to serve the “lower” levels of fraternities.

Delegate of the Provincial Minister (Provincial Spiritual Assistant)

What is a Provincial Spiritual Assistant?

The provincial minister of a friar province (First Order or TOR) has the primary responsibility for establishing fraternities, making pastoral visits, and providing for spiritual assistance, through the *altius moderamen* (GC, art. 88). He may perform these duties personally or through a friar he delegates to fulfill these duties in his name. The provincial spiritual assistant acts in the name of his provincial minister in concerns of the OFS. The provincial minister determines the extent of the authority he delegates to the provincial delegate/PSA (SSA, art. 5.2). There is no limit to the provincial delegate/PSA's term of office.

Duties of the Provincial Delegate/PSA

The provincial delegate/PSA, duly delegated by the provincial minister, has the following duties as specified in the SA Statutes article 11:

2. It is their specific competence, in the name of their jurisdiction:
 - a) to canonically establish new local fraternities and to guarantee them spiritual assistance;
 - b) to appoint the spiritual assistants;*
 - c) to animate spiritually, to visit, and to meet the local fraternities assisted by their own Order;**
 - d) to keep themselves informed about the spiritual assistance given to the OFS and the Franciscan youth.

[*local and regional]

[**or to delegate the responsibility]

The delegate keeps his provincial minister informed about the condition of the OFS fraternities bonded to his province. While Regional SAs usually do the visitations of fraternities in their region, the PSA may make unofficial visits, which are one opportunity to develop the relationship expressed in the life-giving union between friars and seculars.

The delegate of the provincial minister is not the same kind of “spiritual assistant” as a local, regional, national, or general spiritual assistant. Instead, the delegate is given responsibility for ensuring that the canonical obligations of his province are met at local and possibly regional levels. While the spiritual assistants are appointed (often by this delegate) to serve a specific fraternity at a given level, the delegate of the provincial works to ensure that this spiritual assistance is provided to the fraternities his province is responsible for, while also encouraging the friars of his province to be aware of and involved with the OFS. The following responsibilities of the provincial minister are usually delegated to the provincial delegate/PSA:

- Establish new fraternities bonded to his province, with the approval of his provincial minister, following all the requirements of the law of the Church, the OFS, and his own Order.
- Witness the canonical establishment of a new fraternity, though he may delegate this role to another friar for good reasons.
- Appoint spiritual assistants to the local fraternities bonded to his province. Any appointments made by the delegate are, of course, made “in the name of” the provincial minister. The PSA ensures that the person appointed is “suitable and well-prepared” for this service, provides formation for the person as needed, and consults with the person’s religious superior, bishop (for diocesan clergy), or local and regional executive councils (OFS member).
- Appoint regional spiritual assistants to animate and perform pastoral visitation of local fraternities. He may also perform official or informal visits.
- Serve as a point of contact for fraternities bonded to his province or regional fraternities where his province is represented. Fraternities have the right of recourse to their provincial delegate/PSA in serious matters and special needs.
- Offer advice and counsel to the provincial minister when the minister retains authority to appoint SAs, local or regional, or to establish fraternities.
- Report to his provincial administration, especially the provincial minister, about the quality of spiritual assistance and the development of the OFS in fraternities bonded to their province. This often takes the form of a report as directed by the provincial minister.
- Collaborate with RSAs to develop ongoing formation for local spiritual assistants.
- Inform the friars of his province about the OFS generally and especially about the fraternities bonded to his province. Encourage the friars to be involved and consider serving the OFS. This includes being available for friars in initial formation.
- Provide ongoing formation for his provincial minister, and possibly other ministers, regarding the OFS and their responsibilities to the OFS. The appointment of a national spiritual assistant by the provincial ministers is one opportunity for this type of formation.

Local Spiritual Assistant

The spiritual assistant, appointed by the provincial minister/delegate, is a member of the local fraternity council, participates in the fraternity and in the council with special attention to spiritual and pastoral matters, which necessarily include formation and leadership, and without voting on finances or in elections. The spiritual assistant is not the director or manager of the fraternity. A newly forming group or an emerging fraternity may need more direction, but even here, the direction should help the members to become good leaders themselves, rather than simply determining how things should be done.

A spiritual assistant is especially alert to see that the programs and ministry of the fraternity reflect the Franciscan spirit of respect and compassion for all people. This includes the importance of dialogue, collaboration, and a shared sense of equality (equal dignity) among the members of the council, including the SA. The experience and training of a spiritual assistant may help the SA to “assist” with difficult issues in fraternity life or within the council.

In facilitating liturgy and other prayer, spiritual assistants help other competent members of the fraternity to help plan and implement the celebration or event.

Justice requires that the fraternity council offer a stipend to the spiritual assistant. The amount is up to the individual council; it may include travel expenses, mailing expenses, and a reasonable stipend for conferences. The SA and council can dialogue about this to determine a reasonable monthly or annual stipend.

Spiritual Assistant and Initial Formation

Initial formation is an initiation into fraternity life, a time to learn to live the requirements of the OFS Rule and Constitutions. The fraternity council, including the spiritual assistant and formation director, should give serious attention to initial formation and to the careful choice of members of

The Role of the SA on the Fraternity Council (MSA, Chapter IV, 4.1)

The spiritual assistant plays an important and sensitive role in the meetings of the fraternity and its council. The assistant’s specific area is spiritual:

- To foster communion with the Church,
- To bear witness to Franciscan spirituality,
- To cooperate in formation and,
- To nourish the Christian life of the fraternity.

The assistant’s contributions to the meetings, those of the fraternity, as well as those of the council, should be related chiefly to this specific area. Naturally, this calls for tact and spiritual maturity to know when to keep quiet and give priority to the secular leaders in the coordination and animation of the fraternity.

- In the council meetings, the spiritual assistant (MSA, Chapter IV, 4.2) is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity which he or she serves, and collaborates with it in all its activities, taking part in its meetings and activities in accordance with the law proper to the OFS.
- The spiritual assistant acts with respect for the responsibilities and role of the seculars, giving them priority with regard to the guidance, coordination, and animation of the fraternity.

the formation team to implement any formation program. Each council member should attend some formation meetings to get to know newcomers well; the council discerns whether to accept a person for profession, and they must be well-informed to make this discernment.

The spiritual assistant should be an active part of the formation team, typically present in person even when the formation director or other team member conducts the session. The assistance provided in formation also gives those being formed an experience of Franciscan servant leadership. In addition to content, understanding adult learning, ways to teach without relying on lectures, and the role of laity in the Church can help the spiritual assistant to serve well in the work of formation.

Fraternities in close proximity are encouraged to have a common formation program (GC, art. 40), which helps to build relationships and a common understanding toward a united Franciscan family. Spiritual assistants can help build this collaboration, keeping in mind that each fraternity has its distinct identity as well.

The formation program includes a Franciscan retreat (or day of recollection) to prepare for profession. Many regional fraternities have a common retreat across the region or across various districts. Spiritual assistants should collaborate in offering this retreat before profession. Typically, profession occurs at a Eucharistic celebration, and the minister of the candidate's fraternity must be the one to receive the profession.

Spiritual Assistant and Ongoing Formation

We change through life, growing in experience and knowledge, expecting physical and other changes. The world changes, each new birth and each new generation prompting a need to speak the same Gospel in new ways to address these persons and the situations of their lives. The Church and the Order change as well, sometimes seeking to emphasize something differently because it is so critical to the age in which we live or so helpful for our understanding of the world as it is today.

Married life changes, from the excitement of the wedding celebration to the expectation of children, the thrill of newness alternating with the persistence required to work through difficulties. Lifetime commitments require growth and adaptation. Experience and knowledge, as well as the ongoing development of good habits—that is, virtue—help us to fulfill our life commitments, like marriage.

Ongoing formation helps us personally and helps our fraternities to grow and develop the habits of life that allow us to maintain and deepen our Franciscan life profession. Daily, radical interior conversion is part of life for each of us (OFS Rule, art. 7). Thus, spiritual assistants aid in ongoing formation by attending to their own growth in the faith and in Franciscan life, as well as listening and walking with Secular Franciscans entrusted to their service as they grow, as brothers and sisters walking along the same Way.

When some resist a call to change or to consider a different perspective, the best response is often for one person to make a change in that direction. When people see creative responses that work with their own struggles, they are better able to see that change is possible for themselves as well. Ongoing formation, as a form of adult learning, is only effective when it also moves participants (including the “instructor” or leader) to more actively implement the Gospel vision.

Resources for formation include the National Formation Commission, their digital newsletter, “Formation Fridays”; the *For Up to Now* (FUN) Formation Manual (to prepare formators to conduct formation sessions), as well as regional and national formation guidelines and the current formation texts in use across our national fraternity. *Koinonia* and other resources are available at ciofs.info or the OFS-USA website.

Regional Spiritual Assistant

Local fraternities in the USA are grouped into regional fraternities, and the friar provinces bonded to those local fraternities are responsible for appointing regional spiritual assistants (RSA) to serve the regional fraternity. For each friar obedience, the provincial ministers (or delegates) responsible for fraternities in the region together appoint one regional spiritual assistant, consulting with the REC (GC, arts. 90.3.c., 91.2c and 91.3).

While there are situations where it might be necessary for an obedience to appoint more than one spiritual assistant, those persons should share the role, and therefore their vote. For example, if there is only one obedience represented and no one is available to fulfill all of the service (visitations and meetings) required in the regional fraternity. Where more than one obedience is present in a region, the ministers (delegates) appointing RSAs should talk across obediences before appointing a second RSA for any single obedience. Popes and friars have noted that serving the OFS is an opportunity (gift) for friars to cooperate and collaborate. Communication and proportional representation are helpful along these lines.

The Regional Fraternity Council includes the local ministers of local fraternities in the region; the regional spiritual assistant (or the Conference of Spiritual Assistants if there are several RSAs); and the Regional Executive Council. The RSA serves the regional fraternity by participating at regional fraternity chapters and other gatherings, and at least in turn at Regional Executive Council meetings; also in the projects of the regional fraternity, including the oversight and guidance to local fraternities in official pastoral visitations and in unofficial capacities to help ensure a vibrant Franciscan community life within and among the local fraternities in the region.

Friar provinces are encouraged to appoint a friar as RSA when one is available, but, as at the local level, other suitable and well-prepared persons are allowed to serve. However, International Statute 78.2 of the Secular Franciscan Order (2024) prohibits a Secular Franciscan from serving their own fraternity as a spiritual assistant at any level. A Secular Franciscan may, however, serve a region other than their own as a regional spiritual assistant. Each RSA serves the entire regional fraternity, not merely the fraternities bonded to the province(s) which appointed them; since the RSAs operate collegially, this can be of great benefit in fulfilling their joint responsibilities across the regional fraternity.

Regional spiritual assistants animate the spiritual life and apostolic ministry of the regional fraternity, in part through their support of local spiritual assistants, facilitating communication among them and offering ongoing formation and advice where appropriate. Regional spiritual assistants also conduct a pastoral visitation of each local fraternity in the region once every three years. This may be done in conjunction with the fraternal visitation. Details concerning a visitation can be found in Chapter 6, (p. 43).

The pastoral visitor explores (initial and ongoing) formation within the local fraternity and leadership concerns, in addition to their spiritual life and the spiritual assistance provided to the fraternity and apostolic ministry.

As at the local level, RSAs assist in formation and leadership development in the regional fraternity. They also have other responsibilities within the REC so that the REC is able to correspond properly with the National Executive Council, CIOFS, and the responsible friar provinces. The regional spiritual assistant is present as the witness of the Church and the Order in elections at local fraternities of the region. He/she may delegate this role (in writing) if unable to attend. See Chapter 5 for specifics on who can be delegated to witness an election.

The regional spiritual assistant should work with the responsible friars of the provinces present in the region to foster the interest of the friars in the OFS and in Franciscan Youth. Regular communication with friars (especially the provincial minister and delegate) and presence at friar ministry sites, along with an awareness of the culture of the friar provinces, can help spur creative options in reaching the friars; the friar provinces' communications offices can help in this. While each RSA is directly responsible for communicating with the friar province(s) that appointed them, this is also work that can be done collaboratively.

When there is more than one regional spiritual assistant serving the regional fraternity, they serve collegially (GC, art. 90.3c; SSA, art. 21.2). For good order, one of them coordinates their conference, and they rotate this responsibility among all the members. The person fulfilling the coordinating role is called the *president* of the conference of regional spiritual assistants. Usually, this is the person who would attend all REC meetings, facilitating communication within the CRSA about REC concerns. However, the REC may request or allow all RSAs to attend meetings, in which case the president of the CRSA would be the one to exercise a vote (except in finances or elections) (see NS, art. 22.1 below), unless the REC has a different process explicit in their regional guidelines. There are regional fraternities where all attending RSAs are allowed to vote in REC meetings.

The RSA conference members attend the regional chapter meetings and vote, except in finances or elections.

When one obedience of friars is no longer present in a given region, but others of the First Order or TOR are present, it can sometimes be helpful to transfer the *altius moderamen* of fraternities bonded to the one province/obedience to a friar province that maintains a strong presence in the region. However, history or relationships may prompt a different option. Communication among the friar ministers/delegates and the REC—especially the RSAs—can facilitate creative responses to the difficult situations that arise when a group of friars is no longer present.

National Statutes Articles pertaining to Regional Spiritual Assistants

Article 21

3. The Regional Spiritual Assistant or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants exercises pastoral care and spiritual guidance in regard to each regional fraternity as an integral component part of NAFRA and of the OFS, by the same means and manner as does the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) in regard to NAFRA (cf. SSA 21 & 22).

Article 22

1. The Regional Fraternity Council is composed of the Ministers of the Local Fraternities that together form the Regional Fraternity, the Regional Executive Council, and the Regional Spiritual Assistants or the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants, each of whom may vote. Regional Spiritual Assistants, however, do not vote in financial matters and in elective chapters (cf. SSA, art. 12.1).

National Spiritual Assistants

As noted above, the provincial ministers of each obedience within the USA together appoint a friar to serve as a national spiritual assistant (SSA, art. 19.1). These friars, one from each obedience, then form the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA). The provincial ministers together are free to decide how they make the appointment; for example, by rotating which province is responsible for providing a friar for this service, or by a vote or consensus of the ministers. Only the major superiors have the right to appoint one of their friars to CNSA. The friar may serve as national spiritual assistant for at most twelve (12) years.

Within the CNSA itself, the friars rotate the position of President-in-Turn, serving for two years at a time; this friar serves to coordinate the work of the CNSA. The next friar in rotation might be called Vice President-in-Turn, and should be attentive to the duties of the President, so that he will be ready to assume that role. The CNSA decides among themselves how often to meet in person or by video conference. In their service, they operate collegially (SSA, art. 19.2).

In the USA, the CNSA has selected two Secular Franciscans to be secretary and treasurer of the CNSA. Their role for the CNSA is spelled out in the job descriptions given in this *Handbook*.

Roles and Responsibilities of National Spiritual Assistants

- Provide spiritual assistance to the National Fraternity Council of the OFS-USA and the National Executive Council (NEC). This includes especially performing pastoral visitations of each regional fraternity, which are often done in conjunction with the fraternal visitations (performed by the National Minister or his/her delegate). At this time, there are 30 regional fraternities in the USA, and each is visited once every three years; occasionally more often if a difficult concern requires it.
- Write a report after each visitation, for a permanent record of the state of the regional fraternity and the concerns addressed during the visitation, including both corrections and affirmations, challenges and insights, to help the regional fraternity grow in Franciscan life.

GC, art. 90.3.b

The national assistants give their service to the National [Executive] Council, see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS in the whole territory of the national fraternity and, at the national level, to the coordination of the regional assistants. If there are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially.

- Report annually, in writing, to the NEC and National Fraternity Council, the work of the CNSA. *This report is written by the President of the CNSA.* The President also attends NEC meetings on behalf of the CNSA and serves as an *ex officio* member of the Duns Scotus Foundation Board. All national spiritual assistants attend the national chapter of the OFS and remain informed on issues so that they can vote on all matters except elections and expenditures.
- Report annually to the provincial ministers of their respective obediences on the work of the CNSA. Animate interest among the friars of their respective obediences to connect with and serve the OFS. Each friar seeks ways that are most effective for communicating with the friars of their province or Order.
- Oversee and assist in formation and leadership within the OFS in the USA, collaborating with the national OFS leadership.
- Provide opportunities for provincial and regional spiritual assistants in the USA to gather and receive ongoing formation as well as share their experience and ideas; frequency and themes are determined by the CNSA with an awareness of common issues and situations. Foster relevant communication among the spiritual assistants and also with the friars who appoint them.
- Maintain a website and online email list to share resources and facilitate communication among SAs.
- Provide written materials for SAs and for other responsible persons, for example, this *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS*; for the formation of SAs (*Franciscan Family Connections*); and for the spiritual benefit of the national fraternity (articles in the *TAU-USA* and other resources).
- Receive information from the general spiritual assistants and communicate that information to the national fraternity and the spiritual assistants serving in the USA at the regional and local levels.
- Represent the needs of spiritual assistants in the USA to the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants.
- Remind the friar provinces of their commitment to support the CNSA financially, when necessary.
- Appoint spiritual assistants for the various national commissions of the OFS. *Typically, the commission chair requests a spiritual assistant from the CNSA in writing. If making a recommendation, the chair includes a statement of the person's qualifications.* Appointments are made for a three-year term; the usual term limit is two terms.

It may seem obvious, but CNSA members and all spiritual assistants are called to be prayerful people. Spiritual assistants share with the OFS the task of rebuilding our Church and world, which is always in need of reform. Intimacy with Jesus helps us create a world and people influenced by the Gospel. The Holy Spirit dwells in the faithful and prompts all to faithfulness. Spiritual assistants are mindful of the importance of keeping the Franciscan charism alive and well in all councils, fraternities, and OFS members in the USA. A sense of respect for the Franciscan family

relationship among all its members is essential. Spiritual Assistants minister collaboratively to serve the OFS, the Franciscan family, the Church, and the world.

Finances and the CNSA

At this time, the CNSA is funded by the four obediences of friars, the NEC, and the sale of publications. When a national spiritual assistant performs a regional visitation or other service to a specific group, that entity should reimburse for travel and provide a stipend. If the entity cannot afford this, then the assistant, the CNSA, and/or NEC will determine how to fund the friar's travel.

The national fraternity pays for travel, room, and board for the President-in-Turn to NEC meetings and OFS-USA National Council chapters.

When a national spiritual assistant has other CNSA obligations, they may be paid from the CNSA treasury. The CNSA pays for expenses related to national fraternity events for the national spiritual assistants who are not serving as President, unless other arrangements are made in advance.

When national spiritual assistants select alternate meals from those provided at an event, such meals and related expenses are covered by their personal budgets.

CNSA Support Staff

Secretary to the CNSA

The secretary to the CNSA is an appointed volunteer position usually staffed by a Secular Franciscan. This administrative position includes recording minutes for meetings, coordinating schedules, preparing reports, correspondence, and archival materials. The secretary implements the decisions of the CNSA. The time requirement varies. However, the CNSA work is sometimes time-sensitive, requiring prioritization over other responsibilities.

Treasurer for the CNSA

The treasurer is appointed by the CNSA to keep accurate records of income and expenses for CNSA and to write checks for expenses as directed by the CNSA. The treasurer prepares the CNSA budget for the upcoming year, which is shared for approval by the CNSA. A competent outside person or firm shall audit the CNSA financial records once every three years unless directed otherwise. The names of all four members of the CNSA shall be on the bank card for signing checks.

Role of a Spiritual Assistant to a National Commission or National Committee

The spiritual assistant to a National Commission (SA) is appointed by the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA), ordinarily for a three-year term with the possibility of an extension for another three years. The National Commission Chair may make a request or recommendation to the CNSA.

As with any spiritual assistant, this SA serves as a member of the commission, not as a director or manager, but to ensure the Franciscan charism is lived well in the meetings and projects of the commission. The SA offers spiritual and pastoral guidance, including moral, Franciscan, ecclesial, and fraternal matters, ensuring or facilitating prayer and theological reflection within the Commission. Responsible also to the CNSA, the spiritual assistant's presence reflects the bond between the friars and the OFS.

A spiritual assistant may also be appointed to a national committee and function in the same manner.

Among the diverse ways of life that still exist in the Franciscan Family, that of the Secular Franciscans – lay and cleric – occupies a very particular place. They recognize Francis as their founder and live the charism within the secular dimension. For them, since they are an integral part of the Franciscan Family and have been historically united to us Franciscan religious, the Church granted the privilege of having the major superiors of the First Order and TOR as those mainly responsible for their spiritual and pastoral care. We are responsible for the higher direction (*altius moderamen*) that seeks to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church, and union with the Franciscan Family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans (cf. GC, article 85.1, .2).

Letter of the Ministers General of the 1st Order/TOR at the beginning of the *Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS* – October 4, 2009



Confirmation of the Rule
Giotto di Bondone, 1299

De Laun/Alamy Stock Photo

Chapter 3

Appointing Spiritual Assistants

The appointment of a spiritual assistant is a sign of the bond or relationship (*altius moderamen*) between a friar province and the local fraternity. The same is true at higher levels between the relevant entities of friars and the respective fraternity. Thus, while the local fraternity or its council, the Regional Executive Council, or spiritual assistants at various levels may offer suggestions or advice, the actual appointment of spiritual assistants must be made by the responsible friars—at the local level, the provincial minister or his delegate (provincial spiritual assistant); at the regional level, by the relevant provincial ministers (or delegates) of each obedience, in whichever way they choose to collaborate.

“From Franciscan history and from the Constitutions of the First Order communities and the TOR, it is evident that these Orders recognize that they are committed to the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the OFS in virtue of their common origin and charism and by the will of the Church, even if the occasional friar seeks to evade these responsibilities” (Footnote from article 1.1 in the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*, 2009).

Further, the Church has entrusted the care of the OFS to the Friars, so the Friars are responsible in accordance with CCL ccs. 303 and 305.

Local Spiritual Assistants

Each local OFS fraternity is bonded to a province of friars. The provincial minister of that province is responsible for providing spiritual and pastoral assistance to the fraternity; he usually appoints a friar to serve as his delegate (provincial spiritual assistant) to oversee this and related responsibilities. The minister or delegate may request or appreciate recommendations or advice from the local fraternity or REC regarding “suitable and well-prepared” candidates to serve as spiritual assistant (GC, art. 88.1). The appointment is made in consultation with the local fraternity council (SSA, art. 23.1), however there are situations where a spiritual assistant might be

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS – Article 5

The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan 1st Order and the TOR, is the duty above all of their general and provincial ministers. They exercise their office through:

- the establishment of local fraternities;
- pastoral visits;
- spiritual assistance.

They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate (e.g. PSA).

The Franciscan major superiors remain responsible for the quality of spiritual assistance and pastoral care, even in those cases where previous approval from a religious superior or from the local Ordinary is needed to appoint the Assistant (e.g. when the appointee is a diocesan priest or deacon or belongs to another Franciscan province).

They should foster the formation and interest of their own religious in the OFS and ensure a specific preparation for the Assistants so that they will be suitable and well-prepared.

assigned even against the stated wishes of the fraternity council, for example, if there is a conflict or other leadership problem evident. Consultation does not imply a need to seek approval, though it does suggest a need to be aware of the needs of the fraternity. In difficult situations, it is critical that the spiritual assistant be aware of the situation and have experience to deal with the situation pastorally.

Example: The PSA sent four friars in succession to St. Wenceslaus Fraternity. Each was rejected by the local minister, who eventually admitted that the council and fraternity at large simply wanted their former spiritual assistant back. What would you recommend the PSA do? What would you recommend to the next friar or candidate sent to consider becoming their spiritual assistant?

When the local fraternity council is aware of the need for a spiritual assistant (as when the current assistant has notified them of retirement), they should request one from the provincial spiritual assistant. If they are aware of one or more suitable persons who could serve, this is an appropriate time to make a recommendation.

The spiritual assistant receives a letter of appointment from the provincial minister (or delegate on behalf of the minister) of the province bonded to the fraternity. The appointment is made for a limited time, and if re-appointed, the spiritual assistant may not serve that fraternity for more than twelve years (SSA, art. 15.3).

The ideal is that a Franciscan friar will be available to provide this service, however, the provincial minister may “entrust the service of spiritual assistance to” other Franciscan religious, Secular Franciscans who have been prepared for this service, or diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious (SSA, art. 15.4). The order in this list does give preference to those categories listed first, but as a practical matter the suitability of the person in question is more important than which category they fit in.

Since the spiritual assistant needs to be imbued with Franciscan spirituality, it is important that a Secular Franciscan entrusted with this service has been professed for at least five years. It is also helpful that the person has some experience in leadership roles, at least in their local fraternity. In addition, the Secular Franciscan should have already completed a formation program to serve as a spiritual assistant (see Chapter 4, p. 33).

A Secular Franciscan may not serve his/her own fraternity as a spiritual assistant at any level (local or regional) (IS, art. 78.2). The assignment of a spiritual assistant is an exercise of the *altius moderamen* for the fraternity, and therefore, the spiritual assistant must be from outside the fraternity.

Statutes of the International Fraternity (IS, art. 78.1-2)

1. Although the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS has been entrusted to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, the responsible Major Superior may entrust this service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to men and women religious belonging to other Franciscan institutes, to Secular Franciscans, clerics or lay people and other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.
2. A Secular Franciscan cannot be appointed spiritual assistant to his/her own Fraternity at any level.

Spiritual Assistants in General

The process is similar at each level. The minister general of each friar obedience (OFM, Capuchin, Conventual, and TOR) appoints a friar to serve as general (international) spiritual assistant. At the national level, there may be multiple provinces of the same obedience; the provincial ministers of each obedience jointly decide how to appoint a national spiritual assistant representing their obedience. One possible method is to alternate which province appoints a friar to serve. At the regional level, the same process applies in the case of multiple provinces of the same obedience in that region.

The spiritual assistant should be “suitable and well prepared” (GC, art. 88.1), so the CNSA has published the text *Franciscan Family Connections* (2011) to serve as a foundation for this preparation, along with this handbook and the Franciscan legislation. In several regions in the USA, the REC has developed a course to prepare Secular Franciscans to serve as spiritual assistants (see Chapter 4 – Formation of Spiritual Assistants); any provincial spiritual assistant (or his delegate) may also provide formation using this text in person or through a mostly correspondence course. Because this is a program of spiritual and pastoral formation, at least some in-person interaction is encouraged; this might occur after the candidate has completed a portion of the course, to be more sure they can complete it. Such courses are also suitable for religious, including friars, or diocesan clergy who might discern a call to serve as spiritual assistants, and may be adjusted to accommodate their schedule and experience. Ultimately, the friar(s) appointing the person determine whether the person is suitable and sufficiently prepared, but a first-time spiritual assistant might benefit from having or seeking out an experienced mentor; the provincial spiritual assistant can fill this role.

Provincial delegates/PSAs with fraternities in a given region may establish particular guidelines for the formation of spiritual assistants in that region.

While ordination is not required for this role, the responsibility is to provide spiritual and pastoral assistance, so the person chosen should have personal development and experience to allow for this. In particular, the assistant is not a director but more like a midwife to help the fraternity give birth to good Franciscan leadership, an attitude that can require different approaches depending on the development of the fraternity. Letters of recommendation can assist in this determination, but this is also a reason to encourage some in-person interaction with a candidate before their appointment.

The responsible friar(s) consult the council of the fraternity before appointing a spiritual assistant (GC, arts. 91.3 & 91.2.c; SSA, art. 21.1). This ensures that the appointment is made with awareness of the situation of the fraternity and its council.

The spiritual assistant receives a letter of appointment from the friars responsible for the fraternity. At any level, the appointment is for no more than twelve (12) years total, although it might be made for a shorter term, renewable for a total of no more than 12 years (SSA, art. 15). The provincial delegate/PSA is responsible for informing SAs of this process and keeping track of their service. The SA should notify the PSA when the SA is no longer able to fulfill his service (e.g., moving, illness, lack of time).

There is a liturgical ritual in this *Handbook* (Appendix B) which can be used to install the spiritual assistant; the minister/delegate and fraternity council can adjust the ritual to meet local, regional, or national needs.

At the international and national level, the general ministers have determined that a friar should serve as a spiritual assistant. Since the spiritual assistant needs to be imbued with Franciscan spirituality, it is important that a Secular Franciscan entrusted with this service at the regional level will have been professed at least five years, have served in some leadership role, and have completed a formation program for spiritual assistants.

When multiple persons serve a fraternity as spiritual assistants, they form a conference. The fraternity (executive) council should decide, unless there is a higher-level guideline, how to represent the vote of multiple spiritual assistants so that the spiritual assistants do not have a disproportionate influence in the council's decisions.

Example: In one regional fraternity, the REC allows all present RSAs to vote in their decisions. One friar province has appointed multiple persons to fill their one RSA position, since no one person has the time to fulfill all the obligations. If each obedience appoints two persons to fill their RSA role, and all show up for a meeting, the RSAs would equal the non-RSA voting members of the REC, giving them together an undue influence over decisions.

Because the legislation requires they exercise their ministry collaboratively (SSA, art. 3.2), it is important that their vote is not limited to one member of the conference without rotation. Also note that the conference can determine who among them will perform pastoral visitations; a spiritual assistant appointed by the Capuchins may perform the pastoral visitation of a fraternity bonded to Conventuals, for example, as the regional spiritual assistants decide to divide their responsibilities.

Collaboration in Appointment of Spiritual Assistants

SSA, art. 3.2 – It is exercised according to these present Statutes, common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFM Conv, OFM Cap, TOR) and must be performed collegially at all levels above the local level.

SSA, art. 19.1 – The national Assistants of the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major superiors, after consultation with the respective National [Executive] Council. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms established together by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the national territory shall be followed.

SSA, art. 21.1 – The regional Assistants to the OFS and Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the respective Regional [Executive] councils. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms established jointly by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity shall be followed.”

SSA, art. 23.1 – The local Assistant is appointed by the competent major Superior, according to the law of his own Order, having heard the Council of the fraternity concerned.”

Requesting a Local or Regional Spiritual Assistant

Because the spiritual assistant is appointed by friars, the process of recommending and appointing a spiritual assistant is an opportunity for collaboration. Often, the friars responsible for the appointment are far from the location where the fraternity meets.

A fraternity at any level may simply request a spiritual assistant from the responsible friar/s. In the case of the local fraternity, this is the Provincial Minister or delegate/PSA of the friar province bonded to the fraternity, the province with the *altius moderamen*. If writing a province that has a provincial spiritual assistant, that is the proper person for the minister to address an initial request to. It might happen that the friars request or that the fraternity council is aware of a person who might serve well, in which case they should feel free to make a recommendation or to offer possibilities to the responsible friar/s.

Before a spiritual assistant is appointed, the responsible friar(s) will want to know that the person is available, willing, and is or can become suitable and well-prepared to serve. If you know that the person has completed a spiritual assistant formation course, that information will be helpful. Usually, the responsible friar will want to interview or speak with the candidate.

The responsible friar(s) should consult with the council (local fraternity council, or REC for a regional fraternity) as part of the process (SSA, arts. 19.1, 21.1, and 23.1. See sidebar on previous page). This allows the friar to have a sense of the needs and situation of the fraternity, as well as what the fraternity may know about the candidate. It is also helpful to consult the REC or RSA, which might have a broader perspective of the situation of the fraternity and candidates to serve as spiritual assistants; the regional leadership may recommend Seculars, Franciscan Religious, or others suitable and well prepared to serve as spiritual assistants.

When a spiritual assistant is not “assisting”

It may happen that a spiritual assistant is not assisting or is fulfilling their duties in a way that harms the fraternity. Sometimes the fraternity is comfortable or even approves of this assistance. When there are serious, public, proven reasons, it becomes necessary to address the situation and possibly to seek the removal of the SA. Serious reasons include lack of presence or action, taking an inappropriate role with finances, or elections, or dictating how the fraternity must operate.

The Gospel impels us to address the situation first through dialogue (Matthew 18:15-17). Dialogue can be helpful in any conflict, even before it rises to the level of “serious” concerns. The local minister and council may seek to clarify the issues with the spiritual assistant. If the SA realizes that they can no longer serve, they may choose to resign. A facilitator might be helpful in this process.

The council, or those on the council aware of the seriousness of the situation, may inform the friar/s responsible for the spiritual assistance of the fraternity. In the case of a regional fraternity and RSA, the REC should inform all provincial delegates/PSAs from the obedience represented by the RSA. Only the provincial delegate/PSA or the provincial minister (not the council of the higher level) has the authority to remove a spiritual assistant, and it can be helpful to involve him in the dialogue at an early stage.

The SA serves at the will of the provincial minister(s) of the Province(s) that appointed that SA. Therefore, only those responsible friars may remove the SA.

Everyone concerned has the right and the freedom to exercise Christian charity, to document concerns and interactions carefully, and to address their concerns to the council of the higher level and to the friars responsible for the *altius moderamen* of their local fraternity or the fraternities of their region.

Most High,
Glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart
And give me true faith,
Certain hope,
And perfect charity,
Sense and knowledge, Lord,
That I may carry out
Your holy and true command

The Prayer before the Crucifix

FA:ED, Vol. 1, p. 40

Chapter 4

Formation for Spiritual Assistants

Formation programs may be offered by provincial spiritual assistants (usually as a correspondence course) or by regional fraternities, with the approval of at least one provincial spiritual assistant responsible for the spiritual assistance of the regional fraternity. Regional fraternities usually have at least some in-person elements of formation, which is helpful both in providing formation and in evaluating the suitability of a person to serve as a spiritual assistant for a specific fraternity.

Some regional fraternities may find it convenient to allow one or all suitable candidate(s) to participate in the formation program administered by a different regional fraternity.

The correspondence course is often taken one chapter a month for 19 months; when several candidates are in the same geographical region, they may profitably meet on their own or with the formator. The correspondence course format is easily adaptable to those with extensive experience, for example, friars who have been involved in pastoral work for years and mostly need to learn only the particulars of the OFS. However, if someone with that experience engages in a regional SA formation program, that person's experience can benefit the other participants.

Preparation for the formation programs

Individuals who may be appointed as spiritual assistants (Friars, Franciscan Religious, Secular Franciscans, clergy, and members of other religious orders) are eligible to take the formation program. Secular Franciscan candidates for a spiritual assistant formation program must have been professed for at least five years and have served in some leadership role in their local fraternity. While some persons have an impressive grasp of Franciscan life, time allows for a candidate to mature in that life and exercise leadership in other ways, helpful for their eventual service as a spiritual assistant as well as for their connection with the OFS. A candidate for regional spiritual assistant should have participated in regional events as well; experience on the local, regional, or national leadership level is helpful.

Candidates are usually responsible for obtaining all course materials.

Establishing a formation program

Formation programs are best done in collaboration with or conducted by (some of) the friars who are responsible for appointing spiritual assistants in a given regional fraternity or fraternities. The CNSA has published *Franciscan Family Connections* (FFC) (Revised 2011) as the foundation text for such programs: FFC contains the minimum content that, together with this *Handbook* and other listed materials, is necessary for candidates to prepare to serve as local or regional spiritual assistants. Candidates to serve only as local SA need not complete the sections designated for RSAs.

FFC is designed for use as a personal correspondence course or as part of a larger program where candidates may gather fruitfully with experienced spiritual assistants and other presenters. Because some sections cover theological and other topics not specific to spiritual assistance, not

all those assisting in this formation need to have experience with Secular Franciscans or spiritual assistance. Indeed, some regions have found it helpful to supplement FFC with some basic theological or sacramental formation. Many programs established by regional fraternities take two to three years, plus an internship where a beginning spiritual assistant is mentored by a friar or an experienced spiritual assistant.

When a friar or other Franciscan religious has had suitable experience so that the PSA waives the need to participate in a formal course of formation, it is still helpful to have FFC as a resource and important to be connected with the other spiritual assistants, especially RSA, in the regional fraternity.

In summary, to set up a formation program for candidates to serve as spiritual assistants,

- contact all PSAs from friar provinces bonded to fraternities in your region for permission and guidance to begin a formation program for spiritual assistants;
- build or prevail on relationships to work with at least some friars from these provinces;
- PSAs and the REC ideally work together with other interested, suitable OFS members to discern what format the program should take and who should have responsible roles in providing formation.
- Seek to cooperate with other regional fraternities where possible, to share resources and possibly programs (for a day of recollection or even to have the entire formation program jointly administered);
- use FFC as the foundation text for your program, or at least ensure that the material in FFC is covered by your program;
- List your formation program content and materials so that a friar seeking to appoint someone understands what a person who has completed the program should know; the PSAs should approve that the program contains the necessary content for suitable and well-prepared candidates to serve as SA.
- Establish a reasonable application process for candidates.

In those parts of the country where lay spiritual assistants represent the best option, means and resources for training in pastoral ministry skills will be especially helpful for this formation program.

Course Content

The spiritual assistant should have a solid foundation in Franciscan theology, spirituality, legislation, and history. The SA formation program should therefore include some development of this foundation. Extra reading beyond FFC should be encouraged through directed preparation for discussions or other interactions. Suggested topics:

- History of the Franciscan family: St. Francis as the founder of three Orders, the foundation and development of each of the three Orders (including the three obediences of First Order friars), the development of the “Brothers and Sisters of Penance,” OFS, and Franciscan Youth;

- Franciscan Theology & Spirituality: The Christology of the writings of St. Francis, The writings of Clare, introduction to Bonaventure, introduction to Scotus. Franciscan Moral Theology (i.e., the book “The Franciscan Moral Vision” by Thomas Nairn, OFM);
- OFS Legislation: Rule (1978), including its development and predecessors, GC, IS, NS, SSA; the secular nature of the OFS and its unity (including how the friars serve the OFS collegially, a development from after the Rule of 1978);
- Role of the OFS in the Church (ecclesiology): Role of the lay faithful, co-responsibility and collaboration between clergy and laity, religious and seculars in the mission of the Church and the proclamation of the Gospel in the world/society through the choices made by OFS members and their active presence in a society that is not always favorable to the Church. Study of the Catholic Social Teaching (CST) of the Church with specific regard to the responsibilities and duties of lay people;
- Tasks, Roles, and Functions: Provincial ministers of the First Order and TOR regarding spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS; SAs; fostering an ongoing relationship among friars, spiritual assistants, and OFS fraternities, especially when the SA is not a friar; styles and mechanisms for communication to facilitate relationships; Secular SAs balance of their service and other life responsibilities; internships or mentors; appointment process for SAs.
- Other topics: Conflict resolution/mediation; group decision making, facilitating consensus; training leaders and council development.

Required Texts:

- *Franciscan Family Connections* (2011)
- The OFS Rule, General Constitutions, International Statutes [revised in 2024], National Statutes of the US, and Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order
- *Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS* (2026) (or subsequent revisions)
- *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order* (2024)

Recommended Texts:

- Documents of Vatican II
- National Formation Materials currently in use
- *Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership* (2024, or subsequent revisions)
- *CIOFS Manual for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS* (available on the CNSA page of the OFS-USA Website)
- *Francis of Assisi, The Early Documents* (3 volumes)
- *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Implementing a formation program

When a regional fraternity sets up a spiritual assistant formation program, it should consider both the administration of the program and the formation provided. Some find it helpful to have one person to take care of records and arrange for facilities and other practicalities, while others engage with the candidates, actually providing the formation. The REC and those implementing the program on their behalf should come to an agreement with any other friars advising them about the type of program, in particular those decisions that affect expense; who is responsible for submitting a budget and overseeing the expenses of the program; who is reading “homework” or ultimately evaluating readiness. Expectations regarding expenses should also be clear to the candidates: for example, they are usually responsible for at least purchasing any texts like *Franciscan Family Connections*. The PSAs connected with the region should be aware of and invited to assist in the formational dimensions of the program.

Consideration of meeting location, as well as friars and others to assist with formation (justice requires offering a suitable stipend) will also affect any budget for the program.

Care should be taken regarding who is admitted to the program, required background, including an interview by RSA, letters of recommendation from at least their pastor and their fraternity minister.

Regarding who may attend sessions: Some sessions might have a more general appeal, but certain sessions should be only for the candidates, so that they can have a frank and clear discussion of delicate issues that may require confidentiality.

How will candidates for the program be recruited? In some regional fraternities, specific persons are invited to apply, and ministers or other leaders in the regional fraternity might be consulted for possible candidates. In other places, the program is advertised broadly. Before applying, a person should be aware of the commitment required to complete the program.

In some regions, those who successfully complete the program are given a certificate; in other places, since one is not a spiritual assistant except when assigned by a friar province to serve, the names of those considered suitable and well-prepared are forwarded to the friars making appointments. A person may be suitable to serve but not have an assignment for many years due to many personal and regional factors.

Another important dimension of a formation program is the evaluation of the program. In addition to responses from participants and formators, it can be helpful to solicit an independent point of view—either to interview participants confidentially or to examine specific aspects. How candidates participate may provide additional feedback about specific events in your program.

Establishing readiness to serve

“The spiritual assistant plays an important and sensitive role in the meetings of the fraternity and its council. The assistant’s specific area is spiritual: to foster communion with the Church, to bear witness to Franciscan spirituality, to co-operate in formation, and to nourish the Christian life of the fraternity. The assistant’s contributions to the meetings, those of the fraternity as well as those of the council, should be related chiefly to this specific area. Naturally, this calls for tact and spiritual maturity to know when to keep quiet and give priority

to the secular leaders in the coordination and animation of the fraternity” (MSA, Chapter IV, 4.1).

In some places, those administering a formation program for spiritual assistant candidates have worked with friars (PSA) and local fraternities to provide an internship experience. This could take the form where a provincial spiritual assistant assigns the candidate intern to serve as a spiritual assistant for one year, with an experienced mentor to sit in a regular meeting and a council meeting near the beginning and again near the end of the internship. The mentor would be available for advice, but would also report back to the program administrator and PSA the strengths and challenges observed, and how the intern responds to the challenges for growth.

In many places, there is no experienced mentor available, and so finding a way to provide some mentoring and assessment will require creativity.

Documenting readiness

During the formation program, the candidate and formators discern together whether the candidate is suitably prepared to serve as a spiritual assistant. They agree that the Spirit calls the applicant to serve as an SA or is inviting him/her to some other way of service. In addition to suitability and preparedness in general, the relevant PSA will interview any candidate before assigning that person to serve a particular local fraternity. There may at times be no fraternity that a given suitable candidate is able to serve. Or a candidate may be suitable but have other concerns preventing their service at the completion of the program. The International Statutes (2024) give some important constraints to consider.

The formators should keep some shared records, so that the formators are jointly aware of the progress of each candidate throughout the formation process. A formator may move to a different assignment (or to eternal life) before a given candidate has completed the program. While some regional fraternities issue a certificate of completion, this should only be given if someone is truly “suitable and well-prepared,” not simply for the completion of the course or program. Ultimately, a person can be identified as a spiritual assistant only after being appointed by one of the responsible friars.

In particular, it should be recorded for each program participant whether the person completed the course content for regional spiritual assistants.

Ongoing Formation for Spiritual Assistants

Spiritual assistants benefit from ongoing formation for their service, so it is suggested that the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (CRSA) establish good communications with all the SAs in the region. In most regions, due to geography, any regular “gathering” or communication among SAs is likely to be digital (email, video conference). But email is a good way to share articles and other resources regarding the OFS, Franciscan Youth, or spiritual assistance, as well as updates and programs from the higher levels of the OFS or nearby regions.

An annual formation gathering for SAs on a specific topic of interest can give them the opportunity to discuss various difficulties that arise or events in the OFS. If the schedule permits friars to attend from the provinces bonded to fraternities in the region, then this can also strengthen the connections that should be in place from the *altius moderamen*.



The Apparition at the Chapter House at Arles
Giotto di Bondone, 1300

Credit: Art Collection/Alamy Stock Photo

Chapter 5

Spiritual Assistant and Elections

Witness to the Elections

The ordinary witness of a local council election is the regional spiritual assistant. This duty can be delegated to another competent member of the Franciscan family. Delegation is given in writing. A copy is sent to the delegated person and to the minister of the fraternity holding elections.

The witness to an election acts on behalf of the Church and the Franciscan family to confirm that the election conforms to canon law and Franciscan legislation. The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level has the responsibility to witness elections (GC, art. 76), but may delegate this in writing. The delegate should ideally be a professed Franciscan, since this is a witness on behalf of the Franciscan family. The delegate should be a spiritual assistant or ordained clergy, in part so that the delegate has the proper training, office, and experience to serve as a witness. Both the delegate and the concerned minister must receive this delegation in writing.

Duties of a Witness to the Elections

A witness should read articles 79 to 82 in the *OFS General Constitutions*. The witness opens the elections with a prayer. The OFS Ritual may be used or the witness can develop a prayer form. The witness reminds the membership to vote for competent people for each office. Elections are not a popularity contest but a serious discernment of people competent for the office in which they seek to serve.

The witness works with the two tellers to make certain the ballot count is correct. The witness assists in correcting inconsistencies in the balloting. The ballots are counted twice by the two tellers:

OFS General Constitutions on Elections

Article 76

2. The elective assembly, or chapter, will be presided over by the minister of the immediately higher level, or by his or her delegate, who confirms the election.

The president* or the delegate cannot preside over the elections in his or her local fraternity, nor the elections of the council of a higher level, of whose council he or she is a member.

The spiritual assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the TOR.

A representative of the conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR presides at and confirms the elections of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

3. The president of the chapter and the assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.
4. The president of the chapter designates, among the members of that chapter, a secretary and two tellers.**

[*GC endnote xxiii: In some countries, the person who presides at an election is called "president," in others, he/she is called the "presider".]

[**The tellers and the secretary of the election must come from the chapter body, that is, they must be people eligible to vote.]

- Before passing out the ballots, the tellers count out the total number of ballots needed for those who are present and free to vote. Then, the accurate number for an absolute majority is verified. After this count, the ballots are distributed.
- After collecting the ballots, they are counted to verify that an accurate number has voted.

When the elections are finished, the witness verifies the legality of the elections by signing the appropriate documents

The installation of the newly elected officers takes place after the elections are concluded. The installation can be found in the *Ritual* (see “Concluding Prayers”). OFS members may be appointed by the previous council to prepare the rite of installation. Allow for time after the elections to prepare the installation rite. At the installation rite, the former councilors, who have not been re-elected, hand over all the materials of their office to the newly elected councilors, or arrange a time for record transfer. Former councilors may not retain any official material.

Rules for OFS Elections

Since the Witness verifies that the elections are legal at the conclusion of the elections, it is important that the witness is familiar with the following rules from the *OFS General Constitutions* and the *Statutes for the National Fraternity of the OFS in the USA*. Though the presider is responsible for conducting the elections, it is good to have a second pair of eyes and ears overseeing the process.

Definitions:

- The term “Councilors” in the General Constitutions refers to any of the offices other than Minister and Vice Minister. The offices of Secretary, Treasurer, Councilor at Large, and Formation Director are all considered “Councilors” (see NS, art. 13.2).
- “Absolute Majority” means more than half of the voting members present for the election (see Code of Canon Law, canon 119). Note: To calculate the majority for an uneven number, divide by 2 and round up the fractional number.
- “Quorum” means more than half of the active professed members (whether present at the election or not). Members excused from attending Fraternity gatherings are not counted as “active professed members” for purposes of establishing a quorum (see GC, art. 77.4).

Those Eligible for Nomination/Election for Fraternity Council

- Permanently professed active members of the Fraternity are eligible to be nominated and elected to the Fraternity Council (see GC, art. 77.1).
- An outgoing Minister cannot be nominated/elected Vice Minister (see GC, art. 79.2).
- Members of the Regional Executive Council are eligible for nomination/election to local Fraternity office (see NS, art. 28).
- Nominations from the floor are allowed for each office. The presider must call for nominations from the floor three times before voting can proceed (see NS, art. 14.2).
- Please see General Constitutions article 82 that defines incompatible offices. The following are incompatible:

- a) the office of Minister at two different levels;
- b) the offices of Minister, Vice-Minister, Secretary, and Treasurer at the same level.

Term Limits

- The minister, vice-minister, and council members may be elected for two consecutive terms of three years each. A third (and final) term is allowed, but voting requirements for a third term are stricter than those for a first or second term (see GC, art. 79.1 and NS, art. 13.2).
- In the spirit of *OFS General Constitutions* article 32, current Fraternity Council members should only be considered for a third term in exceptional circumstances.
- Term limits for Minister, Vice Minister, and Councilor positions are considered independently. For example, if a 2nd term Vice Minister is elected Minister or Treasurer, they would be considered as a 1st term in those offices.
- The intent of *National Statutes* article 13.2 is to apply term limits to Councilor positions as a group (Secretary, Treasurer, Formation Director, and Councilors at large). In other words, a member having served three consecutive terms in any combination of these positions would not be eligible to be elected for another term.

Voting Requirements

- An “Absolute Majority” is required for the election of any of the Fraternity Council positions.
- For a third term for any office, two-thirds of the votes of those present are required on the first ballot for election (see GC, art. 79.1 and 79.3).
- If the first ballot is inconclusive, a second ballot is taken. A relative majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is sufficient, unless the particular statutes require a greater majority (see GC, art. 78.3).
- If the second ballot is inconclusive, the two candidates with the most votes are carried over to the third ballot. If there is a three-way tie on the second ballot, the two oldest by profession are carried over to the third ballot.
- If the third ballot is inconclusive (i.e., there is a tie), the oldest by profession is considered elected (see GC, art. 78.1).
- Absentee ballots are not allowed. Professed members, who are in good standing and are physically present, can vote.

The following articles of the *National Statutes of the OFS-USA* supersede the *General Constitution* articles 79.2 and 79.3 regarding eligibility for nomination and term limits for Councilors:

- For a third and final successive election to the office of National [Executive] Councilor (which includes every elected office except those of National Minister and National Vice Minister) or International Councilor, a majority of two-thirds (2/3) of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary (NS, art. 13.2).
- The election of National Councilors proceeds in the same manner as provided for in article 78.1 of the *General Constitutions* (NS, art. 14.4).

- GC 78.1 specifies that an absolute majority is required to elect the Minister for both the 1st and the 2nd ballot. In the *National Statutes*, an absolute majority is required on the 1st and 2nd ballots to elect Councilors. The *National Statutes*, article 14.4, overrides GC, art. 78.3, which specifies that the second ballot for Councilors requires a relative majority rather than an absolute majority.

Applicability of the National Statutes to the Regional and Local Fraternities

The provisions of the *National Statutes* apply to both the Regional and Local levels with the exception of articles 11.4 and 13.3. These articles prohibit a member of the National Executive Council from being a member of a Regional or Local Council, and prohibit an outgoing National Minister from being eligible for any other office on the National Executive Council. As a result of article 28, Regional Executive Council members may also hold office at the local level, and an outgoing Minister is eligible to be nominated for any of the Councilor positions.

The various provisions set forth in these *National Statutes of the OFS-USA* administration shall be used as a model for elections, conduct of business, structures for control of property, composition and duties of the Fraternity Minister and of the Fraternity Council, replacement of officers who are unable to continue in office, and similar business of the fraternity at any level. However, articles 11.4 and 13.3 do not apply to the regional and local fraternities. A member of a Regional Executive Council may also be a member of a local fraternity council (NS, art. 28).

Let those who are placed over others boast about that position as much as they would if they were assigned the duty of washing the feet of their brothers. And if they are more upset at having their place over others taken away from them than at losing their position at their feet, the more they store up a *money bag* to the peril of their soul.

Admonition IV
Francis of Assisi – the Saint
Vol I – page 130

Chapter 6

Pastoral Visitation of Fraternities on All Levels

Pastoral visitations help to promote the Franciscan charism and maintain the connections within the Franciscan family. The spiritual assistants of a given level provide the pastoral visitation of the fraternities of the lower level, and they work collaboratively to provide this service. The pastoral and fraternal visitors are responsible for sending a post-visitiation report within a month after the visitation. Their report is usually written collaboratively, but they may make separate reports.

Local and regional visitations are held once every three years. A visitation should guarantee and promote the observance of the OFS Rule and Constitutions as well as fidelity to the Franciscan charism and the Church. The visitor(s) verify the canonical establishment of the fraternity and its relationship to the Church, society, and the spiritual assistant(s) of the fraternity. Individual seculars may wish to meet with the visitor. The pastoral visitor gives attention to formation programs as well as the fraternity's prayer life, liturgical practices, and apostolic activities.

The pastoral visitor promotes collaboration and co-responsibility between the secular council and the spiritual assistant(s). The pastoral visitor promotes the continuing pastoral and spiritual formation of SAs in order to "assist" them; to get their insights about the condition of the fraternity(s); and to discover ways to help one another. The pastoral visitor dialogues with the entire gathering of the whole fraternity and

OFS General Constitutions on Pastoral Visitations

Article 95

1. The Pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion with the First Order and the TOR. It is carried out in the name of the Church and serves to guarantee and promote the observance of the Rule and Constitutions and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. The visit is carried out with respect to the organization and the law proper to the OFS itself.
2. Having verified the canonical establishment of the fraternity, the visitor will give attention to the relations between the fraternity and its spiritual assistant and the local Church. The visitor will meet with the pastors (Bishop or parish priest) when this is opportune for fostering communion and service for building up the Church.
3. The visitor will promote collaboration and a sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the religious assistants. The visitor is to examine the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity, encourage the spiritual assistants in their service and promote the continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
4. The visitor will give special attention to programs, methods and experiences of formation, to the liturgical and prayer life, and to the apostolic activities of the fraternity.

spiritual assistant(s) at a pastoral visitation. The visited fraternity provides adequate time for everything that needs to be done at a pastoral visitation.

It is permissible to do the fraternal or pastoral visitations at different times. This alternative gives more time for both the fraternal and pastoral visitor to accomplish their goals. If the visitation is done together, the visitors can do one post-visitation report done collaboratively or two post-visitation reports done separately. Each visitation team makes these decisions when setting the schedule for visitations. The post-visitation reports should be sent to the visited fraternity within one month after the visitation. Nine to twelve months after the visitation, the visited fraternity council reports to the visitors on the council's implementation of suggestions, recommendations, or corrections in the post-visitation reports.

It is recommended that an election and visitation not be done on the same date. Elections should generally precede the visitation by at least six months. This gives the new council time to get acquainted with their fraternity and their council duties. The old and new councils may dialogue and come to a mutual decision on the timing of the pastoral and/or fraternal visitation.

The planning of a visitation requires good communication between the visitors and the minister. As stated previously, the visitors have many areas that they need to address during the visitation. The visitors will present to the minister a schedule for the visitation and work with the minister concerning any issues this may present. It is very important that adequate time be allotted to the visitation. Suggested time allocations are provided below for both regional and local visitations.

The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church (GC, art. 92.1).

Regional Pastoral Visitations

The ideal regional visitation takes place over a weekend, giving time for the visitors to meet with the Regional Executive Council, often before others arrive. While elements of the visitation can be reordered, the following sample schedule gives the main elements necessary. The regional minister and visitors may adjust the schedule to accommodate the needs of the chapter and the regional fraternity, giving sufficient space for “informal” conversations, prayer, social and fraternal connections—the chapter is not merely for reports and business decisions.

The regional minister should clearly communicate to the local fraternity ministers the importance of being available for the entire visitation. This is especially important when the ministers are accustomed to a short schedule at regional gatherings. Informing the ministers as soon as possible after the dates for the visitation have been confirmed will allow them to make appropriate arrangements to fully attend.

Friday afternoon	Spiritual assistants might be invited to meet with the pastoral visitor while the fraternal visitor examines documents; spiritual assistants could be invited to stay for dinner.
Friday late afternoon or evening	REC meets with visitor(s); consider having another program for other members of the Regional Fraternity Council as they gather.
Friday evening or Saturday morning	Open the visitation chapter, and introduce visitors to the entire RFC.
Saturday morning	Cover usual chapter business. This should be kept to a minimum, but may include a discussion on the budget
Saturday afternoon	Visitors meet with local ministers (or delegates) to hear their sense of the state of the regional fraternity and their concerns; some of this time may also include observers, but there are some concerns more easily discussed without others in the room; visitors may also offer to meet with people individually; some regional fraternities have another program simultaneously which entices others to attend the chapter.
Sunday morning	Visitors reflect on the visitation; the entire community, chapter body, and observers may discuss concerns that surface.
Sunday morning	Mass, possibly joining a local faith community.

The Church gives a preferential option to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist on Sunday morning; joining a faith community that gathers regularly gives a visible witness to our Franciscan way of life. Some parish priests would welcome a friar visitor to serve as celebrant for their public Mass. When praying for the departed from across the region, it is good to bring their names to the altar at Mass. Some symbolic choices we make can help us appreciate and deepen our fraternal and spiritual life.

Time for prayer beyond the Liturgy of the Hours is helpful. It is recommended that 30-60 minutes be set aside for quiet prayer; where possible, allow for adoration of the Eucharist (when a priest is available to bring the Eucharist) closed with night prayer, for example, or some other focus, like an open Bible, when it is not possible to have Eucharistic adoration. *The priest can bring the Eucharist, reserve it privately before, and consume it after adoration.*

Local Pastoral Visitations

Local fraternity visitations usually take place at the usual meeting time, over several hours; the council meets with the visitors for at least one hour before the general meeting. The minister and council should know that the visitors preside over the chapter; they may still allow the minister to address some targeted fraternity business. Arrange for a place where the council can go while the visitors meet with the rest of the fraternity. While some members might be tempted to say, “We are all close, we don’t need the council to leave the room,” the structure helps others to say things they might hold back when the leadership is present. The visitors are able to report necessary ideas with some discretion so that the person(s) expressing concern cannot be deduced from their discussion or written report.

At least one hour	Visitors meet with the fraternity council
Usual meeting time, plan for at least two hours total	Visitors open the Chapter with prayer and introductions, ideally allowing time for formation.
	Visitors meet with the fraternity, without the council, possibly meeting separately with those in initial formation.
	Closing discussion allows the visitors to summarize the themes of the visitation, their encouragement, and challenges to the fraternity.
Within one month	Visitors submit a written report to the REC and the fraternity minister, who shares it with the council; this report should also be shared with the friar province bonded to the Fraternity.

Ongoing formation during the visitation can be given by the visitors—allowing for a different voice the fraternity does not regularly hear—or by a member of the fraternity, allowing the visitors to see the type of formation the fraternity usually experiences.

The pastoral visitor should, in part, through asking about the customs of the fraternity and observing the fraternity in person and through its records, assess the quality of:

- The spiritual and liturgical life of the fraternity
 - Prayer at monthly meetings (content over time, style of prayer); devotions outside the Franciscan tradition can be discussed or prayed, but should not become the custom of the fraternity;

- Are members being held to a spirituality that is not part of the Secular Franciscan Order (required to profess or promise something else)? This is problematic even when proposed by a Franciscan religious spiritual assistant.
- annual retreat or day of recollection,
- spiritual dimension of membership and finances (see below).
- Spiritual assistance given to the fraternity
 - Is the assistant usually present and contributing to the fraternity and its council, and how does the assistant remain aware, connected, and helpful when not able to be present?
 - If there is no spiritual assistant, has the fraternity asked the appropriate friar for one, and what is the responsible friar province doing to provide assistance in the absence of an appointed assistant?
 - What assistance does the fraternity receive from the regional fraternity (RSAs)?
- Initial and ongoing formation programs
 - Content and style of presentation;
 - Verify that the fraternity has a record of recommendations, sacramental records, and interviews conducted for those currently in initial formation.
- Leadership and their communication with each other and with the Fraternity as a whole
 - Is the style of leadership Franciscan, respectful, and encouraging members to better live the Rule? Does the style of leadership reflect Gospel values?
 - How does the fraternity council follow up with members who are not present?
 - How does the leadership encourage members to support the fraternity financially? (recognizing that “fair share” is a fraternity responsibility, not dues)
 - Does the leadership help the fraternity find resources for their spiritual growth and to serve the Church and the world?
 - Are there sources of tension within the fraternity or between the fraternity and others that might provide challenges? Visitors may offer recommendations for growth.
- Franciscan charism, including
 - Use of the Ritual, including not only the prayers to open and close meetings but also the readings and reflections that accompany them;
 - Ongoing reading and review of the Rule;
 - Presence of a visible apostolate (active service to the wider Church and world, not merely to those within the fraternity or financially supporting a charity);
 - Connection with various levels of the OFS, with other parts of the Franciscan family, and with the friar province bonded to the fraternity;

- Celebrating Franciscan feasts; welcoming other fraternities to join in professions and other celebrations, and joining other fraternities in theirs.

This list is not exhaustive, nor does every possible aspect of each broad dimension have to be addressed directly.

The visitation report should describe each of these dimensions of the life of the Fraternity, commending those things that are being done well, noting the progress made in response to the previous visitation reports, and giving concrete recommendations (or even mandates) for the Fraternity to grow in their Franciscan charism.

Pastoral Leadership

Just as prayer requires a depth of quiet and patience, so does leadership. At times, the best approach can only flourish if leadership is cautious and pastoral before difficult situations or when approaching members in difficulty. Being pastoral does not mean opening the gate for anything but rather seeking the sheep that is wandering to bring the lost one back to the fold. One such situation is approaching members who are not attending meetings.

The infirmarian can have a vital—that is, life-giving—role in the fraternity, but all council members share in this life-giving exercise of fraternal leadership, going after the lost sheep. Approaching members in person can be helpful in determining why a person has not attended. Is the member ill or infirm? Are they caring for someone? Keep in mind that Secular Franciscans are obliged by the Rule to care for their family (OFS Rule, art. 17, GC, art. 24.1). Secular Franciscans fulfill the Rule only when they fulfill their responsibility to care for their families. Having determined that the person has a valid excuse for not attending, it is critical that they be classified properly, even if they are unable to contribute financially to the fraternity.

The category “lapsed” is for those who are absent from fraternity life without a good reason, not contributing financially, and have either ceased to communicate or have communicated their unwillingness to participate; that is, for those who have disregarded their Secular Franciscan profession and vocation. But even when someone is in lapsed status, it is generally unhelpful to write them a letter stating this; the word “lapsed” is used to designate an administrative category, but the word carries a strong emotional color that many react to strongly and defensively. Instead, options can be offered, and the member can be made aware of the tangible consequences of their decisions. As an example:

... We are concerned for you. Since you have not attended for six months, we left a voicemail and stopped by your home several times without reaching you. We hope and pray that you are safe and sound, but engaged in some way that prevents you from attending our fraternity meetings.

We hope that you or a family member would let us know how you are doing, or if there is a cause we should pray for. Our council can consider a request from you to be excused from some of the obligations of membership. Or in the event that you are no longer interested in being a Secular Franciscan, you have the option to request a definitive withdrawal. ...

Communication should not be simply to inform someone about a juridical action, but also to encourage and affirm our brothers and sisters as members of the fraternity when they are in a

difficult space. In-person meetings are offered because some people are not comfortable with technology or may be (temporarily) overwhelmed by the other communications they are receiving.

Among the situations that would give cause to excuse a person from attending regularly are:

- caring for an ill or infirm family member,
- suddenly called to raise grandchildren without assistance,
- physical infirmity, possibly moving to a senior care home.

In some cases, there might be a way to resolve the difficulty with effective support, such as finding a suitable alternate caregiver, so that the fraternity meeting could become a welcome break from the struggle to care for others alone. In the case of members who move to a senior care home, the person may lose control of most or all of their financial resources.

Consider what would be an appropriate “active” expression of a Secular Franciscan profession for someone who is homebound with limited income. The person might not be able to attend or to support the fraternity financially; however, that member might still pray for the fraternity and its apostolate. Perhaps the strongest visible sign of their active participation will be the smile on their face when fraternity members visit them. The fraternity should reach out to stay in contact with active excused homebound members to honor them for their previous contributions, which helped the fraternity to grow. Fraternities can prepare for these developments by encouraging members to speak with family members and provide written instructions, possibly even selecting a trusted family member who will be a contact person if the fraternity cannot reach the member directly. In this way, if the member enters dementia or is transferred to a different facility, the fraternity has the hope of staying in touch.

Even after a member has been excused—or has chosen to withdraw temporarily—these situations require the council to follow up with the person, usually annually, to evaluate and possibly renew their status (see GC, art. 56). The pastoral visitor can examine how the council does this: are the active excused (or those who have temporarily withdrawn) encouraged and communicated with as brothers and sisters we are happy to follow up with, that we bring joy and foster hope for our brothers and sisters who are not attending?

Another difficult dimension of membership that has an immediate impact on the finances of the fraternity is the percentage of members unable to contribute financially. Our national fraternity has been reminded by the fraternal and pastoral visitors that the “fair share” is not a membership fee or dues that must be paid individually. Rather, at each level, the fraternity is responsible together as one body for the fair share that is assessed it. Just as happens among nations, where the assessment varies based on ability to pay, so in a healthy fraternity, each member contributes what they can so the fraternity as a whole can meet its financial needs and values.

As with any issue, communication is helpful on all sides. It is easier for those with the financial resources to do so to give more when they realize the financial status of the fraternity at any given time. The needs of the fraternity should be communicated through monthly reports (through the bulletin or otherwise), including the anticipated amount of the Fair Share that will be due at year's end.

Prayer and Devotion

Prayers that are foundational to our Franciscan tradition and charism are encouraged. At times, a fraternity gets sidetracked by a busy season in some dimension of their life and, without consciously choosing to do so, omits some dimension of our life. This can happen even with prayer, especially quiet prayer where we step away from the world and go into silence to listen rather than speak (or think) words to God.

In light of the high value we place on the Eucharist as followers of St Francis, Eucharistic adoration is recommended, especially for a time during the annual fraternity retreat. Adoration fruitfully may include the recitation of the Liturgy of the Hours.

The four steps of meditation outlined by St. Clare are a beautiful treasure in our Franciscan tradition.

Other devotions and prayer styles that are not central to our Franciscan tradition, like centering prayer or various devotions and promises, may be brought to the fraternity for consideration, but should not become central to the life of the fraternity. Those members who find value in such practices and want to share them in common in an ongoing way can gather outside the fraternity meeting so that the Franciscan nature of the fraternity meeting is preserved.

The fraternity does well to discuss how the Spirit is blooming, how our lives are affected, what to pray for, and how to rejoice in God. A faith-sharing based in our daily lives calls for checking in with everyone at each meeting and leads into a prayer that incorporates everyone.

The National Executive Council has developed a brochure for visitations. It is available on the national website under *Governing Documents, Guidelines, Forms, and other Resources*.

In all visitations, the concerned council sends each visitor a copy of the previous post-visitation report and a copy of the most recent annual report.

Guidance from the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants on Visitations

From the *Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order (2009)*

Title III: The Role of the Spiritual Assistants, article 14

1. The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion of the First Order and the TOR with the OFS. It is carried out in the name of the Church and serves to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of unity of the OFS, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
2. The visitor strengthens the fraternity in its presence and mission in the Church and in society; verifies the relation between the secular and religious fraternities; gives special attention to programs, methods, and experiences of formation; gives attention to the collaboration and sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the spiritual assistants; examines the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity; encourages the spiritual assistants in their service and promotes their continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.

3. At the request of the respective council, a delegate of the Conference of Assistants carries out the pastoral visit, fully respectful of the OFS's own organization and law. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the conference of spiritual assistants, having consulted the council of the OFS of the same level.
4. It is recommended that the pastoral and fraternal visits be carried out together, with agreement beforehand on the program. The visitor or visitors will, in good time, communicate the object and the program of the visit to the council concerned. Most of the following is done by the fraternal visitor. They will examine the registers and the records, including those relating to previous visits, to the election of the council, and to the administration of goods. They will draw up a report of the visit they have conducted, appending it to the records in the appropriate register of the fraternity visited, and will inform the council of the level that has conducted the visit.
5. In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor or visitors will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. They will give special attention to the brothers and sisters in formation and to those brothers and sisters who may request a personal meeting. Where required, they will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings possibly encountered.



Saint Francis preaching to the birds,
from Saint Francis Receiving the Stigmata

Giotto di Bondone, c. 1295-1300

Louvre Museum, Paris, France

Chapter 7

Process for Establishing a New Fraternity or Reactivating an Existing Fraternity

So You Want to Start a Fraternity...

Welcome! You're about to undertake a great and rewarding task. But before you begin, you should be aware of the significance of what you intend to do.

If you're already a professed Secular Franciscan, the ideas that follow should not be new to you. Consider this a helpful reminder of some basics that might otherwise get lost in the procedural details. It is important to have these basics firmly in mind.

If you are not a Secular Franciscan, much of what is said will probably be unfamiliar. Some of the terms used will be explained as we go along. As for the rest, you're not going to be doing this alone. Don't be afraid to ask other Secular Franciscans for clarification.

To be more specific, the "other Secular Franciscans" who will assist you are:

- the Regional Executive Council (REC), one of whose responsibilities is the oversight of newly forming Secular Franciscan groups in your geographic area, and
- the sponsoring fraternity, a local fraternity that will be assigned to mentor you through the process.

Let's begin by clarifying what a Secular Franciscan fraternity is not.

- It is not a prayer group, although members do pray when they gather.
- It is not a support group, although members do support each other.
- It is not a study group, although formation in the Franciscan way of life is an ongoing part of every gathering.
- It is not a Bible study group, although the Gospels form the basis of OFS life and are frequently discussed.
- It is not a social ministry group, although members participate in a variety of social ministries.
- It is not a parish organization, although most fraternities do meet in parish facilities.

So what is a fraternity, then? The local fraternity is the basic unit of the Secular Franciscan Order (the OFS). It has a special purpose which is defined by the OFS legislation, and a unique identity (called a "juridical personality") in the Church.

Let's unpack these statements.

A Secular Franciscan fraternity is part of an established Order in the Church, which has certain implications.

- The fraternity itself must be officially 'established' by one of the Franciscan friar provinces that have ecclesiastical responsibility for the OFS. It is thus by definition not a parish or diocesan organization.

- Individual members are bound more intimately to the Church, which is why full membership is open only to Catholics in full communion with the Church.

That describes the fraternity's identity as it relates to the Church. What about its purpose?

- First and foremost, the purpose of the Order (and thus the purpose of the fraternity, all OFS members, and all those who belong to the Franciscan family) is to make present the Franciscan charism in the life and mission of the Church (OFS Rule, art. 1).
- In and of itself, the fraternity is a service to the Church. "Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, and the witness of building fraternity, sincerely and openly, are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love (GC, art. 100.3)."
- "The Fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High revealed the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion" (GC, art. 28.1). As an integral part of OFS life, it is marked by fraternal communion and is a means of holiness.

With these considerations firmly in mind, this Guide sets forth a clear pathway to canonical establishment of a new Secular Franciscan fraternity. It describes:

- the stages of development of the group,
- the requirements for documentation,
- when and how to obtain the approval of the local bishop and the provincial minister, and
- the respective roles of the sponsoring fraternity and the REC throughout the process.

But establishing a fraternity is more than just the end result of checking off items on a To-Do list. There is another aspect of a fraternity's identity, a spiritual dimension that was hinted at in the description of its purpose. The fraternity is to become a genuine ecclesial community. Canonical establishment is an acknowledgment by the Church that a fraternity, an ecclesial community, is present.

The requirements for developing a genuine ecclesial community are more difficult to define than listing those for documentation and approval, but they are obviously key here. In some ways, you can think of the process as analogous to the way you'd go about acquiring any new skill: you'd watch someone, you'd try it out, you'd get some coaching, and you'd practice what you learned. So, to assist you, a sponsoring fraternity will be assigned to mentor you, answer your questions, and serve as a model of fraternity life. In addition, listed here are some general attitudes that are helpful to keep in mind.

- ***Make building community your priority.*** A fraternity doesn't just happen automatically, without significant effort on the part of its members. It needs to be worked on to become a reality. Resolve that your commitment to your Secular Franciscan vocation and to the fraternity will take precedence over your involvement in other organizations, including those of the parish.
- ***Cultivate a sense of co-responsibility within the fraternity.*** Unlike other organizations where responsibility for the well-being of the group is held by a small number, in a fraternity, all members share responsibility for the life of the fraternity. "The sense of co-responsibility

of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer, and active collaboration, in accordance with each one's means and possible obligations for the animation of the Fraternity" (GC, art. 30.2).

- **Acknowledge that community takes time to develop.** Look for opportunities to work together, visit together, pray together, study together, and have fun together. Don't limit yourselves to the monthly fraternity gathering, but find ways to interact with fellow Franciscans throughout the month.
- **Appreciate differences.** Fraternal unity does not imply uniformity. Our differences add to the richness of life and bring a wide variety of gifts and talents to the fraternity. They are a positive advantage and should not be allowed to become the cause of dissension. Which of us can be complete without his brothers and sisters?
- **Beware of being judgmental.** Being judgmental is one of the easiest ways to poison the spirit of the fraternity. "Blessed is the person that puts up with the frailty of his neighbor to the extent he would like his neighbor to put up with him if he were in a similar plight" (Admonition XVIII*).
- **Practice forgiveness.** "...I wish to know in this way if you love the Lord and me, His servant and yours: that there is not any brother in the world who has sinned---however much he could have sinned---who, after he has looked into your eyes, would ever depart without your mercy, if he is looking for mercy. And if he were not looking for mercy, you would ask him if he wants mercy. And if he would sin a thousand times before your eyes, love him more than me so that you may draw him to the Lord..." (Letter to a Minister*). Even in our fraternities, there will be many opportunities to apply this advice.

And finally, and most importantly

- **Follow St. Francis' advice** to his brothers. "Pursue what you should desire above all else, namely, to have the Spirit of God and God's grace working in you..." (cf. Earlier Rule XVII*). When you come right down to it, all the attitudes and techniques in the world are insufficient to form a genuine ecclesial community. The Holy Spirit is the one who breathes life into your fraternity, who molds you and brings you together as one.

Again, welcome. May you be richly blessed and rewarded as you take up the challenge of forming a new Secular Franciscan fraternity.

**Francis of Assisi, Early Documents, Vol. I, The Saint, New City Press, 1999.*



The Basilica of St. Francis from the Rocco Maggiore
Assisi, Italy - March 2026

Corinne Lorenzet, OFS

Pathway to Canonical Establishment

PERSONS DESIRING TO START A FRATERNITY



Approval of Regional Executive Council (REC)

NEWLY FORMING GROUP (NFG)



Assignment of sponsoring fraternity



Time of formation and building community
(minimum one year with five professed members)



Receipt of written intention of the *altius moderamen* from friar province



Approval of REC

EMERGING FRATERNITY



Fraternity council appointed by REC
Fraternity name chosen and approved
Formal agreement for *altius moderamen* and
the appointment of a spiritual assistant



Several years functional as a fraternity
with continued evaluation of progress



Approval of REC/Provincial Minister or delegate/local Ordinary

ESTABLISHED FRATERNITY

Case Studies for Canonical Establishment

Here are some case studies that illustrate some of the problems that can occur when:

- There is insufficient oversight by the REC.
 - The spiritual assistant is either absent or inexperienced.
 - The involvement and support of the sponsoring fraternity are inadequate.
-

Case Study 1: Initial Formation/Fraternity Life

Connie Cortona had a passion for promoting the Order, so she was delighted when the Regional Minister asked for her help with a newly forming group. None of the group members were professed, but Connie liked a challenge, and she was confident in her skills as a formator.

She began to hold initial formation sessions for her small group of inquirers and met faithfully with them over the next two years. When the time came for them to be professed, Connie contacted the Regional Minister, who came and received their professions. But the joy of profession rapidly turned to sorrow when shortly thereafter Connie suffered a fatal heart attack.

The Regional Minister returned, appointed a council, and arranged for the establishment of the fraternity. But the little group was lost without Connie. With no real experience of fraternity life beyond formation classes and no contact with neighboring fraternities, they had no idea what they were supposed to do, and the group floundered.

Case Study 2: Fraternity Life/Building Fraternity

St. Francis Fraternity was large and very active, drawing in new members from miles around. But a time came when some of the members who lived in an outlying area wondered whether it might be nicer to have a fraternity nearer their homes, so they wouldn't have to drive so far for meetings. They discussed their plan with the fraternity council, which agreed to support them.

The group found a home at St. Hildegard's, a small parish where several of them were members; they settled in and began meeting on their own. Paul Perugia, the fraternity minister, arranged to meet with them annually. They tried to be on their best behavior during Paul's visits because they really wanted to be canonically established as soon as possible. During his second visit, they asked to be established, and after his third trip to see them, he told the REC that they were ready.

So the fraternity became canonically established. But having achieved their goal, the group was at loose ends. They had nothing to work for. They decided to get more involved in parish life and do projects for the pastor. While this pleased the pastor and was convenient for some of the members, those who did not belong to St. Hildegard's felt overlooked and left out. Eventually, they drifted away, a couple of members died, and suddenly the group was unable to elect a new council.

Case Study 3: Fraternity Life/Sense of Belonging

St. Angela of Foligno fraternity was growing rapidly, so when some of the members wanted to start a new fraternity a couple of towns away, the council gave them their blessing and sent them off. The council felt that since all the group members had been formed by St. Angela's, they knew everything they needed to know to be an independent fraternity.

The group itself was extremely eager for independence and began meeting on its own. The sponsoring fraternity's minister, Priscilla Parma, kept in touch occasionally and was not offended when the group suggested that they didn't need her help. She recommended that the group be established and found a local pastor who was willing to serve as their spiritual assistant. The REC trusted Priscilla, so they proceeded with the canonical establishment.

Once the fraternity was established, the members wanted little to do with other fraternities in the area, and rarely attended Regional gatherings. Soon, it seemed that even attending their own meetings had become too much of a burden. They started meeting less frequently, sometimes cancelling their regular gatherings. It should come as no surprise that eventually most members permanently lost interest because they were never sure if there would be a meeting or not.

Case Study 4: Spiritual Assistance

There were no fraternities anywhere in the area when Gail Greccio moved in, so she was delighted when she heard that Vinnie Verona was starting a fraternity. He had already located several other professed OFS members who wanted to participate and contacted the REC.

There had been a slight problem to overcome, because the REC said that they had to have a sponsoring fraternity and a spiritual assistant, and none were nearby. But then, success! Frank Foligno's fraternity was three hours away, but he wanted to be of service, so he agreed to meet with them and help them get started. The spiritual assistant from Frank's fraternity would be able to ride along. But Frank was very busy, and after his mother had a stroke and moved in with him, he had little time to devote to the emerging fraternity.

Without Frank, the spiritual assistant was unable to travel. The absence of a spiritual assistant did not faze the group, though, as they were determined to be a perfect fraternity and follow all rules to the letter. In fact, they felt that other fraternities they'd heard of were not strict enough. They even had some doubts about the pastor of the parish where they met. Unfortunately, when they offered constructive criticism about how he could improve his liturgies and then wrote to the bishop about it, the pastor was offended and asked them to leave. The bishop, in turn, was not impressed with their knowledge and zeal; he refused to sign their establishment document, and the group disbanded.

Case Study 5: Elections and Voting

A couple of dedicated OFS members, Sally Subiaco and Sharon Spoleto, felt called to establish a new fraternity in an area of their city that had several Catholic parishes, but no fraternities. Their own fraternity minister and some of the council members were angry that the two fraternity stalwarts wanted to leave, so they refused to support the project.

At this, a few more of their fraternity brothers and sisters joined Sally and Sharon in protest and left the fraternity. The little group found another fraternity, St. Angeline's, that was willing to sponsor them. Sally, Sharon, and their friends transferred to St. Angeline's and proceeded to recruit several interested individuals into initial formation. Sharon and Sally were grateful to St. Angeline's, so when they were asked to run for office in the sponsoring fraternity, they agreed and were elected to the council.

Sadly, they did not foresee the potential for conflict of interest and the problems and hurt feelings that would follow. It was not long before Sharon and Sally ran into difficulty with the rest of the council. When making decisions and plans for St. Angeline's, Sharon and Sally found themselves unwilling to support projects that might interfere with their work with the newly forming group. When the time came for St. Angeline's council to evaluate the progress of the new group, Sally and Sharon's ability to be objective was swayed by their hopes for the group, and they were offended when the other council members did not share their views.

Case Study 6: Record-Keeping and Reporting

Lynn LaVerna had always wanted to help establish a new fraternity, so when her local fraternity was asked to sponsor a new fraternity, she was the first to volunteer. Lynn was hard-working and eminently trustworthy, but she did have one fault---she liked things done her way. One of those ways was that she liked to keep things organized, and she felt that no one could do it better than she did. She insisted on keeping all of the group's records in her home, right where she could lay her hands on them. She saw no need to keep the REC informed of all those details. This seemed to work quite well until she died unexpectedly, and her grieving family threw out all those old papers that they were sure no one needed.

And after the Lord gave me some brothers [and sisters], no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.

FA:ED, Vol 1, The Testament (1226),
v. 114, p. 125.

Process for Establishing a New Fraternity

Please Note: What follows is a guide to establishing a new OFS Fraternity, which covers much of the “how and who” that is not specified in the OFS legislation (the Rule, the OFS General Constitutions, the National Statutes, and the CIOFS Spiritual Assistant Statutes). There are many aspects of the establishment process that have been learned over time to be effective in ensuring a successful outcome. It is highly recommended that you follow these guidelines. Different options for accomplishing a given step or objective should be carefully discerned.

There are three phases of establishing a new fraternity, each with its own tasks, roles, responsibilities, and preconditions.

- Phase I – Newly Forming Group
- Phase II – Emerging Fraternity
- Phase III – Canonical Establishment

For each phase, frequent documentation and thorough record-keeping are essential, particularly since the establishment process can span multiple terms of office in both the sponsoring fraternity and the REC.

Note that although a sponsoring fraternity will be assigned to work directly with the newly forming group/emerging fraternity, the REC is ultimately responsible for overseeing the progress of the new group and its relationship with the sponsoring fraternity.

Phase I: Newly Forming Group

Anyone who wishes to start a new Secular Franciscan (OFS) fraternity must submit a request to the REC of their area, preferably in writing, whether the initial idea comes from professed Secular Franciscans, other lay persons, friars, or religious. After serious dialogue with the requesting group, the REC gives or withholds its approval.¹ If approval is given, the steps to be taken are detailed on the following pages.

¹ If the REC withholds permission to start a newly forming group, the reasons for the decision are communicated to those who made the request.

Requirements for starting a newly forming group

- A group of at least five people (preferably closer to ten) who may or may not be professed OFS members, who seek to form a new canonically established OFS fraternity.
- Request from the group to the REC for newly forming group status and sponsorship.
- Approval of the newly forming group by the REC, and acceptance of sponsorship by the sponsoring fraternity.

Required number of members to start a newly forming group.

Though five members are required in order to provide a fraternity council (GC, art. 46.2), prudence would dictate that more than five members are needed to ensure long-term viability.

Requirements for the sponsoring fraternity.

See section *Responsibilities of Sponsorship* (p 75).

First Steps for the Newly Forming Group

- The REC assigns the newly forming group to a sponsoring fraternity council.
- In the newly forming group, there may be professed individuals who belong to a fraternity other than the assigned sponsoring fraternity. Typically, these Seculars would be expected to transfer to the sponsoring fraternity.² See National Transfer Form on the OFS National Website under Resource/Guidelines, Forms & Other Resources.
- The newly forming group selects a member of their group to be the group leader, with the assistance of the sponsoring fraternity council.
- The newly forming group selects an ecclesial location (parish church, friary, convent, shrine, etc.).

Fraternity Life of a Newly Forming Group

Fraternity Gatherings and Council Meetings

Members of the newly forming group meet regularly in person in order to bond as a fraternity.

Members of the newly forming group are encouraged to attend the sponsoring fraternity's gatherings. The newly forming group leader, or a delegate, may attend the sponsoring fraternity's council meetings as an observer. In addition, where possible, a member of the sponsoring fraternity council should attend the newly forming group gatherings. At any time, an REC member may informally visit the newly forming group.

If distance prevents routine in-person attendance, teleconferencing is an option. However, at least twice a year, representatives from the sponsoring fraternity should meet physically with the newly forming group. Members of the newly forming group are expected to attend Regional meetings, retreats, and workshops when possible. It is important that newly forming group members have an experience of fraternity at the local and Regional level as well as their own gatherings.

Spiritual Assistance

In the initial stages of the newly forming group, before they obtain acceptance of the *altius moderamen* from a friar province, the spiritual assistant of the sponsoring fraternity serves as the spiritual assistant for the newly forming group. If a spiritual assistant is not available, the sponsoring fraternity should confer with the REC (Case Study 4).

Period of Building Community

The newly forming group begins a period of building community. The group holds regular gatherings that include the necessary elements of a fraternity gathering: prayer, formation, announcements, and socializing. During this period of community building, the members of the newly forming group are encouraged to attend sponsoring fraternity gatherings. They should seek opportunities for interaction with each other outside their regular gatherings. They should join with other Franciscans for retreats, fraternity celebrations, apostolates, etc. (Case Study 2) The sponsoring fraternity monitors the newly forming group's structures and activities in order to provide support.

² Any exceptions need to be approved by the REC.

Formation

Initial Formation: Members of the newly forming group start or continue their initial formation under the guidance of the sponsoring fraternity's formation team. Time frames for each stage of initial formation are as specified in the National Statutes, article 19.1-2.

The sponsoring fraternity's council should be in regular contact with whoever is conducting the initial formation sessions for the newly forming group. The progress of those in initial formation should be regularly reviewed by the sponsoring fraternity's council. Initial formation sessions should be in person whenever possible, but appropriate virtual sessions can be used, with the approval of the REC, to complement the in-person sessions (Case Study 1).

The Rites of Admission and Profession are carried out by the sponsoring fraternity. The minister (or their delegate) of the sponsoring fraternity must preside at the Rites of Admission and Profession for members of the newly forming group. The Ceremony of Welcoming may be delegated to a member of the newly forming group.

Ongoing Formation: If distance prevents the newly forming group members from participating in ongoing formation with the sponsoring fraternity, there are two options:

- The sponsoring fraternity, in collaboration with the person responsible for formation in the newly forming group, provides an ongoing formation program. When the sponsoring fraternity member cannot be present at the newly forming group gatherings, the person responsible for formation in the newly forming group is prepared ahead of time by the sponsoring fraternity to present the material and lead the discussion.
- If there are professed members in the newly forming group, the newly forming group proposes an ongoing formation program to the Formation Director of the sponsoring fraternity for review.

Elections and Voting

Once they transfer into the sponsoring fraternity, professed members of the newly forming group have voting rights in the elections of the sponsoring fraternity, which include passive and active voice. Although they do have passive voice (that is, can be elected to the council), it is strongly

What is the Altius Moderamen?

The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS has been entrusted by the Church to the Friars of the Franciscan First Order and the Third Order Regular (TOR). *Altius moderamen* refers to the statement in the Code of Canon Law (c. 303) which gives the "higher direction" in matters of spirituality and pastoral care to the OFM, OFM Capuchin, OFM Conventual and TOR Friars. They carry out this responsibility through their Provinces. The provincial ministers (either personally or through their friar delegate) establish local fraternities and appoint local and regional spiritual assistants. Each canonically established fraternity is "bonded" to a friar province.

recommended that professed members of the newly forming group not serve on the sponsoring fraternity council, since this can lead to serious conflicts of interest (Case Study 5).

The newly forming group itself does not have voting rights in regional fraternity elections. Members of the newly forming group are represented by the sponsoring fraternity.

Record-Keeping and Reporting

Sponsoring Fraternity's Responsibilities

Minutes of the sponsoring fraternity council meetings will include a report of the activities of the newly forming group(s) which they sponsor.

The sponsoring fraternity sets up a file containing the required documentation for each person in initial formation in the newly forming group. Admissions and professions, as well as any changes in member status, will be recorded in the sponsoring fraternity's register.

The sponsoring fraternity will include the demographics and additional information for the newly forming group in their Annual Report to the Region (Case Study 6). Candidates and newly professed members of the newly forming group are listed in the National Database as members of the sponsoring fraternity.

Newly Forming Group's Responsibilities

The newly forming group keeps attendance records and minutes of their gatherings.

The newly forming group collects the required documentation for its members in initial formation and submits it to the sponsoring fraternity.

The newly forming group is responsible for providing written reports to the sponsoring fraternity council twice a year. The newly forming group will keep a roster of its members and provide it to the sponsoring fraternity as part of its reporting.

Fraternity Register versus Roster

Each local fraternity is to have at least a register of enrollments (admissions, professions, transfers, deaths, and every other important annotation relative to the individual members) (GC, art. 52.2.b, footnote 35).

The ***Fraternity Register*** is the official record of OFS members. Each canonically established fraternity must have an official register which includes member name, birth date, and dates of welcoming, admission, profession and death as well as changes in status or transfers.

Members are not entered in the Register until they are admitted to candidacy.

Until a newly forming group or emerging fraternity is canonically established, its candidates and newly professed members will be recorded in the sponsoring fraternity's Register.

A newly forming group, however, maintains a ***roster*** of their members. The roster would include names, addresses and contact information, and status (Orientation, Inquiry, Candidacy, Professed, etc.). The roster is included in its regular report to the sponsoring fraternity.

Finances/Fair Share

The newly forming group keeps records of its members' contributions to the common fund. These contributions cover expenses incurred as part of fraternity life, and their Fair Share³ contribution, which the sponsoring fraternity remits to the REC on their behalf.

The donations from the newly forming group members should not be commingled with any individual member's bank account, and a separate account should not be set up under any individual's social security number. The newly forming group may open its own bank account using the EIN (employer identification number) of the sponsoring fraternity. However, to avoid banking confusion, this account should be opened at a separate bank.⁴

Obtaining the Written Intention for the *Altius Moderamen*

When the sponsoring fraternity and the REC feel that the newly forming group is likely to prove viable, the REC seeks the statement of intention from a friar province to assume the *altius moderamen* for the newly forming group. This statement of intention from the friar province is not a tacit approval of the establishment, which occurs formally in Phase III – Canonical Establishment of a Fraternity.

Typically, the friar province to which the sponsoring fraternity is bonded would be the one approached for the newly forming group. However, if location or other considerations dictate, another friar province can be selected. A copy of the statement of intent from the province needs to be kept on file by the Region, and a copy given to the sponsoring fraternity for their files. The province should appoint a spiritual assistant for the newly forming group within a year of the request. If none are available, the spiritual assistant for the sponsoring fraternity assists the group. However, the appointment of a spiritual assistant must occur as a condition of moving to emerging fraternity status.

³ Regarding expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means. Local fraternities should contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils. Rule art. 25

⁴ Only a canonically established OFS Fraternity should apply for an employer identification number. See detailed instructions on the National Website (secularfranciscansusa.org). Search on "Obtaining an EIN".

Phase II: Emerging Fraternity

The newly forming group begins its preparation for becoming an “emerging fraternity” only after it has a minimum of five (5) professed members, has received the written intention of the *altius moderamen*, and has a spiritual assistant assigned.

Steps in Preparation for Emerging Fraternity Status

- The newly forming group completes at least one year with five professed members.
- The sponsoring fraternity council works with the newly forming group to jointly evaluate their readiness to request emerging fraternity status.
- If the evaluation indicates readiness, the newly forming group requests a pastoral and fraternal visitation from the REC to assess the group’s suitability for the status of an “emerging fraternity”.
- The REC completes pastoral and fraternal visitations and makes recommendations as necessary.
- The newly forming group submits a written request to the REC for emerging fraternity status.

Steps in Setting up the Emerging Fraternity

- The emerging fraternity submits to the REC their recommendation of members to serve on their first fraternity council. Once approved by the REC, this council will serve the emerging fraternity until its first election is held after the Canonical Establishment. If changes to the council become necessary, they require the approval of the REC.
- The emerging fraternity selects a name for the new fraternity and submits it to the REC for approval.
- The REC notifies the National Executive Council (NEC) and the CNSA of the existence of the new emerging fraternity, its name, where it meets, and who will be the contact persons.
- The sponsoring fraternity, on behalf of the new emerging fraternity, provides the necessary information to the database administrator for the region to set up the record for the new emerging fraternity.
- The database administrator for the region sets up a fraternity record for the emerging fraternity, gives it a number that is an extension of that of the sponsoring fraternity, and the members are now listed as part of the emerging fraternity. Since the members of the emerging fraternity are still under the sponsoring fraternity, no transfers are required.
- The REC notifies the friar province to which the emerging fraternity will be bonded that the emerging fraternity is now in existence.
- The newly appointed council of the emerging fraternity enters into a formal written agreement with the friar province for the *altius moderamen* and the appointment of the spiritual assistant. (The intention for this was sought by the REC during the newly forming group phase, but the formal agreement is now requested directly by the council of the

emerging fraternity.)

- The provincial minister (or delegate) informs the local bishop about the existence of an emerging fraternity in his (arch) diocese.

Fraternity Life of an Emerging Fraternity

Fraternity & Council Gatherings

For the next three years (at a minimum⁵), both the emerging fraternity and the sponsoring fraternity share responsibility for development of the new fraternity. While remaining attached to the sponsoring fraternity, the emerging fraternity functions on its own, mentored by the sponsoring fraternity as needed. It has regular council and fraternity gatherings, which may be attended by members of the sponsoring fraternity. At any time, a member of the REC may informally visit the emerging fraternity or attend their council gathering as an observer.

The appointed minister of the emerging fraternity, or their delegate, may attend the sponsoring fraternity council meetings as an observer.

If distance prevents routine in-person attendance, teleconferencing is an option. However, at least twice a year, representatives from the sponsoring fraternity should meet physically with the emerging fraternity.

The emerging fraternity is expected to continue to take part in Regional gatherings as well as interact with other fraternities in the Region.

Spiritual Assistance

The emerging fraternity has its own spiritual assistant, assigned by the Province to which the fraternity is bonded.

⁵ The three year period as an emerging fraternity is a minimum requirement. However, most fraternities need a longer preparation period before canonical establishment

Building Fraternity and a Sense of Belonging

The emerging fraternity holds regular gatherings that include prayer, formation, communications, and socializing. The members of the emerging fraternity are encouraged to attend sponsoring fraternity gatherings. They should seek opportunities for interaction with each other outside their fraternity gatherings. They should join with other Franciscans for retreats, fraternity celebrations, apostolates, etc. (Case Study 3).

Building a Formation Team should be a goal during this time. The emerging fraternity should take advantage of opportunities for “forming the formators,” including collaborative formation sessions with other fraternities, and formation workshops.

Discerning Suitability of Individuals for Admission and Profession

An important responsibility of a fraternity council is discernment of the suitability of aspiring members for admission and profession.

For an emerging fraternity, and in fact, for any fraternity, maintaining a membership that allows for a vibrant fraternity life, as well as an adequate number of professed members to ensure long-term leadership, is a high priority. However, the council must guard against recommending the admission and profession of individuals for the sake of increasing membership, or fear of hurt feelings. Admitting and professing individuals who may not have a vocation can have serious implications for the health of the fraternity long term. Careful discernment is key.

Formation

Initial Formation. The emerging fraternity assumes the responsibility for the initial formation of its inquirers and candidates, with guidance from the sponsoring fraternity. The emerging fraternity council evaluates the candidates for admission and profession, and, after careful discernment, makes a recommendation to the sponsoring fraternity's council. If the recommendation is approved, the minister of the sponsoring fraternity (or his/her delegate) presides at the Rite of Admission or receives the profession of the candidates. Records of admission and profession will continue to be recorded in the sponsoring fraternity's register (see *Sponsoring of a Newly Forming Group*, 6.g, p. 76).

Ongoing Formation. The emerging fraternity prepares and conducts its own ongoing formation at each gathering.

Elections and Voting

The newly forming group itself does not hold elections as its council is appointed. Professed members of the emerging fraternity continue to have voting rights in the elections of the sponsoring fraternity.⁶

Record-Keeping and Reporting

Sponsoring Fraternity's Responsibilities

The demographics and activities of the emerging fraternity, and payment of Fair Share for its members and candidates, are included in the sponsoring fraternity's Annual Report to the REC.

Records of admission and profession will continue to be recorded in the sponsoring fraternity's register. The sponsoring fraternity maintains the emerging fraternity's records in the National Database, including admissions, professions, and any other member updates.

The sponsoring fraternity relinquishes custody of the emerging fraternity's members' files to the emerging fraternity (membership files consist of necessary documentation, initial formation records, correspondence, etc.).

Servant Leadership Training

The sponsoring fraternity council arranges for servant leadership training, and mentors the emerging fraternity's council, preparing the fraternity for canonical establishment. Special attention is given to forming leaders who are able to animate and guide the fraternity in a Franciscan way.

Good formation practices, record-keeping, reporting, Fair Share, and National Database procedures are also important.

⁶ Those professed members who have not transferred from their fraternity of origin (in the context of a transfer, the fraternity from which the member is transferring, not necessarily the fraternity they were professed in) retain voting rights in their fraternity of origin. If distance prevents them from attending the elective chapter, they may be deemed "excused" and not counted toward the quorum.

Emerging Fraternity's Responsibilities

The emerging fraternity will keep minutes of its council and fraternity meetings.

The emerging fraternity will assume the custody of its own membership files from the sponsoring fraternity, as well as maintain the roster for its members.

The emerging fraternity will prepare an Annual Report, which they will submit to the sponsoring fraternity. In addition, the emerging fraternity will be responsible for providing written reports to the sponsoring fraternity council twice a year.

Finances/Fair Share

The emerging fraternity keeps its own records of contributions from the members and remits the amount of Fair Share for each professed member and candidate, as set by the Region, to the sponsoring fraternity.



Porta Moiano
Assisi, Italy - March 2026

Corinne Lorenzet, OFS

Phase III: Canonically Establishing a Fraternity

When the fraternity has completed at least three years functioning as an emerging fraternity with an assigned spiritual assistant, it can begin the process for requesting canonical establishment.

Preparation for Canonical Establishment

- The sponsoring fraternity council and the emerging fraternity's council together evaluate the emerging fraternity, using the *Readiness for Canonical Establishment* document.
- If the evaluation is positive, the emerging fraternity requests a pastoral and fraternal visitation from the REC.
- If the visitations are completed with favorable reports, the emerging fraternity council submits a formal written request to the REC to be canonically established.
- The REC votes on the request. They inform both the emerging fraternity and the sponsoring fraternity of the outcome of their decision. If the vote is affirmative, the REC informs the provincial minister (or his delegate) of its approval of the canonical establishment.
 - If the provincial minister approves the request, he or his delegate requests the bishop's permission to establish the new fraternity in his diocese.
 - An official register is procured for the new fraternity.
 - The REC contacts the CNSA executive secretary to request the formal document of establishment, providing the necessary information.
 - The CNSA executive secretary sends five original establishment documents to the Regional Minister.
 - The Regional minister signs and dates the five documents and passes them on to the provincial minister (or delegate).
 - The provincial minister (or delegate) signs and dates the five documents and obtains the signature of the bishop. All five documents are then brought to the canonical establishment ceremony.
 - The emerging fraternity plans the ceremony of canonical establishment in collaboration with the REC, the provincial minister (or delegate), and, where customary, the bishop, and sets the date.
 - The REC and the fraternity set a date for the council elections. The election should be held as soon after the canonical establishment as possible, and no later than one year after the canonical establishment. The appointed council of the emerging fraternity serves until the election can be held.

Canonical Establishment of a Fraternity

The canonical erection of the local Fraternity belongs to the competent religious Major Superior at the request of the brothers and sisters concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the council of the higher level to which the new Fraternity will be affiliated according to the National Statutes.

The written consent of the local Ordinary is necessary for the canonical erection of a Fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the First Order or the TOR (GC, art. 46.1).

Canonical Establishment Ceremony

The ceremony of canonical establishment is celebrated with due solemnity according to the *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*. During the ceremony, the documents are signed and dated by the minister provincial (or his delegate) and by the witnesses.

After the ceremony:

- The first document of canonical establishment is sent to the REC to be kept in its archives, the second is sent to the archives of the friar province, a third is sent to the diocesan chancery for filing, the fourth is preserved in the newly established fraternity's records, and the fifth is sent to the national secretary for the national archives.
- The Regional Minister informs the NEC and the database administrator for the region of the canonical establishment of the new fraternity.
- The database administrator for the region sets up the new fraternity in the database by converting the emerging fraternity to an established one. See instructions on the National Database website, ofsusadb.org, or contact the national database team through "Contact Us."
- The new fraternity enters the records for their members in their own fraternity register as having transferred in from the sponsoring fraternity. The sponsoring fraternity notes in its register that the members of the newly established fraternity have been transferred to the new fraternity. Transfer forms are not necessary, but the members should be noted as having been transferred in the register.

OFS General Constitutions, Article 46.2

For the valid establishment of a local Fraternity, at least five perpetually professed members are required. The admission and profession of these first brothers and sisters will be received by the Council of another local Fraternity or by the Council of a higher level which will have provided for their formation in appropriate ways. The acts of admission and Profession and the Decree of Election are preserved in the records of the Fraternity. Copies are sent to the Council of the higher level.

After Canonical Establishment

The elections for the newly canonically established fraternity should take place as soon as possible, but within one year after the establishment.

The newly established fraternity council:

- approves and accepts new inquirers and candidates, and professes new members,
- maintains the National Database for its members,
- has voting rights in the regional fraternity, and
- submits the Annual Report and Fair Share contribution directly to the REC.

Responsibilities of the Regional Executive Council

The list below focuses specifically on the responsibilities of the REC regarding a new group and its sponsoring fraternity.

Important Note:

The REC is *ultimately responsible* for overseeing the progress of the new group and its relationship with the sponsoring fraternity.

A procedure should be set in place to ensure that the REC receives periodic reporting from both parties in order to evaluate progress, and gives guidance as needed. Evidence of continued progress is required. In case of prolonged lack of progress, the REC should re-examine the viability of the group.

1. The REC, considering the establishment of a new fraternity, should review the entire section of this document entitled “Process for Establishing a New Fraternity” (p. 61).
2. When the REC receives a request to approve the start of a newly forming group, it carefully considers the request, entering into a dialogue with the requesting group. Careful consideration includes taking into account possible questionable motives for the formation of a new group, such as underlying difficulty with an existing group.
3. Sometimes the request may take the form of a petition to reactivate a deactivated fraternity. The REC should consider the following. If at least one of the members seeking to reactivate a fraternity belonged to the original fraternity, and the fraternity would be meeting in the same location, and the friar province to which it was bonded remains the same, there would seem to be a good reason to prefer reactivation over establishing a new fraternity. If these three conditions are not met, the REC should direct the group to establish a new fraternity.
4. The REC takes a formal vote on the request:
 - a. If the request is denied, a written letter explaining the reasons is sent to the requestors.
 - b. If the request is approved, the REC informs the group and continues with step 5.
5. The REC considers possible sponsors for the group and consults with the requestors on these possibilities.
6. The REC reviews the responsibilities of a sponsoring fraternity with the prospective fraternity council(s), and upon agreement, names the sponsoring fraternity for the newly forming group.
7. The REC may decide to appoint a liaison to work with the sponsoring fraternity and the newly forming group to ensure that the resources needed for both the sponsoring fraternity and the newly forming group are available, and to assist with any questions or issues.
8. Members of the REC are expected to visit the newly forming group on occasion to reinforce a sense of belonging to a larger order and to show support.

9. If the sponsoring fraternity is unable to provide a spiritual assistant for the newly forming group (prior to the appointment of one by the friar province), the REC will ensure that the newly forming group has the support of a spiritual assistant until such time as one is assigned by a friar province.
10. Once the newly forming group is deemed stable and viable, the REC initiates the process of obtaining a written intention of the *altius moderamen* from a 1st Order/TOR province.
11. As part of the Fraternal Visitation to a sponsoring fraternity, the REC will ensure that the newly forming group members are represented in the sponsoring fraternity's register, that transfers have been completed if necessary, and that the Annual Report from the sponsoring fraternity includes the activities and demographics of the newly forming group.
12. As part of the Pastoral Visitation to a sponsoring fraternity, the regional spiritual assistant will ensure that the initial and ongoing formation of the members of the newly forming group conforms to the national and regional norms.
13. When the time comes to evaluate the newly forming group's readiness to move into emerging fraternity status, the REC conducts a pastoral and fraternal visitation. The visitors ensure that all that the requirements for becoming an emerging fraternity have been met.
14. The REC provides written reports of the visitations to the newly forming group and the sponsoring fraternity.
 - a. If the visitation reports are favorable, the newly forming group requests the status of emerging fraternity from the REC, and the REC votes to approve the request.
 - b. If the visitation reports are not favorable, the REC works with the newly forming group and the sponsoring fraternity to remedy any issues.
15. The REC evaluates and votes on the recommended appointed council for the emerging fraternity, which will serve the emerging fraternity until their first election after Canonical Establishment. The REC also evaluates and votes on any changes to the council required during this time.
16. The REC notifies the NEC of the existence of the new emerging fraternity, its name, where it meets, and who will be the contact person.
17. The REC notifies the friar province to which the emerging fraternity will be bonded that the emerging fraternity is now in existence and an appointed spiritual assistant is needed.
18. Once the sponsoring fraternity and the emerging fraternity discern that the emerging fraternity is ready for canonical establishment, the emerging fraternity requests a fraternal and pastoral visitation from the REC. The REC conducts the visitations and provides written reports.
19. If the reports are favorable, the emerging fraternity submits a written request for canonical establishment to the REC. If it is approved, the REC informs the provincial minister (or his delegate) in writing that the emerging fraternity is ready to be established. If unfavorable, the REC works with the emerging fraternity and the sponsoring fraternity to correct any issues.

20. The REC contacts the CNSA executive secretary and provides the necessary information. Once the documents are received, the REC signs them and routes them for additional signatures.
21. The Regional Minister, or delegate from the REC, attends the canonical establishment ceremony.
22. The REC and the council of the newly established fraternity set a date for the council elections. The first election for the new fraternity is held as soon as possible, and no later than one year after canonical establishment.

The Praises of God
St. Francis of Assisi, 1224

You are the holy Lord God Who does wonderful things.

You are strong. You are great. You are the most high.
You are the almighty king. You holy Father,
King of heaven and earth.

You are three and one, the Lord God of gods;
You are the good, all good, the highest good,
Lord God living and true.

You are love, charity; You are wisdom, You are humility,
You are patience, You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are security, You are rest,
You are gladness and joy, You are our hope, You are justice,
You are moderation, You are all our riches to sufficiency.

You are beauty, You are meekness,
You are the protector, You are our custodian and defender,
You are strength, You are refreshment. You are our hope,
You are our faith, You are our charity,
You are all our sweetness, You are our eternal life:
Great and wonderful Lord, Almighty God, Merciful Savior.

FA:ED. Vol 1, p. 109

Responsibilities of a Sponsoring Fraternity

Sponsoring a new group is a serious commitment that requires a substantial amount of time. Those fraternities considering sponsorship of a new group should review carefully the responsibilities listed below before committing to sponsor a new group. This list also serves as a checklist to refer to during sponsorship.

Important Note: Given that the establishment process can span multiple terms of office in both the sponsoring fraternity and the Regional Executive Council (REC), frequent documentation and thorough record-keeping are essential at all levels.

Sponsorship of a Newly Forming Group

1. The sponsoring fraternity, once it accepts the role of sponsorship from the REC, opens a dialogue with the members of the newly forming group.
2. If members of the newly forming group are from fraternities other than the sponsoring fraternity, the sponsoring fraternity council typically obtains transfers for them and records the information in the sponsoring fraternity's register.
3. The sponsoring fraternity council guides the newly forming group in selecting a leader for the group, and sets expectations regarding gatherings, initial and ongoing formation, reporting, and Fair Share contributions.

To the Sponsoring Fraternity

The importance of these aspects of sponsorship cannot be emphasized enough.

Frequent contact and getting to know the members of the newly forming group. Remember, you will be making important decisions that will affect their future.

Documentation --- in the form of council meeting minutes, letters, and reports --- to keep all parties on track.

Updates to the REC. The REC and Regional Spiritual Assistant(s) oversee the process and make the final decision on 'readiness.' Make their job easier by keeping them up to date.

And most important of all, **careful discernment** regarding the following:

- The **presence of a vocation** and proper formation of those in initial formation.
- **Finding a balance** between being too directive and doing everything for the newly forming group, and letting them flounder. This balance will necessarily change as the newly forming group progresses toward emerging fraternity status and establishment.
- **Warning signs** that all is not well with the group. In particular, note a lack of interest in contact with other fraternities and attending regional gatherings, a sense of isolation, a strong attitude of independence regarding the rest of the Order, an unwillingness to accept advice or counsel, and a sense that the new group views itself as 'better than' other fraternities.
- And finally, **your own tendency** to want to form the new group in your own image.

4. The sponsoring fraternity discerns a qualified professed member of the newly forming group who will serve as facilitator of formation. If none of the members in the newly forming group qualify to assume this responsibility, the sponsoring fraternity provides a suitable person. In either case, the formation of new members in the newly forming group will be guided by the council or the formation team of the sponsoring fraternity.
5. When possible, a member of the sponsoring fraternity council attends the gatherings of the newly forming group.
6. On an ongoing basis, the sponsoring fraternity council:
 - a. builds fraternity with the members of the newly forming group, and welcomes them to the sponsoring fraternity's gatherings, Regional meetings, retreats, and workshops;
 - b. schedules an in-person meeting between members of the sponsoring fraternity council and the members of the newly forming group at least twice a year;
 - c. collaborates in the initial and ongoing formation of the members of the newly forming group, and ensures that all formation sessions are conducted according to national and regional norms;
 - d. ensures that the sponsoring fraternity's Formation Director is in regular contact with those conducting formation sessions for the newly forming group;
 - e. maintains the membership files for those in initial formation and the newly professed in the newly forming group;
 - f. arranges for regular review of the progress of those in initial formation;
 - g. together with the professed members of the newly forming group, dialogues with those progressing through the initial stages of formation, arranges for interviews, and after careful discernment, votes on their acceptance;
 - h. conducts the Rites of Admission and Profession, records these events in the register of the sponsoring fraternity, and updates the National Database;
 - i. receives and reviews regular reports from the newly forming group (semi-annually), records any changes in membership in the sponsoring fraternity's register, updates the National Database as needed, and continually evaluates the viability and vibrancy of the group;
 - j. assists with questions and addresses issues;
 - k. reviews the minutes of the newly forming group, includes a report of the activities and demographics of the newly forming group in their council meeting minutes and in their Annual Report to the REC, and submits Fair Share on behalf of the newly forming group.

The newly forming group may set up its own bank account, with the assistance of the sponsoring fraternity (see section on Finances/Fair Share earlier in this chapter, p. 65).

7. Once the newly forming group has functioned successfully for at least one year with five professed members, the sponsoring fraternity council works with the newly forming group to jointly evaluate their readiness to request emerging fraternity status.
8. If the evaluation of the newly forming group indicates readiness, they request a pastoral and fraternal visitation from the Regional level to assess the group's suitability for the status of an "emerging fraternity."
9. Once favorable visitation reports are received from the REC, the members of the newly forming group choose a name and recommend members to serve as an appointed council for the emerging fraternity. These recommendations are sent to the REC for their approval.
10. The sponsoring fraternity provides the necessary information to the National Database administrator to set up the record for the emerging fraternity.

Sponsorship of the Emerging Fraternity

11. Both the emerging fraternity and the sponsoring fraternity share responsibility for the development of the new fraternity. The sponsoring fraternity continues its support as detailed in 6 above, however membership files are now maintained by the emerging fraternity.
12. The emerging fraternity takes responsibility for both initial and ongoing formation with oversight by the sponsoring fraternity council
13. The sponsoring fraternity council arranges for servant leadership training and mentors the emerging fraternity's council, preparing the fraternity for canonical establishment. Special attention is given to forming leaders who are able to animate and guide a fraternity in a Franciscan Way. Good formation practices, record-keeping, reporting, Fair Share, and National Database procedures are also important.
14. In preparation for requesting canonical establishment, the sponsoring fraternity council and the emerging fraternity's council together evaluate the emerging fraternity, using the *Readiness for Canonical Establishment* section, (p. 78).

Extraordinary Circumstances for Sponsorship

Is it ever appropriate for the REC to take on the responsibilities of sponsoring a newly forming group or emerging fraternity? Certainly, the REC has the knowledge of how a local fraternity should function, but there are certain complications that arise when the REC assumes this responsibility. Local fraternities, as the basic unit of the Order, are well-suited to take on the responsibilities of sponsorship. Every effort should be made to encourage a local fraternity to take on this role.

Co-Sponsorship

If there is hesitation on the part of a local fraternity to take on the task of sponsoring a newly forming group/emerging fraternity, the REC might suggest "co-sponsorship." In co-sponsorship, members of the REC participate to some extent in the duties of sponsoring, while mentoring and assisting the local fraternity to the extent possible for their members. Working in partnership has

wonderful advantages and presents fewer complications. If co-sponsorship is agreed upon, the REC and the local fraternity council work together to develop a plan that will fulfill all the responsibilities of sponsorship, as well as the responsibilities of the REC, detailed in the previous sections.

The REC as the Sponsoring Fraternity

Only in extraordinary circumstances should the REC take on the sole responsibility of sponsorship. The following section outlines the adaptations that must be made when the REC assumes the role of the sponsoring fraternity.

Specific Adaptations when the REC is the Sponsoring Fraternity

Initial Steps

The REC carefully reviews this document, noting that they must carry out both the responsibilities proper to the REC as well as the responsibilities of a sponsoring fraternity, detailed above.

The REC designates one (or more) REC member(s) to be the liaison(s) to the group.

Previously Professed Members

Professed members who choose to join the newly forming group or emerging fraternity may remain in their fraternity of origin until the emerging fraternity is canonically established. These professed members should still contribute financially and exercise voting rights in their fraternity of origin, which continues to include them in their reporting and fair share calculation for their Region. The REC may also choose to establish a record in the National Database for the newly forming group and/or the emerging fraternity for record-keeping purposes. If the REC establishes such records, the professed members of the newly forming group or emerging fraternity may “transfer” to the new group, in which case they would not have active or passive voice in the elections of their fraternity of origin.

Formation

The REC assigns an appropriate, qualified professed OFS member to oversee the formation of the members of the group. The REC carries out the Rites of Admission and Profession (see *Record- Keeping* below). The Regional Minister accepts the profession of new members. Candidates may be received during the Rite of Admission by the Regional Minister or another elected member of the REC. The Ceremony of Welcoming can be led by the leader or another professed member of the newly forming group or emerging fraternity.

Record-Keeping

The newly forming group keeps a roster of its members and updates the REC on a regular basis. See “Previously Professed Members” above. The REC begins a Register for the new group.

Readiness for Canonical Establishment – Fraternity Self-Evaluation

- Do the fraternity members show the Franciscan spirit of peace and joy in their hearts, minds, thoughts, and actions? Do the members animate and guide one another in the spirit of Jesus and Francis? In what ways?

- How does the fraternity integrate and make use of the Rule, Constitutions, and Statutes? Are members knowledgeable with respect to the details of the structure and functioning of the Order?
- Is there an appropriate balance in the fraternity meetings and activities (i.e., formation, prayer, social time, outreach activities), or is one aspect emphasized to the exclusion of all else? In all of these areas, has there been demonstrable growth over time?
- Does the fraternity take responsibility for its own ongoing formation? Is a formation team in place, and do they meet to discuss both initial and ongoing formation? Who leads initial and ongoing formation? What formation resources are used? Does the program seem to be effective?
- Does the fraternity maintain records? Are minutes in order? Is there evidence that required reports are submitted in a timely fashion? Are the fraternity Register and National Database up to date? Are there adequate records for those in initial formation?
- Does the fraternity take responsibility for its own finances? Is there a budget? Do they have their own bank account? How is Fair Share handled? How are overall finances handled?
- Does the fraternity as a whole seem able to function independently?
- Are there signs of sustainability and potential for growth in the fraternity? Are there people at various stages of initial formation?
- Is the council working well together? Can the council members set goals and a direction for the group, beyond just getting established?
- Does the spiritual assistant journey with the fraternity? What is the fraternity/spiritual assistant relationship? Does the fraternity council seek assistance from the spiritual assistant?
- Do the members have a sense of connection to and participation in the larger Order (Regional and National Fraternities)? Is the fraternity represented at the annual regional chapter and other Regional gatherings? How does the fraternity implement the recommendations of OFS-USA Commissions, Committees, and priorities of our Order?

Document of Canonical Establishment


Information Needed for Preparing the Document of Canonical Establishment

When an emerging fraternity is ready for canonical establishment, the REC provides the information listed below to the Executive Secretary of the CNSA. Please request the fillable form from the CNSA or retrieve it from the National Website.

1. Name of new fraternity
2. Place of establishment (for example: church, friary, convent, or another ecclesial establishment)
3. City, State
4. Name of (Arch)Diocese
5. Name of (Arch) Bishop (Ordinary)
6. Name of regional fraternity
7. Name of friar province to which the new fraternity is bonded
8. Name of OFS regional minister
9. Name of provincial minister
10. Name of provincial spiritual assistant/delegate
11. Name of local spiritual assistant
12. Who will sign part 2 (the friars' permission) of the document: provincial minister or provincial spiritual assistant/delegate?
13. Who will actually conduct the ceremony of establishment and sign the document: provincial minister, provincial spiritual assistant, or other delegate of the provincial minister?
14. Anticipated Date of Establishment Ceremony, if available
15. Name, address, phone number of contact person (usually the regional minister) to whom documents should be returned

Document of Canonical Establishment Template

Once the information is received from the REC, the executive secretary of the CNSA prepares five originals of the official establishment document and sends them to the Regional Minister.



**FOR THE CANONICAL ESTABLISHMENT
OF A FRATERNITY
OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA**

In the Name of the Lord. Amen!

1. Request of the Regional Executive Council

Upon the request of the emerging Secular Franciscan Community of _____ at _____ (Church) in the (Arch)diocese of _____ we, the Executive Council of the Secular Franciscan Regional Fraternity of _____, attest to the community's viability and fidelity, approve its request for Canonical Establishment, and ask the Provincial Minister of the (OFM or other) Province of _____ to establish the new fraternity canonically according to the Ritual, with the consent of the local Ordinary, and to provide for spiritual assistance for the fraternity.

Date: _____
_____, OFS, Regional Minister

2. Permission of the Prior Provincial Minister

I, Friar _____, Provincial Minister of the (OFM or other) Province of _____, agree to assume canonical responsibility for this new fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order according to Canon 303 of the Code, delegate Friar _____ as the Provincial Spiritual Assistant to make sure that the fraternity is canonically established according to the Ritual, appoint _____ as the fraternity's Spiritual Assistant, and hereby request the consent of the local Ordinary.

Date: _____
(Seal) _____, Provincial Minister

3. Consent of the Ordinary

I hereby give my consent, in accord with Canon 312 of the Code, for the canonical establishment of the above-mentioned Fraternity of _____ of the Secular Franciscan Order in this Diocese.

Date: _____
(Seal) _____, Ordinary

4. Establishment of the Fraternity

The Fraternity of _____ of the Secular Franciscan Order at _____ (Church), (City), (State), was formally established according to the Ritual.

Date: _____
(name of officiating clergy)

Witness

Witness

Reactivating a Fraternity

According to canon law (CCL, c. 120), a canonically established fraternity of the OFS remains “alive” and cannot be dissolved until 100 years after the death of its last member. Therefore, any fraternity that has been deactivated may be reactivated during this period of 100 years in the following manner:

- By *at least* one (preferably more) permanently professed member of the original fraternity.
- By a new group of at least five (preferably more) permanently professed members who are willing to assume the juridic personality (CCL, cc. 116 and 120) of the fraternity and responsibility for the fraternity.
- The REC considers the request, and if approved, seeks a sponsoring fraternity for the reactivating group.
- The REC determines the requirements and timeframes for reactivation, which will closely resemble those of establishing a new fraternity. What follows is an abbreviated summary of the process. If the members seeking to reactivate a fraternity are all members of the same fraternity, they submit a written request to the fraternity council, which, in turn, seeks the approval of the REC. The REC then evaluates the request and notifies the friar province to which the original fraternity was bonded that they are seeking reactivation. If the province is willing to reactivate the fraternity, the province provides a notice of intention to appoint a spiritual assistant for the group or offers to transfer the *altius moderamen* to another province.
- If the members seeking to reactivate a fraternity are from different fraternities, the group submits the request to the REC directly, also letting their respective fraternity councils know of their intent to pursue reactivation.

Notes on Reactivation

If at least one of the members seeking to reactivate a fraternity belonged to the original fraternity, and the fraternity would be meeting in the same location, and the friar province that it was bonded remains in the area, there would seem to be good reason to prefer reactivation over establishing a new fraternity. If none of these conditions are met, the REC must take care to evaluate the motivation for assuming the identity of the deactivated fraternity.

If the REC chooses to approve the reactivation request:

- The original members of the deactivated fraternity at the time of deactivation need to be notified, if possible, that the fraternity is being reactivated.
- The reactivated fraternity must retain the original name of the deactivated fraternity.
- The original Friar Province to which the reactivating fraternity was bonded must issue the decree of reactivation.

In rare cases, just as in a newly forming group or emerging fraternity, the REC may assume sponsorship of a reactivating fraternity.

- Once the period of reactivation is completed, the members formally request the REC, in writing, to be officially reactivated as an already canonically established fraternity. The REC makes a fraternal and pastoral visitation. If they approve the request, the Regional minister verifies the canonical establishment of the fraternity and asks the provincial minister (or delegate) of the Province to which the fraternity is bonded to issue the written decree of reactivation. Copies are sent to the fraternity, the REC, and the local bishop. The appropriate database administrator is notified of the reactivation. The regional minister sends a copy of the decree to the national archives. The REC returns all remaining goods of the fraternity, as well as remaining financial assets and records, to the reactivated fraternity. A ceremony of reactivation is celebrated liturgically and socially.

Transferring a Fraternity to the Altius Moderamen of another Friar Province

As the presence of friars in particular areas changes, grows, or diminishes, it is wise to consider the transfer of the *altius moderamen* (higher direction) of a fraternity to the care of another friar province that may be able to serve the Seculars. Fraternities may also transfer for other reasons. Here is the process to follow:

- The fraternity minister, with the consent of the council of the fraternity, asks the Regional minister and the regional spiritual assistant(s) of the region (to which it presently belongs), to write letters of recommendation to the provincial minister (or delegate) of the friar province to which the fraternity desires to transfer.
- The minister of the fraternity wishing to transfer to the care of another friar province writes both to the provincial minister (or delegate) of the province of origin and the receiving province, detailing the reasons for the transfer. He/she also provides copies of pertinent information and includes a copy of the Document of establishment or a verification of canonical establishment of the fraternity.
- The provincial minister (or delegate) of the friar province to which the fraternity is bonded writes to the provincial minister (or delegate) of the receiving province, giving his consent for the transfer. The provincial minister (or delegate) of the receiving province then gives his consent for the transfer in writing.
- If the provincial minister (or delegate) of the receiving friar province accepts the transfer of the *altius moderamen*, he issues an official letter, in the name of the friar provincial minister, to accept responsibility for the *altius moderamen* of the fraternity and appoints a spiritual assistant for the fraternity, having consulted the concerned fraternity council.
- It is important to inform the REC of any region involved, as well as informing NEC and the personnel who maintain the database, of the change.

Moving a Fraternity's Location to another Region/Diocese

The location of where a fraternity meets may change the region and/or diocese their new meeting place is associated with. Before the move is made, steps need to be taken to make sure the proper approvals are in place for the Province, the incoming and outgoing region, and the incoming and outgoing Diocese.

The Regional Executive Councils must both agree that the move can and should take place. The province to which the fraternity is bonded is then notified of its approval of the move. The province responsible must file the proper request for the fraternity to be canonically established in the new diocese and to be disaffiliated with the old diocese.

If a fraternity is moving from one location to another within the same region and diocese, the diocese needs to be notified.

The Second Letter to Agnes of Prague

Saint Clare, 1235, vv. 11-14

What you hold, may you hold,
What you do, may you do and not stop.
But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet,
So that even your steps stir up no dust,
May you go forward
Securely, joyfully, and swiftly,
On the path of prudent happiness,
believing nothing,
agreeing with nothing
that would dissuade you from this commitment
or would place a stumbling block for you on the way,
so that nothing prevents you from offering
your vows to the Most High in the perfection
to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you.

The Lady, Clare of Assisi: Early Documents, p.48

Chapter 8

Options for Fraternities in Difficulty

When a Local Fraternity has been experiencing a difficult situation for a long time that it is unable to resolve on its own, is unable to elect a Council, or has fewer than five perpetually professed members, there are two options for moving forward: Fraternal accompaniment (IS, art. 57) or deactivation (IS, art. 58).

Various factors contribute to this situation for a fraternity:

1. A fraternity has fewer than five members and is no longer growing.
2. Fraternities struggle to meet due to the age and illness of members.
3. Fraternity council members do not get along, and their personalities 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 the unavailability of nominees or a 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

When a fraternity is unable to elect a new council at the end of a term, or the council as elected can no longer function for any reason as noted above or any other valid reason, the Region, in collaboration with the Province to which the fraternity is bonded, may grant a grace period, known as Fraternal Accompaniment, of up to three years (with a possible extension of one year) (see IS, art. 57.2.b).

The Region delegates the responsibility of taking care of Formation and all the functions proper to the local Council, to an active local fraternity (or, if needed, to the REC), including decisions on admissions and professions. They essentially become the “sponsoring fraternity” as they would for a newly forming group or emerging fraternity, except that the members do not transfer to the accompanying fraternity.

Fraternal Accompaniment should only be considered if it appears that the fraternity in difficulty will be able to resolve the issues that resulted in their entering fraternal accompaniment and to become a viable fraternity within the three or four-year period (see OFS-USA Guidelines for Fraternal Accompaniment – August 2024 [or later revisions], National Website, Guidelines, Forms, and other Resources, National Guidelines).

Removal of Council Members

In the event that the issues with a fraternity are a result of a minister and/or council not meeting their obligations to their fraternity, General Constitutions article 84 allows for the removal of a minister and or council for reasons of negligence or irregularity in carrying out their duties. Article 84 is as follows:

1. In the case where there is grave negligence or irregularity on the part of a minister or a council, the Council of the next higher level conducts a fraternal visit of the Council in

question and, if necessary, requests a pastoral visit. With charity and prudence, it will evaluate the circumstances uncovered and decide on the best way to proceed. This can include the possibility of the removal of the Council or leaders involved (GC, art. 84.1).

2. For a serious, public and proven reason, the Council of a higher level, after a fraternal dialogue with the person concerned, may, by a secret ballot, order the removal of a Minister of a lower level (GC, art. 84.2).
3. In the case of other offices, when there is a serious reason to remove a person from office, it is the responsibility of the Council to which he/she belongs to reach a decision. It is made by a secret ballot after there has been a fraternal dialogue with the person involved (GC, art. 84.3).
4. An appeal, which suspends the action to remove someone from office, can be presented within thirty days to the Council of the level immediately higher than the one that imposed the sanction (GC, art. 84.4) (IS, art. 14.1).

Deactivation

When Fraternal Accompaniment does not appear to be a viable option for fraternities in difficulty, the Region, in collaboration with the Province to which the fraternity is bonded, pursues deactivation. See section on “Process for Deactivation of a Canonically Established Fraternity” on the following page for details on the steps to be taken for deactivation.

The most critical aspect of the deactivation of a fraternity is how the remaining members continue to be in fraternity with other Secular Franciscans. This can be particularly challenging if the deactivated fraternity is some distance away from an active fraternity, and remaining members are not able to fully participate in the life of another fraternity. See the section on “Cells, and other Options for Remaining Members of a Deactivated Fraternity” (p. 88).

Note: The International Statutes (art. 58) and General Constitutions (art. 48) use the term “cessation” for the action of rendering a canonically established fraternity effectively inactive. The US has used the term “deactivation” to describe this process.

International Statutes, art. 58.1

If after fraternal accompaniment, the [Executive] Council of the next higher level considers that a Local Fraternity can no longer return to normal fraternal life, it shall conclude that the Fraternity is effectively inactive and shall issue the Decree of cessation. A copy of the Decree is sent, for informational purposes, to the National [Executive] Council (if it is the Regional [Executive] Council that declares the cessation) and to the Major Superior of the First Order – TOR that erected the Local Fraternity, to the local Ordinary who gave consent for the canonical erection of the Local Fraternity (when applicable) and also, as far as possible, to all the members of the Local Fraternity.

[Executive] is added here for clarification, as this is the term used in the US.

Process of Deactivating a Canonically Established Fraternity

When a canonically established fraternity is no longer viable, for whatever reason, it can be declared deactivated by the executive council of the next higher level in collaboration with the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants or an individual RSA (IS, art. 58.1, see sidebar, p. 86).

The official deactivation may follow this procedure:

- The Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants and the Regional Executive Council make a pastoral and fraternal visit to the fraternity. They dialogue with the members about the options available to the fraternity, of which deactivation is one. They ask the members of the fraternity to consider the options prayerfully and to communicate their decision within 60 days of the fraternal and pastoral visitation. The fraternity informs, in writing, the Regional Executive Council and the Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (or Assistant if there is only one) of their decision.
- The Regional Executive Council records the decision and its recommendation from the visitation. This recommendation is forwarded to the provincial minister (or delegate) of the province to which the fraternity is bonded.
- The REC issues the decree of deactivation to the fraternity minister, with copies sent to the National Minister, the provincial minister (or delegate), and the local bishop.
- Recourse may be taken to the executive council of the higher level than the council that issued the decree (IS, art. 14.1).
- In the case of the deactivation of a fraternity, the patrimonial goods of the same, the library, and the records are acquired by the fraternity of the immediately higher level (GC, art. 48.1).

Thus, since this is a direct consequence of GC, art. 48, stated above, the common fund and other assets are either disposed of according to the decision of the remaining members or put in an interest-bearing escrow account managed by the Regional Executive Council. A copy of the document of establishment of the fraternity and date of its deactivation, plus a list of active members, is sent to the archives of the friar province, the regional fraternity, and the appropriate diocese.

When a fraternity is deactivated, the juridic person of the fraternity remains intact for 100 years after the last member dies. Such a fraternity can be revived if new members wish to reactivate it,

Effect of Deactivation of a Fraternity on individual Professed Members

While deactivation touches the responsibilities of a fraternity, it does NOT remove the individual responsibilities that come from Profession in the OFS. The individual members remain committed to the OFS way of life. They maintain that commitment, gathering together if possible, or transferring to a nearby local fraternity, maintaining communication with the Regional Executive Council and offering whatever support they can to the OFS. Their commitment to the OFS way of life remains intact. See section on Cells and Other Options for Remaining Members of a Deactivated Fraternity (p. 88)

and it can function as a fraternity (CCL, c. 120) (see section on Reactivating a Fraternity, Chapter 7, p. 82). When a fraternity is declared deactivated, the Region must make best efforts to contact all the members of that fraternity, whether they are active or not.

Fraternity records are prepared for archival storage. This preparation may need to be done by people appointed by the REC to assist the fraternity, if its members are not able to do this themselves. The following should be kept permanently:

- all minutes,
- member registers,
- money records: treasury registers only,
- establishment document and decree of deactivation, along with any other documents of similar importance (change of *altius moderamen*).

Files and boxes should be suitable for use in archives: no plastic tubs. Documents should be on acid-free paper. Remove any metal (staples, clips, clamps). Arrange documents in chronological order, and prepare an index of documents to help people locate items in the collection.

Cells, and Other Options for Remaining Members of a Deactivated Fraternity

When a fraternity is deactivated, all professed members and candidates must transfer to an active fraternity in order to remain active in the Order. This includes those members who are excused from attending gatherings or are homebound. The members have a choice of which fraternity to request a transfer to, and go through the normal process for transfer. The Regional Executive Council makes the transfer request on behalf of the deactivated fraternity council. The new fraternity welcomes the active transferred members and includes the excused members in their ministry to homebound and infirm members.

While attending gatherings at their new fraternity and fully participating there, transferred members of a deactivated fraternity may request to meet together as a cell to continue their relationship as a group (see GC, art. 34 and NS, art. 18.5a and 5b).

Remote Cell of an Active Fraternity

There may be cases where attending fraternity gatherings in another fraternity is not possible, either because of distance or inability to travel. In these cases, the Regional Executive Council may consider a request by the members of a deactivated fraternity to become a remote cell of another fraternity (see criteria on the following page).

Note: The members of the cell group might assist with formation, but the sponsoring fraternity must be aware of and involved with formation on a regular basis, especially in cases where the cell group is deemed to require more supervision because of details of its situation. The REC or the sponsoring fraternity has the right to require, for just cause, that formation be done by members of the sponsoring fraternity.

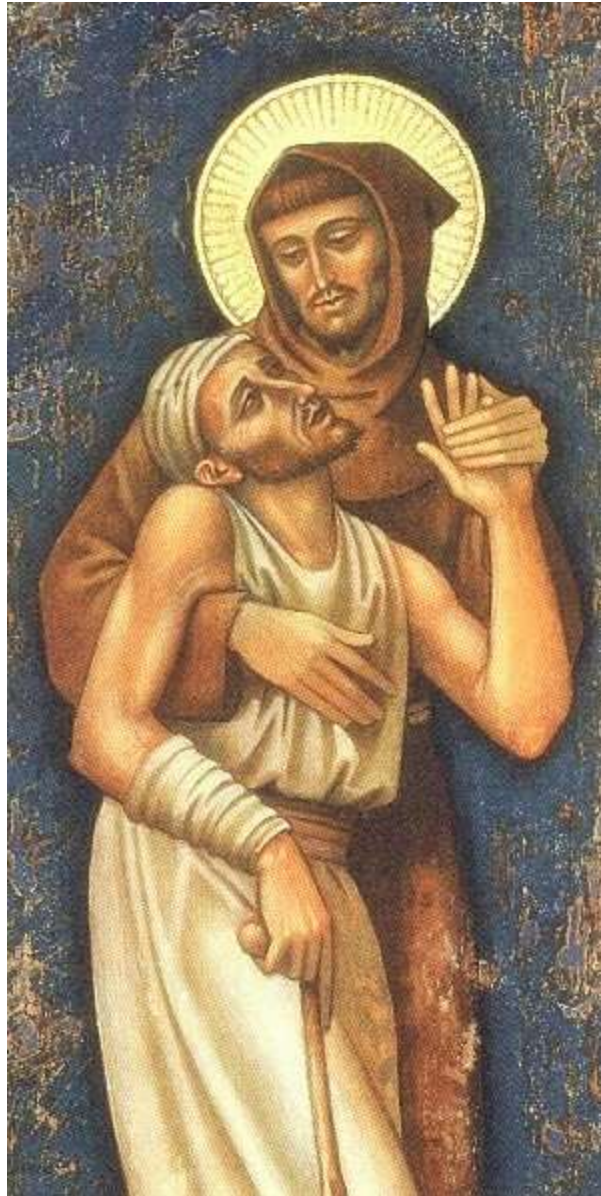
A remote cell retains its identity (name), but is listed as a cell of another (sponsoring) fraternity. Members are recorded in the sponsoring fraternity's register as transfers. If a full transfer to another fraternity or being accepted as a remote cell is not possible, the Regional Executive Council must make certain that the remaining professed members and candidates do not become isolated. The REC may do that through personal interaction on the part of a REC member, or by

inviting a local fraternity to keep in touch with these seculars who can no longer attend gatherings. The key goal for the REC is to keep the relationship alive, letting these seculars know that they are important and still part of the OFS family.

Criteria for becoming a remote cell of an active fraternity

In order for the members to become a remote cell of another fraternity, the following criteria must be met:

- Members of the deactivated fraternity officially transfer to one active sponsoring fraternity (approved and assigned by the REC);
- Most members of the deactivated fraternity are unable to attend meetings in the sponsoring fraternity;
- At least 3 members of the deactivated fraternity are able to come together as a group on a regular basis;
- Members of the deactivated fraternity are able and willing to meet the financial obligations of their sponsoring fraternity (Fair Share), as well as any expenses incurred in meeting as a group on their own.
- The sponsoring fraternity is actively involved in providing spiritual assistance and initial and ongoing formation to the remote cell group. While some of the support might occur virtually, the norm would be that spiritual assistance and initial formation would be done in person.
- Professed members of the remote cell may delegate one of their members to be a non-voting member of the sponsoring fraternity's council, but that individual must be able to attend the sponsoring fraternity's regular and council meetings.



St. Francis of Assisi and the Leper

Piero Casentini
By permission

Chapter 9

Vatican II Documents, Catechism of the Catholic Church and Catholic Social Teaching

While a spiritual assistant does not need an advanced degree in theology, it is important to be aware of the broad scope of how the Church applies the Gospel to our real life experience: the important role of the laity in making the Gospel present to the world, how the Church explains our faith (catechism), and how the Church applies our faith through its relationship with “the world” including those who are not connected to the Church. The Church has a historic role in awakening our world to a deeper respect for human life, even in the economic and political realms. This section is a brief overview of some important themes that connect with and influence the current Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. Hopefully, these themes awaken a thirst for the reader to delve more deeply, to read and pray about how we can better help the Franciscan family to share the treasury of God’s wisdom in word and deed.

The documents of the Second Vatican Council articulate a helpful perspective on living the Gospel in the world today. Spiritual assistants are encouraged to study these documents and encourage and assist others to do so as well. Spiritual assistants are in a good position to help Secular Franciscans become familiar with these texts.

Life of Prayer and Contemplation in the World

In its declaration on the laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem* (AA), the Second Vatican Council—referenced in the OFS Rule, article 8—reminds us that the spirit of prayer and contemplation, union with Christ, is the soul of our life (AA, para. 4). This document reminds us that our presence in the world is not simply about a salvation after earthly life but that our life in Christ impels us to make his presence known in various ways—suited to our abilities and resources—today, here and now.

Since Christ, sent by the Father, is the source and origin of the whole apostolate of the Church, the success of the lay apostolate depends upon the laity's living union with Christ, in keeping with the Lord's words, “He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit, for without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). This life of intimate union with Christ in the Church is nourished by spiritual aids which are common to all the faithful, especially active participation in the sacred liturgy. These are to be used by the laity in such a way that while correctly fulfilling their secular duties in the ordinary conditions of life, they do not separate union with Christ from their life, but rather, performing their work according to God's will, they grow in that union (AA, para.4).

Reflection to share with your fraternity: Explore the lay Secular Franciscan vocation in connection with a section of *Apostolicam actuositatem*. What parts of this document share themes with statements in the OFS Rule? How does this document prompt you (or your fraternity) to look at your apostolic works differently than you have up to now?

The Council reminds us that our apostolate is not merely acts of corporal and spiritual mercy but also evident in how we speak with and coordinate with each other (AA, para. 12, encouraging the young; AA, para. 14, cooperating with all people of good will).

Who is an Apostle? Who is Sent into the World?

An Apostle is one who is sent. Is there any Christian who is exempt from being sent by Christ into the world? Are there parts of my life where I don't have to think about the Gospel?

... [T]he spiritual life of the laity should take its particular character from their married or family state or their single or widowed state, from their state of health, and from their professional and social activity. They should not cease to develop earnestly the qualities and talents bestowed on them in accord with these conditions of life, and they should make use of the gifts which they have received from the Holy Spirit. ...

They should also hold in high esteem professional skill, family and civic spirit, and the virtues relating to social customs, namely, honesty, justice, sincerity, kindness, and courage, without which no true Christian life can exist (AA, para.4).

Reflection: What apostolic works are available for someone who lives near you but can no longer drive on their own? Can a person who is bedridden but of sound mind still perform acts of mercy? What choices do we make today that can help us make better decisions when we are less physically capable?

Reflection: Some monasteries are cloistered. How are cloistered nuns sent "into" the world? What does their monastery give to whom? What is possible for someone who is confined to a nursing home or a hospital bed?

All of us can find some way to serve the Lord in our brother or sister. But some people need more encouragement or direction than others. Discerning this—and encouraging this discernment—is part of the role of the spiritual assistant.

Connected with All People

Gaudium et spes, also known as the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, articulates the perspective of the Church that we are—or should be—in touch with the feelings of all persons, especially those who are on the margins (emphasis added [italics]).

1. *The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of men. United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father, and they have welcomed the news of salvation, which is meant for every man.* That is why this community [the Church] realizes that it is truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.
2. ... [T]he council yearns to explain to everyone how it conceives of the presence and activity of the Church in the world of today.

Therefore, *the council focuses its attention on the world of men, the whole human family along with the sum of those realities in the midst of which it lives; ... that world which the Christian sees as created and sustained by its Maker's love, fallen indeed into the bondage of sin, yet emancipated now by Christ, Who was crucified and rose again to break the strangle hold of personified evil, so that the world might be fashioned anew according to God's design and reach its fulfillment.*

3. Though mankind is stricken with wonder at its own discoveries and its power, it often raises anxious questions about the current trend of the world, about the place and role of man in the universe, about the meaning of its individual and collective strivings, and about the ultimate destiny of reality and of humanity. Hence, giving witness and voice to the faith of the whole people of God gathered together by Christ, this council can provide no more eloquent proof of its solidarity with, as well as its respect and love for the entire human family with which it is bound up, than by *engaging with it in conversation about these various problems. The council brings to mankind light kindled from the Gospel and puts at its disposal those saving resources which the Church herself, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, receives from her Founder. ... Inspired by no earthly ambition, the Church seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ under the lead of the befriending Spirit. And Christ entered this world to give witness to the truth, to rescue and not to sit in judgment, to serve and not to be served.*
4. To carry out such a task, *the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.* Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. We must therefore recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, its longings, and its often dramatic characteristics. ...

We do well to reflect on the “signs of the times,” the events and trends, ideas and perspectives common today, but always to go “from gospel to life and life to the gospel” (OFS Rule, art. 4). *Note how Gaudium et spes* brings everything back to *what we experience and know in the light of the Gospel* (GS, para. 4), in the truth of Christ (GS, para. 2), that salvation is for every human person (GS, para. 1). In order to present the Gospel to the world, the Council recognized that we must engage the world, seek to understand the world and how other people think and explain things, what it is others yearn for, not to embrace the way the world does things but in order to bring the light of the Gospel to actual people and their real experiences, desires, and concerns.

There is a prophetic dimension to these documents, recognizing the technological transformations that affect both human society and personal development, not always for the better (GS, paras. 5-8).

Gaudium et spes (GS, para. 48) also mentions the role of prayer and family in helping us to holiness (see also OFS Rule, art. 17). This persistent and traditional message of the Church that we are all called to holiness, the gift of others to help us, and the importance of prayer in this, is derived from the Gospel and emphasized in documents from Vatican II.

The Second Vatican Council took place in the 1960s, over half a century ago. We live in similar circumstances today—perhaps some difficulties are even intensified as technology and efficiency are mixed blessings. We cannot assuage all fears—nor should we try—but the Gospel presents a way to live in a difficult world and keep hope. We recognize that fear is manifold, and complete security cannot be bought or built with fences or walls, security systems, soldiers or armies, or tools of destruction.

Facing our fears and the struggles all around us, we do well to ask *what response fits our Franciscan charism?* How do our choices and the attitudes we foster in our hearts, grown in a

prayerful trust in the Lord, sow seeds of the Gospel ... or, rather, water the seeds the Lord has already planted all around us. The choices we make can spur hope and embolden others in their faithful responses.

Reading these documents is not always easy, but it is important to be familiar with them, at least to know the themes and some salient passages. We have many resources, many good words, books, and videos on all sorts of devices. The Secular Franciscans are a large group with diverse perspectives on issues today. It is helpful to recognize when someone is taking something out of context or misrepresenting the intent of a document. Pope St. John Paul II, who was present at Vatican II, is known for helping the Church to unpack the intent of the Second Vatican Council.

Reading and reflecting on the Church's response to the circumstances of our world can help us to live more fully Franciscan lives, lives that make the Gospel present for people who have not yet heard it clearly. Quotes from Council documents or from other official writings can often spark good reflection and discussion, especially if accompanied by a story or Scripture to illustrate one idea.

Central to our life is the prayer and contemplation that undergirds our study, keeps us rooted in Christ, and faithful to the ongoing conversion and formation brought about by living our Franciscan vocation.

Reflection: Which passages of the OFS Rule echo the same Gospel elements that we see here in *Gaudium et spes*?

What might help you to properly know and share the Church's purpose in the documents of this great Council?

Universal Call to Holiness – *Lumen gentium*

40. "Thus it is evident to everyone, that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status, are called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity; by this holiness as such a more human manner of living is promoted in this earthly society.

In order that the faithful may reach this perfection, they must use their strength accordingly as they have received it, as a gift from Christ. They must follow in His footsteps and conform themselves to His image seeking the will of the Father in all things. They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good..."

Light to the World

With the document *Lumen gentium*, the Second Vatican Council addressed the role of the Church in the world. Christ came as light to the entire world (LG, para.1), not merely to save people and make them holy as individuals, but to bring us together as one holy people (LG, para. 9), each of us called to “the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity ... by this holiness” promoting “a more human manner of living ... in this earthly society” (LG, para. 40). This holiness grows by using the gifts God has given us to follow and conform ourselves to Christ. “They must devote themselves with all their being to the glory of God and the service of their neighbor. In this way, the holiness of the People of God will grow into an abundant harvest of good, as is admirably shown by the life of so many saints in Church history” (LG, para. 40).

The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ, in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity (LG, para. 41).

The two major documents, *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*, taken together, give a wholistic sense of the presence of the Church in the world, gathered together by God, able through the Sacraments—especially the Eucharist—to grow in making Christ visible and tangible, not only through spiritual and pious activity but also in the ordinary or secular realm of life.

How do Franciscans make a difference among people who may be prompted by greed, profit, fear, anxiety, or competition?

The Holy Spirit calls us; impels us to bring the Gospel and the hope it inspires as a medicine for the fears and troubles of our world. People are often more concerned for their own needs than with people far across the globe. Many people worry about their bills and paychecks before they think about loving their neighbor.

Recognizing that all people are called by Christ, we strive to grow in holiness that forms us as instruments of peace, of hope and faith, of compassion and forgiveness, to build unity and helpful relationships rather than create separation.

Our world is often torn apart by the very things that were supposed to bring happiness. Ads tell us what we can purchase to achieve satisfaction only to learn that some of our new tools have a short lifespan or harmful side-effects. They are replaced by newer, faster, smaller, sometimes more complicated or more short-lived than before. Yet sales draw us to buy more “things.” We search for the latest, the newest, the technologically better, the cheapest, but in the end, “things” don’t improve our life—what we think we desire is not what we truly need. As Franciscans we quiet our hearts to hear the Spirit call us to the real Source of Joy.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) provides background on major aspects of our faith, helpful for teachers and formators preparing lessons or discussions (<https://uscceb.cld.bz/Catechism-of-the-Catholic-Church/>).

While helpful as a resource, especially for specific topics, like the Bible, the Catechism should not be used as a proof-text in arguments. A spiritual assistant can help people to understand the context of statements in the Catechism or in any resource, to avoid a fundamentalist approach to our spiritual life.

Major sections of the Catechism address the Creed, Liturgy and Sacraments, our Life in Christ, including moral questions, and Christian Prayer. Footnotes and explanatory notes point to Encyclicals, Scripture, and the writings of Saints, Church Fathers, and others, for further reading and development when investigating a particular topic. Themes throughout the Catechism include looking at our relationship with God and with each other, both within and outside the Church.

The Symbol of the faith confesses the greatness of God's gifts to man in his work of creation, and even more in redemption and sanctification. What faith confesses, the sacraments communicate: by the sacraments of rebirth, Christians have become "children of God," (John 1:12, 1 John 3:1) "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:4). Coming to see in the faith their new dignity, Christians are called to lead henceforth a life "worthy of the gospel of Christ" (Philippians 1:27). They are made capable of doing so by the grace of Christ and the gifts of his Spirit, which they receive through the sacraments and through prayer (CCC, §1692).

For a Greek Catholic perspective—that is, from one of the Eastern Churches in communion with Rome—one can read the Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, also freely available online (<https://ukrcatholic.org/our-faith/our-spirituality/catechism-of-the-ukrainian-catholic-church>). Catholics of any ritual church are able to join any Secular Franciscan fraternity, and there are Eastern Catholics scattered among the fraternities in the USA, as well as one entire fraternity that follows a Byzantine liturgical tradition, as of this writing.

Sacraments

The Secular Franciscan profession is an intensification of the baptismal commitment we make to live the Gospel. For many reasons, it is helpful for the fraternity members to understand the sacraments and our relationship with them. Liturgy is formative, and liturgical prayers (Eucharist, Divine Office, or Liturgy of the Hours) can help us unpack Scripture and Sacraments to better reflect on their impact in our lives.

There is an abundance of resources about the sacraments, but for easy use in a fraternity, there is a series of audiences from January to April 2014 by Pope Francis, currently available as video and text on the Vatican website (listed together at <https://archbalt.org/worship-and-sacramental-resources/>).

Our Secular Order

The OFS Rule, articles 10-19, make clear that the profession of a Secular Franciscan is a life that brings the Gospel to bear fruit in the secular world. The Church has long dignified labor—even the desert fathers and mothers sought to weave baskets and engage in other labors to keep their

hands busy as they prayed. The Church's rich social teachings assure us that the worker has a "right" under justice to be paid a sufficient wage:

Wages, as we are told, are regulated by free consent ... nevertheless, there underlies a dictate of natural justice more imperious and ancient than any bargain between man and man, namely, that wages ought not to be insufficient to support a frugal and well-behaved wage-earner. If, through necessity or fear of a worse evil, the workman accepts harder conditions because an employer or contractor will afford him no better, he is made the victim of force and injustice (*Rerum novarum*, paras. 43, 45).

Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching (CST) applies the Gospel to life in society. As human beings and as Christians, we are responsible for the world in which we live, and for the well-being of the people with whom we share this planet. We participate in the essential mission of the Church, which is evangelization—the proclamation of the Kingdom of God—and to work for the transformation of social relationships. Its social aspect goes out in love to all creation, particularly where there is poverty and human suffering.

As Catholics who happen to be Franciscans, we live out the Rule in the spirit of the Beatitudes by answering the call to peace and justice. The Church's teaching on social issues (CST) helps us to perceive ways in which we can better serve and advocate for our sisters and brothers in the service of the Word, who is Christ Jesus, our Lord and Brother. As Franciscans, with lives and motives formed by the Gospel, our presence in the world is meant to be a dynamic, engaging presence that gives clear witness to justice, mercy, compassion, and loving kindness. When today's world offers fragmentation, the Church offers integration and communion. CST is "meant to suggest a systematic approach for finding solutions to problems, so that discernment, judgment, and decisions will correspond to reality, so that solidarity and hope will have greater impact on the complexities of current situations" (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, para. 9).

The social teaching of the Church covers a wide range of issues—anything that affects our social relationships is our concern: poverty, rights of workers, homelessness, sexual exploitation and trafficking, war, migration, displacement of peoples, sustainable development, trade, ecology and environment, economics, banking crises, business ethics, access to healthcare, food security, rights of prisoners, and rights of ethnic minorities. Popes and bishops have responded to the "signs of the times"—the circumstances of our lives—using the teaching authority of the Church (Magisterium), publishing encyclicals and documents that challenge the social consciousness of "all people of good will."

It is helpful to know that the social teaching of the Church goes back to the Gospels, but over time, we find ways to make it clearer for people. Writing at a time when life for some was so dire that many sought to argue against allowing private property, Pope Leo XIII (*Rerum novarum*) described the importance of the right to private property—crucial as it is for the functioning of society—but

Exercise: What are some ways of helping open hearts or minds to learn about social justice teachings of the Church? What is an experience you had that helped open your heart to a need or concern that many have?

also checked by the moral obligation to care for those who lack basic necessities and by the requirement that employers provide properly, justly, for those who work in their businesses. He notes that not everything about our moral life is written into civil law.

Although the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* provides a comprehensive summary, there is no single magisterial source that describes CST in full. Social teachings branch out from Sacred Scripture, Biblical principles, Papal writings, conciliar documents, Bishops' pastorals, and writings of the saints.

The bishops participating in the Second Vatican Council (1963-1965) acknowledged the very distinctive roles that lay men and women have in the world: "The laity are called to actively participate in the whole life of the Church; not only are they to animate the world with Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind" (*Gaudium et spes*, para. 43).

The Church continues to address contemporary themes, bringing the Gospel to bear on the circumstances of our lives. Thus, it is important to read new encyclicals and other documents as they are published, and to find places where materials are produced to help share those documents with our fraternities. Finding additional resources involves making connections with friars and others who produce handouts or videos, often published for free distribution. Some of these are mentioned in the Resource list in this *Handbook*.

Reflection: Contemporary politics in our nation are divided on many of these justice issues. Select one topic to present and ask: What are some values that are important in our Gospel perspective on the world? How might we bring these values to bear on one of the issues we face today?

The Seven Pillars of Catholic Social Teaching

- Life and Dignity of the Human Person
- Call to Family, Community, and Participation
- Rights and Responsibilities
- Option for the Poor and Vulnerable
- The Dignity of Work and the Rights of Workers
- Solidarity
- Care for the environment

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults,
pp. 424-425

Appendix A

Code of Canon Law References Applicable to the OFS

These texts from the *Code of Canon Law* are simply available for research if something from OFS documents relates to Canon Law. It is not exhaustive, but only meant to be helpful.

Canon 113:

1. The Catholic Church and the Apostolic See have the nature of a moral person by divine law itself.
2. Besides physical persons, there are also in the Church juridic persons, that is, subjects in canon law of obligations and rights which correspond to their nature.

Canon 114:

1. Juridic persons are constituted either by prescriptions of law or by special concession of the competent authority given through a decree; they are aggregates of persons or of things ordered towards a purpose congruent with the mission of the Church and which transcends the purpose of the individuals that make it up.
2. The purposes spoken of in 1 are understood as those which pertain to works of piety, of the apostolate or of charity, whether spiritual or temporal.
3. The competent ecclesiastical authority is not to confer juridic personality except upon those aggregates of persons or things which pursue a truly useful purpose and all things considered, have resources which are foreseen to be sufficient to achieve their designated end.

Canon 115:

1. Juridic persons within the Church are aggregates of either persons or things.
2. An aggregate of persons, which cannot be constituted unless it consists of at least three persons, is collegial if its members determine its action through participation in making its decisions, whether by equal right or not, according to the norm of law and its own nature; otherwise it is non-collegial.
3. An aggregate of things or an autonomous foundation consists of goods or things, whether spiritual or material, and is directed by one or several persons or a college according to the norm of its law and its statutes.

Canon 116:

1. Public juridic persons are aggregates of persons or things which are so constituted by the competent ecclesiastical authority that, within the limits set for them in the name of the Church, they fulfill a proper function entrusted to them in view of the common good, in accord with the prescripts of law; other juridic persons are private.

2. Public juridic persons are given this personality either through the law itself or by a special decree of the competent authority expressly granting it; private juridic persons are given this personality only through a special decree of the competent authority granting this personality.

Canon 117:

No aggregate of persons or things, intending to obtain juridic personality, can achieve it unless its statutes have been approved by the competent authority.

Canon 118:

They alone represent a public juridic person and act in its name who are acknowledged to have this competence whether by universal or particular law or by its own statutes; they represent a private juridic person who have been given the competency by statutes.

Canon 119:

With regard to collegial acts, unless provision is made otherwise by law or statutes:

If it is a question of elections, that action has the force of law which, when a majority of those who must be convoked are present, receives the approval of an absolute majority of those who are present; after two indecisive ballots, the choice is between the two candidates who have obtained the greater number of votes, or, if there are several (with the same number), upon the two who are senior by age; after a third ballot, if the tie remains, the one who is senior by age is considered elected.

1. If it is a question of other matters, that action will have the force of law which, when a majority of those who must be convoked are present, receives the approval of an absolute majority of those who are present; if after two ballots it is a tie vote, the presiding officer can break the tie by his or her vote.
2. What touches all as individuals must be approved by all.

Canon 120:

1. A juridic person is of its nature perpetual; nevertheless it is extinguished if it is legitimately suppressed by a competent authority or has ceased activity for a hundred years; a private juridic person is furthermore extinguished if the association is dissolved according to the norm of its statutes, or if, in the judgment of the competent authority, the foundation itself has ceased to exist according to the norm of its statutes.
2. If even one member of a collegial juridic person survives, and the aggregate of persons has not ceased to exist according to its statutes, the exercise of all the rights of the aggregate devolves upon that one member.

Canon 121:

If aggregates, whether of persons or things, which are public juridic persons, are so joined that out of all of them one aggregate is constituted, itself enjoying juridic personality, this new juridic person obtains the goods and patrimonial rights proper to the prior ones, and it also takes upon itself the obligations with which they have been burdened; however, the intention

of the founders and donors and acquired rights must be respected, particularly as regards the allocation of goods and fulfillment of obligations.

Canon 122:

If an aggregate which has public juridic personality is so to be divided so that a part of it is united to another public juridic person, or that a distinct public juridic person is established from the separated part, it is the obligation of the ecclesiastical authority which is competent to make the division, having observed before all else the intention of the founders and donors, acquired rights, and approved statutes, to see to it personally or through an executor.

1. that things held in common which are capable of division, both goods and patrimonial rights as well as the debts and other obligations, are divided among the juridic person concerned with the proportion based on equity and justice, taking into account all the circumstances and the needs of each;
2. that the use and usufruct of those common goods which are susceptible to division accrue to each juridic person, and that the obligations proper to them fall upon each, to be determined in like manner with proper regard for the due proportion based on equity and justice.

Canon 123:

Upon the extinction of a public juridic person, the allocation of its goods, patrimonial rights and obligations, is ruled by law and by statutes; if these give no indication, they go to the juridic person immediately superior, with due regard for the will of the founders or donors and for acquired rights; upon the extinction of a private juridic person the allocation of its goods and obligations is regulated by its own statutes. Canon 298:

1. In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life, in which the Christian faithful, either clergy or laity, or laity and clergy together, strive by common effort to promote a more perfect life or to foster public worship or Christian doctrine or to exercise other apostolic works, namely to engage in efforts of evangelization, to exercise works of piety or charity and to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit.

The Christian faithful should enroll especially in associations which are created or praised or recommended by competent ecclesiastical authority.

Canon 301:

1. Competent ecclesiastical authority alone has the right to erect associations of the Christian faithful which set out to teach Christian doctrine in the name of the Church or to promote public worship or which aim at other ends whose pursuit by their nature is reserved to the same ecclesiastical authority.
2. Competent ecclesiastical authority, if it judges it expedient, can also erect associations of the Christian faithful in order to attain directly or indirectly other spiritual ends whose accomplishment has not been sufficiently provided for by the efforts of private persons.

3. Associations of the Christian faithful which are erected by competent ecclesiastical authority are called public associations.

Canon 303:

Associations whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction (*altius moderamen*) of that same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name.

Canon 304:

1. All associations of the Christian faithful, whether public or private, by whatever title or name they are called, are to have their own statutes which define the end of the association or its social objective, its headquarters, its government, the conditions of membership and by whom its policies are to be determined, according to the needs or utility of time and place.
2. They are to choose a title or name for themselves which is adapted to the usage of their time and place, selected especially in view of their intended purpose.

Canon 305:

1. All associations of the Christian faithful are subject to the vigilance of competent ecclesiastical authority, whose duty it is to take care that integrity of faith and morals is preserved in them and to watch lest abuse creep into ecclesiastical discipline; therefore, that authority has the right and duty to visit them in accord with the norm of the law and statutes; such associations are also subject to the governance of the same authority according to the prescriptions of the following canons.
2. Associations of any kind whatever are subject to the vigilance of the Holy See; diocesan associations and also other associations to the extent that they work in the diocese are subject to the vigilance of the local Ordinary.

Canon 306:

In order for a person to enjoy the rights and privileges, indulgences and other spiritual favors granted to the association, it is necessary and sufficient that the person has been validly received into it and not legitimately dismissed from it, in accord with the prescriptions of the law and the proper statutes of the association.

Canon 307:

1. The reception of members is to be done in accord with the norms of law and statutes of each association.
2. The same person can be enrolled in several associations.
3. Members of religious institutes can enroll in associations in accord with their own law with the consent of their Superior.

Canon 308:

No one who has been legitimately enrolled may be dismissed from an association except for a just cause in accord with the norm of law and the statutes.

Canon 309:

Legitimately constituted associations have the right, in accord with the law and the statutes, to issue particular norms respecting the association itself, to hold meetings, to designate moderators, officials, other officers and administrators of goods.

Canon 311:

Members of institutes of consecrated life who preside over or assist associations in some way united to their institute are to see to it that these associations give assistance to the works of the apostolate in a diocese, especially cooperating, under the direction of the local Ordinary, with associations which are ordered to the exercise of the apostolate in the diocese.

Canon 312:

1. The authority competent to erect public associations is:
 - 1) the Holy See for universal and international associations;
 - 2) the conference of bishops in its own territory for national associations, that is, those which are directed by their founding purpose toward action in the whole nation.
 - 3) the diocesan bishop in his own territory for diocesan associations, but not the diocesan administrator; however, these associations are excepted for whose erection the right has been reserved to others by apostolic privilege.
2. The written consent of the diocesan bishop is required for the valid erection of an association or a branch of an association in a diocese, even if this is done in virtue of apostolic privilege; however, the consent given by a diocesan bishop for the erection of a house of a religious institute also allows for the erection in the same house or church attached to it, of an association proper to the institute.

Canon 313:

A public association as well as a confederation of public associations is constituted a juridic person by the decree by which it is erected by competent ecclesiastical authority in accord with the norm of canon 312; it also thereby received a mission to pursue the ends which it proposes for itself in the name of the Church, to the extent that such a mission is required.

Canon 314:

The Statutes of any public association as well as their revision or change requires the approval of the ecclesiastical authority which is competent to erect the association in accord with the norm of canon 312, 1.

Canon 315:

Public associations on their own initiative can begin undertakings in keeping with their character, and they can direct them in accord with their statutes, but under the further direction of the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, 1.

Canon 316:

1. One who has publicly rejected the Catholic faith or abandoned ecclesiastical communion or been punished with an imposed or declared excommunication cannot be validly received into public associations.
2. Those legitimately enrolled who fall into situations mentioned in canon 312, 1, after a warning to be dismissed from the association, observing the association's statutes and reserving the right of recourse to the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, 1.

Canon 317:

1. Unless otherwise provided in the statutes, the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, c. 1, has the right to confirm as moderator of a public association the person elected by the association or to install the one presented or to name the person by his own right; the same ecclesiastical authority also names the chaplain or ecclesiastical assistant, having heard the major official of the association where this is expedient.
2. The norm stated in canon 312, 1 is also valid for associations erected outside their own churches or houses by members of religious institutes in virtue of apostolic privilege; however, in associations erected by members of religious institutes in their own church or house, the nomination or confirmation of the moderator and chaplain belong to the superior of the institute, in accord with the statutes.
3. In associations which are not clerical, lay persons can exercise the office of moderator; the chaplain or ecclesiastical assistant shall not assume that role unless the statutes provide otherwise.
4. Those who exercise leadership in political parties are not to be moderators in public associations of the Christian faithful which are directly ordered to the exercise of the apostolate.

Canon 318:

1. In special circumstances where grave reasons require it, the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, 1, can designate a trustee who is to direct the association temporarily in the name of the authority.
2. The one who named or confirmed the moderator of a public association can remove the moderator for a just cause, having heard both the moderator and the major officials of the association in accord with the norm of the statutes; however, the one who named the chaplain can remove him in accord with the norms of canons 192-195.

Canon 319:

1. Unless other provision has been made, a legitimately erected public association administers the goods which it possesses in accord with the norm of the statutes under the higher direction (*altius moderamen*) of the ecclesiastical authority mentioned in canon 312, 1, to whom the association must render an account of the administration each year.
2. The association must also render to the same ecclesiastical authority a faithful account of offerings and alms which it collects.

Canon 320:

1. Associations erected by the Holy See can be suppressed only by the Holy See.
2. Associations erected by a conference of bishops can be suppressed by the same conference for grave reasons; associations erected by a diocesan bishop can be suppressed by him, also associations erected through an apostolic indult by members of religious institutes with the consent of the diocesan bishop.
3. A public association is not to be suppressed by competent authority without having heard its moderator and other major officials.

Canon 327:

Lay members of the Christian faithful are to esteem greatly associations established for the spiritual purpose mentioned in canon 298, and especially those which propose to animate the temporal order with the Christian spirit and in this way greatly foster an intimate union between faith and life.

Canon 328:

Those who preside over associations of the laity, even those associations erected in virtue of apostolic privilege, are to see to it that they cooperate with other associations of the Christian faithful, where it is expedient, and willingly assist the various Christian works especially in the same territory.

Canon 329:

Moderators of associations of the laity are to see to it that the members of the association are duly formed for the exercise of the apostolate which is proper to the laity.



Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi, Assisi Italy,
With the statue *The Return of San Francisco*,
Norberto Proietti, 1927-2009

Scott Wilson/Alamy Stock Photo

Appendix B

Installation of a Spiritual Assistant

For a Local Spiritual Assistant:

The Presider:

- Provincial spiritual assistant of the province to which the local fraternity is bonded, or
- The regional spiritual assistant, or;
- Someone delegated by the Provincial SA or Regional SA.

The new spiritual assistant stands in the presence of the community

Presider: *In the name of the Lord, Amen ... We begin with Hymn #*

+ Words of welcome by the presider (The community & SA are seated during this time).

1st reader: – *A reading from the OFS General Constitutions (article 89.3):*

The local spiritual assistant is to be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the Secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between the First Order or Third Order Regular and the Secular Franciscan Order.

2nd reader: – *A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS (article 23.2)*

The local assistant fosters communion within the fraternity and between the fraternity and the First Order or the Third Order Regular. In harmony with the local guardian or superior, the assistant sees to it that between the religious and the secular fraternities a real life-giving union with each other exists. He or she fosters the active presence of the fraternity in the Church and society.

3rd reader – *A reading from the first letter of John (1 John 3:18, 4:7-8, 4:12)*

Children, love must not be a matter of theory or talk; it must be true love which shows itself in action. ... My dear friends, let us love one another, because the source of love is God. Everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God, but the unloving know nothing of God, for God is love. ... God has never been seen by anyone, but if we love one another, he himself dwells in us; his love is brought to perfection in us.

Reader: *The Word of the Lord.*

ALL: Thanks be to God.

Presider: *I invite the local minister to read the letter of appointment of the spiritual assistant.*

Local minister: *reads the letter.*

Presider: *In the name of the First Order/TOR (Choose one), I install you, _____ as the spiritual assistant of _____ fraternity. I thank God for your willingness to serve your Franciscan brothers and sisters. Let us listen to the words of the Gospel*

During the reading of the Gospel, the SA stands before the community, which extends its hands over him/her while the Gospel is read.

4th reader - *A reading from the holy Gospel according to John (John 15:7–10, 11–12, 16–17)*

ALL: Thanks be to God

If you dwell in me, and my words dwell in you, ask whatever you want, and you shall have it. This is how my Father is glorified: you are to bear fruit in plenty and so be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Dwell in my love. If you heed my commands, you will dwell in my love.

... I have spoken thus to you, so that my joy may be in you, and your joy complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. ... You did not choose me, I chose you. I appointed you to go on and bear fruit; fruit that will last. ... This is my commandment to you: love one another.

Reader: The Gospel of the Lord

ALL: Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

A short reflection/welcome from the presider & the minister

All are seated, + Presider offers a reflection

The local fraternity Minister offers a word of welcome to the new spiritual assistant.

Presider: *Let us pray for the new spiritual assistant ... Quiet moment ...*

Praise be yours, O Lord, for the love and concern you show the Franciscan family. Look kindly on _____ as he/she begins his/her service to this fraternity. May the gifts of wisdom and understanding, knowledge and counsel, inner strength and honest holiness be his/hers in serving this fraternity. May he/she experience the wonder of your presence among us. Holy Spirit, guide his/her life and ministry. We ask this in the name of Jesus.

ALL: Amen

The community comes forward to offer the SA a sign of welcome and peace

Closing song, followed by a reception

In the case of the installation of a regional spiritual assistant or national spiritual assistant, the following texts are used at the proper places (in the rite for installing a local SA) – indicated by the numbers of the reader.

For a Regional SA: (Use the following texts)

1st reader: *A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS*

The regional assistant(s) ... give their service to the Regional Executive Council and see to spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If there is more than one, they form a conference and render their service collegially (SSA, art. 21.2).

2nd reader: *A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS*

It is the responsibility of the Conference of regional assistants, or of the regional assistant if there is only one: + To collaborate with the Regional Executive Council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society in the

region, and in a special way in the formation of leaders. + To provide for the pastoral visits of the local councils of the Secular Franciscan Order and to ensure a presence at local elective chapters. + To coordinate, at the regional level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the assistants, and the fraternal union among them. + To foster the interest of the friars in the Secular Franciscan Order and in Franciscan Youth (SSA, art. 21.3).

3rd reader: *A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS*

The regional assistant must keep the major superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the Secular Franciscan Order and of the Franciscan youth in the region. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order in the region and keep constant fraternal contact with the local assistants of his own Order (SSA, art. 22.1, .2).

Continue with the ritual for a local spiritual assistant, beginning with the text for Reader #4

For the National Spiritual Assistant(s)

Text for installing National Spiritual Assistant(s). Please replace readers 1 and 2 (in the installation of a local SA) with the following text:

1st Reader: *A reading from the Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS*

It is the responsibility of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants:

- To collaborate with the National Executive Council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and the society of the country, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders.
- To provide for the pastoral visits of the regional councils and to ensure presence at the regional coordinate, on the national level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of assistants, and fraternal union among them;
- To foster the interest of the friars in the Secular Franciscan Order and in the Franciscan Youth (SSA, art. 19.3).

Continue the ceremony with reader #4 for installing a local SA.

Those guiding the Rite of Installation ceremony may adjust or edit this text in ways that enhance the ritual.



Saint Francis of Assisi blessing Assisi before his death
Cordoba, Spain, Convento de Capuchinos (Iglesia Santo Angel).
20th century Painting by an unknown artist.

Sedmak, iStock

Appendix C

Definition of Terms Used in this Handbook

Term	Definition/Significance
Altius Moderamen	<p>The <i>altius moderamen</i> is the bond or relationship between a province of friars and a Secular Franciscan fraternity. This bond entails canonical responsibilities that the friar province has promised to provide for the spiritual assistance of the fraternity (and ultimately of the fraternities of higher levels as well) (see Introduction and Chapter 1).</p>
Canon Law	<p>The term "canon" comes from the Greek <i>kanon</i>, meaning "rule" or "standard."</p> <p>Canon Law is the body of ecclesiastical laws governing the Catholic Church, both in the Latin (Western) Church and the Eastern Catholic Churches.</p> <p>Canon 303 is the source of the altius Moderamen (higher direction), and states, "Associations whose members share in the spirit of some religious institute while in secular life, lead an apostolic life, and strive for Christian perfection under the higher direction of the same institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name." Canon 303 also classifies the Secular Franciscan Order as a Public Association of the Faithful (see Chapter 1 and Appendix A).</p>
Catholic Social Teaching	<p>Catholic Social Teaching (CST) is the body of doctrine developed by the Catholic Church on matters of social justice, human dignity, and the common good in light of the Gospel and Church tradition. It offers a moral framework for how individuals and societies should relate to one another, especially in economic, political, and cultural life (see Chapter 4 and Chapter 9).</p>
Cells	<p>The <i>General Constitutions of the OFS</i>, article 34, and <i>Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America</i>, article 18.5 a and b, allow for the grouping of fraternity members to form a cell group. Members of a cell group participate fully in all activities of the fraternity, but may gather on their own to pursue special interests or apostolates. Cells can also meet apart from the fraternity if travel is an impediment. This usually happens when a fraternity is deactivated, and the members transfer to another fraternity but continue to meet on their own. There are special considerations for this type of cell (see Chapter 8).</p>

Term	Definition/Significance
Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CGSA), Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA), Conference of Regional Spiritual Assistants (CRSA).	Spiritual Assistance at the higher levels of Secular Franciscan Fraternities is rendered collegially by the obediences to which the local fraternities in that higher level are bonded. They make up conferences at the international, national, and regional levels (see Chapter 2).
Emerging Fraternity	<p>An emerging fraternity is the second stage of the formation of a Secular Franciscan fraternity. A newly forming group may request emerging fraternity status from the REC after it has completed at least one year with five professed members and has been deemed ready through a pastoral and fraternity visitation by the REC.</p> <p>An emerging fraternity must have a spiritual assistant and an appointed council, and must function as a fraternity for at least three years before being considered for canonical establishment (see Chapter 7).</p>
Fair Share	<p>In the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), the term "Fair Share" refers to the financial contribution that members are asked to make to support the life and mission of the fraternity at the local, regional, national, and international levels.</p> <p>"Fair Share" is not a membership fee or dues, but a voluntary contribution rooted in the Franciscan spirit of solidarity, stewardship, and shared responsibility (see Chapters 6, 7, and 8).</p>
Fraternal Accompaniment	<p>When a fraternity is unable to elect a new council at the end of a term, or the council as elected can no longer function, the Region, in collaboration with the Province to which the fraternity is bonded, may grant a grace period, known as Fraternal Accompaniment, of up to three years (with a possible extension of one year) (see IS, art. 57.2.b and Chapter 8).</p>
Fraternity of Origin	<p>The fraternity of origin, in the context of a transfer of a member from one fraternity to another, means the fraternity they are transferring from.</p>

Term	Definition/Significance
Gaudium et Spes	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i> , Latin for “Joy and Hope,” is the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, one of the four major constitutions of the Second Vatican Council. It was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965, and stands as a landmark document in Catholic social teaching and ecclesiology. <i>Gaudium et Spes</i> influenced the OFS Rule of 1978 (see Chapter 9).
International Presidency	The International Presidency of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)—also known as the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) - is the executive body responsible for guiding and animating the global Secular Franciscan community (CIOFS is pronounced <i>chee-offs</i>) (see Chapter 2).
Juridical Person	<p>Definition and Nature</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Juridical persons are defined as subjects in canon law that possess rights and obligations corresponding to their nature. ▪ They can be established by law or through a decree from competent authority. <p>Examples</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Common examples include parishes, dioceses, and religious orders, all of which are considered juridical persons. ▪ These entities have perpetual existence unless formally suppressed or inactive for a century
Life-Giving Union	Secular Franciscan Order Rule article 1: “In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.” (see Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, and 6).
Lumen Gentium	<i>Lumen gentium</i> , the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, is one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council. This dogmatic constitution was promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 21 November 1964. " <i>Lumen gentium</i> " is Latin for 'Light of the Nations'. <i>Lumen gentium</i> defines the role of the laity in the Church and the universal call to holiness.

Term	Definition/Significance
Major Superior	What canon law describes as a “major superior,” the friars call “provincial minister” or “minister provincial,” since no friar is to be “superior” to any other, even when entrusted with the decisions of leadership (see Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 7).
National Executive Council (NEC)	The elected leadership of the OFS National Fraternity comprised the minister, vice minister, secretary, treasurer, and optional councilors (see Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8).
National Fraternity	The canonically established National Fraternity of each nation is comprised of all professed members of the OFS in that nation. Professed members of the OFS in the United States belong to four fraternities: Local, Regional, National, and International.
National Fraternity Council	The voting members of the National Fraternity Council include the NEC (including the CNSA President-in-Turn) and the Regional Ministers (see Introduction and Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6).
Newly Forming Group (NFG)	The first stage of the formation of a Secular Franciscan fraternity. A newly forming group can petition to become an emerging fraternity once they have 5 professed members and has received the written intention of the <i>altius moderamen</i> (see Chapter 7).
Obediences	The friars entrusted with the care of the OFS, the First Order, and the TOR belong to four “obediences”: the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), Order of Friars Minor, Conventual (OFM Conv.), Order of Friars Minor, Capuchin (OFM Cap.), and Third Order Regular (TOR). These four obediences are responsible for the <i>Altius Moderamen</i> of the Secular Franciscan Order (see Introduction and Chapters 2, 3, and 4).
President-in-Turn	The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) assigns one of its members as President-in-Turn. This friar is responsible for the communication between the Conference and the National Executive Council of the Secular Franciscan Order in the US. The President-in-Turn serves a two-year term (see Chapter 2).

Term	Definition/Significance
Provincial Bonding	The provincial bonding of a Friar Province to a local Secular Franciscan Fraternity is the formal agreement of a given province to provide spiritual assistance to that fraternity. It is the responsibility of the province to provide spiritual assistance by appointing a suitable and well-prepared Friar, Secular Franciscan, member of a religious order, or priest or deacon as spiritual assistant for the fraternity (see Introduction and Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8).
Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA)	The “Provincial Spiritual Assistant” (PSA) is not a spiritual assistant in the usual sense (serving a particular fraternity) but rather a delegate of the provincial minister for ministry with the OFS (that is, serving the province in the fulfillment <i>at least</i> in its canonical obligations to the OFS). Other language groups do not use this phrase, but recognize that the provincial minister may appoint a delegate for this purpose. If there is no friar appointed to this role for a given friar entity (custody, province, vice-province, or foundation), then the provincial minister is the friar responsible for them (Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 7).
Public Association of the Faithful	The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) is classified as a “Public Association of the Faithful” covered by Canon 303, and is a self-governing order in its own right. Therefore, the <i>altius moderamen</i> for the OFS is focused on the pastoral and spiritual needs of the OFS, and faithfulness to the Franciscan charism (see Chapter 1 and Appendix A).
Regional Executive Council (REC)	The elected leadership of the OFS Regional Fraternity is made up of the minister, vice minister, secretary, treasurer, formation director (can be appointed), and optional councilors (see Chapters 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8 and Appendix E).
Regional Fraternity	The regional fraternity is made up of all professed members of the OFS in that region. Professed members of the OFS in the United States belong to four fraternities: Local, Regional, National, and International.
Regional Fraternity Council	The Regional Fraternity Council in the US is made up of the Regional Executive Council and each of the local Fraternity ministers (see Introduction and Chapters 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8).

Term	Definition/Significance
Servant Leadership	<p>From the beginning of the Franciscan movement, St. Francis instilled in the brothers the idea of servant-leadership, that those entrusted with leadership do so in the manner of Jesus. Spiritual assistants, along with those elected to fraternity councils, follow this example.</p> <p>The Rule and General Constitutions of the OFS specify the duties of the fraternity council, specifically that it is responsible for animating and guiding the fraternity. The SA is a member of the council and serves to accompany the council as they plan and make decisions for the fraternity. They assist the fraternity, rarely by directing, but rather by guiding and supporting the fraternity and its council to live out the Franciscan charism. In cases where the fraternity or its leadership insists on deviating from our charism, both the higher level fraternity and the friar province(s) may intervene in accordance with OFS legislation. This involves fostering a spirit of fraternity, promoting spiritual growth, and ensuring the fraternity's activities align with Franciscan values and teachings. The SA needs to build strong relationships with the fraternity, the Franciscan family, and the Church (see Chapter 2).</p>
Sponsoring Fraternity	<p>In the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), a sponsoring fraternity refers to a local fraternity that accompanies and supports a new or emerging fraternity during its initial stages of development. This relationship is rooted in the Franciscan spirit of fraternity, mentorship, and shared mission (see Chapters 7 and 8).</p>
Vital Reciprocity	<p>In the Franciscan tradition, vital reciprocity refers to the mutual, life-giving relationship between the different branches of the Franciscan family—especially between the First Order and Third Order Regular (TOR) and the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS). It's a foundational concept that emphasizes co-responsibility, spiritual exchange, and collaborative mission (see Introduction).</p>

Term	Definition/Significance
Voting Rights	<p>Voting rights in the Secular Franciscan Order are defined in two different contexts. The voting members of the fraternity council can vote on matters brought up at council meetings. Those members of the council who are elected, that is, minister, vice minister, secretary, treasurer, councilor, and formation director (can be appointed at the regional level), have voting rights.</p> <p>All professed members of the OFS can vote in their own local fraternity elections, that is, have active voice, and can be nominated for council positions, that is, passive voice. SSA, art. 12.3 states, "The spiritual assistant is by right a voting member of the council and of the chapter of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities. Only in economic matters and in elections at any level does he or she not enjoy the right to vote." (see Introduction and Chapters 3, 5, 7, and 8).</p>



An image of the TAU written on the wall of Saint Francis' cell
in Fonte Columbo, where he wrote the Rule of 1223

Appendix D

Resources for Spiritual Assistants

Websites

OFS-USA - <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/>

CIOFS - <https://ciofs.info/>

Documents with asterisks are available online. *OFS-USA website, **CIOFS website

Secular Franciscan Order Documents

Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (1978) 2020 translation*

General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order (2000) 2020 translation*

Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America (2007)*

Statutes of the International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order (2024)**

*Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order** ** (CIOFS Version)

Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order (2024) - Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of the USA (available from the Gospel to Life Bookstore online at <https://gospel-to-life-bookstore.square.site/>)

*National Guidelines** <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/guidelines-forms-other-resources/>

Vox Franciscana – newsletter published twice a year by CIOFS - <https://ciofs.info/news/vox-franciscana/>

Spiritual Assistant Documents

Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order (2002)*, Conference of the Ministers General of the Franciscan First Order and TOR (at ciofs.info, under the “Offices” tab, select “CAS:”).

Manual of Spiritual Assistance to the OFS and Franciscan Youth (2012)**, Conference of General Spiritual Assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order. Can also be accessed on the CNSA page of the OFS-USA website.

*KOINŌNIA*** – Newsletter of Conference of General Spiritual Assistants

Franciscan Family Connections (2011) - Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America

Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS (2026) (Available online on the National Website and through Smoky Valley Press)

Handbook for Servant Leadership to the OFS (2024) - <https://secularfranciscansusa.org/sources-for-secular-franciscan-books-and-supplies/>

Franciscan Journey (2010) - National Fraternity of the OFS in the USA (NAFRA), (available through Smoky Valley Press)

Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA) website
<https://secularfranciscansusa.org/our-friars-and-support-staff/>

*National Guidelines for Spiritual Assistants**

<https://secularfranciscansusa.org/spiritual-assistant-procedures-guidelines/>

Church Documents

Code of Canon Law (1983) - available on Vatican website – <https://vatican.va>

Catechism of the Catholic Church (2003)

<https://uscgb.cld.bz/Catechism-of-the-Catholic-Church/>

A resource for teachers and formators on the major aspects of our faith.

United States Catechism of the Catholic Church for Adults (2019) - United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. Also available online at <https://uscgb.cld.bz/United-States-Catholic-Catechism-for-Adults>

Catechism of the Ukrainian Catholic Church - <https://ukrcatholic.org/our-faith/our-spirituality/catechism-of-the-ukrainian-catholic-church> - An exposition of our faith from the perspective of a Greek Catholic Church.

Website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops – <https://uscgb.org>

The following are available on the Vatican website – <https://vatican.va>

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church – Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1975/1976

https://vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html

An overview of the Church's teaching on social issues and the Gospel-rooted call to live and encourage a life that promotes justice and peace.

Papal Writings (Apostolic Letters, Encyclicals, etc.) Below are a few examples of Encyclicals relevant to Catholic Social Teaching:

- *Populorum progressio* (1967) Pope Paul VI
- *Laborem exercens* (1981) Pope John Paul II
- *Caritas in veritate* (2009) Pope Benedict
- *Laudato si* (2015) Pope Francis
- *Fratelli tutti* (2020) Pope Francis

Vatican II Documents –

- *Lumen gentium*
- *Gaudium et spes*
- *Dei verbum*
- *Sacrosanctum concilium*
- *Apostolicam actuositatem*

Vatican II in Plain English: The Collection (Huebsch), Thomas More Press 1997 – an unofficial translation that explains the Council documents in simpler language.

First Order/TOR Documents

Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor Capuchin (OFM Cap) – 2013

Constitutions of the Order of Friars Minor (OFM) – 2021

Constitutions/Statutes of the Order of Friars Minor, Conventual (OFM Conv)- 2019

Constitutions/Statutes of the Third Order Regular (TOR) – 1992

Prayer/Liturgical Life of the Fraternity

Ritual of the OFS (2024) - Appendix II

Liturgy of the Hours

Other Resources

The Commission on the Franciscan Intellectual Tradition website

(<https://franciscantradition.org>) contains a wealth of Franciscan documents, including:

The 3-Volume *Francis of Assisi - Early Documents*

Volume 1 – *The Saint*

Volume 2 – *The Founder*

Volume 3 – *The Prophet*

Clare of Assisi, The Lady – Early Documents

The above texts are published by New City Press. There is also a separate Index that allows for searching within the texts.

