

Conference of the General Spiritual Assistants OFS-YouFra

MANUAL
for assistance to the OFS
and to the Franciscan Youth

Rome, 2006 / 2012

PREMISE

Conference of the Ministers General of the Franciscan First Order and TOR

From the beginning, the charism of Francis and Clare of Assisi has fascinated men and women who, even in diverse states of life, have followed their example to bring the Gospel of Christ to the world. These have always constituted a single Family that, through the centuries, has known how to maintain among its members solid links of collaboration and has always offered reciprocal support. Moreover, belonging to this Family has been constantly guaranteed by the strong sense of communion, by sharing the same ideals and deepest aspirations, by the acknowledgment of being included in one and the same call to live the gospel life according to a properly Franciscan style. One of the instruments that has strongly contributed to keeping alive this profound unity of the Franciscan identity in its three Orders is certainly that of spiritual and pastoral assistance of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and to the TOR. This mandate, which every Friar has received in regard to their secular Brothers and Sisters, in order to be better guaranteed, is always carried out by some in particular, the spiritual Assistants, those most personally committed so that all, in “life-giving union”, may proceed towards the fullness of life to which the Lord has called us.

It is a matter of a great responsibility because the spiritual Assistant, offering his or her own contribution especially in the area of formation, helps the Brothers and Sisters of the OFS to grow in fidelity to the unique Franciscan charism, in communion with the Church and in union with the entire Franciscan Family.

So we are happy that this new Manual for spiritual Assistants to the OFS, whereby they will be able to enter more deeply into harmony with the history and the spirit of the Secular Franciscan Order that they serve, is now going to the press. Here we have an ample aid that presents the spiritual journey made by the OFS from its beginning till now and illustrates well the roll taken up by the Assistant. If, indeed, the importance and the necessity of an adequate formation has been very much emphasized nowadays in order to live one’s vocation in a complex world like ours, it is likewise urgent that those who are appointed to carry out the delicate service of formators be the first to undertake it seriously, so that they can prepare themselves adequately to carry out ever better what has been asked of them. Therefore, we entrust this new aid to all the spiritual Assistants of the OFS and of Franciscan Youth, with the hope that we can always grow together in the discovery of the marvelous call that we have received from the Father of mercies.

Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo OFM
Minister General

Fr. Joachim Giermek OFMConv.
Minister General

Fr. John Corriveau OFMCap.
Minister General

Fr. Ilija Živković TOR
Minister General

Rome, 18 December 2005

PRESENTATION

Conference of General Assistants of the OFS

The *Manual for Assistance to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth (YouFra)*, prepared by the Conference of General Assistants, issued as a response to the repeated requests of the spiritual Assistants and of some provincial Ministers to have a *Manual* as an aid for the Assistants who are dedicated to this fraternal service. After having examined so many articles published in *Koinonia*, in the *Letter from Rome to the Assistants* and in the official website of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS), and after a labour of systematizing all the material, the present *Manual* is now ready. The aim of this *Manual* is to help the spiritual Assistants in their service of spiritual accompaniment to the Fraternities of the OFS-YouFra, by providing them with a compact and precise instrument for treating the basic themes of the OFS-YouFra, specifying also the role and responsibility of the spiritual Assistants. We are certain that the *Manual* will be very helpful also for the Friars who are not Assistants, but who want to know about the OFS and YouFra. Besides, it will surely be a useful aid for the secular Leaders of the OFS-YouFra Fraternities. The main themes treated in the *Manual* are the following: the history of the OFS (ch. I); the identity and mission of the Secular Franciscans (ch. II and ch. III); spiritual and pastoral assistance (ch. IV); Franciscan Youth (YouFra); Franciscan Children and Heralds (Ch. V) and the collaboration of the OFS with other groups (ch. VI). Chapter VII contains the Rule and the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS in force today, while the Appendix contains the previous Rules that the OFS has had in its eight centuries of history. We are aware that the *Manual* constitutes a point of arrival. It is in fact the fruit of a work that took about four years, being initiated immediately after the definitive approval of the General Constitutions of the OFS (8 December 2000) and after the updating of the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS. But it is also a point of departure for so many other themes that must still be deepened. From now on, we pledge ourselves to take into careful consideration all the observations and suggestions that will come to us: they will be very useful for further research and new publications. To all the brothers and sisters who have collaborated with the Conference of General Assistants in the realization of this *Manual* we express our very sincere thanks. Our appreciation goes also to Emanuela de Nunzio, ex-Minister General of the OFS, to Fr. Valentin Redondo OFMConv and to Fr. Ben Brevoort OFMCap, both ex-General Assistants of the OFS, for their great contribution.

For the translation of the *Manual* into English we sincerely thank Fr. Edward Hagman OFMCap, Fr. Carl Schafer, OFM and other persons who have collaborated in proof reading and correcting the texts, especially Sarah Mulholland, OFS.

Our wish to all is that this *Manual* may be an effective instrument in the service of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order and to the Franciscan Youth.

Fr. Samy Irudaya, OFMCap
General Assistant of the OFS

Fr. Ivan Matić, OFM
General Assistant of the OFS

Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFMConv
General Assistant of the OFS

Fr. Michael Higgins, TOR
General Assistant of the OFS

Rome, 6 January 2006

CHAPTER I

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (OFS)

1. Introduction

The OFS is a *penitential* Order that comes under the name of a Movement born in the Church as the result of the ecclesiastical penitential discipline. From the beginning of the Church a penitential doctrine and a practice – doctrinal and ritual – was outlined, which can be summarized in these terms: the baptized who commits sin can obtain pardon provided “he does penance” and “is converted”. The sinner who wanted to be converted, to change his life, to give up sinning, entered into the Order of Penance or of Penitents and remained there until he carried out the expiation determined by the church community together with the bishop. Alongside the “compulsory” penitents there arose, in time, the “voluntary” penitents, who desired a life of greater perfection.

The OFS is a *secular* Order, and this value of secularity always appears with the passing of time in such a way that in the Middle Ages it was recognized as one of the three Orders existing in the Church: *The Order of Clerics, the Order of Monks, and the Order of Penitents*. This Order of Penitents does not refer to all the faithful of the Church but only to those Christians who have decided to belong to one of the existing different forms of voluntary penitents.

The OFS is a *Franciscan* Order. Our aim is to try to know how a part of these secular penitents seek the help of Francis and his friars and follow the norm of life given them by Francis of Assisi. So, this penitential secular Order is animated by and immersed in the charism of Francis and forms part of the great Franciscan Family.

Francis is the man of penance. He was a penitent in the gospel sense; the first friars were called “penitent friars of Assisi”¹; and the Franciscan Third Order was known as the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

2. Pre-Franciscan Period

2.1. Obligations of the Penitents

Today it is difficult to reconstruct the situation of the Order of Penance in the period before Francis of Assisi and his companions. We can say that there were bishops who spoke of the Penitential Movement and other personages who had a great influence on the spirituality of the Penitents. These persons will help, at least in part, to bring about the Gregorian Reform. Through preaching and the practice of poverty after the manner of the Apostles, they will give to the Christian people a form of gospel life.

We can summarize the obligations of the penitents in these few lines.

- the habit: simple, of wool only, not expensive and dark in colour, characteristic of penance or of a hermit, often with the sign of the TAU on the mantle or hood; a staff, a haversack and sandals;
- the profession: made with the clothing of the habit; a written document was requested²;

¹ They asked: “Where are you from?” Or: “What order do you belong to?”. They answered simply: “We are penitents and we come from the city of Assisi” (AP, 19).

² In Spain, in the case of the profession of women, the profession was requested “in scriptis”, as stated in the X Council of Toledo (*Mansi*, XI, 36).

- the tonsure: the public sign of the penitent; they could not cut their hair and they wore beards³; a special penitential blessing was recited over the women⁴;
- prohibited: public spectacles, banquets⁵, commercial work (for fear of fraud and speculation)⁶; exercise of administrative or juridical public functions; military service⁷;
- fasts and abstinence, twice or three times a week, in the *feriae legitimae*⁸,
- participate in the Eucharist, especially on the solemnities of Christmas, Easter and Pentecost⁹;
- dedication to the works of charity in hospitals, hospices for pilgrims and also leprosariums;
- repair of churches and voluntary help in building cathedrals.

2.2. From the Gregorian Reform to Francis of Assisi

The reform of the Church was not completed with the pontificate of Gregory VII. After his death other popes continue it, both in the struggle over investiture and over the reform of the clergy. A secular clergy was poorly prepared¹⁰, either in formation or in pastoral service, in preaching and in instructing the people. Much of what was done was the work of the monks.

The unpreparedness of the laity allowed entry into the Order of Penance, in the second half of the Twelfth Century, of the heterodoxy of a number of itinerant preachers, among them the Waldensians¹¹, and the influence of the heretical Cathar teaching.

The uncertain situation, created by the grafting of the new wandering preachers onto the traditional forms, does not hinder the appearance of groups or fraternities who adopt a penitential *Propositum vitae*, with obedience to the authority of the fraternity and a commitment called *professio*. These fraternities are documented in Belgium, Italy, Holland, Germany and also in Spain. Some of these penitents will adopt a common life, as happens in the rural communities. Particularly known among them is that of San Desiderio, near Vicenza¹². The Brothers of the Holy Spirit, in 1195, place their property in common and want to imitate Christ and the Apostolic Community radically. The fraternities of the Humiliati in Lombardy divided the day between work and prayer, with a semi-monastic life, and also built monasteries and churches such as the one of Viboldone, outside Milan, in 1195. The *Propositum* of the Humiliati has two parts: a longer one, exhortative and very evangelical, and a second part, shorter and juridical, that indicates the practices to carry

³ In canon 6 of I Council of Barcelona (540), (*Mansi*, IX, 109) and canon 7 of VI Council of Toledo (638) (*Mansi*, X, 665).

⁴ Canon 21 of the Council of Epaon (517) (*Mansi*, VIII, 561).

⁵ I Council of Barcelona (540) (*Mansi*, IX, 109).

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Valdo retires from commerce, but Omobono of Cremona (+ 13-XI-1197) remains in office, and is canonized fourteen months after his death by Innocent III, 12 January 1199.

⁷ Nicholas I allows some penitents to carry arms in the fight against the pagans. Also Gregory VII grants permission to a Spanish penitent to fight against the Arabs. This principle was applied afterwards to all the crusades.

⁸ The Council of Agde (506) advises not to admit young people to penance, because of their tender age (*Mansi*, VIII, 327, c. 15). The Council of Orleans (538) requests the same (*Mansi*, IX, 18).

⁹ Council of Agde (506) (*Mansi*, VIII, 327, c. 18). Vulfredo of Bourges mentions it in *Epistola pastoralis*, PL. 121, 1140-1141. And the Synod of Magonza requests that they receive communion at least twice a year: at Easter and Christmas (*Mansi*, XXII, 1010).

¹⁰ "The priests were too much like the mass of the faithful". Cahiers de Fanjeaux, n. 11, Privat, Toulouse 1976, *La religion populaire en Languedoc du 13 s. à la moitié du 14 s.*

¹¹ Valdo and his followers seek to live the Gospel, claim the right to preach and take it upon themselves, and live a life of material poverty that truly charms the Christian people, so that an English cleric, at the end of the Twelfth Century, described the Poor Men of Lyons as: simple and illiterate men, without fixed abode, without property, that had all in common as the apostles and, naked, followed the naked Christ" GEREST, C., *Comunidades y movimientos en el cristianismo en los siglos XI y XII*, en "Comunidades de Base", por Casiano Floristán, Madrid, p. 179.

¹² The families who live in their houses place in common their work, their goods, furniture and implements for production and harvesting. cfr. MEERSSEMAN-E. ADDA, *Pénitents ruraux communautaires en Italie au XII s.*, en "Revue d'Histoire ecclésiastique" XLIX, 1954.

out and gives guidelines for a fraternal life¹³. There are also fraternities that arose in particular circumstances, in orthodoxy but with a penitential spirit. Some of these groups join also some Order of knighthood.

Having arrived at this point, we can say that the “Penitential Movement” or the “Order of Penance” continues to exist and the concept of penance is maintained, but more of the ritual kind, of gestures and external signs, than of the biblical kind and of the primitive Church. The result is obvious, because moral and existential personalities are lacking as spiritual guides to help the movement with their life and word.

3. Penitents at the time of Francis of Assisi

3.1. Revival of the Penitential Movement

We have pointed out that, between the end of the Twelfth Century and the beginning of the Thirteenth, rural fraternities exist, outside the city walls, and also hermits, recluses ... The movement is lively, even if the Waldensian and Cathar influence has entered among the penitents. The heart of the people is sound, but spiritual guides are lacking.

Francis and his companions, called at first “the penitents of Assisi”¹⁴, with their life and itinerant preaching, will have a particular influence on the revival of the Order of Penance. Many of the “voluntary penitents” will ask the Saint of Assisi and his companions for a form of life that will contain the whole Franciscan spirituality. They will continue to be called “Brothers and Sisters of Penance”, but at the end of the Thirteenth Century the name, “Third Order of Saint Francis”, will begin to prevail.

Francis begins his conversion as a “penitent”, as “donated” to the church of San Damiano: “he begs him (the priest) to allow him to stay with him to serve the Lord”¹⁵. And Jordan of Giano presents Francis in his Chronicle as a man of penance: “In the year of the Lord 1207, Francis... began a life of penance in a hermit’s habit¹⁶... In the year of the Lord 1209,..., having heard in the gospel what Christ said to his disciples... he changed his manner of dressing, and put on what the friars wear now, becoming an imitator of gospel poverty and a diligent preacher of the Gospel.”¹⁷. Ida Magli affirms that Jordan “presents this penance of Francis not as a common and transitory penance, but as a state, *modum poenitenti*”¹⁸.

Francis became then an “oblate” or “converse”, one of the penitential forms known also in Assisi. The converse juridically was a true religious, he belonged to the forum of the Church, and did not depend on the civil jurisdiction, but on the ecclesiastical: “he told the messenger that he had been made free by God’s grace and, since he was a servant of almighty God alone, was no longer bound by the magistrates. The magistrates ... told his father: ‘Because he is in the service of God, he no longer falls within our power’... He (Pietro, his father) made the same complaint before the bishop of the city”¹⁹.

¹³ In 1178 some weavers and peasants of Lombardy form a group of Penitents, called “Humiliati”. This group included clerics, single women and married people. Innocent III will receive them into the Church and divide the group into three Orders: clergy, single women, and married people who will assume the name of Third Order of the Humiliati. Innocent III approves, in 1201, the “Propositum” of the Third Order of the Humiliati; in 1208 the “Propositum” of the Poor Catholics; in 1210 and 1212 he approves that of the Poor Lombards; and in 1212 another “Propositum” of other Penitents directed by the Poor Catholics is approved.

¹⁴ AP, 19.

¹⁵ I Cel, 9.

¹⁶ Cf. I Cel, 21; GIULIANO DA SPIRA, *Vita di San Francesco*, 15, AF. X, p. 342.; *Legenda choralis Carnotensis*, AF, X, p. 583.

¹⁷ GIORDANO DA GIANO, *Cronaca*, 1-2, FF, 2323-2324.

¹⁸ MAGLI Ida, *Gli uomini della Penitenza*, Garzanti 1977, pp. 42-43.

¹⁹ *The Legend of Three Companions (TC)*, 19.

Francis lived, at least for two years, in the Order of Penance: “While he was completing the church of San Damiano, blessed Francis wore the habit of a hermit: a staff in his hand, shoes on his feet, and a leather belt around his waist... Two years after his conversion, some men began to be moved to do penance by his example and, leaving all things, they joined him in life and habit”²⁰.

It will be difficult to know the journey that Francis made to arrive at this decision to enter the Order of Penance, but who was his guide and spiritual accompaniment: bishop Guido of Assisi? The Benedictine monks of Subasio? Personal knowledge gained in his trips to France? How did he learn and deepen the spirituality of this movement?... Certainly it influenced him greatly and there are traces of it in his spirituality.

When the first companions come together they recognize themselves as “penitents”: They were asked “Where are you from?”. Or: “What Order do you belong to?”. They answered with simplicity: “We are penitents and we come from the city of Assisi”²¹.

Thomas of Celano in his first Life wrote: “Many people, well-born and lowly, cleric and lay, driven by divine inspiration, began to come to Saint Francis, for they desired to serve under his constant training and leadership... To all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way of salvation”²². And The Anonymous of Perugia completes it in some way by adding Francis’s companions themselves as guides: “Similarly, married men said: ‘We have wives who will not permit us to send them away. Teach us, therefore, the way that we can take more securely.’ The brothers founded an order for them, called the Order of Penitents”²³.

Meersseman, the authority on the Penitential Movement, says that around 1215 in many Italian cities there was a florescence of penitents, an increase in numbers, also with married persons who, as the already quoted Anonymous of Perugia specifies well, observe the norms and church laws of the Order of Penance, and “that is precisely what the historians call the Penitential Movement”²⁴. The same Meersseman adds: “The unexpected increase of urban Penitents has to be attributed, as we know, to Saint Francis of Assisi, who himself lived as a brother of Penance before founding his religious order”²⁵. In 1276 Bernard of Bessa wrote: “The Third Order is of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, shared by clerics, laity, virgins, widows, and married couples. Their purpose is to live uprightly in their own homes, to devote their attention to works of piety, and to flee the world’s allurements. Therefore, you might see among them nobles, and even knights, and other people great in the world’s estimation, dressed in proper cloaks of black fur, humble in both their clothing and mounts, so modestly associating with the indigent that you would not doubt they are truly God-fearing. From the beginning a brother was assigned to them as a minister, but now, in each region, they are released to their ministers, but who, as confreres begotten by the same father, are still encouraged by the brothers with counsel and assistance ... Thus the Lord made his servant, Francis, grow into a great nation, thus He gave him the blessing of all nations”²⁶.

²⁰ TC, 25 and 27. But Thomas of Celano recounts that before having the first companions, Francis changed the form of the habit after hearing the gospel of the mission (Cf. *I Cel.*, 22).

²¹ AP, 19; Cf. TC, 37.

²² *I Cel.*, 37. Saint Bonaventure writes: “For set on fire by the fervour of his preaching, a great number of people bound themselves by new laws of penance according to the rule which they received from the man of God. Christ’s servant decided to name his way of life the Order of the Brothers of Penance. As the road of penance is common to all who are striving toward heaven, so this way of life admits clerics and laity, virgins and the married of both sexes” (LM. 4,6).

²³ AP, 41; Cf. TC, 60.

²⁴ MEERSSEMAN, *Disciplinati e Penitenti nel Duecento*, Perugia 1962, p. 45; Cf. IDEM, *Dossier de l’Ordre de la pénitence au XIII siècle*, Fribourg 1961.

In this way today the thesis of K. Müller and P. Mandonnet at the end of the last century has been abandoned, who considered that, from a “group of penitents” meeting around Francis of Assisi, some separated, against the will of Francis, and founded the “Friars Minor” and the “Poor Ladies”. Cf. MÜLLER, K., *Die Anfänge des Minoritenordens und der Bussbruderschaften*, Freiburg 1885; MANDONNET, P., *Les origines de l’Ordo de Poenitentia*, Fribourg 1898.

²⁵ *Idem*, *Disciplinati...*, p. 46.

²⁶ BERNARD OF BESSA, *Liber de laudibus*. FA:ED III p.64.

3.2. Francis and the Penitents

It seems that Francis was interested in the penitents not only since 1221 but also much earlier. The reflection is made through his writings, in particular in the one that is called “Letter to the Faithful” in its two versions that, according to the latest studies, would regard not directly all the faithful but specifically those who were following him, that is, the brothers and sisters of Penance. But still more important is the consideration made by Esser on the first version or *recensio prior* of the Letter to the Faithful, considered until now as the first draft but, after meticulous analysis of the document, it has come to be considered as the first *propositum vitae* given by Francis to the penitents²⁷. Even if other documents are lacking, Esser says that, looking directly at the penitential movement, “it is very clear that we are faced with an instruction addressed to persons who have embraced a movement of Penance ... a movement to which Francis and his fraternity were strongly linked and associated with... the receivers are not to be looked for among the Friars Minor. So it must be a matter of the *fratres et sorores de poenitentia in domibus propriis existentes*...those to whom Francis gave a *forma vivendi*, according to the testimony of the first biographers”²⁸.

This document contains the teaching that Francis gave in his itinerant preaching, and, says Esser, is before 1221²⁹. It also shows Francis’s concern for the penitents. “The two versions, in their unicity, show that Francis was deeply interested in the Brothers and Sisters of Penance and followed their development with a greater sympathy than some historians are till today prepared to admit”³⁰. Does this norm of life, pointed out by the first biographers of the Saint, correspond to the first version of the Letter to the Faithful? Esser thinks so, even if we do not have documents to prove it. This fact, says Iriarte, shows us “the authentic witness of the conscience of the Founder that the Saint had”³¹.

3.3. Francis and his friars as guides of the Penitents

Between the end of the Twelfth and the beginning of the Thirteenth Century there is a reawakening of the laity that is shown in the demand for the gospel and with entry into the Order of Penance. The same IV Lateran Council is the first council that is concerned with the laity in a special way³². The first canon says: “If, after having received baptism, someone has fallen into sin, he can always be saved through penance. Not only virgins and the continent but also married persons if they serve God with right faith and good works, merit to reach eternal beatitude.” And secularity, lived as aspiring to a gospel radicalism in the Church and with the Church, is what distinguishes the lay followers of the son of Pietro Bernardone.

At this moment, the situation of the groups of penitents is in crisis, between the gospel and church criteria on the one hand and on the other hand the propositions of the Waldensians and Cathars, who lived evangelical poverty while opposing the bishops and priests, preaching rebellion and neglect of the sacraments. They lacked harmony between gospel life, ecclesiastical hierarchy and sacramental life.

Francis and his friars presented a life and preaching in accordance with the Gospel, with the invitation to respect priests and theologians, because they have the power to give us the Eucharist without which “you will not have life in you.” Without naming or saying anything against the

²⁷ Cf. ESSER, Kajetan., *Un (documento) precursore dell’Epistola “ad fideles” di San Francesco d’Assisi* (Codex 225 of the Guarnacci Library of Volterra), in *Analecta TOR*, 1978, p. 39.

²⁸ ESSER, K., *o.c.*, p. 38.

²⁹ “We can admit without doubt that our document predates that date (1221), perhaps even by some years.” ESSER, K., *Un documento dell’inizio del Duecento sui Penitenti*, in AA.VV. *I Frati penitenti di San Francesco nella società del Due e Trecento*, Roma, Istituto Storico Cappuccini 1977, p. 96.

³⁰ ESSER, K., *Un (documento) precursore...*, p. 45.

³¹ IRIARTE, L., *Historia Franciscana*, Ed. Asis, Valencia 1979, p. 516.

³² Cf. AA.VV., *Nueva Historia de la Iglesia*, Ed. Cristiandad, Madrid 1983, t. II, pp. 270-71.

Waldensians and Cathars, Francis and his friars live the Gospel as they do, but also, and here is the difference, they respect priests and theologians and ask people to approach the sacraments: confession and the Eucharist. For this reason, as Esser writes, “Burcardo, Provost of Ursperg, explains the rapid spread of the minorite Order as a reaction to the contemporary heretics. The Friars Minor were like the catholic corrective to them”³³. But at the same time Francis affirms that the laity have a place in the Church and have the possibility of reaching sanctity through their lay state and by living the gospel as lay persons. Only much later, with Saint Francis de Sales and Vatican II, will we hear a similar word regarding the laity.

Francis is the man of catholicity. He does not call for reform, but with his life he introduces it into the Church and in accord with it. The same will happen with respect to society. He will never impose anything, but his life will change so many things. Francis is the man of gospel dialogue and he makes the experience of the ever desired reform a reality, first of all in himself. Here also, Francis does not follow the ways of the monks or the clergy but he has his own stamp, authentically evangelical.

Francis will not be the founder in the strict sense of the Order of Penance because the Movement existed for centuries, but his personality, charism and animation, with that of his companions, will give life and splendour to this Order. The penitents will ask Francis and his companions to be their guide and to give them a rule of life, so that Francis can be considered, or better is considered, as the founder of this Order, as Nicholas IV names him in the bull *Supra montem* (18 August 1289): “The present manner of living Penance was instituted by blessed Francis”. But still earlier, in 1238, Gregory IX wrote to Agnes of Bohemia telling her that Francis founded three Orders: “that of the Friars Minor, that of the Enclosed Sisters and that of Penitents”³⁴. Another Minor chronicle speaks of Francis as the founder of three Orders: Friars Minor, Poor Ladies and Penitents³⁵.

Francis knew how to see the lights and shades of his century also in the Penitential Movement, which he himself entered, and he continued to help it with the gift of a gospel norm of life rather than a juridical one: the first version of the “Letter to the Faithful”. The Spirit works in this movement and in the Church through Francis. Afterwards a more juridical help will arrive to resolve many problems that arise with the civil authorities of the Communes, and also with the ecclesiastical Hierarchy. In this he will have the collaboration of Cardinal Hugolino, and in 1221 the *Memoriale propositi* or *Regula antiqua Fratrum et Sororum de Poenitentia* will be published. The document of 1228, when Hugolino will already be Pope Gregory IX, will come down to us. In *Memoriale propositi* the penitential-gospel spirit proposed by Francis remains but, somehow, closed in a cage of juridical norms...

3.4. Origin and foundation of the Franciscan Penitents

It is difficult to precise the date, even if the tradition speaks about 1221. First of all, because it is not a true “foundation” but a flanking and an animation of an existing Penitential Movement. The fact that the IV Lateran Council spoke about it means that there was a reawakening, in which the Friars Minor certainly participated. Francis will present to the penitents a whole program of life that, before arriving at the first version of the so-called *Letter to the Faithful*, approaches very much the way of life proper to the friars (there is also a parallel reading between the Rules for the friars, the Letters to the Faithful and the Testament of Francis).

³³ ESSER, K., *Origini e inizi del Movimento e dell'Ordine francescano*, Jaca Book 1975, p. 52.

³⁴ Iriarte says, “a witness (Gregory IX), so much more to appreciate as he portrays the one to whom the principle initiative belongs in starting the Franciscan institutions”. IRIARTE, L., *o.c.*, p. 5515. It seems to me that we must still plumb the depth not only of the quality of friendship between Francis and Cardinal Hugolino but also of the understanding that the latter had of the charismatic spirit of the Saint of Assisi and his quick use of the charismatic movement of Francis in favour of the Holy See.

³⁵ Minor Chronicle of Erfurt, Cf. *FF*, 2657-2659.

The features of the penitential life were:

- form of gospel life
- fraternal life
- life of “disappropriation” (it seems to be a richer and more adequate concept than “poverty”)
- life of prayer and penance
- relation with the Hierarchy
- life of manual work and begging
- penitential preachers and promoters of peace
- perfect joy
- welcome
- relation with the poor of society
- approach to the laity

The laity began to ask the friars for advice and a norm of gospel life while remaining in their homes. Other legends reaffirm this when they say that in the neighbourhood of Cortona a woman, having sought out Francis for advice about the way “to serve the Lord” and after a word from Francis, makes the decision together with her husband, who said: “My lady, let us serve the Lord and save our souls in our own house”³⁶. And the Legend of Perugia tells us that Francis, at Greccio, says, rejoicing, to his friars: “There is no large city where so many have been converted to penance; and still, Greccio is only a small town”³⁷. The Fioretti tell us that the inhabitants of a town (Cannara in some codices, in others those of Savurniano and for Canonici those of Alviano), after Francis’s preaching, want to follow him and leave everything: houses, fields, family ...; then the Saint tells them: “Don’t be in a hurry, and don’t leave. I’ll arrange what you must do for the salvation of your souls’ And then he got the idea of starting the Third Order for the universal salvation of all”³⁸.

The lay followers of the counsel of Francis and his friars spread all over Italy (the friars will spread the penitential laity into the ultramontane zones, in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi) and the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance was born. The translation of the Anonymous of Perugia made by Beguin is more explicit: “The friars then regrouped it into an Order that bears the name of Penance, and they had it approved by the High Pontiff”³⁹. The friars are those first responsible⁴⁰ for the organization and promotion or creation of the so-called Third Order. Beguin’s translation is much more consonant with the work done by the friars with the seculars than is the official tradition: “Thus was born what is called the Order of Penitents, approved by the High Pontiff”⁴¹.

According to tradition, the blessed Lucchesio and Buonadonna of Poggibonsi, in Tuscany, are the first Franciscan tertiaryaries⁴². Can’t we speak, in some way, also of Jacopa dei Settesoli or of Prassede of Rome⁴³ as Franciscan tertiaryaries, or of John Veliti of Greccio and Count Orlando of Chiusi della Verna as Franciscan penitents?

³⁶ 2 Cel, 38.

³⁷ LP, 34.

³⁸ *The Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, 16.

³⁹ BÉGUIN, P.B., *L’Anonimo perugino*, Franciscaines, Paris 1979.

⁴⁰ “Similarly, both married men and women given in marriage, unable to separate because of the law of matrimony, committed themselves to more severe penance in their own homes on the wholesale advice of the brothers”. TC, 60.

⁴¹ AP, 41.

⁴² The first to call these penitents the “Third Order” seems to have been Bernard of Bessa in his *De laudibus beati Francisci*, c. 7.

⁴³ Thomas of Celano says of her: “among the best known religious women in the City and in Roman circles” (3C. 181), while St Bonaventure writes: “In the city of Rome there was a woman named Prassede known for her religiosity” (LM, 8,7).

4. Juridical discipline of the Franciscan Penitents

4.1. From *Recensio Prior* to *Memoriale Propositi*

We have said that today, according to the opinion of some franciscanologists, the so-called first version of the “Letter to the Faithful” is considered to be the first form of life for the penitents guided by the Friars Minor and given by Francis to the penitents who took counsel from him and his friars: “The receivers of this writing, as also the relations of the receivers among themselves, cannot be referred to all Christians in general, but must be understood as individual persons and as communities united in a particular way to Francis who had given them a *forma vivendi* very much like the form of life of the Friars Minor”⁴⁴.

Afterwards, in 1221, they were given the *Memoriale propositi*, although only the copy reworked in 1228 has come down to us. This “Memoriale” is considered to be the first juridical Rule of the Penitents⁴⁵, containing the spirit that Francis left us in his Letters, but also with elements taken from the *Propositum* of the Humiliati of Lombardy, approved by Innocent III in 1201.

The figure of Francis, “the role of the Saint, in the organization of the lay movement, furthered by his work and words, if it did not indeed sprung from them,”⁴⁶ the life and preaching of his friars, and the form of life given to the penitents, will ensure the entry of many into the Order of Penance assisted by the Friars Minor⁴⁷. The *Memoriale* will help these penitents to live the gospel life in fraternity, an incontrovertible and a fundamental point in their life. Each fraternity has its own government, with brothers and sisters chosen by the members of the fraternity. The “council” has the faculty to adapt the articles of the *Memoriale*, with previous notice given to the fraternity.

4.2. Some significant aspects of the Franciscan Penitents

At the base of the spirituality of the penitents, as it appears in the Letter to the Faithful, is “to live according to the spirit”. In a list of fifty-seven brothers of the fraternity of Bologna that has come down to us, the social role and each one’s occupation is given. They consider themselves to be members of an Order with privileges and exemptions, some proper to the Order of Penance, others granted to them by the popes. This is confirmation that it was not a matter of a simple confraternity:

- one had to live “in communion with the Church”: the faith of those who asked to enter was examined and, often, in the *Memoriale* the bishop is referred to,
- the fraternity is considered to be the source of spirituality and sanctity,
- the love of God and neighbour will lead many fraternities, who possessed mobile and immobile property, to show their commitment to concrete works of mercy such as hospitals, dispensaries, depositories of foodstuffs and clothes for the poor, for pilgrims ...⁴⁸. Many

⁴⁴ ESSER, K., *L’Ordine della Penitenza di San Francesco d’Assisi nel secolo XIII*, 1973, p. 71.

⁴⁵ The first document that has come down to us that speaks of the penitents as a grouping is a bull of Honorius III, “*Significatum est*” (16.12.1221) sent to the bishop of Rimini, requesting him to protect the penitents from the civil authorities who want to make them bear arms, under oath, for the defence of the city. He even sends another bull: “*Cum illorum*” (1.12.1224). With these apostolic letters, these groups of penitents are recognized as approved. Gregory IX will renew this approbation with the apostolic letter “*Nimis Patenter*” (26.5.1227), addressed to the bishops of Italy, and the letter “*Detestanda*” (30.3.1228), addressed to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance.

⁴⁶ COSENTINO, Giovanni, *L’Ordine Franciscano Secolare*, Ed. Porziuncula, S. Maria degli Angeli 1994, p. 39.

⁴⁷ “Only the movement headed by Francis and Dominic and the apostolate of their Orders ... could approach Christians animated by gospel ideals but who stayed in their homes, and succeed in addressing their energies and filling their religious needs, finally giving new form, consistency and subsistence to the non-monastic gospel life in an “Order” of simple penitents”. POMPEI, Alfonso, *Il movimento penitenziale nei secoli XII-XIII*, in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Francescani*, Assisi 1972, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁸ Gregory IX, with the bull “*Detestanda*” (21.5.1227), permits them to use “the yield of their goods in works of charity, which are not subject to reprisals for the debts and delicts of their fellow citizens, who are exempt from the public offices”. Celestine V (1294) exempts them from paying the communal contributions, as persons dedicated to divine worship.

cities and civil associations will offer to the Franciscan penitents, given their honesty, the government and administration of social and charitable works,

- the penitent did not bear arms⁴⁹ (he was like a “conscientious objector”) and did not swear the oath of fealty⁵⁰. These facts will contribute to the disappearance of the feudal system and the avoidance of rivalry and war, so frequent at that time⁵¹ ... The governments of the new Communes will oppose this privilege and will impose on the Franciscan penitents the obligation of a civil service for their capacity and honesty ...,
- exemption from the civil forum brought it about that the Franciscan penitent could be judged only by the ecclesiastical judge. He was requested to resolve his disputes within the fraternity, otherwise they were carried before the diocesan bishop,
- all penitents were requested to make a will before profession, to avoid conflicts and division in families, and also to avoid the feudal lord’s appropriation of the citizen’s property if he died intestate,
- during interdict, the penitents had the indulgence to be admitted to the sacraments, divine office church burial ...
- the Franciscan tertiaries had to seek reconciliation with everyone, to live in peace and to work for peace; they were asked to act justly and to be reconciled with justice through restitution and the cancellation of debts.

4.3. Rules of the Franciscan Penitents

The *Memoriale* of 1228, with thirty-nine articles, is the revised text that we know of the *Memoriale* of 1221⁵². Both in the “**Memoriale**” of Gregory IX and in the Rule of Nicholas IV, with twenty chapters, and also in that of Leo XIII, each of the aspects of fraternal life is detailed: how to receive those who wish to enter the fraternity, use of the habit, how to make the profession... All of these particulars are indicated in each of the Rules reported in Chapter VII.

The spirituality of this penitential movement, that wants to follow the form of life given by Francis, can be synthesized thus:

penitential life: penance: fasts, abstinence
works of mercy

life of prayer

life in fraternity: live human values, attentive to persons; bring peace and good to the fraternity, to the family and to the brothers...

In the intermediate period between the “*Memoriale*” and the Rule of Nicholas IV there will be very close moments of relation between the Friars Minor and the Order of Penance, as happens during the generalate of John Parenti (1227-1232), but it seems that brother Elias (1232-1239) was opposed to this responsibility, and so it remains until the generalate of John of Parma (1247-1257). During his ministry, Innocent IV, with the bull *Vota Devotorum* (13.6.1247), recommends to the provincial Ministers of Italy and Sicily the visit to the brothers of Penance, although a year later he puts under the jurisdiction of the bishops those of Lombardy and in 1251 those of Florence. Saint

⁴⁹ Honorius III writes to the bishop of Rimini to defend the penitents of Faenza and its neighbourhood against the magistrates who oblige them to take oaths and to take up arms and follow them to war when requested (“*Significatum est*”, 16.12.1221); also Gregory IX does the same with the bull “*Nimis Patenter*” (26.5.1227).

⁵⁰ The oath of fealty carries the obligation to take up arms in defence of the feudal lord or of the commune. There is also the exemption to distance oneself from public appointments considered incompatible with the penitential life.

⁵¹ Some popes will grant these privileges to oppose Frederick II and other political enemies of the Holy See.

⁵² Sabatier discovered, in 1901, the “*Memoriale*” in the Codex of the library of the Franciscan friary of Capestrano; Lemmens found it in the Codex of Koenigsberg, in 1913; and in 1921 the “*Veneto*” Codex was discovered at Florence by P. Bughetti. It seems that they report the “*Memoriale*” reworked by Gregory IX. The “*Veneto*” Codex calls the penitents “*continentes*”, and begins: “*In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Memoriale of the propositum of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance living in their own houses, begun in the year of the Lord 1221.*”

Bonaventure is contrary to a concession of the friars with the Third Order⁵³. Alexander IV with his letter *Cum illorum* (20.1.1258) confirmed the jurisdiction of the bishops of Italy over the penitents. In 1284 there is a return of good relations between the Friars Minor and the Order of Penance. In this year the “Apostolic Visitor” of the brothers and sisters of Penance is Fr. Caro of Florence, who draws up a Rule for the Franciscans.

The Rule of Nicholas IV, approved with the bull *Supra Montem* (18.8.1289), is the one composed by Fr. Caro. It maintains all the aspects of the “Memoriale”, but it introduces the “visitor” and the “instructor”. It asks that all visitors and formators of the Penitents be Friars Minor⁵⁴. The pope imposes this again with the bull *Unigenitus Dei Filius* (8.8.1290), in which he says that Francis is the Founder of this Penitential Order⁵⁵. He orders the Tertiaries to elect their own ministers in distinct Fraternities. As some penitents opposed the Rule published with the bull *Supra Montem*, he confirms the validity of the Rule signed by him and that the privileges of the Holy See would have been granted only to those who observed it. This Rule remains in vigour for almost seven centuries, during which the loss of autonomy of the tertiaries and their dependence on the First Order is accentuated: with the Bull *Romani Pontificis Providentia*, of 15 December 1471, the Franciscan Pope Sixtus IV confers on the First Order *superioritas, praeminentia et auctoritas* over the tertiaries.

Other important documents of the secular Franciscans over the centuries are:

- Julius II, with his letter *Cum multae et graves* (16-VI-1506), requests that the Conventuals and the Observants each have the care of their own tertiaries;
- Paul III reworks, in 1547, the Rule of Nicholas IV and places the tertiaries of Spain, Portugal and the Indies under the jurisdiction of the Minister General of the TOR, but it was only a theoretical innovation, because the relation of the First Order with the Third Order Secular remained unchanged;
- Innocent XI approves the Constitutions and General Statutes with the constitution *Ecclesiae Catholicae* (26-VI-1686).

In the last part of this chapter, when we run through the history of the secular Franciscans in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century, we will deal at length with the more recent Rules (that of **Leo XIII** of 1883 and of **Paul VI** of 1978), as well as with the General Constitutions (those of 1957 and of 1990, updated in 2000).

5. Salient facts of the OFS from the Thirteenth to the Nineteenth Century

5.1. Thirteenth Century

Francis is consistent in his way of operating. As he did with the two Rules of the Friars Minor, which evidence the gospel mentality and texts but few strictly juridical aspects, so he did also with the seculars who sought advice for gospel living. Also for the seculars, the *forma vitae* is the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, even if the structures, the modes and the conditions of life are different ... Francis and his friars present to the lay penitents, who ask for their advice for living the Gospel in the family and in the world, the contents and style of the Letter called *recensio prior*, different in some aspects, especially juridical ones, from the *Memoriale propositi*.

⁵³ Cf. SAN BONAVENTURA, *Determinationes quaestionum circa Regulam fratrum minorum*, p. II, q. 16, en *Op. Om.*, p. 368 ss.

⁵⁴ A great innovation because until this time the bishops had the right to visit the fraternities and often designated secular clerics and even simple laity for this service.

⁵⁵ The Minister General of the Dominicans Fr. Munio de Zamora, at this time organizes the penitents guided spiritually by the Dominicans and calls them the Order of Penance of Saint Dominic. Honorius IV, in 1286, is the first to speak of the Dominican Third Order.

In the *recensio prior* there is no reference to the structure of the OFS fraternity at any level, neither does it speak of the animation of the fraternity. Its contents is more a charismatic-evangelical commitment. The *Memoriale propositi* channels the charism and codifies it for the life of the Penitents of the Franciscan Third Order.

Many other pontifical documents will be added to the *Memoriale propositi* that helped the development of the life of the OFS, particularly when they arise from the difficulties resulting from the abuses and disorders coming from an effervescent Christian people but also contrasting many times with the criteria and the faith of the Catholic Church. In the first Franciscan century, often the secular Franciscans were confused with the Beguines and the Begards and also with the Fraticelli, rebellious against the Church's authority. The popes had to struggle to save the Franciscan Penitents from this confusion, and also to protect them from the attacks of the bishops, the clergy and particularly the civil authorities.

As it happens with the Friars Minor, many men and women of different social levels: nobles and commoners, literate and uneducated, clerics and laity..., accept the proposition of gospel life of Francis and his companions to live the Gospel in their own homes. The First Order also collaborates in this diffusion. For promoting vocations, the style of life of the penitents will be important, much esteemed by the citizens who considered them *trustworthy men*. For this reason, many citizens handed over to them the administration of their own property, and in many cities, especially in Romagna and Umbria, the superintendence of elections, markets and communal interests.

The manner of living of the secular Franciscan was not that of the monk or religious, but that of the Order of Penance, which, precisely being an Order, enjoyed certain privileges:

- the main one seems to have been that of ***exemption from civil authority***. For this reason, the secular Franciscan (tertiary or penitent) was free from the oath to the "lord of the manor", that is, to the "governor of the castle", or to the mayor, and was also exempt from military service;
- another privilege was ***exemption from the civil forum***. The secular Franciscan, as a member of a true Order, not a simple association of pious laity, could be judged not by a civil court but by an ecclesiastical tribunal;
- they enjoyed also ***immunity from interdict***. The secular Franciscans, as the clerics and the religious, could celebrate the Eucharist and the divine office in their own churches, behind closed doors and without ringing bells, at least provided that the interdict was not nominal.

Even admitting that many became secular Franciscans to enjoy so many privileges more than to live the Gospel, it is true that the civil authority felt weakened. In order to go against the penitential movement, they burdened the properties and goods of the penitents with taxes and tributes; they prohibited them from leaving their property to the poor and obliged them with threats to pay the debts of others. Against this situation of persecution, the Roman Pontiffs had to counter with bulls and apostolic letters, also because the Secular Order of St Francis, and that of the Dominicans, were a weighty spiritual force for the renewal of the Church and of society, and also, in some moments, an authentic spiritual army in the struggle of the papacy against civil and political powers. In this sense, it is important what Pier delle Vigne, secretary of Frederick II, wrote to the Emperor, in his struggle with the Holy See, seeing the number and the fidelity of the tertiaries: "To deal the last blow to our power and to take from us the submission of the people, (the Minors and the Preachers) have instituted two new fraternities, which embrace generally men and women. Everyone is running to them; you can hardly find anyone who isn't inscribed in one or the other"⁵⁶.

⁵⁶ ANDREOZZI, Gabriele, *San Bonaventura e l'Ordo Poenitentiae*, in *San Bonaventura Maestro di vita francescana e di sapienza cristiana*, a cura di A. Pompei, Pontificia Facoltà Teologica "San Bonaventura", Roma 1976, vol. I, p. 359.

The secular Franciscans, in this ambience as privileged by the Holy See, are an obstacle to the imperial power through their form of life, loyalty to the Church and civil exemption ..., and they are also a reason for tension between the Holy See and the civil powers and the bishops. During this time Saint Bonaventure (1257-1274) is elected Minister General. He prohibits the friars to occupy themselves with the “penitents”. The reasons for not promoting the Order of Penance that he expounds to the doctors of Paris, who reject the presence of the friars in the university chairs, are these:

- it is necessary that the friars be free, in their pastoral action, to go out to all and not to be tied to only one group;
- it is difficult to defend the secular Franciscans (the penitents) before the ecclesiastical and civil authorities because of the great privileges they have obtained;
- to avoid the scandal of the friars who frequent the houses of tertiaries;
- the accusation of heresy against some penitents;
- it is impossible for the Friars Minor to help the secular Franciscans who, through debts or other crimes, are in the hands of justice;
- it is difficult to bring peace to the Fraternity when there is division in the group, or when the friars are accused of favouring the richer and more powerful members of the fraternity.

It is not easy to justify such a response from Saint Bonaventure, in some way incomprehensible in our times. In the social and ecclesial ambience of his time, the brothers and sisters of Penance are a value: “although not being of the world they had to continue to be in the world, to participate in civil life and in church life and to work for a continual *metanoia*, a continual conversion, an incessant return to God”⁵⁷.

This situation will be resolved before the Rule of Nicholas IV, as is evident from the fact of the presence of Fr. Caro as “Visitor” of the penitents in Tuscany. This reaction of the First Order and the Rule *Supra Montem*, will set things right, particularly in the relation between the two Franciscan Orders, the First and the Third, because from 1275, when the Mendicant Orders have no more need of the support given by the laity, the Pontifical Curia invites the Bishops to take under their control, by way of Visitors, the associations of penitents characterized by economic vitality and able to offer resources to the diocesan administrators.

5. 2. Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries

At the beginning of the Fourteenth Century, at the moment of the strained and difficult relation between the First Order and the Fraticelli, the Penitents were considered by some bishops as “Beguines”, “Begards” or “Fraticelli”, which is to say, “heretics”. Clement V will investigate and will vindicate their orthodoxy, and in 1318 he will confirm the Rule. Also John XXII will still have to defend them against different bishops of France in 1318 and 1321.

During the Black Plague, the number of Penitents decreases, but in 1385 there were 244 fraternities assisted by the Friars Minor⁵⁸.

After the suspicion of heresy and spiritual decadence, consequent upon the Western Schism (1378-1417), the Third Order recovered. In the Fifteenth Century the great preachers of the moment, including St Bernardine of Siena, St John Capistran and Fr. Bernardine of Busto, will propagate the Third Order through their preaching. St John Capistran wrote a book entitled *Defensorium Tertii Ordinis* (1440) in favour of the Franciscan penitents. With the help of Pope Eugene IV (1431-1447), he sought to sustain the secular Franciscans of Italy, to whom he wrote a

⁵⁷ ANDREOZZI, G., “o.c.”, p. 362.

⁵⁸ 141 in Italy and in the Orient, 23 in Spain, 29 in France, 37 in the Germanic countries and eight in the British Isles. G. GOLUBOVICH cites these statistics, in his *Biblioteca*, II, p. 260.

letter that begins with these words, *Noveritis qualiter*. The same Eugene IV had great esteem for the OFS and trusted it for the reform of the Church.

Bernardine of Busto, who wrote the tract “Imitation of Christ in the Third Order”, says of the secular Franciscan Order: “This Order is great in numbers. In fact, all Christianity is full of men and women who sincerely observe its Rule.”

St Antonine of Florence (1389-1459), careful chronicler of his times, recognizes this reality and says: “The doctors do not treat of the Third Order of Saint Dominic as they do of that of St Francis, because the Dominican tertiaries are few around here and there are almost no men. Instead, the Third Order of Saint Francis counts many members of both sexes, also of those who live in hermitages, in hospitals and in congregations”. Precisely because they are many, they do not enjoy the exemptions granted to the Dominican Third Order⁵⁹.

Through the Chronicles of the Franciscan Order we know that the visitators were always appointed by the Friars Minor in conformity with the Rule of Nicholas IV. Evident signs of the activity and florescence of the secular Franciscans are their social and charitable works. During this period as in the preceding, the members and the Fraternities of the OFS practise all the works of mercy: assistance to the sick and to those affected by any illness, also the most repulsive such as leprosy, the plague or typhoid; assistance to the poor, opening also free schools for them all over Europe; frequently, a hospital or a pious work is located beside a fraternity, sustained by the offerings of the secular Franciscans and by the administration of the property that many citizens left them in their wills.

With the bull of Sixtus IV *Romani Pontificis Providentia* (15 December 1471) a very particular epoque of the Secular Franciscan Order comes to a close, “that of the active autonomy of the Order of Penance, and another is opened, in which the new name of Third Order assumes entirely its meaning of an accessory, a dependent, a fringe of the First Order”⁶⁰.

5.3. Sixteenth Century

During this time, the Secular Franciscan Order underwent the consequences of the cultural, social and political evolution of the renaissance and of Protestantism and also the consequences of the separation between Conventuals and Observants sanctioned by Leo X (1517), and then the birth of the Capuchins, in 1525. The Secular Franciscan Order (the Third Order) always remained “one and unique”, but the distinction, if not the division, began, of Fraternities according to the Obedience from whom they received spiritual assistance, which thus created an artful division according to the four Families: Friars Minor (of the Observance), Friars Minor Conventual, Friars Minor Capuchin and Regular Tertiaries, whose Rule was approved by Leo X in 1521.

In the countries devastated by Protestantism and in many Italian cities, the Franciscan tertiaries maintain among themselves and around them loyalty to the Church, even to martyrdom. In Calvinist France fraternities of Penitents come to light, such as at Montpellier and Paris, with a spirit of discipline, rectitude and charity. The “Companies of the Most Holy Sacrament”, particularly attacked by the Huguenots, are formed and intensify.

With the Renaissance and the Protestant Reformation, the Third Order diminishes in number and in its quality of life in Italy and in the countries of northern Europe, while it expands and grows in number in Spain and in Portugal and in the colonies of both these nations. And at the end of

⁵⁹ Cf. SANT' ANTONIO DA FIRENZE, *Summa theologica*, Ed. Verona 1740, t. III, tit. 28, c. 5,5.

⁶⁰ ANDREOZZI, G., “o.c.”, p. 181.

1500, with the help of the First Order and of the popes and bishops and also the civil authorities, the Secular Franciscan Order multiplies in Fraternities and works of charity.

After the Council of Trent, the secular Franciscans give up social and apostolic activities and set out on a life of charity and piety. In some way, they become more religious, they live more within the walls of the churches and lose the sense of secularity and of living the charism of Francis in the world. Franciscan spirituality enters into the lay Fraternities that flourish again: worship of the Eucharist and the devotion of “Forty Hours” are a sign of a more intense interior life. There is a secular Franciscan renewal in Spain, in Portugal and in the colonies of both these powers, in Naples, in Lombardy, in Flanders ..., but always of a character that is more devotional than penitential, more as a social honorific title than as an evangelical force for change in the social and church life of its time.

The Sixteenth Century is also a century of saints who, in one way or another, drank from the spiritual waters of Francis of Assisi and from his gospel charism, such as the great organizer Ignatius Loyola, the joyful and tolerant Philip Neri, the educator of young girls Angela Merici, the counter-reformer Charles Borromeo...

5. 4. Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

As already indicated for the Sixteenth Century, also in the Seventeenth Century the Third Order presents devotional rather than penitential characteristics, and is also “fashionable” in the socially elevated circles. The habit of the Tertiaries, which had been a sign of penance, is modified, and the number of great names who enter the Order increases: kings and queens, nobles, ecclesiastics and politicians..., but the quality of Christian and evangelical life diminishes, as also does its spiritual depth. Fraternities become very numerous: 11,000 in Lisbon, in 1644, or 25,000 in Madrid, in 1689⁶¹. At the same time, in Belgium the Franciscan Third Order enrolls the aristocracy, overlooking the people, to the point that the poor are accepted only on demand, for fear that they may form the majority⁶². In Rome as in Naples, the nobility are Franciscan tertiaries.

The popes of the Seventeenth Century promote the Franciscan Third Order for the Catholic restoration and to confront errors. At the same time, the Third Order is a great instrument for the education of the ruling classes. The rich and powerful are utilized to serve the poor, to conduct hospitals, to keep granaries, canteens and pharmacies..., and also to put doctors, advocates and notaries at the disposition of the poor....

When it lives the active and social dimension, the Franciscan Third Order has fruitful moments and members and Fraternities increase; when the vitality is only religious and ecclesial, the numbers fall away.

It is true that in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century the penitential sense of the Order is lost, but it is also true that from the Secular Franciscan Order many men and women emerged as founders and foundresses of new religious institutes, who stand to signify the force of the OFS Rule as a form of gospel life, capable of leavening and sanctifying society and the culture at all times.

During the Eighteenth Century there were also juridical controversies over the dependence of the secular Franciscans on the various Franciscan families. The popes resolved them, especially Benedict XIII (1724-1730), acknowledging the faculty of the Friars Minor, the Conventuals, the

⁶¹ Cf. IRIARTE, L., *o.c.*, p. 529.

⁶² Cf. GRILLINI, Giorgio, *Presenza francescana. Appunti storici per un profilo socio-politico del francescanesimo secolare*, Ed. Porziuncola, S. Maria degli Angeli 1995, p. 38.

Capuchins and the Regular Tertiaries, to found and direct the fraternities of the Third Order, but always as a single Order.

Difficult moments arose for the Third Order in the second half of the Eighteenth Century and part of the Nineteenth. The Caesarism (autocracy), absolutism and regalism of Maria Teresa of Austria prohibits the Third Order from receiving new members (1776). Her son Joseph II, with an edict of 23 September 1782, suppresses the Third Order in any form, together with the religious Orders that are not under his control. In the same year 1782, the OFS is interdicted in France. In 1790, the Civil Constitution of the Clergy declares all religious associations suppressed including the secular Franciscans, and nationalizes their property. During the French Revolution some Tertiaries will pay for their loyalty to the Church with imprisonment and also with their lives. Napoleon, during his government, sets about suppressing the Franciscan tertiaries in 1810.

5.5. Nineteenth Century

The suppression of the religious Orders in the Nineteenth Century in Italy and Spain and in many other countries, will impact painfully on the Third Order. At times, the secular Franciscan Fraternities themselves are the object of suppression and persecution; deprived as they are of juridical personality, they live as private societies and receive the guidance of the secular clergy and of exclaustated friars.

This is also the century of the great secular Franciscan priests, such as the sainted Cure of Ars, John Mary Vianney, who initiate a new evangelization of the poor from the confessional, with the sacrament of reconciliation, or the evangelization of the society of workers that develops within the great factories; and so there appear the circle of the good press, asylums, oratories, orphanages, refuges for beggars, workers' societies, or societies of mutual help: the works of the priests, Bedetti⁶³, Bosco⁶⁴, Guanella⁶⁵, Cafasso⁶⁶, Cottolengo⁶⁷, Piamarta⁶⁸, Murialdo⁶⁹...

A notable revival is effected through the work of Pius IX and then of Leo XIII. During the pontificate of **Pius IX**, the secular Franciscans enter with full rights into the social question with writings of great mark for renewal, such as the wise "*Christianity and the Question of Labour*" of the secular Franciscan bishop Wilhelm Emanuel von Ketteler (1811-1877), archbishop of Magonza, or his discourse in Magonza cathedral: "*The Contemporary Social Question*". At this time, the industrialist and secular Franciscan Romanet founds the Bank of Compensation for working family men, and Leo Harmel (1829-1915), industrialist and innovator in the social field, founds the first "Savings Bank and Workers' Aid", and in the factories of Val de Blois sets up two other banks ("Cassa Assegni Familiari", and "Cassa Mutua Assistenziale"), and a "Centre of Social Studies", and actuates the "Factory Council". Harmel synthesizes his social program in four points:

- to safeguard the health of our brother workers;
- it is of strict justice to offer the workers a just salary;
- one must prevent the death of the spirit of the workers;
- one must assure them of material bread and daily food for their spirit.

⁶³ The Servant of God Joseph Bedetti (1799-1889).

⁶⁴ Saint John Bosco (1815-1888), father and master of youth, writer, founder of the Salesian Society and of the Daughters of Mary Auxiliatrix.

⁶⁵ Blessed Louis Guanella (1842-1915), social apostle, founder of the Daughters of Saint Mary of Providence and of the Servants of Charity (Guanelliani).

⁶⁶ Saint Joseph Cafasso (1811-1860), master and formator of priests, apostle of the confessional, consoler and father of prisoners.

⁶⁷ Saint Joseph-Benedict Cottolengo (1786-1842), founder of the Little House of Providence (the "*Cottolengo*"), of the Sisters of Cottolengo...

⁶⁸ John Piamarta (1841-1913), the work of preparation of youth for life, the Pious Society of the Holy Family of Nazareth.

⁶⁹ Saint Leonard Murialdo (1829-1900), founder of the Congregation of Saint Joseph for the education of youth ...

Leo XIII was himself a Franciscan tertiary and found in Franciscan spirituality that just evaluation of work, love of poverty together with respect for property, humble and open fraternity, and promotion of peace that establishes harmony among the different social classes. Leo XIII, the Pope of *Rerum Novarum*, wanted to find in the TOF a support and a solid foundation for social reform. He affirmed: “I want to find in the Order of Saint Francis vigilant support to help me defend the rights of the Church and to bring about social reform. And when I speak of social reform, I think especially of the Third Order of Saint Francis”⁷⁰. And again, Leo : “The Third Order of Saint Francis, reorganized for social action, can bear marvellous fruits”⁷¹. The Pope was convinced that, through the diffusion of the Franciscan spirit, the world would be saved from the poisons spread against Christianity by the Masonic sect and by Marxist ideology.

In order to correspond to the mission that the Pope intended to confide to it, the TOF had to become young, active and disciplined. It had to be adapted to present times, while conserving all its religiosity of the past. So Leo XIII reformed its Rule, and approved it with the bull *Misericors Dei Filius* of 30 May 1883, in which we read: “*The Third Order is adapted to the many; and both the records of times gone by, and the nature of the thing itself, show how great is its influence in promoting justice, honesty and religion*”.

From a quick comparison with the Rule of Nicholas IV, we note that the latter has been greatly simplified:

- in the first chapter, we note the intention to rejuvenate the TOF, by fixing the date of admission at 14 years. The full habit is no longer prescribed, but the scapular and cord under the clothes;
- in the second chapter it does not speak evidently of the external clothing and confirms only the simplicity of dress, both for the brothers and for the sisters. The prohibition of dangerous spectacles remains. The ascetical prescriptions regarding abstinence and fasting are drastically reduced, and also the prayers to be recited daily. Instead, the frequency of confession and communion is intensified. It no longer speaks of the prohibition to bear arms, so as not to make life impossible with the militaristic governments at that time;
- in the third chapter it is established that the visit to the Fraternities be made “officially” and that the visitators be from the First Order or the Third Order Regular.

The list of indulgences was attached to the new Rule. So many! And they were especially those that would make inscription in the Third Order “appertizing” for many devout people.

Sustained and animated by Leo XIII, the series of congresses is launched, in which “fraternal concord”, “concord of spirits”, and “unity” are insisted upon, and they also return to the social theme as the specific field of the Third Order. Pope Leo XIII receives in audience the delegates of the Congress of 1900, presided by the Franciscan Cardinal Vives y Tuto, to which sixteen thousand Tertiaries came from all over the world, and he says to them: “... the Tertiaries must apply themselves without delay to the works of *social resurrection* and make the Franciscan institution produce the marvellous fruits that it contains in its essence and that have been evidenced in history”⁷².

In 1893, Leo Harmel holds the Franciscan Congress of France, Belgium and Holland in Val de Bois. Another Franciscan Tertiary, Cardinal Manning, in his conferences, announces his

⁷⁰ To the Minister General and Definitory OFM, AAVV., *Dizionario francescano*, Ed. Messaggero Padova, 1995, col. 1299.

⁷¹ PERUFFO, A., *Il Terz'Ordine francescano nel pensiero dei Papi*, Roma 1944, p. 188.

⁷² Taken from *Dizionario francescano*, col. 1301, that refers to S. DESCLUX, *Le Tiers-Ordre de saint François*, libr. Canisius, Fribourg (Suisse) 1913, p. 49.

principles: “This accumulation of wealth like mountains is a scandal! No State can subsist for long on such foundations! The Gospel is not preached to empty stomachs!”⁷³.

With this participation in social reform and in the social field, the Order increases in numbers and in the male component.

What have been the effects of the Leonine reform? Striking at the level of numerical expansion of the TOF (they spoke of millions of tertiaries in the world!), very modest at the level of the desired contact in the social ambit. Mariano Bigi⁷⁴ identifies some causes of this failure:

- the lack of definition of the juridical nature of the TOF and of the nature of its members, which left room for a mentality, rooted in the times, according to which the Third Orders were only a lesser expression of the religious life;
- the contrast between two tendencies, within the Franciscan world itself, between those who wanted to conserve the Third Order’s character tending uniquely to Christian perfection and those who wanted to direct the activity of the tertiaries onto the social level;
- problems of jurisdiction and relations with the diocesan clergy, that were posed for the First Order as a result of the spread of the Fraternities in the non-Franciscan parishes;
- the prophetic, and perhaps premature, character of the grand project of Leo XIII, which did not find the support of an adequate preparation and a suitable formation.

In spite of the apparent failure, a seed had been sown and in the more enlightened spirits the conviction circulated that the Third Order was not “a simple congregation of persons who alone could gain a certain number of indulgences” But it took almost a century to arrive at the reform of Paul VI.

It is noteworthy that in the Nineteenth Century many Franciscan religious Congregations arise that also follow the Rule of Leo XIII, then adapted by Pius XI in 1927. John Paul II gave them a new Rule, *Franciscanum vitae propositum*, of 8 December 1982.

6. Twentieth Century

6.1. A backward step

Pius X calls into question the social action of the Franciscan Third Order and entrusts it, as well as the organization of its Congresses, to the First Order. Consequently, the number of male tertiaries falls immediately. The Order loses a large part of its identity and the Fraternities return to devotionism rather than being schools of gospel life, as the Code of Canon Law of 1917 requested.

The First Order and the TOR turn their attention to other forms of apostolate, sidelining, in a way, the Third Order, in particular the Fraternities not connected with the friaries; often and in many places they substitute the Third Order with Catholic Action⁷⁵, lacking a proper vision of the OFS and of its life and apostolate as projections for the future.

⁷³ Taken from the book of GRILLINI, G., *o.c.*, p. 44.

⁷⁴ Cf. M. BIGI, “*L’universale salute*”, pg. 142.

⁷⁵ The Tertiaries themselves founded Catholic Action: in 1867, the tertiary Mario Fani and John Acquaderni found the *Italian Catholic Youth*; the tertiaries Toniolo, Pericoli and Meda, in 1909, constitute the *University Federation of Italian Catholics* (FUCI); Armida Barelli, Franciscan tertiary, in 1918, constitutes the *Young Women of Catholic Action*; in 1922, Augustus Ciriaci, another tertiary, organizes the *Mens’ Union of Catholic Action*...

This does not deter us from remembering Benedict XV, who with the encyclical *Sacra Propediem* (6.10.1921), exhorts the bishops to ensure that the Fraternities of the Third Order prosper and that new ones be created where they do not yet exist. Pius XI, with the encyclical *Rite expiatis*, that calls to mind the seventh centenary of the death of Saint Francis, requests the bishops to favour and foster the TOF, and he says to the tertiaries, on 30 September 1938, “This should be your life: a life of action”⁷⁶.

In this epoch the “Fraternities of Priests” appear, such as the *Pia fratellanza*, founded by Cardinal Vives y Tuto in Roma, in 1900. Members and ministers of this fraternity will be James della Chiesa (Benedict XV) and Eugene Pacelli (Pius XII). There were many of these priests’ Fraternities in Italy, Spain, Belgium, and France (twenty-seven in 1950).

6.2. A new Spring

After the Second World War there is a stronger presence also in the Third Order of those craving for the renewal that they noticed already in the Church and, in particular, in lay fellowships.

The first official signs for the opportunity of a renewal in the legislation of the Franciscan Third Order appear immediately after the war: on 5 September 1946, the four General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR approve the *Statutes of the International Council of the Third Order of Saint Francis*. This Council, defined as *the head of the Third Order*, was composed of the four General Commissaries (= Assistants), delegated by their respective General Ministers. One of the first initiatives of the Council was to send, at the beginning of 1947, a letter to the General Ministers that points out how the Rule of Leo XIII was too much of a skeleton and needed clear and univocal interpretations, to put an end to the subjective ones of different commentators. And so, it showed the need for a legislative revision that would affect both the Rule and the Constitutions of the TOF.

In 1948, after an informal consultation with the Congregation for Religious, the study of possible revisions was begun by the four Commissaries, who adopted the position not to touch the Rule of 1883, but to concentrate on the elaboration of a text of Constitutions. These would have to take account, especially on the juridical level, of the need to harmonize the legislation of the TOF with the Code of Canon Law of 1917 and to regulate the existence and the functioning of the provincial and national Discretories that had arisen in different cultural areas, although not foreseen by the Leonine Rule. If in this first phase the secular leaders of the TOF remained excluded from the work undertaken, very soon events took another turn. In fact, at the end of the Holy Year 1950, the **International Congress of the Leaders of the Franciscan Third Order** was held in Rome, which already in its preparatory phase saw a very large involvement of the laity. About 1,500 persons were present at the Congress, among whom were also many religious, from fifteen nations and seven linguistic areas and, for the first time, it was organized in an “interobediential” form. The selected theme was the apostolate, being the most opportune when considering the necessities of the time. The reports were then enlarged to a complete vision of what the secular Fraternity was and did in the new times. A reflection was made on how to find actual ways of living the Franciscan charism as seculars without changing the nature of the institution, how to maintain relations with the other lay associations, how to coordinate the forces and the works of the Third Order at the level of the bearings that would characterize the life of the secular Order in the second half of the Twentieth Century.

Among the concluding votes of the Congress, an outstanding one requested that “besides the local Councils, also those districtual, provincial, national and international are to be constituted as

⁷⁶ Taken from the book of GRILLINI, G., *o.c.*, p. 58.

soon as possible”⁷⁷. Also an interesting request emerged from the replies to the preparatory questionnaire of the Congress, that Constitutions be elaborated and published, to comment on and apply the Rule of Leo XIII. Many motives underlay the request: the brevity of the Leonine Rule, the necessity to be aligned with the legislation of the Code of Canon Law, the relations created with Catholic Action, the evolution of the organization of the Third Order itself, the unity of direction of the whole Franciscan First Order with respect to the Third Order.

A clear and authoritative invitation to renewal came then from the Discourse of Pope Pius XII to the Franciscan Tertiaries of Italy, 1 July 1956. The pope, himself a Franciscan tertiary from the first years of his priesthood, while holding fast to the preceding interventions of the Magisterium, expressed a precise and paternally firm identification of the causes that could have led to a phase of “organic stagnation” and of “spiritual cooling” and designated lucidly, with precise theological reasoning, the program of renewal and the leap in quality that the secular Fraternity had to make to become “a school of Christian perfection, of genuine Franciscan spirit, of daring and prompt action for building up the Body of Christ”. Both the discourse of Pius XII and the material gathered and elaborated on the occasion of the International Congress were used for the drafting of the Constitutions, that were approved and promulgated on 25 August 1957.

The Constitutions of 1957 are one of the most ample and complete texts of the legislation of the OFS; they gather, order and clarify all that had been elaborated on the Third Order previously: from the definition of its nature and purpose to its government, distinguished into external (proper to the First Order) and internal (proper to the tertiaries); from the program of life, spiritually profound, ample and precise, to disciplinary norms.

We can say that this document marks the “situational pivot” of the OFS on the eve of the II Vatican Council. It would place the problems and structures in a different and deeper theological context also of church life, which, in its turn, would make the drafting of a new Rule necessary. Fr. Jaime Zudaire⁷⁸ indicates the conciliar orientations that would have greater incidence also for the TOF:

- the call to be renewed, returning to the sources and with the heart open to the new requests of society and of the Church;
- the theology of the Church, the People of God and ‘Communion’;
- Chapter Five of *Lumen Gentium*: the universal vocation to holiness. This overcame a certain monastic conditioning in the presentation of the evangelical counsels; so it helped to overcome the difficulties embedded in the expression ‘religious in the world’ and to present the vocation of the lay Franciscans to perfection;
- Chapter Four of *Lumen Gentium* and the decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*: the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church, their capacity to create and guide associations with a religious and apostolic purpose;
- the decree *Presbiterorum Ordinis*, in particular numbers 6 and 9: relations with the People of God, and with the laity;
- *Gaudium et Spes*: dialogue between the Church and the modern world, the presence of Christians in the world.

⁷⁷ *Acta congressus internationalis moderatorum laicorum Tertii Ordinis Saecularis S. Francisci Assisiensis*, Romae, 17-20 decembris Anni Sacri 1950 habiti, 105.

⁷⁸ Jaime Zudaire, “L’Assistenza Pastorale e Spirituale all’OFS” - Napoli 1992, pg. 67.

7. Renewal of the Rule

7.1. Preparatory work

We will treat fully of the importance and contents of the renewed Rule in successive Chapters of this Manual. Here we shall present only a synthesis of the procedure followed for its drafting and approval.

The work began immediately after the conclusion of the Council as part of that wider renewal that involved all religious institutes, including the four religious Franciscan families, who also renewed their Constitutions. With various shadings, the Constitutions of the three branches of the First Order intend to affirm the vocation and proper location of the Third Order in the Franciscan Family, and to reconcile its adequate autonomy (but they do not use this expression) with the right and duty of care that belongs to the Franciscan Superiors with regard to the secular Fraternity. The Constitutions of the TOR, when affirming the necessity of the secular component for the fullness of the Franciscan charism, add the special relation that exists between the TOR and the TOF⁷⁹.

The work extended over twelve years. Professor Mariano Bigi, who was also International Vice President of the OFS, in a very valuable article on the history and origins of the OFS Rule⁸⁰, distinguishes three phases in the *iter* (journey) that led to the drafting and approbation of the definitive text of the Pauline Rule.

7.2. First phase (1966-1969)

It opens officially with a letter of 9 March 1966, signed by the four General Commissaries of the Third Order, and that opened the way for an ample consultation and provided the first guidelines for renewal and prospects for the future. The work to be done would regard both the Rule and the Constitutions and the Ceremonial (Ritual). The renewal would commence with the Rule of Leo XIII; the new Rule would have a “more positive, evangelical and Franciscan” character. The renewal, after all, would have to take into account the basic principles of the Ecumenical Council of Vatican II “especially regarding the mission of the laity in the Church”. In one of his articles,⁸¹ Fr. Leon Bédrune writes: “an impressive documentation arrived in Rome”, an evident sign of the great desire for renewal felt in the entire Franciscan world. A first examination of the replies was carried out by a working group composed of the four General Commissaries and by experts of the highest level of the different Families of the First Order. Then an appropriate Commission was constituted. Soon after, lay persons were also called to belong to it. A first outline in Latin resulted from the work of this Commission, and on 20 July 1968 it was sent to the National Councils for consultation. In their outline, the Commission had remained very close to the text of the Rule of 1883. Mariano Bigi comments: “the new wine of the Council’s teaching was contained in a wine-skin still strongly impregnated with a ‘religious’ type of spirituality and with devotionism.”

From the critical observations and counter-proposals coming to Rome, the strong desire emerged for greater participation of the “base”, with the request that the new Rule be the fruit of a further ample consultation and participation of the different cultural areas and not only of the initially constituted “Roman” commission. So much fervour for research and desire for renewal are confirmed by the fact that, during this period, in the different cultural areas, inspirational documents appeared that, although diverse in style and contents, presented notable similarities.

⁷⁹ Jaime Zudaire, *Ibidem*, pag. 70 e segg.

⁸⁰ Mariano Bigi, “La Regola dell’Ordine Francescano Secolare – Origini e storia del testo”, in VITA FRANCESEANA, n. 3/2001.

⁸¹ Fr. Leon Bédrune “Le tappe della redazione”, in Osservatore Romano del 5 febbraio 1979.

7.3. Second phase (1969-1973)

The second phase culminated in the International Congress organized by the four General Commissaries. The Congress was held from 27 September till 3 October 1969 in Assisi. Besides the four General Commissaries and their substitutes, seventeen delegates participated, of different nationalities and coming from four continents (Africa had no representative.)

Mariano Bigi, in the abovementioned article, describes the work of the Congress thus: “The participants, divided into five language groups (Italian, French, English, Spanish and German) reviewed the synthesis of the replies to the first outline of 1968; then, distributed in three Commissions they discussed respectively: the characteristics of the secular Order of Saint Francis facing today’s world, the essential points of the spirituality and basic laws of the secular Order. In the plenary session of 3 October, all of twenty-five motions elaborated by the Commissions were approved, but only by the lay members – since the religious, although having the right to vote, had declined expressing a vote – and with majorities always greater than two-thirds. In these motions we find in a nutshell much of the contents of today’s Rule.” The unity of the Third Order and the need to tend towards unity of structures was also affirmed in this Congress.

In order to actualize the orientations that emerged in the Congress and to favour further steps in the desired direction, the Commission for the Rule was integrated with the members of the *Praesidium* of the Congress, and charged with preparing a new “basic text”, guided by the motions approved in the sessions of the congress. At the same time, while waiting for the new Rule, “orientative texts” were also elaborated in the various cultural areas, and approved *ad experimentum*. They were called “*Way of life*” (in English), “*Orientations*” (in French), “*Ideario*” (in Spanish), “*Richtlinien*” (in German) and “*Itinerario spirituale del Francescano secolare*” (in Italian).

All of this happened under the vigilant attention of the General Ministers of the First Order and TOR who already on 17 July 1969 had a mandate from the Congregation for Religious to authorize experiments in the different cultural areas, always within the limits of the document *Ecclesiae sanctae*. An extraordinary encouragement came from the discourse given by Pope Paul VI to the participants in the International Pilgrimage of the TOF on 19 May 1971, on the occasion of the celebration of seven hundred and fifty years of *Memoriale propositi* (1221-1971). The Pontiff traced for the Tertiaries a program for a strong and demanding life, affirming that he had a “threefold confidence” in them: first, in their capacity to live and witness gospel poverty, understood as “affirmation of the primacy of the love of God and neighbour,... an expression of freedom and humility.... a kindly style of simplicity of life”; secondly, in their capacity, “like St Francis, to love the cross”; thirdly, in their “fidelity to the Church”.

7.4. Third phase (1973- 1978)

The third phase sets out with the constitution of the International Council of the TOF (CITOF). Already Article 121 of the 1957 Constitutions had foreseen the possibility of constituting councils at levels above the local and the opportunity to extend them to the interobediential level, also contemplating the figure of national presidents and of a “general president”. A first international organism had been named in 1969 by the Capuchin General Minister, who had called Manuela Mattioli to preside over it. With a document of 4 October 1973, the four General Ministers appointed the first International Council of the Franciscan Third Order, which – under the active, qualified and incisive presidency of the same Manuela Mattioli – had given a very notable impulse to the unity of the OFS, to the renewal of its legislation and structure, as well as to its presence in the Church. As components of the new Council, the names of the representatives proposed by each nation or cultural area were confirmed, without reference to the “obediencies” that they belonged to.

Among the duties assigned to the Council, that of favouring and increasing studies of the new Rule figures expressly. On 17 September 1976, the four General Ministers approved the Statutes of CITOOF.

We quote again Mariano Bigi's article: "As the first consequence of the constitution of the International Council, its President, Manuela Mattioli, entered by right as a member of the Commission for the Rule; following on that, the CITOOF, being the organism to which 'the coordination, animation and guidance of the Secular Fraternity of Saint Francis belonged' (Statutes, Art. 2), assumed and carried to its completion the work of elaboration and consultation that had been begun previously".

In the meantime, as a result of the work of the Commission, the work had gone ahead, and had passed through all of five successive versions. Finally, on 30 April 1975, it was possible to send to the national Councillors a text of the Project of the Rule, that explained and evidenced – with the support of suitable references to Scripture, the Franciscan sources and the conciliar documents – the essential elements of the "form of life" outlined by the motions of the Congress of Assisi.

7.5. Conclusion of the work and approbation

The replies received, collected and classified in a new *dossier*, were first studied by the General Assistants and then examined by the CITOOF Presidency who met in Assisi in September 1976. For the course of the work, the Presidency appointed a Commission, with the task of bringing to the Project the corrections that had been singled out, while taking into account the observations that had come from the National Councils. The Commission interpreted their mandate extensively, and elaborated a new project, very different in its inspiration and structure from the preceding one. Substantially, the two projects expressed the permanence of "two perspectives and diverse visions: one more markedly theological and spiritual, the other more practical, normative and juridical."⁸². The two texts were examined by four noted experts in Franciscanism and in canon law, one for each of the Franciscan religious families. Besides each one expressing his opinion, they held a common meeting, and expressed to the Presidency their conclusive opinion in the sense of wisely "recasting the two texts, with respect to the useful assertions of both".

The complex of all the documentation was examined by the Presidency in a meeting held in Rome during Holy Week 1977. Manuela Mattioli's proposal was accepted, to edit in that session, without further referrals, a new text utilizing the material at hand that, on the other hand, represented the fruit of long labour and of no less long consultations and examinations. On 27 June of the same year the document was consigned to the General Ministers of the First Order and TOR, who examined it together in a working session of over two days, at Rieti. The same General Ministers, on 18 October 1977, transmitted to the Congregation for Religious the Latin text of the new Rule, requesting its approbation.

On 24 June 1978, the new Rule was approved and promulgated by Pope Paul VI, with the Apostolic Letter *Seraphicus Patriarcha*.

On 4 October 1978, the four General Ministers consigned the Rule to the Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order, with a letter in which they pointed out the two "hinges" of the desired renewal: return to the sources, and attention to the Spirit in the signs of the times.

After that, the International Council attended to having the translations made in modern languages. In February 1979, the parchment containing the text of the Rule and the Pontifical Letter of approbation were consigned by Fr. Pasqual Rywalski OFM^{Cap}, in the name of the Conference of

⁸² Mariano Bigi, article "*La Regola dell'Ordine Francescano Secolare*", already quoted.

General Ministers, to the Vice President Mariano Bigi, delegated by the President Manuela Mattioli, during a solemn eucharistic celebration in the church of Corpus Christi of the Capuchin Poor Clares at Garbatella, in Rome.

The Rule was welcomed with joy and zeal by the Secular Franciscans and its circulation and presentation soon became the object of conventions and studies.

8. New General Constitutions

8.1. Start of the work and consultations

The work of updating the General Constitutions of the OFS, for applying the renewed Rule, was first begun immediately after the International Congress of Assisi (6 – 10 October 1979), that had approved a motion to that effect.

Already during 1978, some Nations forwarded their own drafts, amply reworked with respect to the Constitutions of 1957 and rich with interesting hints; others formulated to the CITO Presidency observations and partial proposals, but not less significant for that. After taking these collaborations into consideration, the Presidency – in the meeting of 19 to 22 December 1989 – arrived at the conclusion that, for juridical reasons (waiting for the new Code of Canon Law) and existential reasons (the still incomplete assimilation of the Pauline Rule), the time was not ripe for drafting a new text of Constitutions. Rather, they reviewed some questions that needed urgent clarification.

So the Presidency, in its session in December 1980, decided to entrust their examination to a team composed of religious, experts in canon law, and lay persons. The Presidency requested from them a clarification on the points of “concordance” between the dispositions of the Constitutions of 1957 and the Rule approved in 1978. First information on the subject was presented by the Commission during the meeting of September 1981. The charge of presenting the observations and the modification to be made to the Statutes of CITO was entrusted to the same Commission (following on in February 1982), taking into account the suggestions that would have arrived from the International Councillors.

We must say at once, though, that the soul and supporting column of all the work, from the beginning to its conclusion in 1990, was Fr. Jaime Zudaire, OFS General Assistant for the Capuchin Order. He poured out his love for the Secular Franciscans, his competence, his experience, and his sensitivity, with an inexhaustible strength, carrying all the other “workers”.

In the **III General Chapter of the OFS**, held in Assisi from 22 to 27 September 1982, some bearings were fixed for the drafting of the new Constitutions:

- it had to begin within six months after the publication of the new Code of Canon Law;
- by 1 January 1983, the Presidency would have to appoint a Commission charged with preparing the new text.

As a first approach to the problems relative to the new General Constitutions of the OFS, the connection between the three normative sources to which the Constitutions themselves had to refer was taken into consideration. They are listed here in chronological order, not in order of importance:

- the Constitutions of the TOF of 1957;
- the renewed Rule of 1978;
- the new Code.

On the relation between the renewed Rule and the Constitutions of 1957, the opinion of the experts was that the latter did not have to be understood as abrogated together with the Rule of Leo XIII. Only the norms of the Constitutions that ended up contrasting with the new Rule had to be considered as automatically abrogated. With regard then to the general bearing of the new legislation, the experts affirmed that one had to take into account the “declericalization” of the OFS which inspires the Pauline Rule: and so the “rights to power”, that the Constitutions of 1957 attributed to the priests (Directors and Commissaries) had to be transferred to the laity.

The new Code of Canon Law was promulgated on 25 January 1983. It is worth reporting here a short extract from the discourse made, during the signing ceremony, by Mons. Rosalio Castillo Lara, Pro-President of the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Code: “Also new is the statute of Christ’s faithful, which enumerates their more relevant rights and duties in the life of the Church. The operational space of the laity, that is, of those who have not received sacred order, has been greatly enlarged, both in their participation in the triple function of teaching, sanctifying and governing, and in the ambit of their recognized freedom of association”⁸³.

On the effects of this new vision of the laity regarding the new legislation of the OFS, enlightening indications came from the same Mons. Castillo Lara. In an interview on 28 April 1983 that he gave to Fr. Jaime Zudaire and other General Assistants of various Secular Third Orders, Mons. Castillo Lara settled in particular on two criteria followed in the new Code for lay aggregations:

- the introduction of the unique distinction between public and private associations;
- the ample space left to the statutes of the same associations.

Referring in particular to the Third Orders, Mons. Castillo Lara explained that can. 303 represents a true “exception” in the present legislation: in fact it is a unique article that speaks of a particular type of association, precisely the Secular Third Orders, in consideration of their importance and venerability in the history of the Church and of their specific character. The Code has considered as *essential* the following characteristics of a Secular Third Order (regardless of the name that it can assume:

- participation in the spirit of a religious Family;
- striving for holiness (Christian perfection);
- the apostolic life;
- relation with a religious Institute.”

To more specific questions addressed to him on the theme of *altius moderamen*, Mons. Castillo Lara replied that its contents is not necessarily a “*potestas regiminis*” (that is, a true and proper jurisdiction), and he added that it belongs to the proper statutes of each Secular Third Order to determine who should exercise such *superior direction* and what is to be the way of exercising it, taking into account the finality to which it is ordered: to guarantee the faithful participation of the tertiaries in the charism of the religious Institute.

Mons. Castillo Lara made it clear, at the end, that the Secular Third Orders that are to be counted among the public associations come under the legislation proper to these associations:

- their statutes should be approved by the competent ecclesiastical authority;
- their property is considered to be ecclesiastical property and therefore subject to the norms of Book V of the new Code.

⁸³ Cf. *Promulgazione e Presentazione ufficiale del Codice di Diritto Canonico*, Città del Vaticano.

To the authoritative precisions of Mons. Castillo Lara were added the opinions of other canonists, who wanted to stress how the Pauline Rule, inspired by Vatican II, had anticipated the lines sanctioned by the Code of Canon Law of 1983. The Code, so as not to *strangle* the life of associations with the imposition of too many structures and too many bonds imposed from above, reduced the norms to those strictly necessary and, applying the *principle of subsidiarity*, codified only what was of its exclusive competence, wanting to make the leaders at the lower levels responsible and to involve them in doing their part in the integration and completion of the legislation for each association.

Following this line, also the Presidency of CIOFS wanted the involvement to regard not only the leaders at the top of the OFS (religious and lay), but the entire reality of the Order, in its worldwide dimension. And so, a wide circle of consultations developed, in which both the National Councils and the International Councillors as well as interested and competent individual persons could make interventions.

The Juridical Commission had the task of gathering and coordinating the contributions that arrived from everywhere, and of highlighting the points of convergence and those points where more or less emphasized differences were found.

A “provisional outline” of Constitutions was presented by the Commission to the Presidency on 27 September 1983. This text was characterized by the excessive mass of aspects considered, so much as to assume, on certain themes, the tone of a tract on spirituality, losing sight of the essential and of what carries effective juridical relevance.

The work of editing had brought out also some *sensitive points*, which made necessary the opinion of expert canonists designated by the respective General Ministers. It was they who lovingly gave precious collaboration to the Commission during the entire development of the work, unravelling knots, responding to queries, overcoming perplexities and keeping the conduct of the Commission and the Presidency on the rails of correct juridical experience.

After the examination of the “provisional outline”, the Presidency had entrusted to the Commission the task of proceeding to a more harmonious draft that, while taking the collected material into account, would display it in the form of a working hypothesis, on the subvention of the opinions expressed by the canonists. The text so edited was distributed with a circular dated 8 December 1983. The National Councils and International Councillors were requested to examine it in the light of their respective experiences and to formulate, by 31 March 1984, their replies to the questionnaires attached to each title of the articulated text.

So we arrived at the **IV General Chapter and the I Elective Chapter (Madrid, 29 April - 3 May 1984)**. It was an event of particular importance in the process of the renewal of the OFS and the consolidation of the International Fraternity:

- the direct election of the General Minister and the Presidency of the International Council was held for the first time;
- the new text of the **Statutes of CITOF** were voted on and approved;
- the President of the Chapter, Fr. José Angulo Quilis TOR, consigned to the Secular Order its **Ritual** (in the Latin text), approved on the previous 9 March by the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship. The Ritual contained important anticipations of some aspects that would then find definitive systematization in the Constitutions.

With regard to the theme of the Constitutions, Fr. Jaime Zudaire presented a full report on the work done up to that moment and on the more prickly questions, which still required deeper study. The Chapter took action and fixed the procedure to follow for carrying out the work.

The replies to the questionnaires that we mentioned above arrived from the National Councils and International Councillors. The Presidency examined them, article by article, in two sessions, held respectively at St. Poelten (Austria) in September 1986 and at Rome in September 1987. The National Councils and International Councillors were requested to review the text only on specific points, and to send proposals for modifications and alternative formulations of single articles by 31 March 1988, in view of the General Chapter that would have to discuss and approve the articles of the General Constitutions.

8.2. Approbation “ad experimentum”

The **V General Chapter (Rome, 6-15 June 1988)** was opened by a presentation of the General Minister, Manuela Mattioli, which we want to report almost in full, both because of the importance of the theme and because, unfortunately, this is the only General Chapter whose Acts were not successfully printed.

Manuela commenced with a historical reference: “The Decree of the Sacred Congregation for Religious (in 1957), which approved the Constitutions of the Third Order Secular of St Francis, accentuates ‘the paternal solicitude of the Roman Pontiffs such as Nicholas IV and Leo XIII who adapted the Rule itself to the changed conditions of life; others, such as Innocent XI, attentively prepared and approved new Constitutions. Leo XIII adapted the Rule to the conditions of modern life’ ... Being aware of the necessity to have new Constitutions, the General Ministers of the four Franciscan Families elaborated them so that ‘the tertiaries would understand more clearly the profound Franciscan principles contained in the Rule (of Leo XIII), in spite of its brevity, and that they would translate them into practice in their life.’ Regretfully, the Constitutions of 1957 have not been sufficiently known and lived.

“Today it is no longer the paternal solicitude of the Pontiffs or that of the General Ministers that is preoccupied with this updating. After the approbation of the Pauline Rule – we will celebrate its tenth anniversary on next 24 June - we Secular Franciscans ourselves assume the responsibility for adapting the legislation of the OFS.

“So, here we have a new fact in the current, ancient and perennial life of the OFS; an historical moment in which we, here present, are playing a part with Christ and Francis, in an attitude of service, availability and attentive listening to the voice of the Lord, to the voice of our brothers, and to the voice of our own discernment.

“We are not here to follow our own opinions or personal points of view or those of a group. We are here to follow the thinking that the Rule and the Code of Canon Law express in regard to the Secular Franciscans and to apply it to the life of the individuals and of the Fraternities, in the light of the Franciscan charism, and of the contributions of the National Councils, and of our existential and pastoral experiences.

“Docile to the motions of the Spirit, we will endeavour to give to the universal Fraternity a constitution to guarantee its unity in diversity”.

The points over which the capitular debate was most lively regarded:

- the entitlement of the task of animating and guiding the Fraternities at all levels (personalized or collegial authority?);
- the structure of the international Fraternity;
- reasons and procedures for dismissal from the Fraternity and the Order;
- the place and functions of the spiritual Assistants in the Councils of the OFS at the various levels, in the light of can. 303 of the Code of Canon Law;

We wanted to record them because precisely these points and the solutions adopted in 1988 were proposed again in the phase of revision of the General Constitutions in 1990, as we shall see better in the following paragraphs.

The General Chapter concluded with the papal audience, granted to the capitulars on 14 June 1988. In his allocution, the Holy Father recalled above all the universal call to holiness, and underlined that perfection is not a luxury or much less a superfluous aspect of Christian life, but involves all the baptized in a precise response, which becomes indeed a question of salvation. Referring then to the discourse delivered by Pius XII to the tertiaries on 1 July 1956, John Paul II confirmed: “You are also an Order, a lay Order but a true Order; and, furthermore, Benedict XV had spoken of an *Ordo veri nominis*. This ancient term – we can say medieval – of “Order” does not mean other than your strict belonging to the Franciscan Family (...), it means the participation in the discipline and austerity proper to that spirituality, while in the autonomy of your lay condition, which on the other hand often calls for sacrifices not less than those that arise in religious and priestly life.” Referring, finally, to the role of the laity in the Church (let us not forget that the Synod on the Laity had not long concluded!), the Pope stressed: “What counts is not so much numbers but quality. It’s a question then of small groups, humanly poor: what is important is goodwill and loyalty to the Church. They will be – as Jacques Maritain said once, with a happy turn of phrase – bright stars spread in the night of the world”⁸⁴.

With the capitular votation, a new phase opened for the process of the General Constitutions: that of their approbation by the competent authority. The text launched by the Chapter presented a number of hitches due to the multiplicity of languages in which the voted amendments had been presented in the Chapter. Besides, some capitular options had reflected on the formulation of other articles, which had to be retouched to harmonize the various norms. The Juridical Commission went back to work and the canonists of the General Curias were called on again with regard to specific aspects and precise formulations.

Finally, the text, polished also from the linguistic point of view, could be sent to Card. Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (ICLSAL), with a letter of 17 September 1988 and signed by the four Franciscan General Ministers and the General Minister of the OFS. The letter emphasized “the long shared work to which all the National Councillors of the Secular Franciscan Order were called”, and requested that the text be approved *ad experimentum*, keeping in mind “the diverse innovations contained in the new text of the Constitutions, the great spread of the Order in the world, the varieties of culture and of social and ecclesial ambients in which the Secular Franciscans live and operate”.

The Congregation subjected the text to a rather attentive and deep scrutiny. Granting that “the text is edited and presented with great care” and that “the spirit that runs through it is truly excellent”, the Congregation gave a disposition that retouches be made to all of twenty-four commas of the articulated text. The Juridical Commission of CIOFS attended to them and the readjusted document was consigned again to the Congregation, that finally approved it with the Decree of 8 September 1990, Prot. n. T. 69, a) - 1/90.

⁸⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Ad eos qui generali Capitulo Tertiariorum franciscalium in speculo viventium interfuerunt coram admissos*: AAS 80 (1988) pp. 1786-1789; *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 June 1988, p. 4.

The official consignment to CIOFS was made on the occasion of the **VI General Chapter and the II Elective Chapter (Fatima, Portugal, 13 - 20 October 1990)**. The lamented Fr. José Angulo Quilis, General Minister of the TOR presided, in the name of the Conference of Franciscan General Ministers. He was also the bearer of a Message that the Prefect of the Congregation ICLSAL addressed to the capitulars, connecting the two events, the approbation of the new General Constitutions and the capitular session, to recall the OFS “to the role that it is called to carry out in the Church and in the world. “It is certain, in fact –wrote Card. Hamer – that the Secular Franciscan Order, especially today, after the fusion of its four branches headed by the respective Families of Franciscans (Minors, Conventuals, Capuchins and Regular Tertiaries) in a single great organism of world dimensions, represents an army that can be at the vanguard in the Church and in the world, to construct a more human and Christian society”⁸⁵.

“Its numerical strength, its diffusion over all the continents, the attraction of the Franciscan charism, are all elements that confer on the Secular Franciscan Order perhaps a determining influence on collaboration with projects of world importance, such as peace to be built on justice or the solution of problems that afflict humanity, with different shadings, but in all latitudes. But to arrive at this, it is indispensable that all members of the Secular Franciscan Order be conscious of their vocation and mission in the Church and in the world”⁸⁶.

With reference to the Rule of Paul VI, Card. Hamer continued: “It is enough that the individual tertiaries meditate on it and apply its substance, in accordance with the interpretation suggested by the Constitutions just approved, to be sure of the authenticity and validity, in a modern key, of their response to their vocation and mission as committed lay Franciscans. However, allow me to underline that the lay Franciscan is essentially called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St Francis, modelling all his life on the Gospel; he is an apostle of the Gospel, who is concerned with making present the charism that he carries, passing from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel; an individual who makes his own the anxieties and preoccupations of all humanity, but especially of the most disinherited and those suffering, collaborating, in perfect docility with the Roman Church, in the mission of saving souls. The lay Franciscan makes prayer and the sacramental life the soul of his being and acting; he lives in the world but in that freedom of spirit that allows him to preach the gospel beatitudes by his example and word. Besides, the lay Franciscan should feel himself engaged in the construction of a more fraternal sharing of life; he should be a true promoter of justice and peace; one who brings joy and hope. The single Fraternities, for that reason, must not be reduced to being simple associations of piety, but will have to rise to the level of true schools of evangelical and Franciscan formation, to turn out passionate spirits, like Francis of Assisi, for Christ and for the Church”⁸⁷.

8.3. Publication and first application

On receiving the General Constitutions, the General Chapter of Fatima, in its conclusions, engaged the elected Presidency:

- to offer to the National Councils some orientations to understand better the innovations introduced by the Constitutions;
- to prepare a guide regarding essential points to be inserted in the National Statutes in order to align them with the Constitutions.

⁸⁵ HAMER, J., Cardinal, *Lettera della Congregazione per gli istituti di vita consacrata e le società di vita apostolica* (Rome, 12 September 1990), in *Atti del VI Capitolo Generale del Consiglio Internazionale dell'OFS*, Allegato 1 (Roma 1996) (<http://www.ciofs.org/doc/ki90lm01.htm#3>).

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

Besides, the Chapter made a specific pronouncement on the theme of the unity of the OFS: “While respecting the configuration in Obediences of the four religious Orders to whom the pastoral and spiritual assistance of the OFS is committed, the Presidency will encourage and promote the overcoming of the corresponding divisions that in the past had characterized the secular Order. The Presidency will give full attention to developing unity within itself and between the CIOFS and the national and regional levels, while urging all the National Fraternities to realize the unity outlined by the Rule and General Constitutions. In recognizing the pluralism of expressions of the one Franciscan charism, the Presidency intends to promote the secular Order as an instrument and agent of communion in the Franciscan Family also through the cooperation of the spiritual Assistants in ‘Conferences of Assistants’ at the general, national and regional level”⁸⁸.

The *editio tipica* of the General Constitutions, in Italian, was printed with the technical and economic collaboration of the OFS of Italy. It included a Presentation of the General Minister of the OFS, in which the important lines of the new legislation were individuated: secularity, unity of the OFS and its autonomy. We report an extract literally, for easy consultation:

“*Secularity*, which characterizes the whole text of the Constitutions, is not a re-reading of the spirituality of the lay Franciscans in a ‘modern’ key. Not at all. It is an awareness of the past, a return to the origins and an evaluation of the purest tradition, if one would only reflect on the importance that the Order of Penance had in its first centuries, to the point of penetrating the entire church reality and the complicated texture of civil society. In an alienated and disoriented world, space is offered to the Secular Franciscans today to renew the great adventure of revealing and proposing a ‘lifestyle’ that is rooted in the fatherhood of God, in the brotherhood of all men and women, in harmony with nature.

The *unity* of the Secular Franciscan Order is also a characteristic present at its beginning and never disputed on the theoretical level. On the practical and organizational level, on the contrary, the successive historical evolution had introduced the distinction between the various branches deriving from the respective Families of Franciscan religious who offer spiritual assistance to the seculars. The new Constitutions reaffirm, without repeal, the unity of regulation, structures and formative and operative lines.

And finally, *autonomy*. In the Constitutions the functions of government of the Fraternities at all levels, reserved exclusively to the secular leaders, are exactly delimited from the functions of spiritual assistance and animation entrusted to the religious of the First Order and Third Order Regular. In this distinction, belonging to a single Franciscan Family stands firm and solid, as also does the ‘life-giving union’ that expresses the community of spiritual goods, the unity of intents, the mutual help for bringing to life in our days – in the life of each one and in the mission of the Church – Francis and his ideal of peace and good for everyone.”

At the same time, the Presidency took care of the translation of the Constitutions into the official languages of CIOFS, which at that time were five besides Italian, namely: French, English, Spanish, Portuguese and German. Once the translations were approved by the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and TOR, they were distributed to the National Fraternities of the respective linguistic areas.

While this work proceeded, which was long and complicated also because of particular linguistic and cultural “sensitivities”, the Presidency put its hands to another task entrusted to it by the Chapter of Fatima: to provide the National Councils with an instrument to help them update their Statutes (if they already had them) or to compose them *ex novo* (if they had never been given internal statutes). The distribution of “Guidelines” was held to be urgent, aimed at filling the spaces

⁸⁸ ATTI del VI Capitolo generale del Consiglio internazionale, pg. 98.

left by the General Constitutions to the evaluation and choices of the National Fraternities, and they were provided for with a circular of May 1992.

The period of experimentation of the General Constitutions, initially foreseen as six years, was soon shown to be insufficient: the translation of a text containing all of a hundred and three articles required a long and heavy task, also because the translations in the official languages of CIOFS were not enough, but from these, translation had to pass to the native languages of the single National Fraternities. Various simplifications in the process of the relative approbations were adopted. In spite of that, years passed before every Fraternity had in its hands the legislation to be applied. Besides, by definition, the legislation had to be “experimented” in the different cultures, before its validity could be tested and the possible adjustments could be identified and introduced before the definitive approbation. Also the Statutes of CIOFS had to be adjusted to the dispositions contained in the General Constitutions.

8.4. Updating and definitive approbation

In the **VII General Chapter (Mexico City, 9 - 17 October 1993)**, the new Statutes of the International Fraternity of the OFS (FIOFS) were approved and the Presidency was authorized to request from the Holy See an extension of three years of the experimental period of the General Constitutions⁸⁹, to expire therefore in October 1999. The request was supported by the Conference of General Ministers and was promptly granted by the Congregation ICLSAL.

Meanwhile, the International Fraternity, with its legislative instruments updated by now, was ever more engaged at all levels in the work of modernizing and strengthening formation at the base, intensifying communication, reorganizing structures, resuming contacts with and revitalizing the Fraternities of the countries of Eastern Europe that had remained for so long in the catacombs... There was a lot of work to do if, as the General Ministers of the First Order and TOR had written in their Letter of “Franciscan resonance” to the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Christifideles laici*: “We are aware that the reality of many OFS fraternities, which are old, set in their ways and lacking vitality, is hardly encouraging.... Instead we prefer to admire the new vitality, so clearly evident in all the work you have accomplished to implement the legislative and liturgical texts, the organizational structure and the formation of the OFS and of Franciscan Youth”⁹⁰.

This “new vitality” required a change of mentality on the part of both the Secular Franciscans and their spiritual Assistants. Not perchance, the General Ministers in their Letter had recommended to the friars: “The recognition of the responsibility that is due to the seculars must not be transformed into the passive attitude of “let things alone”, but must be an active attitude: to promote and collaborate so that they may realize their vocation and their mission”⁹¹.

Also for the revision of the General Constitutions an ample consultation was undertaken, like the one followed on the preceding occasions. The first results were brought to the evaluation of the highest organ of government of the OFS.

The **VIII General Chapter and III Elective Chapter (Rome, 7-14 July 1996)** gave a mandate to the Presidency to constitute an appropriate Commission to examine the material already collected and to edit the proposals for modification. The same Presidency had to examine and evaluate them and then send them to the National Councils and International Councillors, in view of the next General Chapter.

⁸⁹ ATTI del VII Capitolo generale, Mozione n. 1, pg. 154.

⁹⁰ Vocazione e missione dei fedeli laici francescani nella Chiesa e nel mondo - Roma, 18 agosto 1989, pg.12.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*, pg. 37

The Commission, composed of a Brazilian, a Frenchman and a North American, under the presidency of a Spaniard (Prof. Cortés), carried out a valuable work, and put the Presidency in the best position for fulfilling their engagement to present a definitive text of the General Constitutions by October 1999.

The **IX General Chapter (Madrid, 23-31 October 1999)** passionately discussed the text, which presented both the amendments whose usefulness had emerged from the experimentation, and the *desiderata* of some National Fraternities that had been overlooked in the voting of 1988.

The Chapter had to be concerned also with the difficult situation evidenced in Italy, where a component of the OFS opposed the process of unification promoted by the Presidency of CIOFS, and contested the collegiality of spiritual assistance and the unity of the structure of the secular Order. We have to mention this dispute, because its progress is closely tied in with that of the definitive approbation of the General Constitutions. The dissident component, in fact, sought in every way and with all means to interpose obstacles to their approbation through interventions before the General Ministers and the Congregation ICLSAL, through questions to the Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, and finally through recourses before the Supreme Tribunal of the Apostolic Signatory.

None of these initiatives produced the proposed effect and the updated General Constitutions were approved and confirmed by the Congregation ICLSAL with the Decree of 8 December 2000 and promulgated with a circular of the Presidency dated 6 February 2001. To complete the process of updating legislation, the **X General Chapter and IV Elective Chapter of the OFS (Rome, 15-23 November 2002)** renewed the Statutes of the International Fraternity, adjusting them to the amendments introduced with the General Constitutions of 2002.

CHAPTER II

IDENTITY OF THE OFS

1. Life Project

It is essential to understand clearly the charism, mission and prophetic role of the OFS in the Church and today's society in order to foster the growth of mutual and lifegiving communion between the Seculars and the religious of the various Franciscan Orders and within the Franciscan Family.

1.1. Vocation of the Secular Franciscans

The vocation of the Secular Franciscans arises from the universal call to holiness. We read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (941): "Lay people share in Christ's priesthood: ever more united with him, they exhibit the grace of Baptism and Confirmation in all dimensions of their personal, family, social, and ecclesial lives, and so fulfill the call to holiness addressed to all the baptized."

As penitents, the Secular Franciscans aspire to conversion of heart, knowing that in this way God will fill them with himself, for he is the Holy One. In his *Letter to the Faithful or Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance*, Saint Francis presents "doing penance" as a way of Christian life and as doing the will and works of the Father. And in his *Testament* (1-3) he describes clearly a well-defined process of conversion: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way: for when I was in sin, it seemed too bitter for me to see lepers. And the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them, what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body."⁹²

Such a conversion process, to be realized day by day, is essential for a life of penance.

- God initiates the process: "*The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, thus to begin doing penance in this way.*" This the call, the "vocation" of the penitent.
- God leads the penitent to places where the penitent would rather not go; yet such times and places allow us to increase our trust in God.
- The penitent responds by accepting and placing self at the service of others and, in the final analysis, by acceptance of self: "*...and I showed mercy to them.*"
- This leads to happiness: "*...what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.*"

1.2. Penance, the way of holiness

Penitents are those who desire to open their hearts to God while living among ordinary people who often long for happiness even though they may not be aware of the need for conversion of heart. All Franciscan men and women, whether Seculars or members of religious Orders, have the responsibility to teach by word and example that "penance" (*metanoia*) is a positive act of self-realization. It is a change in our heart when it opens itself to God's action in us, in union with Jesus, through the power of the Spirit. Unfortunately we have a tendency to confuse "penance" with "doing penance." The two things are not the same.

⁹² Test 1-3; FA:ED I, 124.

The *traditional works of penance* to which we are called—fasting, almsgiving—are a result of our decision to open our hearts to God. In themselves, these things do not lead us to God or to conversion, even though they are helpful in our conversion. For example, unless we fast with the intention of opening ourselves more to God’s action, what use is it? It is simply a diet concealed behind a lofty motive. If in giving alms or helping the poor, as the Lord exhorts us, we do so selectively, we give only to those we decide are deserving. How can this open our hearts to trust in God’s power?

1.3. Secular Franciscans share the charism of Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis of Assisi—God’s gift to the Church, to the men and women of all the Franciscan Orders (religious and secular), and to the world—lived the gospel charism he left to all his children. Among the latter, within the Franciscan Family, are the Secular Franciscans. The Secular Franciscan Rule, with great simplicity, says that the members of the Franciscan Family “intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.”⁹³ We read in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “In the communion of saints, many and varied spiritualities have been developed throughout the history of the churches. The personal charism of some witnesses to God’s love for men has been handed on, like ‘the spirit’ of Elijah to Elisha and John the Baptist, so that their followers may have a share in this spirit.”⁹⁴

The Secular Franciscans follow the same path as Francis in following Jesus. It consists in attuning our entire being to the Lord, truly God and truly human, living among us. Imitation does not mean duplication or cloning. Saint Francis was the “mirror of Christ” and we too must reflect the Lord Jesus in our life.

1.4. Secular Franciscans in the footsteps of Jesus

Secular Franciscans follow the Jesus of the Gospels, who was the center of Francis’s life. To the extent we are able to share the primitive Franciscan charism, we will be able to present ourselves to the whole world as examples of true joy. As baptized Christians, Secular Franciscans should give an example of Christian life lived in simplicity, within the Church. They manifest this by living their values:

- obedience to the Holy Spirit,
- prayerful trust in divine Providence,
- grateful and simple use of the gifts of creation,
- delight in the gifts of God all around us,
- joy at being a Christian in the Church,
- gratitude for the world seen as a gift,
- readiness to help others.

Franciscans, like all Christians, must be a living proof of the Incarnation, promoting the growth of the Kingdom of God in society. Since the one who is baptized is with Jesus, what could harm us? “Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword” (Rom 8:35). Saint Francis writes: “Where there is charity and wisdom, there is neither fear nor ignorance. Where there is patience and humility, there is neither anger nor disturbance. Where there is poverty with joy, there is neither greed nor avarice. Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness. Where there is fear of

⁹³ *Rule OFS*, 1.

⁹⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (= CCC), 2684.

the Lord to guard an entrance, there the enemy cannot have a place to enter. Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment, there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.”⁹⁵

1.5. Secular environment is what characterizes secularity

Secular Franciscans live the ordinary life of the Christian laity. Secular Franciscans who are bishops, priests or deacons live the ordinary life of the diocesan clergy.

The diocesan clergy and the laity strive to make present the gift of themselves to the world, as followers of Saint Francis and his way of following Jesus, wherever they are, just as they are, without pretense, with the hope and joy that should characterize followers of the Lord Jesus. This “secularity,” an essential feature of the life of the OFS, must be expressed by the Seculars in a way that can be recognized in their particular society and culture.

2. Secular Franciscan spirituality

2.1. Spirituality and spiritualities

According to the *General Constitutions of the OFS*, “the principal task of the assistant is...to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation” of the members of the OFS.⁹⁶ This means helping them become conscious of their special role. For this reason assistants should be familiar with the main points of Vatican II ecclesiology and the document *Christifideles laici* (1988) on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world. They must also recognize how the main points of lay spirituality are present in the *Rule* and *Constitutions* of the OFS.

Among its various meanings, the word “spirituality” is used to refer to styles of Christian life associated with specific existential circumstances (lay spirituality, priestly spirituality, religious spirituality) or certain spiritual traditions (Benedictine spirituality, Franciscan spirituality). Here it is used in both senses, and for this reason we speak of *secular and Franciscan* spirituality.

To be sure, the OFS *Rule* is a mature fruit of Vatican II and later reflection, but at the same time it is also a faithful expression of the Franciscan spiritual heritage.

Let us briefly recall the main points of the conciliar documents. The laity: who they are, their special characteristic, their dignity as members of the People of God;⁹⁷ the universal call to holiness in the Church;⁹⁸ the Church’s solidarity with the whole human family;⁹⁹ the rightful autonomy of earthly affairs;¹⁰⁰ the help the Church offers to human activity through Christians.¹⁰¹ The decree *Apostolicam actuositatem* speaks of the vocation and formation of the laity for the apostolate and about the ends, means and areas of their apostolate.

The *Rule* gives a Franciscan spirit and expression to these directives.¹⁰² The synthesis of lay and Franciscan spirituality becomes more concrete in the *General Constitutions*.¹⁰³ Here we should note two documents from the ministers of the Franciscan Family: “I Have Done My Part,” for the

⁹⁵ Adm 27; FA:ED I, 136-37.

⁹⁶ *Const.*, 90.1.

⁹⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, (= LG) 30-36.

⁹⁸ Cf. *LG*, Ch. V

⁹⁹ Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, (= GS) 1

¹⁰⁰ Cf. *GS*, 36.

¹⁰¹ Cf. *GS*, 43.

¹⁰² Cf. *Rule OFS*, 4-19.

¹⁰³ Cf. *Const.*, 8-16 on the form of life, and 17-27 on active presence in the Church and in the world.

eighth centenary of the birth of Saint Francis (1981), and “Vocation and Mission of the Lay Franciscan Faithful in the Church and in the World” (1989). Both of these contain directives and important practical suggestions. In the first document, the special role of the OFS is described near the subheading “Concrete Efforts to Heal Human Ills.”

It is not easy to speak of Franciscan spirituality in a way that will show all the riches it contains. Here we emphasize the basic points of this spirituality.

2.2. What is Franciscan spirituality?

Franciscan spirituality is one of the great spiritualities that finds expression in the Church in two major areas: the practical and concrete, and the speculative and doctrinal. It is a spirituality characterized by an intense experience, beginning in the thirteenth century with Saint Francis of Assisi and continuing in history with his followers until today. It cannot be easily captured in a few pages.

In Bortoli’s book, *Lineamenti di spiritualità francescana*, we find a simple definition that may be helpful in our reflection. Speaking of Franciscan spirituality, the author writes: “Franciscan spirituality is a form of spiritual life nourished by a desire to possess, ever more intensely, divine love as a love-response to God who is Love, through Jesus Christ, conformed to him by means of total and loving observance of the Gospel.”¹⁰⁴ Briefly, we can say that Franciscan spirituality is a form of life whose aim is to follow Jesus Christ in love of God and neighbor by observing the holy Gospel.

2.2.1. To live according to the form of the holy Gospel

Saint Francis’s *forma vitae* was nothing but a collection of various gospel passages especially dear to him. Here we would like to recall 24 February 1209, the feast of Saint Matthias. Francis, who is in the Portiuncula, hears the following passage from the Gospel: “*The kingdom of heaven is at hand.... You received without payment; give without payment. Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food*” (Mt 10:7-10). The biographers tell us that when he heard those words and the priest explained them to him, he exclaimed: “This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.”¹⁰⁵

There are many other examples where Francis also urges his brothers to faithfully follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The way of life proposed by the saint is nothing but an application of the Gospel. Writing his *Testament* during the last weeks of his life, he reminds the brothers once again of their basic commitment to “live according to the pattern of the holy Gospel.”¹⁰⁶

For Francis the holy Gospel contains the very person of Jesus Christ. For him, to love the Gospel means to love Jesus; to hear the Gospel means to hear Jesus. To live according to the Gospel means to live according the example of Jesus, to live life as Jesus Christ lived it.

By living the holy Gospel in this way Francis left us a beautiful example in which we can see how the Gospel itself molded and shaped his life, making him increasingly like his Master. He left us an example of a life lived wholly according to the Gospel.

¹⁰⁴ Cf. M. BORTOLI, *Lineamenti di spiritualità francescana*, Vicenza 1976, p. 27.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. 1C 22; FA:ED I, 201-02.

¹⁰⁶ Test 14; FA:ED I, 125.

In the Gospel Francis discovered the tremendous love of God the Most High, who has revealed himself through his only Son Jesus Christ. God has shown us the greatest love by giving us the most beautiful gift, his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ. Reflecting on the example of Jesus, who for us and for our salvation became poor and little, Francis became poor and little. For Francis, responding to this great love meant becoming like Jesus, being the servant of all, doing as the Lord did. For although he was Son of God, he became the least of all and the servant of all.

For Franciscan spirituality, love of God with all our heart and all our soul, and love of neighbor as ourself was always the first task. This is the true reality of this new *forma vitae*. By placing our life in the hands of the One who loves us and by living in his presence, we became increasingly free. Only then can we proclaim, with joy, God's great mercy. This is the good news that Francis and all his followers proclaimed with simplicity and in the power of the Holy Spirit.

2.2.2 Follow the footprints of Jesus Christ

Franciscan spirituality sees in Jesus Christ the one mediator between God and human beings. We also find this affirmation in other spiritualities in the Church, but in Franciscan spirituality the words take on a deeper meaning. When we say "through Jesus Christ" we mean that without Jesus Christ or apart from Jesus Christ it is impossible to conceive of the father-child relationship between God and human beings. The existence of Jesus, the Word who became flesh independently of sin, is essential to Franciscan spirituality.

For Francis, Jesus Christ was first of all the Father's Son through whom all things have been made and renewed. God sent him into the world as savior of humankind and all creation. Francis felt called to live fully this reality of faith and to make its joyful message known to all people. Recognizing in Jesus Christ the teacher, who is the *way, truth and life*, Francis found it natural and spontaneous to follow his footprints.

The idea of following Jesus presented itself to him as a prompting of grace in his tireless search for God's plan. This charismatic inspiration led him to divest himself of everything, choosing humble poverty in order to resemble Jesus Christ more closely.

Francis was not attracted by the great and powerful Lord, but by the poor, humble and crucified Lord, and he desired always to follow his footprints in freedom and joy. The following of Christ, undertaken in response to his love, became for Francis a reality that marked the path to complete liberation: first, through liberation from evil, then through orientation to good with complete attachment to the will of God.

2.3. The Eucharist, center of Franciscan spirituality

Another very strong element in Franciscan spirituality is the sacramental life where we contemplate and experience the living presence of the Lord Jesus. The sacrament of the Eucharist, the greatest gift of God's love for us, holds a primary place in Franciscan spirituality. The Eucharist helps us realize that our Lord Jesus Christ has not left us alone, but with his presence—living, true, real, substantial—and with his sacred humanity and his divinity he has remained with us until the end of the world. For Saint Francis too this was reason for the deepest and most heartfelt love.

Contemplating Jesus in the Eucharist, two things especially struck him: *the humility of Jesus*, who is willing to remain with us under the appearances of bread and wine, and his *command to feed on him*. This humility and this command aroused in Francis's heart feelings of deep

humility, together with a more intense desire to give himself to Jesus in order to live in and for him alone.¹⁰⁷

Writing to his brothers assembled at the General Chapter, Francis says: “Kissing your feet, therefore, and with all that love of which I am capable, I implore all of you brothers to show all possible reverence and honor to the most holy Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in whom that which is in heaven and on earth has been brought to peace and reconciled to almighty God.”¹⁰⁸

According to Saint Francis, to celebrate the Eucharist means to celebrate the life, to celebrate the love that becomes for us the food of new life, life that has been given to us by God and renewed in the sacrifice of the death and resurrection of his beloved Son Jesus Christ. For this reason Franciscan spirituality finds in the sacrament of the Eucharist the center and basis of its life with God and with the brothers and sisters.

2.4. Live the Church

Another theme we rightly consider essential in Franciscan spirituality is ecclesiality. This too has its historical basis in the personal attitude of Saint Francis. Every step in his vocation, inspired by the Lord, was marked by a great love for the Church, beginning with his encounter with the Crucifix in the church of San Damiano, where he heard the Lord’s words: “*Francis, go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed.*”¹⁰⁹ From that moment Francis began to carry out, with deep love, this command of the Lord.

Francis expresses his profound sentiments of faith and love for the Church in many other situations. In the *Legend of the Three Companions* we find his very beautiful words when he said to his brothers as he was searching for answers to his questions and doubts: “*Let us go to our mother, the holy Roman Church.*”¹¹⁰ We see that for Francis the Church is like a mother.

The ecclesial spirit in Franciscan spirituality, based on Francis’s personal example, is characterized not only by a promise of strict obedience and subjection to the authority of the Church, but also by a love, affection and desire to serve the Church, to collaborate in its pastoral work for the good of souls. Above all it is based on a faith vision that sees in the Church the presence of God, in other words, the Church’s supernatural reality.

The Church is a community of persons who share the same faith in Jesus Christ and live together as brothers and sisters, in spite of their differences. Thus we come to another great theme of Franciscan spirituality: fraternity.

2.5. Live fraternity

The novelty that Jesus Christ brought to all the people by his preaching, the good news Francis discovered in the Gospel, was that our God is a Father, the Father of all people, and all people are his children. So, concluded Francis, if God is our Father, then all of us, created in his image, are his children, and therefore brothers and sisters. We have the same Father, and through Jesus our brother we are members of the same family.

What we have then is a very familial relationship, which God has revealed to us through his only Son. The fraternity is a family that is based on this truth of faith and that lives by and in the

¹⁰⁷ Cf. M. BORTOLI, *Lineamenti di spiritualità francescana*, Vicenza 1976, p. 48.

¹⁰⁸ LtOrd 12-13; FA:ED I, 117.

¹⁰⁹ 2C 10; FA:ED II, 249.

¹¹⁰ L3C 46; FA:ED II, 95.

presence of the Lord. This family is formed from those who experience themselves as brothers and sisters in the faith.

To live in the Church means to live in fraternity, since we are all children of the same Father, members of his family. And if we are children, we are also brothers and sisters. Jesus' words, "*You are all brothers*" (Mt23:8), found a special place in Francis's heart. Seeing that many were coming after him in order to follow this new way, he wrote in his *Testament*: "And after the Lord gave me some brothers, 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."¹¹¹

Francis's concept of fraternity as the place where God's presence is manifest is also essential in Franciscan spirituality. Christ is the true center of fraternal life. It is he who speaks to us through our brothers and sisters. It is he who unites us in the power of his Spirit. It is he who makes us all one.

3. Fraternal life

3.1. Live the Gospel in fraternal communion

The Secular Franciscan vocation is a call to live the Gospel in fraternity and in the world. The purpose of the OFS's organizational structure -communion and sharing of goods- is to achieve this ideal, which is reflected in its presence and mission in a specific place.

The gospel fraternity finds its basis in Christ, first-born of many brothers, who makes of all people one true fraternity. Fraternal life is built by welcoming the option of the *kenosis* of the Incarnation and Easter, and by following the footprints of Christ the Servant, for "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20:28).

Ever since Christ gave his life for others, service implies the elements of renunciation, humiliation and suffering. The natural context of service is the expectation of solidarity in suffering, not that of reward and recognition. The commitment to fraternal life and its cult (*douleia*) necessarily pass through *the gift of service (douleia) rendered as a sacrifice and gratuitously*.

Gift, because it means serving our brothers and sisters, not being served by them. *Sacrificial service*, because in service there is sacrifice; only service costs something. *Gratuitous service*, because it does not demand recompense (*do ut des*), because it is not motivated by the constraints of slavery, but by the freedom of love, by the need to show loving concern for others and for the fraternity.

3.2. Fraternity as service

What kind of service?

3.2.1. The service of "bearing one another's burdens"

This is the first and essential form of fraternal *diakonia*, because brothers and sisters are not objects to be dominated, but "burdens" to be borne. And they are brothers and sisters precisely because they weigh heavily on the shoulders of others.

¹¹¹ Test 14; FA:ED I, 125.

Fraternal communion is realized in support, just as communion between God and humans is realized in support. In fact, God supported us in the Body of Christ, because “*he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases.... he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities, upon him was the punishment that made us whole*” (Is 53:4-5).

Fraternal communion is the communion of the Cross; it is present whenever we feel the weight of others. On the other hand, there would be no Christian communion and the law of Christ would be nullified if we did not feel the burden of our brothers and sisters.

3.2.2. The service of good example

Good example is always connected with and dependent on *metanoia*, which enjoins self-transformation, doing violence to our passions and evil desires. Fraternal life is not built through discussions; it is not the outcome of a defense of fraternity. It is based instead on the example of those ready for sacrifice, who overcome their natural reluctance to carry out tasks that involve renunciation, weariness and distress; those who do not allow themselves to become disheartened will not be discouraged by opposition in the form of mediocrity for which “good example” is a reproach.

Fraternal life is the result of humble and simple witness; it depends on personal readiness to die like the grain of wheat; it is the goal, never definitively reached, of constant daily heroism.

3.2.3. The service of dialogue

Dialogue springs from a love that enables people to “be receptive” and gives them the courage to “be open” themselves. Dialogue is not superficial conversation, nor is it dialectic display, nor is it discussion or even a simple exchange of opinions.

Before it is ever seen as an act, dialogue is an interior attitude, a way of “behaving” as a person before others, a way characterized by a sincere desire to understand and be understood, in order to arrive at mutual acceptance in love and, if possible, at an encounter in the truth.

3.2.4. The service of trust and respect

Trust and respect are not given or granted to others through simple *goodwill*; they are required because of the value which is the brother or sister. Goodwill must be superseded by merit. Brothers and sisters *merit or deserve good* because of their value as human beings, as *christifideles*, as Franciscans. To esteem our brothers and sisters means to revere them, recognizing them as a *sacramentum Christi*.

3.2.5. The service of confidence

Fraternal service is based on awareness of mutual dependence and mutual needs, on overcoming individualistic self-sufficiency. Therefore we must confidently share our experiences and needs.

3.2.6. Service in sincerity and loyalty

Sincerity and loyalty are inseparable, for sincerity is not justified in itself. It is not virtue unless at the same time it is also loyalty, that is, unless it relates not simply to abstract truth, but has a relationship with love. It is a question of *authenticity*, that is, an awareness not only of one’s own

deeper experience but also that of others. We are neither authentic nor sincere when we say what we think at all costs, without taking into account the feelings of others.

Truth is not present simply because the truth is told. Truth is reality; it exists more in the realm of action than of word. Truth is not spoken but constructed, and it is impossible to construct the *verum* if at the same time we do not construct the *bonum*. Sincerity is possible when the rule of conduct is not just the thoughts and feelings of the individual but also those of others.

Fraternal life takes place when we stop being *individuals* and become *persons*, that is, when we enter into relationships. Persons are born and develop in relationships, in awareness of their own worth and that of others, in mutual giving and receiving, in care and trust, in sharing and gratitude. Personal identity is experienced and acquired in fraternal relationships.

In light of these basic considerations, we can see how, for one who becomes a member of the OFS, fraternity is a gift deriving from profession and is to be lived with particular commitment, so that the mutual relationships of communion might become “the place” of our sanctification and of witness to the love of God, who in Christ is revealed and given to us. Thus fraternity becomes also an inescapable mission. Therefore, as professionals of Peace and Goodness, the Brothers and Sisters of Penance should live in the world as gospel leaven, so that others, seeing their fraternal life lived in the spirit of the beatitudes, will come to understand that the Kingdom of God has already begun in their midst.

4. Secularity

4.1. Secular dimension of the Franciscan charism

Christifideles laici states: “The lay faithful’s position in the Church comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character.”¹¹²

Francis is seen today as a man for the second millennium. We are all convinced of the place he and his spirituality of communion, fraternity, respect and dialogue occupy in ecclesial and lay circles, even though the spiritual riches of the OFS are not sufficiently known, nor is its presence in the Church and in society always evident. The *Rule* and *General Constitutions* are meant to give the OFS a more significant presence in the Church and in society.

The secular nature of the OFS will be discussed at greater length in Chapter III when speaking of its mission. Here it is enough to note that the vocation and mission of the OFS place special emphasis on this Order’s uniqueness as called to live the Gospel “in the world” according to the charism of Francis of Assisi. Unlike the “religious” Orders, the OFS is a secular Order, whose secular nature is recognized by the Church.

The secular nature of the OFS means that it is part of the world and that it is responsible, in and with the Church, for proclaiming the Gospel for the salvation of all. In the *OFS Rule* this vocation and obligation are traced back to certain essential features, inspired by Franciscan spirituality, which are at once seen to be in full accord with the Council’s teaching, and which respond to the Church’s expectations for the work of restoration that was, and remains, the original mission of Francis and his followers.

¹¹² *Christifideles Laici* (= CL), 15.

The *OFS Rule*, in accord with the experience of Francis, is meant to lead lay Franciscans to assume fully in themselves a positive relationship with God, using their secular state as starting point. By living in fidelity to their state they effect in themselves conversion or turning to God, in other words, holiness. To create this awareness, the *Rule* presents a positive view of the world, understood as all people, children of God to be loved, and creatures who bear God's likeness,¹¹³ as the place in which Christ's redemption is present and made real through the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus the *Rule* is offered to lay Franciscans as a project or itinerary, suitable for leading them to live in right relationship with God, people and creatures.

Through the way of gospel penance lay Franciscans are led to overcome in themselves that "spirit of the flesh" or "wisdom of this world" which is the negative expression of the human world opposed to God, and to restore, in themselves and the world in which they live, that "new creation" which is already present in hidden mystery. Indeed, we must still complete in ourselves the salvation Christ merited for all.

The *Rule* does not forget that people, in their tireless search for God, are severely hampered by the evil that surrounds them and vitiates all reality. But evil is, and can no longer be, absolute lord of this world. Christ has overcome it, Christ who by his death on the cross reconciled sinful humanity with God, re-establishing communion of life and grace, laying the foundation for universal reconciliation between people themselves, and between people and all creatures.

Secular Franciscans find in the *Rule* the gospel project and the help needed to become true instruments of the universal reconciliation brought about by Christ. This Franciscan project envisions collaboration with God's project, starting from within human structures. The expression "from within" is extremely important because it means that holiness, the "perfection of charity" that lay Franciscans are called to achieve, does not exist "above" their human condition, be that individual or social. It is not achieved "despite" the fact that they live in a family, work, study, fight for a more just society, for justice, peace, etc. But—and this is the great truth Saint Francis understood—their holiness is achieved by living faithfully and in a gospel manner all the situations proper to their secular state.

4.2 From the beginning

The emphasis on "secularity" as an obligation in and for the world goes back to the purest traditions of the Franciscan laity. We need only think of the prominence enjoyed by the Order of Penance in its first centuries, to the point that by itself it permeated the entire ecclesiastical world and the complex fabric of civil society. The austere lifestyle and spirit of poverty that had become widespread in the fraternities led the brothers to give away their surplus goods each year. Thus the fraternities of Penitents established hospitals, dispensaries, stores of food and clothing for the poor, for pilgrims etc. This "ministry of charity" is one of the best known chapters in the history of the Franciscan Penitents, and we still find traces of it today in place-names in cities and in the remote origins of existing charitable organizations.

The Franciscan laity also exerted a strong influence because of their prohibition against bearing arms and taking oaths. Moreover, because of their reputation for honesty, their spirit of dedication and unselfishness, they were often asked by the civil authorities to accept difficult public positions. Documents still exist about brothers who were asked to manage hospitals and other charitable organizations; who held administrative and fiscal, political or diplomatic positions; who were placed in charge of public works and food distribution programs.

¹¹³ Cf. Cant. 4; FA:ED I, 113.

In times closer to our own, we should not forget that Pope Leo XIII, the Pope of *Rerum Novarum* and initiator of the Church's social teaching, hoped to find in the Third Order of Saint Francis "a vigilant support to help me defend the rights of the Church and carry out social reform."¹¹⁴

5. Unity

5.1 Organic union

The first words that come to mind when presenting the "unity of the OFS" are those of the *Rule*, which describes the OFS as "an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world."¹¹⁵ "The international fraternity...is identical to the OFS."¹¹⁶

To speak of the unity of the OFS means to travel the path, not always easy, that goes from theory to practice. But the reality of the OFS today gives us the basis of unity in these terms: the *Rule*, a "splendid gift"¹¹⁷ of the Holy Spirit, approved and confirmed by Pope Paul VI, "is in your hands a genuine treasure, in accord with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council according to what the Church expects from you today;"¹¹⁸ the *General Constitutions* "ratify, without derogation, the union of ordinances, structures, formational and operational models;"¹¹⁹ it is an "international fraternity...guided and animated by the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS) with its seat in Rome (Italy), by its Presidency and by the general minister or international president."¹²⁰

But we must be renewed and converted if we are to fill up what is lacking in the plan of unity for the OFS, which manifests itself in the unity of OFS structures and in the collegial union of spiritual assistants at the various levels: regional, national and international. Moreover, mindful that it is the Spirit who animates us and that unity "is founded on the activity of the Spirit,"¹²¹ this unity is sustained by mutual love, deepened through formation, guaranteed by the service of the brothers and sisters, aided by the brothers of the First Order and the TOR, and gives us a more mature awareness of our responsibilities.

5.2. Walking together

The plan of the past, in which Pope Leo XIII was urging the Secular Franciscans (then known as Tertiaries) to join forces and many of them were feeling the need to seek an organic and permanent form for linking the obediencial fraternities, becomes present today in "the union of the Secular Franciscan Order" as a "characteristic present on a practical and organizational level."¹²² The task at this point is to achieve in every country and region the unity of the Secular Franciscan Order expressed in its legislative texts and affirmed by the fact of its juridical personality in the Church.

¹¹⁴ *Dizionario francescano*, s.v. "Ordine Franciscano Secolare."

¹¹⁵ *Rule OFS*, 2

¹¹⁶ *Const.*, 69.1.

¹¹⁷ *Lettera dei quattro Ministri generali della Famiglia francescana*, in *Regola, Costituzioni generali, Rituale dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare*, Roma 2001, p. 9.

¹¹⁸ John Paul II, *Ai membri del Consiglio internazionale dell'OFS*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 September 1982.

¹¹⁹ Emanuela De Nunzio, *Presentazione delle Costituzioni e le loro entrata in vigore*, in *Regola e Costituzioni generali dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare*, Roma 1991, p. 49.

¹²⁰ *Const.*, 69.2.

¹²¹ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 47.

¹²² Emanuela De Nunzio, *Presentazione delle Costituzioni...*, p. 49.

In this regard we have gone through a process of renewal and deeper understanding of the nature of the OFS, a rediscovery of the Franciscan charism, of the place of the Gospel in the life of the fraternity, its secularity, its autonomy and its self-government.

Every country has a national council and minister, and a collegial spiritual assistancy, a sign of unity. It is a question, then, of a finished product to which all must contribute in order to make it effective. Specifically, the Secular Franciscans must be able to move, simply but boldly, from the norm of one *Rule, Constitutions*, one council and one minister/president to the practical and everyday life of feeling and living unity, and vice versa.

5.3. Promote the charism of unity

It is also the task of the brothers of the First Order and the TOR to learn how to accept these structural changes. We are asked to stand beside the laity, the Secular Franciscans, who, as the Second Vatican Council says, have a maturity and responsibility in the Church: “Priests should confidently entrust to the laity duties in the service of the church, giving them freedom and opportunity for activity and even inviting them, when opportunity offers, to undertake projects on their own initiative.”¹²³ And, paraphrasing a text in *Christifideles laici*, helping our Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters to become increasingly aware, not only that they *belong* to an order, the Secular Franciscan Order, but that they *are* the Order, sharing the same charism as the brothers of the First Order and the TOR. They are a Secular Franciscan Order “because they in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church.... These are the Church.”¹²⁴

Recognizing the greater age of the laity and our responsibility for *altius moderamen* and spiritual assistance, we friars must learn how to go from direction, which at times we still exercise in the fraternities at various levels, to accompaniment and spiritual assistance, being at the same time promoters of unity, for it is not easy to do this, even after reflection. It is also a characteristic of our Franciscan maturity and our minority. Here it seems opportune to quote some lines from the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries....”¹²⁵ We Franciscans are called to be “meek, peaceful, modest, gentle and humble,”¹²⁶ promoters of peace and reconciliation and harmony in all situations and circumstances. Must we, perhaps, be this in a special way with the secular brothers and sisters who share with us the Franciscan ideal and spirituality?

Only a positive response of animation and accompaniment in the movement toward unity will indicate that we have understood that the OFS has “the special characteristic of the laity,” which is to be “secular.”¹²⁷ And so, in the great Franciscan Family, “the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is ‘properly and particularly’ theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression ‘secular character.’”¹²⁸

Let us allow ourselves to be imbued with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of unity. Let us allow ourselves to be seized by him whose fruits are “love, joy, peace patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Gal 5:22), the basis for unity of charism. We quote two texts from the letter of the Conference of the Franciscan Family on the subject of unity. The first is from the section “Our Service of the Spirit”: “We should not forget that the first visible effect of the

¹²³ *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9

¹²⁴ *CL*, 9.

¹²⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, (=VC) 51, Cf. also nos. 41, 45, 46, 47.

¹²⁶ LR III, 11; FA:ED I, 102.

¹²⁷ *LG*, 31.

¹²⁸ *CL*, 15.

coming of the Spirit at Pentecost was that of uniting in the one faith many different peoples. He is the Spirit of unity and he is present wherever unity is created or strengthened....”¹²⁹ And among the proposals, in the section entitled “The Spirit of Unity,” we also find a stimulus to unity in the OFS: “...called to live the spirit of unity especially among themselves.... We want to insist, as we did in last year’s pre-Jubilee letter, in inviting to an ever closer communion and collaboration within the great Franciscan Family.... Within the three Franciscan Orders...encouragement should be given to meetings even of an informal kind, to exchanges, common moments of prayer and reflection, concrete initiatives of communion and fraternity.”¹³⁰

5.4. From the beginning

Turning our attention to the history of the Secular Franciscans, we see that certain steps are of great importance and signs of the Spirit’s presence.

Francis of Assisi was a sign of the renewing and encouraging movement of the Spirit in his day. Francis dedicated his life to penance, he lived “in conversion,” and at the same time became part of the penitential movement. Francis was also faithful to the Spirit of the Lord in the Church and coming from the Church, at a time of great confusion and many movements that claimed to be led by the same Spirit, but in which neither peace nor unity reigned.

To this must be added the interest of Francis and his brothers in the penitential movement, with which they began the Third Order, today the Secular Franciscan Order: “Similarly, married men said: ‘We have wives who will not permit us to send them away. Teach us, therefore, the way that we can take more securely.’ The brothers founded an order for them, called the Order of Penitents, and had it approved by the Supreme Pontiff.”¹³¹ They received a “rule of life” already outlined in the *First Letter to the Faithful* and a little more developed in the second version. It contains these five elements:

- love of God;
- love of neighbor;
- opposition to the spirit of the flesh, to evil’s sinful tendencies;
- celebration of the sacraments, especially confession and the Eucharist;
- behavior always consistent with a life of conversion.

Juridically, this rule of life is found in greater detail in *Memoriale propositi* (1221-1228), the work of Francis and Cardinal Hugolino. Its thirty-nine articles regulate the live of austerity, poverty in clothing, fasting, frequent reception of the sacraments, works of mercy. *Memoriale* was given concrete expression in three great Rules over the course of time.

The Rule of Nicholas IV (Fr. Girolamo Masci of Ascoli Piceno, Minorite) repeats *Memoriale*. It was promulgated with the bull *Supra Montem* (18 August 1289) and remained in force for six hundred years. Opposed to the unity of the Rule were the “obediences,” later consolidated as a reflection of the separation between Conventuals and Observants, ratified by Leo X in 1517, and the later separation of the Capuchins in 1525, besides the autonomy of the Third Order Regular. The Third Order Secular, while remaining one, began to make a distinction between fraternities according to the religious obedience from which they received spiritual assistance. In this way an artificial division was created, based on the four families of Franciscan religious. The unity of the Secular Franciscan Order was preserved since the Tertiaries are seculars, not friars. The

¹²⁹ Second Letter of the Conference of the Franciscan Family on the occasion of the Jubilee 2000, in the year of the Holy Spirit, 9.

¹³⁰ *Ibidem*, 13.

¹³¹ AP, 41 (FA:ED II, 54-55); cf. 1C 37 (FA:ED I, 215-17); LMj IV, 6 (FA:ED II, 553-54); L3C 60 (FA:ED II, 103).

OFS is not identified with any of the branches of the First Order or with the TOR, nor with their geographical structures.

Leo XIII published a new Rule with the bull *Misericors Dei Filius* (30 May 1883). Even though the structure of “obediences” was kept, Leo XIII considered the Third Order to be a *single Order* when he wrote: “When I speak of social reform, I am thinking especially of the Third Order of Saint Francis.” And in another place: “The Third Order of Saint Francis, organized for social action, is capable of producing wonderful fruits.”¹³² The “interobedientiality” that appears in the 1957 Constitutions was the first step toward achieving the unity of the OFS, which had existed from the beginning but was obscured by the division of the First Order into different branches.

On 24 June 1978, Paul VI issued the present Rule with the bull *Seraphicus Patriarcha*. Its Prologue is the first version of the *Letter to the Faithful*, and it recaptures the importance and basis of the expression “to observe the gospel,”¹³³ to seek “the living and active person of Christ,”¹³⁴ as well as the meaning of “penance” and “conversion,”¹³⁵ the proper relationship to temporal goods¹³⁶ and their witness to the goods yet to come.

If the Rules of these long seven and a half centuries are the main sign of the “unity” of the OFS, today the Rule of Paul VI has given the decisive impetus to this unity. It speaks of one Rule, General Constitutions, a single International Council, one general minister, a single structure, a structure that disregards “obediences,” which are a reflection of the division existing in the First Order. In the *General Constitutions* interobedience is not even mentioned, since the OFS is a single united Order, “which is governed by the universal law of the Church, and by its own: the Rule, the Constitutions, the Ritual, and the particular statutes.”¹³⁷

5.5. Guidelines in the Rule and Constitutions

The Secular Franciscan Order has its own personality: “It is divided into fraternities of various levels—local, regional, national and international.”¹³⁸ Each fraternity at the various levels has a “juridical personality within the Church”¹³⁹ and is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president), who are elected by the professed according to the *Constitutions*.¹⁴⁰ The autonomy of the OFS, that is, its direct responsibility for managing its own affairs (G. Pauldet OFM), is indispensable, since the core of its spirituality is “to live the Gospel in fraternity.”¹⁴¹

The *General Constitutions* indicate that the OFS is a public association in the Church,¹⁴² that it is divided into fraternities at various levels (local, regional, national and international), each of which has its own juridical personality in the Church.¹⁴³ The chapters of the fraternities at the various levels have legislative, deliberative and elective power.¹⁴⁴

Naturally, there remains the bond of affection, family and recognition between the fraternities of the OFS and the fraternities of friars through the *altius moderamen* and spiritual

¹³² AA.VV., *Dizionario Franceseano*, col. 1299-1300.

¹³³ *Rule OFS*, 4.

¹³⁴ *Ibidem*, 5.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 7.

¹³⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*

¹³⁷ *Const.*, 4.1.

¹³⁸ *Rule OFS*, 20.

¹³⁹ *Const.*, 1.5.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*; can. 309.

¹⁴¹ Cf. can. 215: “Christ’s faithful may freely establish and direct associations which serve charitable or pious purposes or which foster the Christian vocation in the world.”

¹⁴² Cf. can. 116 §1.

¹⁴³ Cf. *Const.*, 1.5.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 64, 68 e 70.3.

assistance, by seeking “to live in life-giving reciprocal communion with all the members of the Franciscan Family.”¹⁴⁵ But the geographic structure of the friars must in no way influence the regional structure of the Secular Franciscan Order: “The regional fraternity is the organic union of all the local fraternities existing in a territory or which can be integrated into a natural unity, either by geographic proximity, or by common problems and pastoral circumstances. It assures the link between the local fraternities and the national fraternity in respect to the unity of the OFS and in accord with the cooperative efforts of the Franciscan religious orders to provide spiritual assistance within the area.”¹⁴⁶

This is repeated when speaking of the national fraternity, which has no connection with the provinces of the friars: “The national fraternity is the organic union of the local fraternities existing within the territory of one or more states which are joined and co-ordinated among themselves through regional fraternities, wherever they exist.”¹⁴⁷

The international fraternity “is identical to the OFS. It has its own juridical personality within the Church.”¹⁴⁸

If we want to list the essential points of the new OFS Constitutions, we can single out three basic elements: secularity, unity of the OFS and its autonomy.¹⁴⁹ In the Constitutions the governmental functions of the fraternities at all levels, reserved exclusively to responsible seculars, are carefully distinguished from the functions of spiritual and pastoral assistance, entrusted to religious of the First Order and the TOR. In this distinction their membership in the one Franciscan Family remains firm and solid, the “life-giving reciprocal communion” that expresses the communion of spiritual goods, unity of purpose and mutual help, in order to make Francis and his ideal come alive today in the life of each person and in the mission of the Church.¹⁵⁰

5.6. Looking towards the future

Juridical union itself, with its international council and its national and regional councils, is a sign of human, evangelical and Franciscan growth. It is an advantage for everyone, seculars and friars, society and the Church, for the brothers and sisters are communicating vessels in which gifts are exchanged and enriched. Fr. Jaime Zudaire says it this way: “The expression organic communion (= common union = unity) means soul and body. Soul: the fraternal affection, the common ideal, the desire to serve and help each other and perform common works in order to promote the good. Body: the organization, the juridical norms that are an incarnation, sign and instrument of the call to live in local and universal fraternity.”¹⁵¹

It seems opportune to refer to the words of Francis, which recall the presence of the Holy Spirit that draws the fraternities into unity: “His constant desire...was to foster among his sons the bond of unity so that those drawn by the same Spirit and begotten by the same father should be held peacefully on the lap of the same mother.”¹⁵²

The unity of self-government of the OFS and the unity of the entire family in one and the same charism are two expressions of the power for maintaining the bond that unites us and for achieving mutual penetration of two realities: friars and Secular Franciscans, animated by one and

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 98.1.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 61.1.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 65.1.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 69.1.

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Emanuela De Nunzio, *Presentazione delle Costituzioni*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁵¹ Jaime Zudaire, *En seguimiento de Cristo con Francisco de Asís*, Consejo Nacional OFS, Madrid 1995, p. 56.

¹⁵² 2C 191; FA:ED II, 369.

the same Spirit: “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.”¹⁵³

Secular Franciscans achieve unity by studying, loving and living the *Rule*, as John Paul II asks them to do: “Study, love and live the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, approved for you by my predecessor Paul VI. It is a real treasure in your hands, it is in accord with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, and it responds to what the Church expects of you.... The Church needs you for the world to rediscover the primacy of spiritual values.”¹⁵⁴

This exhortation of John Paul II holds true for religious. They must study the *Rule* and *Constitutions* of the OFS and love them, in order to help the members of the OFS to live them. For only by knowing them will they love them, and by loving them help to live them in the unity and communion of one Order, which with the First, Second and Third Order Regular form the great Franciscan Family.

6. Autonomy

6.1. Autonomy of government of the OFS

Pope John Paul II, in *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, cites the Second Vatican Council: “By his incarnation the Son of God has in a certain way united himself with each individual. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind. He acted with a human will and with a human heart he loved.”¹⁵⁵ This means that Jesus Christ acted with the autonomy proper to a human being. Consequently the autonomy due to each of the Secular Franciscans and their fraternities must be respected.

According to the legislation of the *Rule* and *General Constitutions*, the OFS is autonomous because it is one Order, guided by responsible elected seculars and financed by the professed members. The *Rule* says: “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by and council and minister (or president).”¹⁵⁶ “The council of the local fraternity is composed of the following offices: minister, vice-minister, secretary, treasurer, and master of formation.”¹⁵⁷

The key to the unity of the OFS is the regional fraternity. The *General Constitutions* describe it this way: “The regional fraaternity is the organic union of all the local fraternities existing in a territory or which can be integrated into a natural unity.... It assures the link between the local fraternities and the national fraternity in respect to the unity of the OFS and in accord with the cooperative efforts of the Franciscan religious orders to provide spiritual assistance within the area.”¹⁵⁸

The *Rule* establishes the financing of the Order and the *General Constitutions* repeat it: “Regarding the 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.”¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ *Statute for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS* (= *Statute for Assistance*), 1.2.

¹⁵⁴ John Paul II, *Ai membri del Consiglio internazionale dell'OFS*, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 September 1982.

¹⁵⁵ *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 4; Cf. *GS*, 22.

¹⁵⁶ *Rule OFS*, 21.

¹⁵⁷ *Const.*, 49.1.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 61.1.

¹⁵⁹ *Rule OFS*, 25, Cf. *Const.*, 30.3.

6.2. Autonomy is connected with unity and secularity

Autonomy, with unity and secularity, is a single reality. There cannot exist a totally autonomous OFS if it is not one, nor can there be a really secular OFS if it depends on the religious and identifies itself with the friars who provide spiritual assistance.¹⁶⁰ The OFS is an organic union of all the Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world, coordinated and united among themselves.¹⁶¹ The council and minister of the higher level fraternity have the task of uniting and coordinating the lower level fraternities.

There can be no unity without autonomy. Autonomy and unity are two sides of the same coin. Autonomy requires that the OFS have, at all levels, “secular leaders capable of assuming full the functions of animation and guidance of the fraternities, with all the burdens of fatigue, study, responsibility and availability this implies.... It requires an independent structure, with its own headquarters and self-financing, in other words, capable of putting programs into action without the need to appeal for help to others, whether they be organizations or private individuals.”¹⁶²

During the preparation of the renewed *OFS Rule* this autonomy was desired by the Secular Franciscans and by the general ministers of the First First Order and the TOR, who were convinced that this autonomy would be a source of life for the OFS, giving it a greater spirit of initiative.¹⁶³ This same attitude is again evident in the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*, approved by the general ministers in 2002.

6.3. Autonomy in communion

It is quite significant that the *Rule* does not start with a definition of the OFS but with a presentation of the Franciscan Family. The OFS realizes its autonomy in relationships of “life-giving reciprocal communion” with the other members of the Family. This is in line with the vision of the Church as communion and mission and with an “exchange of gifts” ecclesiology. Church communion does not permit communities to enclose themselves in their own spirituality, structures and activities, as was stressed during the at the World Congress of Church Movements (Rome, 27-29 May 1999). Union with one another presupposes respect for each other’s specificity; collaboration presupposes the autonomy of those who work together. Obviously, if there is to be an exchange, there need to be different gifts, received and cherished, and each one’s “charismatic identity” must be clear. Special or simple and humble, the charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit that, directly or indirectly, are useful for the Church, because they are directed toward building up the Church, for the good of the people and the needs of the world.¹⁶⁴ The OFS needs to be conscious of its own nature, of its own role and its own responsibility in the mission of the Franciscan Family.¹⁶⁵

As an integral part of the Franciscan Family and called to live the charism of Francis within the secular dimension, the OFS has special and close relationships with the First Order and the TOR.¹⁶⁶ From Franciscan history and from their constitutions, it is evident that these orders recognize that they are committed to the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the OFS by reason of

¹⁶⁰ *Report of the CIOFS Presidency to the elective General Chapter, in Ordine Francescano Secolare, VIII Capitolo Generale, Roma, 7-14 luglio 1996, Atti, Rome 1997, p. 65.*

¹⁶¹ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 20.

¹⁶² Cf. *Report of the CIOFS Presidency to the elective General Chapter ...*, pp. 64-65.

¹⁶³ Talk: *Vision of the OFS (autonomy, unity, secularity)* by Emanuela De Nunzio at the seminars for national Assistants at Frascati (27 February 1998 for Slavic speaking countries, 26 June 26 1998 for African countries). I am using my private notes made during these conferences.

¹⁶⁴ Cf. CCC, 799.

¹⁶⁵ Cf. *The Secular Third Orders today*, by the General Assistants of Secular Third Orders (Rome 1978), in *La voce del Padre*, February 1979 (in Italian).

¹⁶⁶ Cf. *Const.*, 85.1.

their common origin and charism and by the will of the Church.¹⁶⁷ This is exercised with respect for the *Constitutions* of the OFS and the statutes prepared by the fraternities at the various levels.¹⁶⁸

According to the OFS *General Constitutions*: “The spiritual assistant is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity to which he or she gives assistance and collaborates with it in all activities.”¹⁶⁹ The spiritual assistant “does not exercise the right to vote in financial questions.”¹⁷⁰ And the *Statutes for Assistance* state again: “In economic matters and in elections at any level he or she does not enjoy the right to vote.”¹⁷¹

The spiritual assistants must take part in the council of the fraternity as “spiritual assistants” in accord with the new legislation and new spirit of collaboration with the laity, “giving them priority with regard to the guidance, co-ordination and animation of the fraternity.”¹⁷²

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.¹⁷³

6.4. From the beginning

Just as unity goes back to the beginning of the OFS, so also its autonomy, confirmed by the current legislation, is a return to the beginnings.¹⁷⁴ The present autonomy is a return to the origins. The figure of Francis, the life and preaching of his brothers, the form of life given to the penitents caused many persons to enter the Order of Penance assisted by the Lesser Brothers.¹⁷⁵ The *Memoriale propositi* (1221) helped them live the gospel life in fraternity, a fundamental aspect of the life of these penitents. Each of these fraternities had its own government, composed of brothers and sisters chosen by the fraternity. The council had the power to adapt the articles of the *Memoriale*, after consulting the fraternity. When the year had passed, the ministers with the counsel of the brothers were to elect two other ministers and a faithful treasurer, who would provide for the needs of the brothers and sisters and other poor; and messengers who at the command of the ministers would publish what was said and done by the fraternity.¹⁷⁶

Between the *Memoriale* and the Rule of Nicholas IV (1289), there have been moments of very close relationship between the Lesser Brothers and the Order of Penance, for example during the generalate of John Parenti (1227-1232). But it seems that Brother Elias (1232-1239) was against this responsibility. During the generalate of John of Parma (1245-1257), Innocent IV in 1247 urged the provincial ministers of Italy and Sicily to visit the brothers of Penance, even though a year later he put the Penitents of Lombardy under the jurisdiction of the bishops, and in 1251 those of Florence. Saint Bonaventure (1257-1274) was against having obligations toward the Third Order.¹⁷⁷ In 1284 good relations between the Lesser Brothers and the Order of Penance were re-established. That year we find as Apostolic Visitor of the brothers and sisters of Penance a certain Brother Caro from Florence, who composed a Rule for them. Nicholas IV, with the bull *Supra montem* (1289) approved this Rule composed by Brother Caro, which retains all aspects of the *Memoriale*, but

¹⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 85, note.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. *Const.*, 90.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 90.2.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 90.2.

¹⁷¹ *Statutes for Assistance*, 12.3.

¹⁷² *Ibidem*, 13.2.

¹⁷³ Cf. *Lettera dei Quattro Ministri generali francescani sulla Vocazione e missione dei fedeli laici francescani nella Chiesa e nel mondo* (Roma, 18 agosto 1989) n. 49 c.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. *Lettera dei Quattro Ministri generali della Famiglia francescana* (4 ottobre 1978), nell'occasione della consegna della *Regola*.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. A. Pompei, *Il movimento penitenziale nei secoli XII-XII*, in *Atti del Convegno di Studi Francescani*, Assisi 1972, pp. 20-21.

¹⁷⁶ Cf. *Memoriale propositi*, 38.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Saint Bonaventure, *Determinationes quaestionum circa Regulam fratrum minorum*, p. II, q. 16, in *Opera omnia*, p. 368 ff.

introduced “visitors” and “instructors.” He stipulates that all visitors and instructors of the penitents would be Lesser Brothers: “Because this present form of life took its origin from the aforementioned Blessed Francis, We counsel that the visitors and instructors should be taken from the Order of Friars Minor, whom the custodes or guardians of the same Order shall appoint, when they have been requested in the matter. However, We do not want a congregation of this kind to be visited by a lay person.”¹⁷⁸ The visitor’s first duty was to guard orthodoxy and the observance of the Rule.

The fraternities of the laity remained autonomous, as is proved by the chapter for all of Italy, held in Bologna in 1289, and by a number of regional chapters in Marsciano, Bologna and Umbria.¹⁷⁹ With the bull *Romani Pontificis Providentia* of Sixtus IV (1471), any remaining desire for autonomy on the part of the Penitents was squelched, and a system of dependence on the religious was established, which would last until the Rule of Paul VI in 1978.¹⁸⁰

The Rule of Leo XIII (1883) states: “The offices shall be conferred at a meeting of the members. The term of these offices shall be three years.”¹⁸¹ But it emphasizes: “The visitors are to be chosen from the First Franciscan Order or from the Third Order Regular.... Laypersons cannot hold the office of visitor.” And again: “The visitor...shall diligently investigate whether the Rule is properly observed. Therefore, it shall be his duty to visit the fraternities every year, or oftener if need be, and hold a meeting, to which all the officers and members shall be summoned.”¹⁸²

In the *Constitutions* of 1957 the Third Order has no autonomy, no direct responsibility for the fraternity. They state: “The government of the Third Order is of a double kind, in conformity with its particular nature: external, which is exercised by the Church and the four Franciscan Families; and internal, which common law leaves in the hands of the Tertiaries themselves.”¹⁸³ The superiors of the four Franciscan Families normally govern the Third Order through the general, national, provincial and regional commissaries, and through the local directors.”¹⁸⁴ The local director or moderator...must be a person of experience, zeal, holiness, prudence and pastoral dedication. In the spirit of our Seraphic Father, the Tertiaries shall show him obedience and reverence.¹⁸⁵ The internal government of a fraternity, as a moral person, belongs to the council of the Third Order. This council consists of the minister prefect and councillors, and constitutes the director’s advisory board.¹⁸⁶ At least once a month...the council shall hold a session, presided over by the director.¹⁸⁷ If the director was not present at the session of the council, its decisions require his approval. Elections, however, may not be held in the absence of the director or the visitor.¹⁸⁸

These citations from the *Constitutions* of 1957 show the great extent of the changes brought about by the renewed *Rule* and by the *Constitutions* of 1990 (updated in 2000), according to which the fraternity is guided by the council and the minister, whereas the spiritual and pastoral assistant is a member of the council.

6.5. Process of realization of autonomy

The law establishes the autonomy of the Secular Franciscan Order clearly and without exception. In fact, the OFS will not be fully autonomous until it is united as a single Order in every

¹⁷⁸ *Rule of Nicholas IV*, 16.2.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. G. G. Meersseman, *Dossier de l'Ordre de la Pénitence*, pp. 160-178.

¹⁸⁰ M. Bigi “*L’universale salute*”, pg. 111

¹⁸¹ *Rule of Leo XIII*, 3.1.

¹⁸² *Ibidem*, 3.3, 3.2.

¹⁸³ *Constitutions of 1957*, 94.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 105.

¹⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 111.

¹⁸⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, 120.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 130.

¹⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 131.

regional and national fraternity, until the councils at the various levels are capable of governing the respective fraternities, and until it is financially self-sufficient.

In realizing autonomy as envisioned, there is no lack of difficulties.¹⁸⁹ There are fraternities fully conscious of their own autonomy. But there are also contrary situations where fraternities to a certain extent depend on the religious or the spiritual assistant. Such dependence is often desired by the seculars themselves, because they are not ready to assume their own responsibility. In those cases the fraternities lose significance in their ecclesiastical and social surroundings.

In general there is still a considerable need for formation to autonomy. This topic needs to be developed especially in initial formation and the first years after profession, but also through programs of ongoing formation. Often, the help of the assistants will still be indispensable for this formation. One sign of autonomy is willingness to accept responsibility on the part of the fraternity council.

Another problem is the relationship between the self-government of the OFS and the role of the spiritual and pastoral assistant in the fraternity and in the council. The spirituality of the OFS is not a kind of “mirrored” spirituality in which one reflects the spirituality of the religious. An exchange of gifts is impossible if the OFS is seen only as an aid for the life and mission of the religious; there will be no exchange if the religious who assist the OFS want to “colonize” it by enforcing their own vision of the Franciscan charism and Franciscan values. There is still need for deeper theoretical and practical reflection on the basic outlines of a *secular* Franciscan spirituality for our times. The assistant should offer his *help*, often really needed, but he should be attentive and respect the authority of the council and minister of the fraternity.

What has been said so far regarding autonomy also holds for the Franciscan Youth. The model *National Statutes of the Franciscan Youth* say: “The local fraternity is animated and guided by a council composed of the president, vice-president and at least one councillor, elected...by the local fraternity.... Besides them, the OFS representative and the spiritual assistant are also members of the council.”¹⁹⁰ Not only the animators and assistants, but also the Secular Franciscans involved in FY must be very careful not to take over direction of the fraternity in the council.

The documents concerning FY say nothing about the means for financing FY. The OFS, since it is responsible for FY, will need to help it financially. Nevertheless the FY fraternities must make an effort to generate means of their own so as to have the necessary degree of autonomy.

7. Formation

7.1. Agents and leaders of formation

The Constitutions rightly recall that “the brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord.”¹⁹¹ But with regard to responsibility in formation they add: “Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation and always attentive to collaboration with him, those responsible for formation are: the candidate, the entire fraternity, the council with the minister, the master of formation, and the assistant.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ From the Lecture by Emanuela De Nunzio.

¹⁹⁰ *Modello degli Statuti nazionali della GiFra*, 35.

¹⁹¹ *Const.*, 37.3.

¹⁹² *Ibidem*, 37.2.

7.2. Agents

7.2.1. The Holy Spirit

“It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries that the Holy Spirit makes the people holy, leads them and enriches them with his virtues. Allotting his gifts ‘at will to each individual,’ he also distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts, he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, ‘the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit.’”¹⁹³

The Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation, the principal agent of formation, and the soul of fraternal living.¹⁹⁴

The Holy Spirit:

- gives birth to the new life that makes us sharers in the divine nature and bears witness that we are children of God (Cf. Jn 3:5-8; 2Pt 1:4; Rom 8:14-16);
- reveals and communicates our fundamental call to holiness (Cf. Eph 1:4-5), and he becomes the principle and source of its realization by conforming us to Christ, making us sharers in his life as Son: love for the Father and for our brothers and sisters (Cf. Gal 4:6; 5:25);
- teaches us what is necessary for the following of Christ (Cf. Jn 14:26; 16:3-14);
- strengthens our inner being by giving us the power to understand the greatness of the mystery of Christ and his love that surpasses all knowledge (Cf. Eph 3:16-19);
- enriches us with gifts and special graces that enable us to assume offices and services for the common good (Cf. 1Cor 12:4-11);
- gives us strength to bear witness to Christ, teaches us how to act and what to say in emergencies (Cf. Acts 1:8; 8:14-17; Lk 12:11-12);
- consoles, counsels, assists and sustains us in the various circumstances of life; helps our weakness and intercedes for us (Cf. Jn 14:16-17.26; Rom 8,26-27);
- joins us to the resurrection of Christ (Cf. Rom 8,11).

The *Rule* describes the action of the Holy Spirit on the candidate as:

- *antecedent*: he prepares for each one the “welcoming family,” the Franciscan family raised up by him in the Church;¹⁹⁵
- *stimulating*: he “moves” the candidate to enter that family in order to follow Jesus Christ after the manner of Saint Francis;¹⁹⁶
- *illuminating and strengthening*: he leads the candidate into the truth, into the mystery of Christ, in the Church and in liturgical actions, especially the Eucharist,¹⁹⁷ as Saint Francis writes: “It is the Spirit of the Lord that lives in its faithful, that receives the Body and Blood of the Lord. All others who do not share in this same Spirit and presume to receive him eat and drink judgment on themselves”¹⁹⁸

7.2.2. Saint Francis

During his lifetime Francis was filled with the Holy Spirit, and acted and spoke under his influence.¹⁹⁹ He believed that:

¹⁹³ LG, 12.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. *Const.*, 11; 37.2.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 1.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, 2.

¹⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 5.

¹⁹⁸ Adm I, 13-14; FA:EDI, 129.

¹⁹⁹ Cf. 2C 46, 52.

- like Christ, his brothers had been born of a poor mother by the power of the Holy Spirit, whom he regarded as general minister of the Order;²⁰⁰
- in order to follow the footprints of Jesus Christ we must be interiorly cleansed, enlightened and inflamed by the fire of the Holy Spirit;²⁰¹
- the new person, the one who sees with the eyes of Jesus and acts in the spirit of the Gospel, is the one who has “the Spirit of the Lord and its holy activity;²⁰²
- the Spirit leads us to the knowledge of spiritual realities even without human instruction,²⁰³ joins the faithful soul to Jesus Christ and makes that soul the spouse of Christ.²⁰⁴

7.2.3. The Candidate

The candidate is the chief agent and center, the subject and the object of formation, which concerns each one directly and involves each one personally.

The results of the formative process are linked to the candidate’s cooperation with the action of the Holy Spirit, and to the candidate’s active collaboration with the work of the leaders of the fraternity on the candidate’s behalf.

Moved by the “impulse” of the Holy Spirit inviting the candidate to seek the perfection of charity in his or her own state of life by living the Gospel after the manner of Saint Francis as laid out in the *Rule* of the OFS,²⁰⁵ the candidate begins the process of formation that leads to the clarification of ideas and prepares each one to make the choice of vocation, a choice ratified by the promise to lead a gospel way of life, that is by Profession, which seals the candidate’s “membership” in the OFS.

This commitment should lead each one to work so as to:

- act responsibly toward God, oneself and the OFS by analyzing calmly and seriously the motives that impel one to begin the Franciscan experience, by examining one’s abilities and character, and by taking into account future difficulties, whether subjective or objective, which may arise as a consequence of one's choice;
 - open oneself with complete docility to the light of the Holy Spirit and the assistance offered by those responsible, so as to judge the genuineness of the “impulse” to the Franciscan way of life and its significance for the candidate, the discernment employed in making this assessment, and the responsibility to act in accord with it;
 - acquire and use evangelical discernment, which comes from the light and power of the Gospel and from a gift of the Holy Spirit. As a principle of knowledge, this discernment allows the candidate to see God’s call in the various circumstances of life; as a criterion of interpretation, it helps each one to choose among the different values that can present themselves, and among the maze of difficulties and possibilities, negative elements and reasons for hope;
 - use this discernment to avoid isolating positive indications from one another, regarding them as absolutes, in such a way that they seem to be in contradiction and to conflict with one another; and perceive, even when the indications are negative, whatever is of value and waiting to be extracted and used to the full;
 - cultivate those human qualities necessary for the development of a balanced personality tending toward human and Christian maturity, which is marked by a profound harmony with the persons, by a full and conscious possession of the truth, by a capacity for giving

²⁰⁰ Cf. 2C 193; LMj III,10.

²⁰¹ Cf. LtOrd 51; FA:ED I, 120.

²⁰² LR X, 8; FA:ED I, 105.

²⁰³ Cf. 2C 191; FA:ED II, 369-70.

²⁰⁴ Cf. 1LtF I, 8; FA:ED I, 42 (Prologue to the Rule)

²⁰⁵ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 2.

oneself, fully aware of one's particular responsibilities as a member of both civil and church communities, and a genuine witness to the faith in every area of life: family, professional, social, political.

This requires of the candidate an openness to love for truth; to loyalty, to respect for others, to keeping one's word, to harmony, to balance in one's judgment and conduct, to an ability to relate to others. This last is especially important for one who wishes to become a member of the Franciscan Fraternity.

7.3. Those Responsible for Formation

Those responsible for formation must be capable of:

- supporting without dominating;
- providing conditions in which each candidate may find himself or herself;
- performing the duties of both action and reflection.

7.3.1. The Fraternity

The fraternity, whose lifestyle is intensely communal, profoundly ecclesial and dynamically missionary "is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer, and example"²⁰⁶

For this reason it must be like a school equipped to develop the Franciscan vocation and an ecclesial sense, and to animate the apostolic life of its members, so as to make genuine Secular Franciscans of those it has brought into the Order.

To foster such a way of life, it is recommended that they also look after the environment in which their meetings take place.

7.3.2. The Minister and the Council

The animator and guide of the fraternity is the council, of which the minister is the one primarily responsible.²⁰⁷ It is the council's duty to:²⁰⁸

- fix the program in conformity with higher directives;
- support the master of formation and keep abreast of his work so as to be able to judge its results and be in a position to accept or reject candidates for admission and profession;
- plan the meetings;
- promote the renewal and foster the growth of all the members.

7.3.3. The Master of Formation

The master of formation must be:²⁰⁹

- qualified for the office and readily available, able to communicate and possessing the content he is called upon to pass on;

²⁰⁶ *Const.*, 37.3.

²⁰⁷ *Cf. Ibidem*, 51.1.

²⁰⁸ *Cf. Ibidem*, 50.1.

²⁰⁹ *Cf. Ibidem*, 52.3.

- conscious of the office, the Spirit of God, competence, obligation to the whole person, internal tensions;
- mindful of charism of the founder and the deep roots that sustained it, interpreting this charism in light of the signs of the times and the new demands of Church and society;
- conscious of his position as being deputed by the fraternity;
- ready to foster the full and joyful incorporation of the candidates into the fraternity;
- careful about the way he relates to each individual;
- able to understand their experiences and motives;
- capable of choosing appropriate ways and times for correcting wrong conduct;
- in constant communication with the assistant and with other people who have responsibility in the fraternity.

In short, this brother or sister must be totally dedicated to the work as a personal response to the confidence placed in him or her and to the powerful plea for help.

7.3.4. The Spiritual Assistant

The spiritual assistant is a concrete sign of the communion and coresponsibility that exists between the First Order and the Third Order Regular in their relationships with the Secular Franciscan Order.²¹⁰

In the fraternity he serves as a brother in Saint Francis and as a teacher and guide *in persona Christi e in nomine Ecclesiae* (“in the person of Christ and in the name of the Church”).²¹¹

- As a brother, he shares the same ideal; partakes, though in a different way, of the same charism; and shares in the same mission of Francis. In this way he lives and facilitates that mutual and lifegiving communion among all the followers of Saint Francis.²¹²
- As a teacher and guide, he reveals the Christ who saves, and through his priestly ministry he communicates Christ’s grace to the candidates so that they might exercise their common priesthood, the gift of all the baptized.²¹³ In this way he fosters communion with the Church, guaranteeing the integrity of the faith and of ecclesiastical discipline.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 26.

²¹¹ Cf. *Pdv*, 20.

²¹² Cf. *Const.*, 89.3.

²¹³ Cf. *PO*, 6; *Pdv*, 16,127.

²¹⁴ Cf. *CJC*, 305; *Const.*, 85.2; *Statutes for Assistance*, 2, 2-3.

CHAPTER III

ACTIVE PRESENCE OF THE OFS IN THE CHURCH AND IN SOCIETY

1. The OFS in the Franciscan Family

1.1. The Franciscan trilogy

The *Rule* of the Secular Franciscan Order begins with this forceful statement: “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 Saint 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.”²¹⁵

The statement that Francis started three Orders occurs constantly in the Franciscan Sources. Thomas of Celano says in 1229: “Through his spreading message the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching, and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved”²¹⁶ A little later (1234 or 1235), Julian of Speyer sees the three churches rebuilt by Francis as a sign of his work of rebuilding the Church through his three Orders. The question remains as to *how* Francis is the source of these three Franciscan Orders.

Thomas of Celano says of Francis: “He himself originally planted the Order of Lesser Brothers”²¹⁷ and “wrote their rule.”²¹⁸ Speaking of the church of San Damiano, he notes: “This is the blessed and holy place where the glorious religion and the most excellent Order of Poor Ladies and holy virgins had its happy beginning, about six years after the conversion of the blessed Francis and through that same blessed man.”²¹⁹ He adds that they received their rule from Pope Gregory IX, at that time bishop of Ostia.²²⁰ For the Third Order he speaks in more general terms, saying: “Furthermore, to all he gave a norm of life and to those of every rank he sincerely pointed out the way to salvation.”²²¹ Julian of Speyer, in the text cited above, says that Francis organized and arranged or coordinated three Orders.

In thus coordinating the three Orders, Francis allowed himself to be guided by the Spirit of the Lord. He was aware that the three Orders, each in its proper state, were related to the work of rebuilding the Church which the Lord had entrusted to him. Nothing in the sources indicates that Francis wished to give the First Order the task of guiding the Second or Third Order or being over them in some way. Rather it is clear that he wished to give all three Orders, each in fidelity to its own vocation, the responsibility to help each other and walk together in the ways of the Lord. Thus, those who enter the First, Second or Third Order become part of a life-giving reality in mutual communion, willed by God for the rebuilding of his Church.

We can conclude from the sources that the manner in which Francis is at the origin of each of the three Orders is by no means the same. For the First Order, Francis was the founder who gave it its name, wrote its Rule and guided it as general minister. The *Earlier Rule* says: “This is the life of

²¹⁵ *Rule OFS*, 1.

²¹⁶ 1 C 37; FA:ED I, 216.

²¹⁷ 1 C 38; FA:ED I, 217.

²¹⁸ 1 C 32; FA:ED I, 210.

²¹⁹ 1 C 18; FA:ED I, 197.

²²⁰ Cf. 1 C 20; FA:ED I, 199.

²²¹ 1 C 37; FA:ED I, 216-17.

the Gospel of Jesus Christ that Brother Francis petitioned the Lord Pope to grant and confirm for him; and he did grant and confirm it for him and his brothers present and to come. Brother Francis—and whoever is head of this religion—promises obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors. Let all the brothers be bound to obey Brother Francis and his successors.”²²² This is an Order with a centralized government, not bound to any particular territory but extending to the whole world. Governing power is in the hands of the general minister, at the service of the whole Order. The General Chapter has the power to decide the basic lines of the gospel life and even to remove the minister general, if necessary.

For the Second Order, Francis had to find other solutions. Clare herself says that she did penance according to the example and teaching of Francis, and that she and her few sisters promised obedience to him.²²³ In other words, Francis accepted Clare and her sisters into the circle of his Order. What was excluded for them was the itinerant apostolic life of the brothers, as well as the possibility of incorporating them into an existing monastery. The solution adopted was to establish a new house of monastic religious life, with a promise of loving care and special solicitude on the part of the First Order.²²⁴ Like all monasteries, the monastery of San Damiano was fully autonomous with its own form of life, written by Gregory IX.²²⁵

The Third Order, of Order of the Brothers of Penance,²²⁶ originated from Francis’s desire to provide new ways for men and women who wished to “do penance” following his preaching and example. It cannot be said with certainty that Francis instituted or founded the Order of Penitents, since it was present in the Church from the beginning. But he spared no efforts to give directions to those who, touched by his message, wished to “do penance.”²²⁷ Thus there arose groups of brothers of penance inspired by his experience of gospel life. Francis continued to feel close to them and felt in some way responsible for supporting them in their choice and making them associates in his call to rebuild the Church. Already in 1221 *Memoriale propositi* formulated special rules for the life and organization of groups of penitents, most of which had arisen in Franciscan circles.

Francis thus established the three Orders, institutionally autonomous and independent. Therefore their autonomous existence does not depend on the existence of the larger body. Their spiritual vitality, however, requires that they support each other “in life-giving union with each other.”²²⁸

The Secular Franciscan Order has its own way of living the Franciscan charism, just as the Friars Minor, the Poor Clares and the men and women religious of the Third Order. To be precise, the Secular Franciscan Order lives the Franciscan charism in its secular manner and does not share the particular charism of any Franciscan religious institute. It has its own place within the Family, in which it assumes the form of an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world, in which “the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state... [and]...pledge themselves to live the Gospel in the manner of Saint Francis.”²²⁹ The relationship that links religious Franciscans and Secular Franciscans is not a relationship in which the lay members share in the charism of their religious brothers and sisters. It is a relationship of “life-giving union with each other,”²³⁰ in which the Church is lived as communion and efforts are joined in a spirit of “cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in

²²² Cf. ER, 1-3.

²²³ Cf. TestCl 24-26; CA:ED 58.

²²⁴ Cf. RCI 6.4; CA:ED 71-72.

²²⁵ Cf. 1 C 20; FA:ED I, 199.

²²⁶ Cf. LMj 4.6; FA:ED II, 553.

²²⁷ Cf. LtF; FA:ED I, 41ff.

²²⁸ *Rule OFS*, 1.

²²⁹ *Ibidem*, 2.

²³⁰ *Ibidem*, 1.

the Church's mission," in order to render more effective our "response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts."²³¹

Concrete experience with the Secular Franciscan Order shows us the importance of encouraging "new experiences of communion and cooperation"²³² between religious and laity. It is likewise important to recognize the fundamental ideas on which are based the relations between religious and laity who are inspired by the same spiritual vision. Two principal models can be distinguished. The first is based on the idea of *sharing gifts*, and the second is based on the idea of *sharing the charism*. Naturally the two models often mix in the daily relations between religious and laity.

1.2. The field cultivated by Francis

In the history of the Church Francis was the first to found a religious trilogy. Because he could not use the brothers' itinerant form of life for the women's communities and the groups of penitents, he had to institute the Second and Third Orders. These two Orders, by their very nature, require that they be autonomous, even though related to each other and to the First Order.

Francis and Clare knew very well that under the rules of the Fourth Lateran Council the Second Order must be part of the monastic type of religious life, into which they would have to incorporate the values of their spirituality. Clare, the little plant of the most blessed father Francis, always did everything in her power to remain in the Franciscan Family. In her *Rule*, she promises "obedience and reverence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors," which is a statement of her Order's autonomy and its direct link to the Holy See. She also safeguards its link to the Franciscan Family by adding: "And as, at the beginning of her conversion she, together with her sisters, promised obedience to Blessed Francis, so now she promises his successors to observe the same obedience inviolably."²³³ To assure the Poor Ladies of this vital link, Francis promised for himself and his brothers to have "loving care and special solicitude" for them.²³⁴ This loving care for the little plants growing in the field cultivated by Francis always implies great respect for their specific nature and autonomy.

The same thing applies to the Third Order, which grew up in the field tilled by Francis. Its roots lie in the pre-existing Order of Penitents, but closely linked to the Franciscan Family. It embraces penitents who are living in the married state as well as penitents who are living under a promise of chastity, individually or in community. The latter could enter "regular" religious life with the approval of their project by ecclesiastical authority. This option, which already existed in the canon law of the time, favored the birth of the Third Order Regular as well as a host of religious congregations of Franciscan Tertiaries. In the course of history it was not always easy for the Third Order, secular or regular, to maintain a balance between its autonomy and its link to the First Order and the entire Franciscan Family.

In the field cultivated by Francis many little plants grew up, rooted in the Franciscan charism and linked to one another. Within the First Order there grew up the three great branches of the Observants, the Conventuals and the Capuchins, each one fully autonomous and proud to have Francis as their one and only Seraphic Father. Within the Second Order there flourished various federations and branches of Poor Clares, Urbanists, Capuchinesses and others, formed from many autonomous monasteries and linked to the various branches of the First Order. The greatest development was seen within the Third Order, both religious and secular. We find here the Third

²³¹ VC, 54.

²³² VC, 55.

²³³ RCI 1.3-4; CA:ED 64.

²³⁴ FormViv 2; CA:ED 312.

Order Regular, almost in mutual relationship with the three great branches of the First Order. We also find a great number of different religious communities, old and modern, each autonomous but linked in some way to the great Franciscan Family. Today they profess their own particular Rule and collaborate in the International Federation of the TOR. Finally, there is the Secular Franciscan Order, set up as an organic union of all the Catholic fraternities in the world, divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national and international.

1.3. Sharing a charism

The concept of “sharing a charism,” as described in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*,²³⁵ refers to relationships between religious and lay people that are different from those presented under the heading “exchange of gifts.” The concept of “sharing a charism” implies closer participation in the life of a religious institute than “exchange of gifts.” “The laity are...invited to share more intensely in the spirituality and mission” of the various Institutes of consecrated life.²³⁶ It facilitates “more intense cooperation between consecrated persons and the laity in view of the Institute’s mission.”²³⁷ It can develop into forms of associate membership or of sharing fully “for a certain period of time the Institute’s community life and its particular dedication to contemplation or the apostolate.”²³⁸ Note the much closer participation in the internal life of the Institute than in the case considered before.

It is worth noting that the concept of “sharing a charism” is present in the Secular Franciscan Order not only in their relationship with Franciscan religious, but also in their relationship with “those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to share its experiences and activities.”²³⁹ The Franciscan Youth, with a world-wide membership of about 50,000 young people and for whom the OFS considers itself particularly responsible, “is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.”²⁴⁰ “The members of the Franciscan Youth consider the Rule of the OFS as an inspirational document for the growth of their own Christian and Franciscan vocation either individually or in a group.”²⁴¹ These youth are animated and assisted by secular and religious Franciscans together. Apart from the youth, a certain number of people, Catholics and non-Catholics alike, want in some way to share in the charism of the OFS and participate in its life and activities. Already in 1995 the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS felt the need to give some guidelines for associate membership in the OFS and for “friends of Saint Francis” who feel attracted by Saint Francis of Assisi and want to be close to the Franciscan Family.

Another way, unexpected perhaps, of “sharing a charism” is the fact that the OFS, in the past and in the present, has given birth and is giving birth to various religious Congregations. The same thing is happening in some of the new lay movements in the Church. There has been no formal research on this, but an impressive number of Franciscan religious Congregations started out as small groups of Secular Franciscan who decided to pool their resources, to live and pray together and to consecrate themselves to God by private vows. Most of them were following the Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order of Saint Francis approved by Pope Leo X in 1521; nowadays they follow the Third Order Religious Rule, approved by Pope John Paul II in 1982. But even today some Secular Institutes follow the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978. Besides the members of these Institutes of Consecrated Life, there are also

²³⁵ Cf. VC, 54-56.

²³⁶ *Ibidem*, 54.

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, 55.

²³⁸ *Ibidem*, 56.

²³⁹ *Const.*, 103.1.

²⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 96.2.

²⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 96.3.

Secular Franciscans “who commit themselves with private vows to live in the spirit of the beatitudes and to make themselves more disposed to contemplation and to the service of the fraternities” and who can be “a great help in the spiritual and apostolic development of the OFS. These brothers and sisters may gather in groups according to statutes approved by the national council, or when these groups spread beyond the borders of a nation, by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.”²⁴²

It is worth noting that the concept of “sharing a charism” affirms the leadership of those sharing the charism over those participating in it. For religious who are sharing their charism with lay people, it means that the religious are expected to be the leaders in their relationship with the laity. The religious appear as models to be imitated as far as possible. “Moved by the examples of holiness of the consecrated members, lay men and women will experience at first hand the spirit of the evangelical counsels,...in order to transform the world according to God’s design.”²⁴³ The religious are seen not only as “expert guides in the spiritual life,”²⁴⁴ but also as those bearing final responsibility. Any “initiatives involving lay persons at the decision-making level, in order to be considered the work of a specific Institute, must promote the ends of that Institute and be carried out under its responsibility. Therefore, if lay persons take on a directive role, they will be accountable for their actions to the competent superiors.”²⁴⁵

This relationship between religious and lay people benefits both, and “the participation of the laity often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate.”²⁴⁶ This sharing in the charism of a religious Institute, “which draws from the riches of the consecrated life, should be held in great esteem.”²⁴⁷ “Consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life,” whereas “the laity should offer religious families the invaluable contribution of their ‘being in the world’ and their specific service.”²⁴⁸

This view of the relationship between religious and laity has by no means been absent in the history of the Secular Franciscan Order. It still lingers in the minds of quite a number of both religious and secular Franciscans all over the world. It has produced fruits of holiness and great works of charity in the past and in the present, but it has been, and still is, the cause of much misunderstanding and even conflict between religious and secular Franciscans.

The first and most important consequence of this view is the affirmation of the religious as the real leaders and lack of autonomy on the part of the laity. Initiatives either originate from the religious or need to be approved by them. Secular Franciscans espousing this view look to the religious as their models and leaders, inwardly and outwardly. They offer valuable assistance to Franciscan religious, participate in their activities, in their prayer, and even at times share in their community life. According to the Rule given by Pope Leo XIII to the OFS in 1883, and even more according to the General Constitutions of 1957, the Secular Franciscan Order is animated and guided by the religious: “The superiors of the four Franciscan Families govern the Third Order normally through the general, national, provincial and regional commissaries, and through the local directors.”²⁴⁹ “The internal government of a fraternity, as a moral person within the Third Order, belongs to the council of the fraternity. This council consists of the minister prefect and councillors,

²⁴² *Const.*, 36.1-2.

²⁴³ *VC*, 55.

²⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 56.

²⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 55.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 56.

²⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 55.

²⁴⁹ *Const. 1957*, Art. 105.

and constitutes also the advisory board of the director.”²⁵⁰ It is only with the *Rule* approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978 that the OFS regained its autonomy. The present *General Constitutions*, approved in 1990, express this autonomy in more detail and see it as strongly related to both unity and secularity.

This shows us a second consequence of “sharing a charism,” which is singularity and lack of unity. In this view, each religious institute that shares its charism with the laity should have its own lay movement. The Secular Franciscan Order used to be divided into four obediences based on the four Orders assisting it. This division has been overcome in all countries.²⁵¹ But it still continues in the mind of many religious and secular Franciscans. Often enough one hears the question, “How many Secular Franciscans are there in the world?” When the answer is, “About 400,000,” the next question is often, “Yes, but how many are *ours* (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap, TOR)?” Then one has to start to explain that there are no “obediential” Secular Franciscans and that the Secular Franciscan Order belongs to *itself* and not to the brothers.

A third consequence of “sharing a charism” is special attention to aspects of the charism that are important to the religious, while elements specific to the seculars are often overlooked. Taken to the extreme, this would deny a specific secular spirituality to the Secular Franciscan Order and have it live a mirrored spirituality and a charism received from the religious Franciscans. According to this view, to be a real Franciscan one needs to be a religious, as were Saint Francis and his brothers, the first Friars Minor. If this is not possible there is a second choice, to enter the Third Order, founded by Saint Francis himself for those who would like to follow him but cannot leave their family, house or children. In this view, the personal and devotional aspects of Franciscan spirituality are dominant, and little attention is given to active social and political involvement. This view is often implicit in the insistence of certain Secular Franciscans or their spiritual assistants to allow the Seculars to wear a kind of religious habit. The point in question is not the habit itself, but the confusion of ideas that causes the attachment to this outward sign of belonging to the Franciscan Family.

1.4. Different expressions of the same charism

Religious and secular fraternities within the Franciscan Family make present the charism of Saint Francis “in various ways and forms.”²⁵² The Franciscan Family is a communion of different expressions of the unique charism of Saint Francis. Franciscan religious should foster unity and communion with all members of the Franciscan Family because all belong to the same “spiritual family” and all participate in the same charism. In such an understanding, the OFS must be recognized as an autonomous Franciscan Order within the communion of the Franciscan Family, and necessary for the *fullness* of the Franciscan charism.²⁵³ Religious Order Franciscans need to recognize that the Secular Franciscan complements their own. The OFS is on an equal footing with all other components of the Franciscan Family. It is important to know this fact and to make it known. It is clear that responsibility for communion between Seculars and religious is based on the will of Church not just on the desire of the Franciscan Orders.²⁵⁴

It is necessary to insist again on the need for clear and objective concepts regarding the relationship between religious and laity who draw inspiration from them. “In whatever activity or ministry they are involved, consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate ‘the most precious gift: the spirit.’ For their part, the laity should offer religious families the invaluable contribution of

²⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, Art. 120.

²⁵¹ In Italy they are working hard and confidently toward this unity, even though there is still suffering and conflicts.

²⁵² *Rule OFS*, 1.

²⁵³ Cf. *Capuchin Constitutions*, 95. See Constitutions of the Friars Minor, Conventuals, TOR.

²⁵⁴ Cf. K. Schindler, *Figure and Role of the Assistant*, in *Koinonia* 1994, 3, 2-4.

their ‘being in the world’ and their specific service.”²⁵⁵ Only in this way can we unite our efforts “with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church’s mission. This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts.”²⁵⁶

This relationship is also one of love and solidarity. If one member of the Franciscan Family is suffering, all Franciscans suffer. It is a communion or sharing of spiritual goods. Each activity of a single fraternity within the Franciscan Family has or could have consequences for the whole Family. Let us not forget also the ecclesial and human aspects of our communion, our help and our collaboration. Secular Franciscans are often looking to their religious brothers and sisters for encouragement, support and spiritual assistance.

1.5. Exchange of gifts

The term “exchange of gifts” appears six times in the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*,²⁵⁷ all of them in the context of inter-related independent entities who are able to enrich each other and to be enriched by one another. This “exchange of gifts” can “contribute to an inculturation of the Gospel which purifies, strengthens and ennobles the treasures found in the cultures of all peoples.”²⁵⁸ It will make religious and laity “participate more effectively in the Church’s mission”²⁵⁹ in renewed “faithfulness to the Holy Spirit, who is the source of communion and unceasing newness of life,”²⁶⁰ and who gives the Church “a unity of fellowship and service; furnishing and directing her with various gifts, both hierarchical and charismatic.”²⁶¹ The “exchange of gifts,” mutual knowledge and “co-operation in common undertakings of service and of witness, ... show the will to journey together towards perfect unity along the path of truth and love.”²⁶²

Therefore Secular Franciscans are called to live the Gospel after the manner of Saint Francis in the world, just as their religious brothers and sisters are called to live the same Gospel by leaving the world. “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.”²⁶³ In the same way, “the rule and life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own, and in chastity”²⁶⁴ and “the form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis is to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, in poverty and in chastity.”²⁶⁵

Secular Franciscans in fact have their own Order, with its own *Rule* of life, approved by the Pope, its *Ritual* and *General Constitutions*, approved by the respective Roman Congregations. They have their own leaders, elected by themselves, at all levels: local, regional, national and international. The general minister of the Secular Franciscan Order is a member of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, together with the four religious Franciscan general ministers and the president of the International Conference of Franciscan religious of the Third Order Regular (CFI-

²⁵⁵ VC, 55.

²⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 54.

²⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 47, 54, 62, 82, 85, 101.

²⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 47.

²⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, 54.

²⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, 62.

²⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 85.

²⁶² *Ibidem*, 101.

²⁶³ *Rule OFS*, 4.

²⁶⁴ LR 1,1; FA:ED I, 100.

²⁶⁵ *Rule TOR*, 1,1.

TOR). It is evident that such a situation has profound effects on the relationships between secular and religious Franciscans.

The Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters are Franciscans as much as all other Franciscans, but in a different way. It is only together (“in various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other”) that we are able to make present the Franciscan charism in the life and mission of the Church. Both religious and Seculars try to live the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as brothers and sisters, having but one Father, who is in heaven. All of us try to place our will in the will of the Father,²⁶⁶ to live without anything of our own²⁶⁷ and, with a clean heart and spirit, never cease to adore and to see the Lord God living and true.²⁶⁸

Secular Franciscans have their own way of living basic Franciscan values, as expressed in their *Rule*: “A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.”²⁶⁹ “They should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which bear the imprint of the Most High, and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.”²⁷⁰ “Uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father’s hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life.”²⁷¹ “Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the Gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children. Thus, in the spirit of the beatitudes, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.”²⁷² “Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.”²⁷³ “In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.”²⁷⁴

Inspired by these basic values, Secular Franciscans have always seen their personal witness in the environment in which they live and their service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situations of this world as their preferred apostolate.²⁷⁵ They have been and are most active in the field of practical charity: care for poor and destitute people, care for the sick and the aged. One of the oldest hospitals in Madrid is owned and run by the local OFS fraternity of San Francisco el Grande. There are several old people’s homes owned and run by local fraternities in various countries: Venezuela, Guatemala, Spain, Italy, Brazil. But most often, Secular Franciscans cooperate in programs run by others, like feeding school children in Caracas, helping in the soup kitchen in Dublin, collecting and sorting used clothing in Milan, preparing meals for the poor in San Salvador, visiting people in the home for the elderly in Brno, etc. A special characteristic of Secular Franciscans is their ability to see specific needs and offer simple and concrete solutions. They will take their own initiatives but often prefer to collaborate with existing organizations.

²⁶⁶ Cf. 2Ltf 52; FA:ED I, 49.

²⁶⁷ Cf. LR 1,1; FA:ED I, 100.

²⁶⁸ Cf. Adm 16,2; FA:ED I, .

²⁶⁹ *Rule OFS*, 13.

²⁷⁰ *Ibidem*, 18.

²⁷¹ *Ibidem*, 10.

²⁷² *Ibidem*, 11.

²⁷³ *Ibidem*, 12.

²⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 17.

²⁷⁵ Cf. *Const.*, 17.

The communion between Religious and Seculars must be life-giving and mutual. It requires the participation of the Seculars in the daily life of the religious community (prayer, meals, recreation), and the participation and collaboration of all the friars (not just the assistants) in the spiritual guidance, in the formation, and in the apostolic activities of the OFS Fraternity. It would also be a good idea to organize common retreats, as well as common studies of the charism, the history, spirituality and practical aspects of the Franciscan charism. One concrete contribution to communion is the inter-Franciscan news about common areas of interest, Franciscan problems and activities.

A fraternal relationship between the members of the Franciscan Family implies respect and love for the different forms of the single Franciscan charism. Communion with the OFS means that the friars must know, love and help the OFS. The Church has entrusted five specific ministries or areas of apostolic activity to the OFS: justice and peace, the world of work, the family, creation, hope and joy. The friars will be able to participate in these ministries of the OFS.

The relationships of communion between the Franciscan Orders are not to be sought at the juridic or institutional level, but at the level of mutual exchange, sharing a charism and support of one another in the vocation to rebuild the Church. The Conference of the Franciscan Family was set up precisely to help us “make present the charism of our common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.”²⁷⁶

Andrea Boni, OFM, says: “The mission entrusted to the three Franciscan Orders...requires the combined action of the friars of the First Order, the penitents of the Third Order and the contemplative sacrifice of the sisters of the Second Order. In the post-conciliar reorganization of the triple army coordinated by Saint Francis, Franciscans must look to the third millennium in the history of the Church with clear minds and renewed enthusiasm in constructing their history. They have been entrusted by God with the task of rebuilding his house. The Church is rebuilt with the same tools with which it was constructed: evangelization and witness of life. In their coordinated salvific activity Franciscans realize a ‘corporeal’ communion, based on the fact that they are members of the same body. This practical corporeality must be expressed in terms of shared responsibility on the part of the First, Second and Third Order whenever the whole great Franciscan Family is engaged in its own proper activity.”²⁷⁷

1.6. Exchange of gifts between Secular Franciscans and Spiritual Assistants

“The assistant is a bond of communion between his Order and the OFS.” He is “a witness...of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the Secular Franciscans.”²⁷⁸ These statements mean that communion and fraternal affection ought to be normal in our mutual relationships. All the local religious fraternities and the whole province should know and love the Secular Franciscans. Only in this way can an assistant be a true sign of a genuine existing reality. This new awareness in our religious provinces should be fostered, proclaimed and developed in every country where the Franciscan Family is present.

In the context of assistance, this exchange of gifts benefits both secular and religious Franciscans in manifold ways. On the spiritual level, it helps both religious and seculars to become more conscious of their own specific calling in the Church. Being an assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order means above all meeting people who are inspired by Saint Francis, celebrating the beauty of life and dancing with children, being with youngsters whose eyes are pure and whose

²⁷⁶ *Rule OFS*, 1.

²⁷⁷ A. Boni, OFM, *Tres Ordines hic ordinat*, p. 179-180.

²⁷⁸ *Const.*, 89.3.

bodies are chaste, dining with fraternity leaders, sitting at the bedside of sick and elderly brothers and sisters.

Serving as a spiritual assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order has been and still is an opportunity to inspire the Seculars to engage in politics and economics based on the Gospel. The Secular Franciscans and their spiritual assistants are facing problems of bioethics, abortion, euthanasia, exploitation, wanton destruction of nature, consumerism, racism and religious fanaticism. Assisting Secular Franciscans means also talking about educating youth today, helping young people prepare for marriage, listening to the stories of the elderly. Serving as assistant to the OFS means that many doors open, from the entrance of the UN headquarters in New York to the shack of a poor leper on the shore of the Indian Ocean. Assisting the OFS means covering many miles with Franciscan brothers and sisters in the relative comfort of an airplane or private car, but also in the cramped space of a bush-taxi or tracking along the road to nowhere.

This exchange of gifts also helps the assistant to grow as a Franciscan religious, desiring above all things “to have the Spirit of the Lord and its holy activity.”²⁷⁹ As religious, our task is to be people of God, to give Spirit and life to our secular sisters and brothers, to speak to them about God.²⁸⁰ The reason is because the Secular Franciscans can manage everything else themselves, but what they expect from us is inspiration, enthusiasm, love—yes, being madly in love with God.

In exchange, our secular brothers and sisters will give us their love and sympathy, their material support and help. They will be with us, defending us and helping us to get out of trouble. They are long-suffering, courteous, humble and accommodating with us religious. They will help us in our apostolic activities and charitable ventures. They will even give us their own sons and daughters to join our ranks. But on one condition: that we are truly religious, people of God, living our own specific calling the best we can.

Religious and Secular Franciscans have a common mission of evangelization. The friars should therefore be eager to offer spiritual assistance and share in the efforts of the OFS to transform the temporal order according to the spirit of the Gospel.²⁸¹ The friars are called to pool their spiritual and apostolic efforts with the other religious branches of the Franciscan Family and with the OFS.

This communion could also be expressed through collaboration in vocational promotion for both secular and religious Franciscan life. If it is true that the Third Order of Saint Francis has its origin in communion with Saint Francis, there is no reason why the Franciscan friars and sisters cannot be inspirations for a secular Franciscan vocation. Both religious and secular Franciscans are in the process of renewal and “return to the origins” initiated by the Second Vatican Council. Communion and collaboration in this process is bound to be fruitful for both.

2. Church life of the Lay Franciscans

2.1. Called to follow Christ in the mission of the Church

It is already forty years since Vatican II,²⁸² and its “rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral patrimony” continues to nourish deep reflection on the “nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility” of the Christian laity in the Church and in the world.”

²⁷⁹ LR 10,8; FA:ED I, 105.

²⁸⁰ I remember what one spiritual assistant said to me: “I still have ringing in my ears the cry of one of our Secular Franciscan sisters: ‘Tell me about God!’”

²⁸¹ Cf. Constitutions TOR, 159. See General Constitutions, OFM, OFMConv and OFMCap.

²⁸² Chapter IV of the book by Carlo Dallari, OFM, *I laici francescani... Consacrati a Dio per la vita del Mondo*. Assisi 1994, Ed. Porziuncola, Biblioteca Testi di formazione a cura dell'OFS 3, pp. 91-93.

This global rethinking, a true grace of the Spirit who leads the Church of Christ along the paths of history, is taken up by John Paul II and harmoniously proposed again by him in the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*. The Pope's intention is to "stir and promote a deeper awareness among all the faithful of the gift and responsibility they share, both as a group and as individuals, in the communion and mission of the Church."²⁸³

Following the essential lines of this magisterial document, we will highlight the specific meaning of the gift and responsibility of the Franciscan laity, who live their ecclesial vocation as baptized laity, within the mission of the Church.

2.2. Dignity and ecclesial mission of the Christian laity

The topic of the identity and ecclesial dignity of the Christian laity is dealt with by the Church's magisterium in a special way beginning with Vatican II. Within a renewed ecclesiology of communion one could begin to speak of the laity no longer in a negative way, saying what they are not, but rather positively, describing what they are for the Church and identifying their position within it. This step forward was made possible by some ecclesiological choices made by the Council, especially that of presenting the Church as the People of God, which is entered through faith and baptism. This choice allowed a strong recovery of the baptismal priesthood, affirmed as "common to all the baptized," before any other differentiation due to different charisms or ministries, given or raised up by the Spirit.

Another choice has led to a rediscovery of the service of the entire Church on behalf of the world. The Church, as the People of God in pilgrimage through history toward the fulness of the blessed homeland, is essentially missionary. It owes the world the announcement of the Gospel and collaboration with all persons of good will for the realization of the Kingdom of God. Therefore, gifted by the Holy Spirit with suitable charisms and ministries, it is called to exist not for itself but for Christ and for the world. All in the Church are responsible for this mission, according to their state or condition due to the particular vocation of each baptized person. All can bring about in themselves this holiness, with which the Holy Spirit has endowed his Church, by responding to their own vocation and committing themselves to the mission common to all.

In this full context, the dignity and the ecclesial role of the Christian laity are emphasized. They are no longer considered second-class Christians (those who are *not* priests or those who are *not* religious), but have the same ecclesial dignity as priests and religious, since they are equal to them through baptism and belong with full right to the Church of Christ. In conclusion, as the Council says, the Christian laity are those who "by baptism are incorporated into Christ, are constituted the People of God, who have been made sharers in their own way in the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ and play their part in carrying out the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world."²⁸⁴

This passage contains a series of ways to deepen our understanding of the identity of the Christian laity.

The first identifies the sacrament of baptism as the basis of the title to ecclesial dignity for all the faithful: "Baptism regenerates us in the life of the Son of God; unites us to Christ and to his Body, the Church; anoints us in the Holy Spirit, making us spiritual temples."²⁸⁵ The new Christian life, of which baptism is the first expression, consists in the believer's participation in the life of

²⁸³ CL, 2.

²⁸⁴ LG, 31.

²⁸⁵ CL, 10.

God or better in the coming of God “who creates new things” in human history. Thus what characterizes the Christian as such is his or her acceptance of this God in faith, an event fully manifested in the sacramental celebration of baptism.

The second way leads to a rediscovery of the common priesthood: “The lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King.”²⁸⁶ They participate:

- in *priestly* service, because baptism, by uniting them to Christ and to the Church, makes them capable of offering themselves and all their activities as a spiritual sacrifice pleasing to God;
- in *prophetic* service, because it enables them to welcome his Word, to live it in themselves and to witness to it in the Church, and with the Church in the world;
- in *kingly* service, because it qualifies them for service to the Kingdom of God and its mission in history: “They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin, and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, especially in the very least.”²⁸⁷ Conformed to Christ, “Lord and King of the universe,” the laity have before them, as their final goal, to be like their Lord, who came to serve and to give his life for his brothers. This “kingly” service extends to all creatures, since it belongs to the laity in particular to “restore to creation all its original value. In ordering creation to the authentic well-being of humanity in an activity governed by the life of grace, they share in the exercise of the power with which the Risen Christ draws all things to himself and subjects them along with himself to the Father, so that God might be everything to everyone.”²⁸⁸

The third way is to carry out, on their part, the mission of all Christian people. In the Church, to which they belong through baptism, they occupy themselves specifically with temporal realities and with witnessing to the Kingdom of God present in the world.

The dignity of the laity is further exalted by the fact that they, personally, aspire to the final purpose of the Church itself, namely holiness: “We come to the full sense of the dignity of the lay faithful if we consider the prime and fundamental vocation that the Father assigns to each of them in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit: the vocation to holiness, that is, the perfection of charity.”²⁸⁹ It belongs to the blessed Trinity to make every baptized person holy. Therefore in the Church, through baptism, the laity too can call themselves “saints” and for this reason enabled and committed to show holiness of being through holiness of doing. This doing is the expression of life in the Spirit through faith, hope and charity, and its specific field is participation in the human activities proper to one who lives in “the world.”

In fact, the laity “must be sanctified in everyday professional and social life. Therefore, to respond to their vocation, the lay faithful must see their daily activities as an occasion to join themselves to God, fulfill his will, serve other people and lead them to communion with God in Christ.”²⁹⁰ And so “flight from the world” or attachment to the spirituality of a religious Order can no longer be considered as the only way to attain sanctity. All Christians may stay in the ecclesial situation in which they are called to live their proper vocation, because whatever may be their state, as such they are “active subjects” of the Church’s mission and of the call to holiness.²⁹¹ So, “such a

²⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, 14.

²⁸⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁸⁹ *Ibidem*, 16.

²⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, 17.

²⁹¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 3.

vocation ought to be called an essential and inseparable element of the new life of baptism, and therefore an element which determines their dignity. At the same time the vocation to holiness is intimately connected to mission and to the responsibility entrusted to the lay faithful in the Church and in the world.”²⁹² Therefore the Christian laity also fulfill the mission of building up the Church by bringing to holiness that portion of the Church which they themselves are; and, in this sanctity, the Church finds the essential condition for bringing Christ to the world and the world to Christ.

2.3. The laity today

To say that the twenty-first century in the Church will be the age of the laity²⁹³ takes nothing away from the ordained ministry or from consecrated life. Just as there is no Eucharist, and hence no Church, without the sacramental priesthood, so there can be no “civilization of love” or sanctification of the heart of the world without laity who live the Church as a mystery of missionary communion. In the second century, the *Letter to Diognetus* expressed the same truth: “The Christian is to the world what the soul is to the body.”

Christians already participate in the mission of Christ through the sacraments of baptism, confirmation and the Eucharist. Through these privileged encounters with Christ, every disciple is called to the “perfection of charity.” Forty years after the Second Vatican Council this statement might seem obvious. But it is by no means so for those millions of laity all over the world who might continue to think that Jesus was speaking to someone else when he said: “Go...and make disciples of all nations.”²⁹⁴

In every great apostolic work there are risks. In the Church equality is based on complementarity of different vocations, each one equally worthy, each one necessary and a support to the other, but each one quite distinct from the other. In the world the term “equality” has come to mean identity and interchangeability of roles, a leveling of all differences in the name of radical egalitarianism and individualism. But such ideas are completely foreign to the “catholic” or universal nature of the Church. In fact it is the will of God that all be saved, and Christ and his Catholic Church, through the Holy Spirit, are sent so that the Father’s will may be fulfilled for all and the order of love permeate the whole of creation.

The risks, however, take second place when compared with the grace given by God for the new evangelization. The zeal of the laity can produce great things. Their charisms and services enrich the life of the Church. Their responsible participation will revitalize the Christian communion, and it bears renewed witness to the communion of saints. The ecclesial movements and groups are signs of the vitality of the faith of Christian lay people who are experiencing the fruit of the Holy Spirit in their families and workplaces.²⁹⁵ Many of them are committed to building ways of life that are more human, more just and less confrontational. For the Church, the mission of the laity is not a luxury or an extra. It is not pompous rhetoric. The times demand it. It is fundamental for the Church’s identity. Nothing can take the place of the laity.²⁹⁶

In order for the Church to bear effective witness to Christ in the twenty-first century, the involvement of the laity in the evangelization of the culture is indispensable. It is an involvement that cannot be realized without a deep interior renewal and without repentance. It is an involvement that calls for a renewed awareness of belonging to the Church and a firmer and more convinced

²⁹² *Ibidem*, 17.

²⁹³ From “Laity Today” – Information Service of the Pontifical Council for the Laity (n.19/1996), the second part of the message of Cardinal G. Francis Stafford, President of the Council.

²⁹⁴ Mt 28:19.

²⁹⁵ Cf. Gal. 5:22.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Acts, 16.

commitment to the missionary thrust of the Christian community. Only in this way will the Church be able to shine brightly as the *lumen Christi*, the light of Christ.

2.4. Lay Franciscans in the Church's mission

Lay Franciscans participate in the global mission of the entire People of God, in the specificity of their secular state. As baptized persons, they fulfill the mission of being witnesses in the world of God's sovereignty, of his saving initiative, and of the mysterious reality that human history is totally oriented toward him. As called to holiness, the laity bear witness to people that since the Incarnation the whole world is sacred, except for sin, and that conversion to God can be fully realized without "fleeing" from secular activities.

In short, Secular Franciscans are simply baptized lay persons, consecrated to the service of the Gospel according to the charism and example of Saint Francis. More specifically, given that their call is not a generic one, it must be remembered that, in the variety of charisms the Holy Spirit has given the Church for mission and sanctification, they are the ones who recognize that they are called to live the Gospel after the manner of Francis of Assisi²⁹⁷ and are endowed with the grace of the Spirit in sufficient measure to respond to their vocation. This "modality" is described and codified in the normative documents of Secular Franciscan life: *Rule*, *General Constitutions* and *Ritual*. For this reason, what we are to say will be guided by the directives contained in these texts.

The membership and mission of the lay Franciscans in the Church are described by the *Rule* in an important passage: "They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their lives and words. Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example...."²⁹⁸

We find the same directives in the *General Constitutions*: "Called to work together in building up the Church as the sacrament of salvation for all and, through their baptism and profession made 'witnesses and instruments of her mission,' Secular Franciscans proclaim Christ by their life and words. Their preferred apostolate is personal witness in the environment in which they live and service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situation of this world."²⁹⁹ And again in the *Ritual*: by perpetual profession of the *Rule* lay Franciscans commit themselves to work for the Church and for humanity;³⁰⁰ to contribute to its good, to its never-ending renewal and to its mission among people.³⁰¹

Lay Franciscans are living members of the Church and instruments of its mission, summoned by the Spirit in a fraternity to serve the Kingdom of God in the situations of this world, after the example of Saint Francis, whose work of rebuilding the Church they continue.

"Living members," since Secular Franciscans recognize themselves in that communion of divine life which is the Church, and thus called to live personally its mission and take responsibility for it, in their own way.

The first way is in service to the Kingdom through building up the Church and the building of a more fraternal and evangelical world.

²⁹⁷ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 2.

²⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 6.

²⁹⁹ *Const.*, 17,1.

³⁰⁰ Cf. *Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order*, Preface, 1.

³⁰¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 14; 29.

The second, implicit in the reference to the example of Saint Francis, is made explicit in the fraternity. Secular Franciscans live the Church's mission "as brothers and sisters" or "in fraternity," where the term "fraternity" is meant to indicate the basic structure of Franciscan life in a specific place, as "the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love."³⁰² Lay Franciscans find in the fraternity "the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members."³⁰³ Through life in fraternity they are sent, in the Church and with the Church, together with all persons of good will, to all humanity in order to "build a more fraternal world,"³⁰⁴ and bring about "universal kinship"³⁰⁵ with all creatures in an attitude of respect and appreciation, according to the plan of God, the Creator and Lord of all things.

Lay Franciscans are, by vocation, creators of fraternal relationships among people, docile instruments in the hands of Christ the universal reconciler and peacemaker. They should be attentive to welcome whatever of Christ is present in each person, and thus seek the collaboration of all people of good will. We find the same directives in the *Ritual*: lay Franciscans consecrate themselves to the Kingdom of God;³⁰⁶ this involves "living for the world," with a "commitment to collaborate in building a more fraternal world."³⁰⁷ They are called to be in the world "a leaven of gospel life,"³⁰⁸ to "give witness to to the Kingdom of God and to build a more fraternal world based on the Gospel,"³⁰⁹ "to serve for the glory of God and the fulfillment of his commandment to love others."³¹⁰

In short, the mission of the lay Franciscans consists in the commitment to "rebuild the Church" according to their secular state, by working in the Church and with the Church, for a world in which people can live as brothers and sisters, recognizing that they are all children of the same heavenly Father and loving each other as Christ loved them. This mission is realized through the development of a form of life, the fraternity, which requires the communion of love as its source of strength.

3. Missionary vocation of the Secular Franciscans

3.1. "Mission" means sending

Secular Franciscans, like all the baptized, are sent (missionaries) to the whole world to teach the values that followers of Jesus are to have. The first thing is to recognize the call of him who alone is the Holy One. The fact that the Father who created us did so using Christ as model and firstborn of all creation means that all creation is good, including our very selves. The fact that many do not believe this is a sad truth, and self-hatred seems to be the basic cause of personal and societal unhappiness. People who turn to violence, greed, ambition, pride, anger, envy, who give themselves over to lust or gluttony or laziness, are usually doing so because they have no other hope. And they think that happiness can be gained in this way. Our dependence on God's faithful love for us is a matter of faith.

Systematized deviance from what we can actually accomplish (which we will term "dysfunction") is the great sickness in wealthy societies today. It is shown in the pitiful attempts we

³⁰² *Rule OFS*, 22.

³⁰³ *Ibidem*, 22.

³⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 14.

³⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 18.

³⁰⁶ Cf. *Ritual*, Chapter 2, 29.

³⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, Preface, 14.d.

³⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, Chapter 1, 12.

³⁰⁹ *Ibidem*, Chapter 2, 29.

³¹⁰ *Ibidem*, Chapter 1, 12.

make to be happy by having things. In poorer societies, this dysfunction infects people (and not just their leaders) by enticing them to desire to possess things rather than to achieve peace. In all the world today there is a great spiritual hunger for values, for recognition of the preciousness of human beings. Whatever we call this sickness, we know that there is only one cure: to give ourselves to God, who alone can make us whole again.

We are missionaries when we show the world that we are trying to let God deliver us from the foolishness of filling the void in our lives with power, prestige and possessions. The only real success story the world has ever heard is told about a poor Crib, a heavy Cross and an empty Tomb. How will others hear the story unless they are told? “But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent?” (Rom 10:14-15). Missionaries are not just priests and religious brothers or sisters who leave their homes and families and go around the world to serve others. There are also lay people who do this.

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* Pope Paul VI wrote: “Lay people, whose particular vocation places them in the midst of the world and in charge of the most varied temporal tasks, must for this very reason exercise a very special form of evangelization...to put to use every Christian and evangelical possibility latent but always present and active in the affairs of the world. Their own field of evangelizing activity is the vast and complicated world of politics, society and economics, but also the world of culture, of the sciences and the arts, of international life, of the mass media. It also includes other realities which are open to evangelization, such as human love, the family, the education of children and adolescents, professional work, suffering.”³¹¹

3.2. Secular Franciscan missionaries

Secular Franciscans carry out this mission:

- By living the Gospel: “They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people proclaiming Christ by their life and words.”³¹² By changing society, beginning with themselves. This is done within families by couples showing marital love for one another. By families who raise children in love, not fear. Teaching respect for the elderly by showing that respect. By caring for the poor and making sincere efforts to change the situations of poverty. By being honest and paying what is owed others. Cardinal Martini of Milan, on January 1, 1999, in response to reporters’ questions of how people might make this a better world for all, said, “Pay for your bus rides.” That is a simple way of honesty and justice, one of many often overlooked in our desire to do wonderful things for God and other people. There is no free ride in the world today for anyone.
- By working in their parish. Be slow to criticize the parish priests, be quick to help out. Show others that you go to church not just for yourself, but that you see yourself as part of a community of believers. The task of the lay Franciscan missionary is to bring witness to every home within the area of their parish. The theme of the mission is to invite people to “open wide the doors to Christ.”

The mission is ongoing and Secular Franciscans must always be in the front lines.

- By assisting Franciscan religious in their mission efforts, and by fostering mission awareness in their fraternities.

³¹¹ *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (= EN), 70.

³¹² *Rule OFS*, 6.

- By serving as an OFS missionary. There are “Franciscan Partners,” “Franciscan Volunteers” and other groups around the world. In Italy there is a Secular Franciscan Mission Center, dedicated to raising mission awareness among the OFS, and training and sending Secular missionaries where they can work alongside the friars and sisters.

3.3 “Prophetic” vocation of the Secular Franciscans

Prophecy is not “foretelling the future” but showing God’s plan for humans by living the values of Jesus. This plan of God is spelled out in the commandments of the Lord Jesus: “‘Hear, O Israel; the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mk 12:29-31). This is not easy to obey, but if we do not, how will people have hope today without prophets to bear witness to it? The Catechism, citing *Lumen Gentium*, says: “‘The holy People of God shares also in Christ’s prophetic office,’ above all in the supernatural sense of faith that belongs to the whole People, lay and clergy, when it ‘unfailingly adheres to the faith...once for all delivered to the saints,’ and when it deepens its understanding and becomes Christ’s witness in the midst of this world.”³¹³

Society and the Church can be changed only by living true values. This is how lay Franciscans by refusing to bear arms helped to destroy the medieval feudal system. It is impossible to have a war if the soldiers will not fight. This example of conversion still shocks society and even the Church, to say the least. Saint Francis did not always preach with words, and at first his “radical ideas” made church leaders nervous, but the Gospel of Jesus cannot be swept under the rug. Secular Franciscans, once they are freed from the fear of what their neighbors and friends might think, can change society by openly living Christian values. This does not mean that we force others to accept our ways; it means only that we ourselves live the values and that invites others to do the same. But all men and women must be free to choose. Love cannot be forced.

There is a great need today to strengthen values everywhere, including within the Church. Selfishness and self-centeredness, stubborn insistence on our way of doing things, misuse of power and possessions, craving for prestige—these symptoms of spiritual illness are not limited to secular society today, in any culture. We are only human, and we are the Church; therefore the Church is always in need of reforming. Start with yourself, then work on others when you are sure you have made sufficient progress.

The Church calls Secular Franciscans to this! Secular Franciscans are more deeply involved in the society where they live than religious Franciscans can ever be. In the Church, Secular Franciscans can animate friars and sisters by sharing life (life-giving union with each other works both ways). They can animate discouraged parish priests by their loyalty, not offered uncritically, but flowing from a sense that together we are one Church. Sometimes we forget that priests are human beings and need to be loved!

It is within the parish that the OFS’s main work is done. A Secular Franciscan fraternity is a basic Christian community, approved by the Church, “...where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another.”³¹⁴ Secular Franciscans who are truly living the Gospel, can give new life to their own parishes. Dysfunction can be overcome, but it can destroy individuals and societies (even parishes) if it is not dealt with. Societies, including the Church, need healing. The future is bright because Jesus, the Light of the world, lights it. Jesus is the answer. Are we clear about the questions? Do we understand the request of Jesus, “Repair my

³¹³ CCC, 785; LG, 12.

³¹⁴ CL, 26.

house”)? God alone makes us into saints. Our task is to live what God sends us and invite others to do the same. This is the best way to promote Franciscan vocations, for the religious and the secular Orders.

4. Ecclesial life of the OFS Fraternities

4.1. Life in Fraternity

The Secular Franciscan vocation is a call to live the Gospel in fraternity and in the world. The organizational structure, communion and sharing of goods are ordered towards this goal. What is more, this ideal is reflected in its presence and its mission in a specific place.

It seems appropriate to mention here some aspects of the OFS life in fraternity and the service of animation and guidance, as laid down in the *General Constitutions*.

4.1.1. Witness of fraternal life

Fraternal life must be witnessed and fostered in the concrete realities of life. The lifegiving space of the secular Franciscan fraternity is not the sacristy, nor the church as a place where the Christian community meets, but the world itself. It is certain that fraternal life cannot be meaningful without a rich spiritual life, and it must be lived in the world because that is where the great Franciscan cloister is found,³¹⁵ for if the world is the cloister for religious Franciscans, it is all the more so for Secular Franciscans. This requires that we pay close attention to the signs of the times in order to involve the fraternities and their members: “The OFS shall also support the commitment of the fraternities in their service to the world, and specifically to the life of society.”³¹⁶

4.1.2. Animation and guidance

According to the *Rule*, animation and guidance of a fraternity at any level is not personal (by the minister or president), but collegial (by the council with the minister): “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president).”³¹⁷ This makes broader communication and coordination possible, in local fraternities and on the regional and national levels. Only shared joint responsibility can improve the service of animation and guidance of a fraternity.³¹⁸

4.1.3. Availability and service

In order to ensure proper animation and guidance of the fraternity at the various levels, recognizing that all the brothers and sisters are necessary but not indispensable, some very important amendments were adopted. These were based on experience, like the change which says that “the outgoing minister cannot be elected vice-minister.”³¹⁹

4.1.4. Use of dialogue

Dialogue is always necessary for fraternal life, but it becomes even more important especially in the difficult or problematic situations in which a fraternity or one of its members can find itself. It is not always easy to speak in a group, and thus it may be better if this dialogue is

³¹⁵ “This, Lady, is our enclosure” (The Sacred Exchange, 63).

³¹⁶ *Const.*, 28.2.

³¹⁷ *Rule OFS*, 21.

³¹⁸ Cf. *Const.*, 31.1; 61.3; 65.3; 69.2.

³¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 79.2.

conducted by the minister of the fraternity and the spiritual assistant, respecting the person and keeping the council informed.³²⁰

4.1.5. Communion and subsidiarity

A sense of communion and subsidiarity among the fraternities serves to respect and foster the vitality of the councils: “This is a requirement of the communion among the fraternities, of the orderly collaboration among them, and of the unity of the OFS.”³²¹

The council on a higher level has a great responsibility for animating and guiding the fraternities on a lower level, when it is apparent that the life of those fraternities is in danger from misconduct by the minister or council. As an organ of communion and subsidiarity it can arrange a fraternal visit to the council in question and request a pastoral visit if necessary. After charitably and prudently evaluating the situation in the fraternity, it can “decide on the best way to proceed, not excluding the eventual removal of the council or leaders involved.”³²²

4.1.6. Solidarity

A sign of maturity in fraternities and in each Secular Franciscan is their cooperation in economic responsibilities. This means acceptance of the expenditures decided in this area, but also solidarity in taking on the financial burden that other brothers and sisters cannot assume because of their poverty. Solidarity is not just a word; it involves the sharing of material goods. Solidarity and the sharing of material goods, not just spiritual things, presupposes a journey of solidarity in unity, which builds autonomy and proves responsibility in the vocation assumed.³²³

4.2 International fraternity

This topic is considered as a unit because it is relevant for the life of all the fraternities at the other levels.

First, the *Constitutions* describe the international council as the highest governing body: “The International Council convened in General Chapter is the highest governing body of the OFS with legislative, deliberative and elective powers.”³²⁴

The international council has the duty and the competence to animate and guide the national fraternity,³²⁵ “to promote and sustain the evangelical life” of the charism “within the secular condition” and “to increase the sense of unity of the OFS while respecting the pluralism of the persons and groups.”³²⁶

The Presidency of the the CIOFS, whose task is “to coordinate, animate, and guide the OFS,”³²⁷ reinforces the bonds of communion, communication and collaboration at the world-wide level, offering its help “in a spirit of service, according to the circumstances,” and it strengthens “reciprocal relationships of collaboration between the OFS and the other components of the Franciscan Family at the world level.”³²⁸

³²⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 58.1-3.

³²¹ *Ibidem*, 29.1.

³²² *Ibidem*, 84.6.

³²³ Cf. *Ibidem*, 30.3.

³²⁴ *Ibidem*, 70.3.

³²⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 70.2.

³²⁶ *Ibidem*, 71.1.a-b.

³²⁷ *Ibidem*, 73.b.

³²⁸ *Ibidem*, 73.c.d.

The Presidency of the CIOFS directs and animates the Secular Franciscans in their various places of presence and mission in the Church and in society, in collaboration with “organizations and associations which defend the same values” and in order to reach its own goals.³²⁹

4.3. Formation

The *General Constitutions* invite us to continue to cultivate our vocation, to remain faithful to our identity and mission, to fulfill the responsibilities of our profession or work, including acquisition of the corresponding professional training “as the primary and fundamental contribution to building a more just and fraternal world,”³³⁰ adapting its forms to new and different situations of life. To cultivate Franciscan values in secular life, as well as to grow in our vocation and bear witness to it in “social and civil responsibilities,”³³¹ necessarily requires formation. We have already spoken about this in Chapter 2, Section 7. Here we would like to point out some of its other aspects.

4.3.1. A specific vocation

The *General Constitutions*, following the *Rule*, are clear enough in reflecting and explaining the proper place the Secular Franciscan Order occupies in the Franciscan Family, with its secular dimension of the Franciscan charism. The *Rule* and *Constitutions* emphasize that “the vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members.”³³² Therefore, “those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life” cannot be admitted to the OFS.³³³ Of course the reverse is also true in the sense that a Secular Franciscan who assumes another commitment ceases to belong to the OFS.

4.3.2. Initial formation

Formation must be not just intellectual, but lifegiving and existential in order to help a brother or sister understand the form of evangelical life they wish to live. Only by knowing it can they come to love it; only by loving it can they communicate it to others. Formation helps them to deepen their sense of who they are as an Order and to feel part of it.

Great emphasis is placed on initial formation, a time necessary for discernment and vocational maturation. A good initial formation, which is the foundation for ongoing formation, is also the basis for a “sense of belonging.” Allowance is made for the possibility of temporary profession: “Perpetual profession...may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewed annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years.”³³⁴ It is a way of prolonging initial formation, avoiding the risk of superficial enthusiasm and subsequent defections from the fraternity.

4.3.3. Ongoing formation

Initial formation will bear fruit only if formation is permanent or ongoing. This requires time and effort. The monthly meeting alone cannot serve as sufficient formation. Fraternities are asked to give “special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.”³³⁵ Ongoing

³²⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 73.e.f.g.

³³⁰ *Ibidem*, 20.2.

³³¹ *Ibidem*, 20.2.

³³² *Ibidem*, 2.1; Cf. *Rule OFS*, 1.

³³³ *Ibidem*, 2.1.

³³⁴ *Const.*, 42.2.

³³⁵ *Ibidem*, 44.2.

formation is recognized as indispensable if the horizon of our fraternal, ecclesial, social life is open, as was that of Francis who repeatedly said, “Let us begin, brothers”³³⁶

Important moments of formation, besides the formation program as such, are the chapter of the fraternity at every level, in which the fraternity studies, discusses and decides “questions regarding its own life and organization;”³³⁷ remembrance of the deceased brothers and sisters,³³⁸ through whom the roots of Secular Franciscan life are sunk deep in the past, but also reach out to the future; financial transparency and care for the goods of the fraternity.³³⁹ These are sensitive temporal realities, but they can reflect clearly a sense of fraternity and solidarity.

4.4. Secular Franciscans in ecclesial communities

In the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* we read that they, sharing the mission of Christ, priest, prophet and king, have an active part of their own in the life and activity of the Church. It goes on to say that their activity within ecclesial communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors is unable to obtain its full effect.³⁴⁰

The *Rule* of the OFS, in full agreement with the conciliar directions, invites us to become “witnesses and instruments” of the Church’s mission, inspired by Francis of Assisi who felt himself called by the crucifix of San Damiano to “rebuild the Church.”³⁴¹

About our duty to be actively present in the local Church, there is no doubt or discussion. On the practical level, however, we sometimes meet difficulties and contradictions. Often it is hard to develop formation programs and deepen fraternal life because of the excessive activity and work being undertaken by Secular Franciscans. They are extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist, they are ministers of the Word, they are involved in the various social activities of the local Church, and sometimes all their spare time is taken up. Their presence at fraternity meetings? “I can’t because I have to perform another service.” Their participation in a retreat or formation seminar? “I can’t because the pastor needs me on the weekend.” Election to a position in the fraternity? “I can’t accept because I am already president of this, secretary of that....” And so it goes.

They are caught up in an excess of activity that does not leave enough “vital space” in which to be together in the manner and forms of an authentic fraternity. In order to exist and develop, there needs to be sharing, revision of life, time for prayer and formation, and also time for common recreation. There needs to be space for helping each other learn to dialogue and communicate in order to support each other when difficulties arise, to pray better. There needs to be space where “fraternal communion” is made tangible and in which we are called to be responsible for each other’s growth. On this subject the *General Constitutions* say: “The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer and active collaboration, in accordance with each one’s situation and possible obligations for the animation of the fraternity.”³⁴² Fraternal life is so important that this is the only article of the *Constitutions* in which we find such a strong verb: “requires.” All the other articles use an exhortatory form, not the imperative.

At this point you will ask: How can Secular Franciscans commit themselves to “repair the Church” with that creativity and co-responsibility to which the Pauline *Rule* urges us? This vital and

³³⁶ 1 C, 103.

³³⁷ *Const.*, 49.2.

³³⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 53.4.

³³⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 50.2; 62.2.i; 66.2.j.

³⁴⁰ Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10.

³⁴¹ *Rule OFS*, 6.

³⁴² *Const.*, 30.2.

delicate question demands careful discernment by the council and the whole fraternity, because the situation must be evaluated concretely in the individual local situations.

To discern the missionary presence of the Secular Franciscans in the Church, we need to reflect on a certain individualism, typical of modern culture, that has introduced itself more or less openly into the life of the fraternity's members. Too many individual apostolic activities are a sign of it. Many brothers and sisters choose apostolic programs and activities without considering those of the fraternity. The fraternity then has great difficulty taking up and carrying out its own community apostolic work because of the unavailability of the individual members.

It seems that many Secular Franciscans find an apostolic task chosen on their own initiative, or offered them as individuals, more rewarding than one that places them, more or less anonymously, in a community activity. Nothing strengthens and consolidates a fraternity so much as a work done together, sharing pain and satisfaction, success and failure, joys and disappointments. A work done together gives opportunities to ask for advice, to support each other, to share experiences, to integrate each one's gifts and abilities with those of the others, however different.

Apostolates that a member feels it necessary to take on individually must be subordinated to those of the community, or at the very least co-ordinated with them, always in dialogue with the council and the fraternity. The *General Constitutions* say: "The fraternities [note that it does not say "the Secular Franciscans"]...should seek to cooperate in the animation of the parochial community, in the liturgy and in fraternal relations. They [the subject is still "the fraternities"] should integrate themselves into the pastoral apostolate as a whole, with preference for those activities more congenial to the Secular Franciscan tradition and spirituality."³⁴³ This article should be grounds for reflection for many OFS fraternities in their missionary activity and cooperation with the local Churches.

Linked to the subject just treated is the subject of Secular Franciscans who belong to a host of groups and movements in the parish. This going back and forth from one spirituality to another is a sign of spiritual weakness, psychological instability and immaturity in one's decision to observe the Gospel.

5. Mission of the OFS in the world

5.1. Vatican II: pastoral Council

The term "pastoral" has many meanings. Ordinarily it is taken to refer to the activity undertaken by pastors : bishops, parish priests and other clerics. The term however should be understood as referring to all those who in some way are involved in activities whose purpose is to proclaim and/or share in salvation. Salvation in fact is mediated through the sacraments. But it also comes through other "ways" that are not in the strict sense sacramental, for example at the personal level of witness, communication and gestures.

The obligation to engage in the work of mediation requires that the mediator be aware of being in the middle, between the source of salvation, God, and its recipients, all people. Therefore, the intrinsic purpose of every pastoral activity should be to establish contact between God and people. Each person must be put in the condition of understanding the message of salvation. However, each one remains free to accept or reject it.

³⁴³ *Ibidem*, 102.1.

It is important that whoever mediates salvation knows who is the Savior, God; what salvation is all about, the Gospel; and for whom it is intended, each individual. Each single person lives in a particular environment, which continually changes his or her mentality, culture, life-style. Therefore, to be effective, pastoral ministry (it would be better to call it “salvific mediation”) must be continually reviewed and updated. If people, the recipients of salvific mediation, change, the style of pastoral ministry must also change.

The Second Vatican Council has been described as a “pastoral council.” To understand what this description means, it is necessary to go back and reread the document issued to convene the Council, the Apostolic Constitution *Humanae salutis*, December 25, 1961.

The document opens with the Lord’s promise, “I will be with you always, even to the end of time,” in order to assert that the Lord is present even in our times. Characteristic of our times, says John XXIII, is a “changing over to a new era,” which calls for the Church to undertake “tasks of immense seriousness and extent, as in the more tragic periods of her history.” The text pinpoints what this means: “It is a question of putting the modern world in touch with the inspiring and inexhaustible forces of the Gospel, a world that boasts of its successes in the technical and scientific field, but also bears the effects of being in a temporal order, which some want to reorganize without benefit of God.”

The modern world is thus presented as ambivalent. Good and evil are intertwined; before anything else, therefore, what is required is the exercise of discernment according to the standards of “the signs of the times.” The changes that characterize the modern world are primarily of the cultural order. The Second World War was instigated by cultural changes and it in turn instigated cultural changes. Therefore, the response the Church must give is primarily cultural, and secondly practical-operational. In other words, it is a question of creating a new synthesis between the inexhaustible forces of the Gospel and the opportunities emerging from the cultural and social circumstances in which people are living at this point in history.

The pastoral quality of Vatican II, therefore, is to be understood as the Church’s commitment to re-establish relations between the human being and Christ, between society and Christ, between scientific and technological gains and Christ. In fulfilling this mission, the Church must be aware of being inserted into this modern world, of being in solidarity with it, and of carrying out in it the task of leavening, directing it toward eternal realities and goods.

These directions are systematically spelled out in *Gaudium et spes*, which for this reason is called a pastoral constitution. But if she is to carry out a mission of this kind, the Church must renew herself, in her self-understanding rather than in her mission.

5.2. Secular Franciscan mission

The vocation of the Secular Franciscans is “to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi,”³⁴⁴ which expresses itself “in their involvement in temporal affairs and in their participation in earthly activities.”³⁴⁵ The vocation of the Secular Franciscans is a call to mission through life and word, for they live in the ordinary circumstances of ordinary citizens.³⁴⁶

Given the place that the secular occupies or should occupy in the Church, as we see in the documents of the Second Vatican Council and in *Christifideles Laici*, stress has been placed on the

³⁴⁴ *Rule OFS*, 4.

³⁴⁵ *CL*, 17; *Cf. Const.*, 17.

³⁴⁶ *Cf. LG*, 35.

distinctive place of mission in the charism of the OFS. Although the articles of the second chapter of the *Rule* are in themselves rich in content and very concrete, the *General Constitutions* wanted to emphasize two things to which our society is especially devoted:

- the ability to actively put forward “initiatives that care for creation” and “establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person”³⁴⁷
- living the Franciscan spirit in the family,³⁴⁸ and reaching out to the many people, in society and in the Church, who live in difficult family situations: “...single, widows, single parents, separated divorced—who are living in difficult situations.”³⁴⁹ Human and Christian warmth can help to recognize and alleviate the wounds, even if they cannot be healed, always in the spirit of the beatitudes.³⁵⁰

5.3. Participation of Franciscans in the mission of the Church

In carrying out their own specific mission, Franciscans cannot regard themselves as being outside the Church and her mission. In this, Saint Francis is our outstanding model. He was aware of being in the Church, of having been given a mandate to “repair the Church,” of needing to extend the Church by proclaiming the Gospel of Christ beyond its institutional boundaries. Above all, Saint Francis had the clear and ongoing awareness of having to “change himself,” of having to “continually engage in self-conversion.”

In Saint Francis, the task of mission in the Church and for the Church has its roots in his unceasing search for the will of God in contemplation. Therefore, what he proposed did not stem from his own wishes and designs, but solely from his readiness to become a “poor instrument” of God’s will. Starting from this premise, Saint Francis inserted a process of renewal into the Church: a cultural renewal rather than an institutional one.

As a founder, Saint Francis remains the model to which all Franciscans must refer. But it is not a question of materially repeating what he has done; it is a question of reinterpreting the model with reference to today’s ecclesial and socio-cultural context. With regard to the ecclesial context, it is impossible not to refer to Vatican II and the process of renewal deriving from it. With regard to the socio-cultural context, it is necessary to take note of the basic fact that Saint Francis acted in the context of Christendom. We must live and act in the context of the end of Christendom, and in the year 2000 marked by profound global changes.

It is not easy to be and to live as Christians and as Franciscans in this period of transition, but we cannot live outside it. We must be capable of discernment: socio-cultural discernment and discernment of faith. The recent Popes have urged us to “take notice of our responsibilities” to renew our charism and mission.³⁵¹ Today’s world looks to Saint Francis as to a “model of a human being” rather than as a “model of a Christian.”³⁵²

In this context, the typical character of the Franciscan charism can be understood only if we start with the Franciscan Movement in its globality: brothers, sisters and lay people. No single component part can express it in its totality. Thus “reciprocity,” the exchange of gifts between the various members of the Franciscan Family, becomes necessary. Reciprocity implies the acknowledgement of diversity and the readiness “to give and receive gifts.”

³⁴⁷ *Const.*, 18.4.

³⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 24.1.

³⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 24.2.

³⁵⁰ *Rule OFS*, 11; LG, 38; AA, 4; GS, 72.

³⁵¹ Cf. discourses to the general chapters by Paul VI and John Paul II, which contain very valuable guidelines.

³⁵² Cf. the spirit of Assisi, starting in 1982, and especially from 1986

Through analogy with all that is taking place in the Church at this point in human history, it also becomes necessary for Franciscans to recognize the eminent role of lay people. Franciscan lay people enable us to understand better the original charism of Saint Francis. Franciscan lay people are indispensable for infusing into the present world “the spirit of Saint Francis;” they are indispensable for the development of the Franciscan mission. For this reason, Franciscan lay people are formed to be what they should be, without exploitation or dependency, but in full and total autonomy.

From lay Franciscans can come a first-rate contribution to making Franciscan ecumenism more concrete. They do not carry on their backs the painful history of the friars and the sisters. They are less tied to the requirements of the legal element. Perhaps, and to a degree, they incarnate the charism of Saint Francis in a more authentic form, as they leave to one side the institutional and legal externals. The autonomy of the lay Franciscans can be seen and experienced as one of the signs of the times, a real Franciscan innovation. We must not forget, however, that it all has to be seen as a contribution to the mission of the Church in the contemporary world.

5.4. Fidelity to one’s charism

The *General Constitutions* say: “Fidelity to their own charism, Franciscan and secular, the witness of building fraternity, sincerely and openly, are their principal services to the Church, which is the community of love. They should be recognized in it by their ‘being,’ from which their mission springs.”³⁵³

Emanuela De Nunzio, who was general minister at the time, was asked this question in an interview: “What do you Secular Franciscans do?” Behind the question there was a reflection of our utilitarian and technocratic culture, which tends to evaluate the importance of things and people according to their immediate functionality. This bothered her a little, and she replied: “The question is badly put. Ask me *who we are*, and then I can also tell you *what we do*.”

If it is true that the charisms are gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Church for the good of the community, Secular Franciscans must feel the responsibility of making this gift shine in the local Church in which they live and work. This is the priority of “being” over “doing.”

The Franciscan general ministers, in their letter on the *Vocation and Mission of the Franciscan Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World*, invited the Secular Franciscans “to deepen the Secular Franciscan vocation in such a way that there is harmonious agreement between vigorous affirmation of their own identity as a public association and their active and cordial presence in the local Church: such a relation should not assume the style of a compromise dictated by circumstances, but must spring from the very roots of their vocation.”³⁵⁴

And then there is the “witness of the fraternity.” We should not forget that fraternal communion, as such, is already apostolic and contributes to the work of evangelization. It would be marvelous if it could be said of our fraternities as of the first Christian communities, “See how they love one another!”

5.5. OFS in the Mission *Ad gentes*

The Secular Franciscan Order also wishes to rediscover a renewed obligation of lay Franciscans in the area of evangelization, in the mission *ad gentes*, as a concrete sign of

³⁵³ *Const.*, 100.3.

³⁵⁴ Letter of the four general ministers of the Franciscan Family: *Vocation and Mission of the Lay Franciscan Faithful in the Church and in the World*, 1989, 22.

collaboration “in building up the Church as the sacrament of salvation for all...,”³⁵⁵ “fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.”³⁵⁶

5.5.1. Why are lay Franciscans at the service of the mission *Ad gentes*?

Why the mission of lay Franciscans *ad gentes*? Because the “general obligation”³⁵⁷ to strive so that “the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the world,”³⁵⁸ and to proclaim Christ “by their life and words,”³⁵⁹ “ready to promote common initiatives...in order to work together to spread the Gospel, remove the causes of marginalization, and serve the cause of peace,”³⁶⁰ cannot help but affect or concern Secular Franciscans, since through baptism and profession they are witnesses and instruments of the Church’s mission.³⁶¹

Today much is said about charitable service and social justice as privileged areas for new forms of lay commitment. But John Paul II in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* reminds us right from the beginning that missionary evangelization is “the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world.”³⁶²

5.5.2. How can lay Franciscans work for the mission *Ad gentes*?

As is revealed in the Acts of the Apostles, the mission in the Church was originally seen as being a community effort of the local church which needed “missionaries” to go forth to new frontiers.

Based on this experience, but moved by the force of the mandate of the Risen One given to the Christian community gathered in the Cenacle (“the eleven and their companions” Lk 24:33), the Church has recently called the laity to rediscover the missionary dimension of their own Christian vocation. In the same decree *Ad gentes* the Church invites the laity to participate as witnesses and living instruments in her saving mission by nurturing in themselves and in others a knowledge and love of the missions, and by offering—in their families, in Catholic associations and in schools—support of every kind so that the gift of faith they have received might be shared.³⁶³ “In fact, wherever possible, the laity should be prepared, in more immediate cooperation with the hierarchy, to fulfill a special mission of proclaiming the Gospel and communicating Christian teachings....”³⁶⁴

5.5.3. Give the little that you have

What attitude should our fraternities assume toward the universal call to the mission *ad gentes*, “You also go” (Mt 20:4)? How can we answer positively, despite the many difficulties, internal and external, in the life of our fraternities?

Let us stop for a moment to reflect on the biblical passage of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: “As Jesus went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them....and he began to teach them many things.... [He said to them], ‘You give them something to eat.’ ...

³⁵⁵ *Const.*, 17; Cf. *Rule OFS*, 1. In September 1998 the Secular Franciscan Order instituted the CE.MI OFS (Missionary Center, OFS) to animate the missions in the local fraternities, form animators and co-ordinate the missionary drive *ad gentes* of lay Franciscans.

³⁵⁶ *Rule OFS*, 6.

³⁵⁷ CJC, can. 225.

³⁵⁸ *Ibidem*

³⁵⁹ *Rule OFS*, 6.

³⁶⁰ *Const.*, 98.

³⁶¹ *Ibidem*, 17.

³⁶² *Redemptoris Missio*, 2.

³⁶³ Cf. *Ad gentes* (= AG), 41.

³⁶⁴ AG, 21.

Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he...gave them to his disciples to set before the people.... And all ate and were filled; and they took up twelve baskets full of broken pieces and of the fish. Those who had eaten the loaves numbered five thousand men.”³⁶⁵

Only to the extent that we commit ourselves to collaborate with the Lord (“You give them something to eat”), without making useless human excuses, will we give generously of our poverty (the five loaves and two fishes), moved by the growing number of men and women (about four billion) who still do not know Christ. Then the people (*Ad gentes*) without a shepherd will be able to experience the abundance of God’s love (“all ate and were filled”).

³⁶⁵ Mk 6:34-44.

CHAPTER IV

SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE TO THE OFS

1. Assistance through the centuries

This topic has already been treated in Chapter II when speaking of the autonomy of the OFS (point 6). To introduce the special topic of assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, we shall limit ourselves to recalling briefly how, over time, it has been expressed in some of the more important documents for the OFS.

1.1. Development of relations between the OFS and the First Order and TOR

Ever since lay men and women were saying to the brothers, “Tell us what we can do to save our souls,”³⁶⁶ Francis and his companions are presented as servants who collaborated with those secular penitents who wanted to live the Gospel, giving them the necessary help: “Similarly, both married men and women given in marriage, unable to separate because of the law of matrimony, committed themselves to more severe penance in their own homes on the wholesome advice of the brothers.”³⁶⁷

In *Memoriale propositi* (1221), the visitor does not necessarily have to be a Friar Minor,³⁶⁸ whereas the *Rule of Nicholas IV* (1289) states clearly that “the visitors and instructors should be taken from the Order of Friars Minor.”³⁶⁹ In time, “after the Friars Minor had been divided through a difficult and fruitful history of tensions and reforms,”³⁷⁰ the Holy See frequently stressed that assistance to the OFS is a task, duty and service of the First Franciscan Order (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap) and Third Order Regular (TOR).³⁷¹

Sixtus IV conferred this service on the Conventual general minister and provincial ministers and on the Observant general vicar and provincial vicars with the bull *Romani Pontificis Providentia*: “By the same authority, we also grant to the ministers, brothers and sisters of the Third Order, the permission and faculty of appointing the visitor or confessor from among the Conventual Friars Minor or those of the Observance, whichever pleases them most.”³⁷²

The Popes have insistently maintained this norm down through the ages. In the Rule of Leo XIII we read: “The visitors are to be chosen from the First Franciscan Order or from the Third Order Regular, and shall be appointed by the provincial or local superiors when requested.”³⁷³

An important step taken in the unity of criteria for service to the OFS is the letter that the four general ministers wrote to Pius XII, thanking him for the talk he had given to the Tertiaries in the Basilica of Saint Peter, a talk regarded as one of the landmarks in the age-old history of the Secular Franciscan Order. In it the Pope sees the OFS as “a select part in the peaceful secular army,

³⁶⁶ AP 41; FA:ED II, 54.

³⁶⁷ L3C 60; FA:ED II, 103; Cf. AP 41, 1 C 37.

³⁶⁸ Cf. *Memoriale propositi*, n. 37.

³⁶⁹ *Rule of Nicholas IV*, ch. XVI.

³⁷⁰ J. Zudaire, *En seguimiento de Cristo con Francisco de Asís. Introducción a la Forma de Vida y Organización de la Orden Franciscana Seglar* (Madrid 1995) 229.

³⁷¹ The abbreviated expression “First Order and TOR” is also used to refer to the four religious Orders: OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap and TOR. But it should be remembered that in citations of the various documents quoted here we find these other expressions, which have the same meaning: “four religious Franciscan families,” or simply “four Franciscan families.”

³⁷² Bull *Romani Pontificis Providentia* (15 December 1471).

³⁷³ *Regola di Leone XIII*, 3,3.

which now as never before has openly declared itself for the defense and spread of the Kingdom of God in the world.”³⁷⁴

The *Constitutions* of the Third Order Secular of St. Francis, approved on 25 August 1957, state that the external government of the Third Order “corresponds to the Church and the four Franciscan Families.” They devote the entire the second section of Chapter III to the external government of the OFS where they say, among other things, that the spiritual direction and internal discipline depend on the superiors of the families of the First Order and the TOR.³⁷⁵ But already here something new is being depicted when they speak of the possibility of enacting particular statutes, according to differences of time and place, strongly recommending that “these statutes should be drawn up by mutual agreement among the four Franciscan Families, in order to provide more effectively for the unity and harmony of the entire Third Order.”³⁷⁶

1.2. In the present legislation

The *Rule* of Paul VI (1978) takes a decisive step, moving from submission of the OFS to the First Order and the TOR to life-giving union with each other: “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.” After stressing the “organic union of all Catholic fraternities,”³⁷⁷ the particular characteristics of their secular life and their autonomy, the *Rule* once again mentions “communion and co-responsibility” in the charism of the common Seraphic Father, calling for “suitable and well-prepared religious for spiritual assistance” from the four religious Franciscan families.³⁷⁸

The text of the Pauline *Rule* begins by recalling that the Secular Franciscans are not an appendage but an integral part of the Franciscan Family.³⁷⁹ It ends with a request for spiritual assistance to the superiors of the First Order and the TOR,³⁸⁰ as something flowing from one and the same charism.

The *General Constitutions* of the OFS, definitively approved by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, reaffirm and clarify these concepts in article 85: “As an integral part of the Franciscan Family and called to live the charism of Francis within the secular dimension, the OFS has particular and close relations to the First Order and the TOR.” By reason of these bonds, which have existed for centuries, the Church has entrusted to the superiors of the Franciscan religious Orders the *altius moderamen* mentioned in canon 303, in other words, the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS.

2. From director to spiritual assistant

2.1. Introduction

The spiritual assistant is not the director of the fraternity, or its secretary, or its treasurer. He or she is a member of the fraternity council, with the right to vote on every question, except financial questions³⁸¹ and in elections.³⁸²

³⁷⁴ G. Andreozzi, *Storia delle Regole e delle Costituzioni dell'Ordine Franciscano Secolare*, Edizioni Guerra, Perugia 1988, p. 255.

³⁷⁵ *Costituzioni del Terzo Ordine Franciscano Secolare di San Francesco*, art. 94.

³⁷⁶ *Rule OFS*, 1.

³⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, 2.

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 26.

³⁷⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 1.

³⁸⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 26.

³⁸¹ Cf. *Const.*, 90.2.

³⁸² Cf. *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance*, 12.3.

This view of assistance is effectively expressed by the general ministers when they say that “the work of the spiritual assistants, less far-reaching today in the area of direction and organization, can and must be more profound, as spiritual accompaniment and help in the formation of the brothers and sisters.” 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.³⁸³

2.2. Expectations and obstacles

In an speech to the Council for the Laity in 1981, addressed to the ecclesiastical assistants of lay groups, Pope John Paul II urged them to be:

- builders of communion;
- educators in the faith;
- witnesses to the Absolute;
- true apostles of Jesus Christ;
- ministers of the sacramental life, especially the Eucharist;
- spiritual animators.

Similarly, the pastoral activity of the Franciscan religious, spiritual assistants to the OFS at all levels, must be characterized as:

- theological and spiritual direction;
- witness of fidelity to the Franciscan vocation;
- stimulus to create conditions of peace and justice, truth and love;
- help in reading the signs of the times;
- presentation of the spiritual dimension of the motives and objectives of the OFS.

But the spiritual assistants of the OFS are not just the “ecclesiastical assistants” of some lay group. For the Secular Franciscans they represent something more. They are a special channel thorough which passes the nourishment that should ensure “life-giving union with each other,” between the secular component and the religious components of the Family.

The goal of “life-giving union with each other” requires the removal, at all levels, of certain obstacles. These lie in a mentality that has been overcome, but whose roots are still deep. To go from one form of accompanying the Secular Franciscans to another is always hard:

- from “director” to “assistant”³⁸⁴ (spiritual assistance, guidance by the “good shepherd” and not direction);
- from “commanding” to “serving”;
- from being “Father” who has the last word (even though there is only one Father, in heaven!) to being a member who collaborates with the council and its minister and should not be a substitute for them.³⁸⁵

2.2.1. Obstacles on the part of the seculars:

- insufficient awareness of the dignity of the laity in the Church;
- limited knowledge of the true identity of the Secular Franciscan;
- “affective” dependence on the friar;
- mistaken “reverence” for religious, even in areas that have nothing to do with their status and role;

³⁸³ Cf. *Lettera dei Quattro Ministri generali francescani sulla Vocazione e missione dei fedeli laici francescani nella Chiesa e nel mondo* (Roma, 18 agosto 1989) n. 49 c.

³⁸⁴ Cf. *Const.*, 85.2.

³⁸⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 86.2.

- idealization of the figure of the religious and fierce criticism when their limitations and weaknesses are perceived.

2.2.2. *Obstacles on the part of the religious:*

- an “esprit de corps” with regard to one’s own Order, even when convinced of the unity of the OFS;
- a tendency to pursue and impose one’s own idea of the OFS instead of an awareness that the OFS has its own identity;
- a fear of losing the limelight if responsibilities are shared with the seculars.

To this must be added the excessively long tenure of some religious as assistants to the OFS, especially at the regional and local levels. As a result, even though they use the new terminology, these assistants are in fact still continuing their role of “direction.” This prevents the Secular Franciscans from ceasing to be a devotional group or mere collaborators of the assistant or parish priest, and not allowing them to live fully their own form of gospel life, with all their commitments to mission.³⁸⁶ Too much time spent in the office of assistant brings with it, among other things, a negative charge of weariness, repetition and lack of creativity, which often seriously damage the life of the OFS fraternity. Sometimes this can happen even in “collegiality,” when for one reason or another the established rotation is not followed and they do not work as a team.

These difficulties are not insurmountable obstacles. They represent a path on which to move forward together and are subjects for reflection, which can be of help in providing better assistance to the OFS. They should lead to a better knowledge of the Franciscan Order which, with the First Order and the TOR, shares the same charism of Francis, but in a secular expression.

If at times the provincial ministers or the assistants are ignored by the Secular Franciscans, this is not the fault of the Secular Franciscan Order or the Church, which recognizes it as an international and public association of the faithful. It could be the fault of individual Secular Franciscans who are arbitrarily interpreting the innovations that have taken place, or it could be the fault of the provincial ministers and assistants themselves, who do not know the Church’s legislation concerning the OFS or are unwilling to enforce it.

It can happen that the Secular Franciscans are opposed to a spiritual assistant because he acts like the old spiritual director of a Third Order Fraternity, thinking that the local OFS Fraternity “belongs” to him or to his Order. A priest will certainly meet opposition if he has failed to grasp the difference between a spiritual director of the old Third Order and a spiritual assistant of today’s Secular Franciscan Order. But this does not give the Secular Franciscans the right to exclude him from meetings of the fraternity council. If they have problems with him, they should report their difficulties to the OFS regional council, where this exists, or if not to the national council, either through the regional assistant or directly. The general assistant should get involved only if the national council is unable to resolve a serious problem, or if the case has to be brought to the attention of the president of the international council.

³⁸⁶ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 4; *Const.*, 1.3.

3. Spiritual assistance in the OFS General Constitutions

3.1. Definition

Compared to the *Rule*, the *Constitutions* describe more fully and completely the figure of the assistant as “the person designated by the competent major superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the OFS.”³⁸⁷

The description does not mention priestly status, since the specific task is not sacramental assistance but rather spiritual assistance. This allows any brother of the First Order or the TOR, whether a priest or not, to assist an OFS fraternity, as long as he is capable and well-prepared.³⁸⁸ In case no friar is available for spiritual assistance to an OFS fraternity, the major superiors are allowed, after hearing from the council of the fraternity, to entrust this responsibility to “religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes; diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the OFS; other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious,”³⁸⁹ provided they possess the necessary qualifications of ability and competency.

The task of the assistant is “spiritual assistance to the fraternities at the various levels,”³⁹⁰ communicating “Franciscan spirituality” and cooperating “in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters.”³⁹¹ But animation and guidance of the fraternity at every level is the task of the respective council, of which the spiritual assistant is a member “by right, with vote,” except in financial questions.³⁹²

3.2 Role of the major superiors

The responsibility of the major superiors of the First Order and the TOR in spiritual assistance is very important. Besides canonical establishment, spiritual animation and visitation of the local fraternities,³⁹³ they are asked to keep themselves informed “on the spiritual assistance given to the OFS,” to see to it that “their own religious are interested in the OFS and that capable and well-prepared persons are appointed for the service of spiritual assistance.”³⁹⁴ Their appointment of capable and well-prepared friars for assistance arises from the concern they have for the Secular Franciscans, their spirituality, their mission and their task in society and the Church. Today many Franciscan religious are attracted to other ecclesial groups or movements, not realizing that the Secular Franciscan are companions in life and mission in the secular arena, called like them to the same gospel charism.

The ministers and custodes, as major superiors, are invited to maintain a dialogue or exchange of opinions with the respective OFS councils and ministers, as a sign of union and co-responsibility, when they are asked to propose candidates for assistance. This exchange of opinions will be a sign that the nature and mission of the OFS has been understood, while the foundations of collegiality at all levels are strengthened.

The sense of family between the OFS, the First Order and the TOR is also manifested by going through the process of appointing the spiritual assistant together. The OFS council solicits and requests the assistant,³⁹⁵ the major superior (general or provincial minister) hears the council,

³⁸⁷ Cf. *Const.*, 89.2.

³⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 89.3.

³⁸⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 89.4.

³⁹⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 86.1.

³⁹¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 90.1.

³⁹² Cf. *Ibidem*, 90.2.

³⁹³ Cf. *Ibidem*, 88.2.a-b.

³⁹⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 88.2.c.

³⁹⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 91.1.

and the two dialogues to reach the best consensus for assistance to the fraternity concerned: “The competent major superior, having heard the council of the fraternity concerned, appoints the assistant according to the norms of the Constitutions and of the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*.”³⁹⁶

3.3 Collegial assistance

The subject of collegiality in assistance to the OFS fraternities at the international, national and regional levels deserves special consideration.³⁹⁷

The *Statutes for Assistance*, which are “common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFMConv, OFMConv, TOR),” state in Article 3.2 that the service of assistance “must be performed collegially at all levels above the local level.” For local fraternities it does not speak of collegial assistance, since a local fraternity is normally assisted by a single religious Order.

According to the 2000 *General Constitutions* of the OFS, collegiality in the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, which is entrusted by the Church to the First Order and the TOR, applies explicitly to:

- the general ministers;³⁹⁸
- the major superiors who have jurisdiction in the same territory, national or regional,³⁹⁹
- the general, national and regional assistants.⁴⁰⁰

The *General Constitutions* express express this collegial activity in a much clearer and more evident way: “For all that concerns the OFS as a whole, the *altius moderamen* must be exercised by the general ministers collegially.”⁴⁰¹

If the general ministers exercise their service collegially, their immediate delegates, the general spiritual assistants,⁴⁰² in giving collegial assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order, should be in agreement with the mind of the Conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

This Conference of the four general ministers has been recognized by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) as a juridic person of pontifical right by Decree of 17 February 2003 (Prot. n. 38051/2003). This gives further juridical weight to what is decided concerning collegial assistance to the OFS. Indeed, Article 6 of the *Statutes* approved by the same Decree inserts at the end: “To perform for the Secular Franciscan Order the collegial service of *altius moderamen*, entrusted by the Church to the four Orders.”

Similarly, the assistants form the so-called Conference of Spiritual Assistants (CSA).

The creation of the Conference of Spiritual Assistants is required by the very unity of the OFS, as well as by the fact that communication and participation will make the assistance more productive and creative. In order to achieve creation of the Conference of Assistants, animation by the provincial ministers of the First Order and the TOR is appropriate.

³⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, 91.3.

³⁹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 90.3a-c.

³⁹⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 87.1.

³⁹⁹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 88.5; 91.2b-c.

⁴⁰⁰ Cf. *Ibidem*, 90.3a-c.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibidem*, 87.1.

⁴⁰² The same thing can and must be said for the national and regional assistants with regard to their provincial ministers or custodes.

The change from general commissaries and general assistants, and especially to collegial assistance by the Conference of Spiritual Assistants, has been and continues to be marked by persistence and good cooperation, in which people are working and studying collegially, in accord with the *Constitutions* of the OFS: “The general assistants give their service to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, form a conference, and collegially see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS as a whole.”⁴⁰³

Assistance, inasmuch as it is communion and co-responsibility, is not a finished or closed subject, but is open-ended and capable of growth and creativity among the components of the Franciscan Family.

If on the general level collegial assistance is very well established and organized, it is necessary to work so that this collegiality, on the national and regional levels, is not just a theory but a living reality. Spiritual assistance to the OFS must respect its unity, its organization and its organs of government.

3.4 Role of the spiritual assistants

According to the *Rule* (n. 26), the proper role of the spiritual assistant is to provide “spiritual assistance.” He or she is appointed by one of the four religious Orders as a sign of communion and co-responsibility. Articles 85-91 of the *General Constitutions* describe this role further. It contains two main elements:

- witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious;⁴⁰⁴
- collaboration in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters.⁴⁰⁵

Nowhere does it mention or indicate that the spiritual assistant is in any way the “superior” of the OFS. Neither the general minister of the friars, nor the provincial ministers, have a role of direct authority in the structures of the OFS. The *altius moderamen* over the OFS, which is entrusted to them, does not involve power or control. Rather it is a guarantee of the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, of its communion with the Church and of its union with the Franciscan Family.⁴⁰⁶

Therefore we can conclude that the spiritual assistants have no authority in the sense of a right to direct the members of the OFS. On the contrary, they assist the Secular Franciscans, sharing their own Franciscan life with them, preaching to them not so much with words as with the example of their life. The spiritual assistants, in light of the OFS *Rule* and *General Constitutions*, are not supposed to tell the Secular Franciscans *how* they should live, unless they actually adopt and propagate actions obviously contrary to the teachings of the Church (not just contrary to the personal theological opinions or the liturgical preferences), or in ways not in conformity with the directives given to the OFS in the *Rule*, the *Constitutions*, and the *Ritual*.

3.5 Pastoral and spiritual role

In order to better understand the *altius moderamen* or pastoral ministry to the Secular Franciscan Order, it is necessary to understand what a “pastor” is. In the Catholic Church, we ordinarily understand a “pastor” as a person “who is responsible for all that takes place in a diocese or parish.” In the Church, it also refers to the priest who is charged with representing the authority

⁴⁰³ *Const.*, 90.3a.

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. *Ibidem*, 89.3.

⁴⁰⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 90.1.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 85.2.

of the Church in Catholic associations. Naturally, more precise distinctions about the role of a pastor are found in the law of the Church.

However, for spiritual assistants to the Secular Franciscans, the role of pastor is better described by the title of “spiritual assistant.” 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.

As friars, we should limit ourselves to “assisting” the Secular Franciscans; we are not responsible for “directing” them. In fact we are not even the sole spiritual experts, since the entire fraternity is responsible for the spiritual life of each of its members.⁴⁰⁷ It is essential to acknowledge this way of understanding and this way of being a pastor, and to act accordingly.

This ministry is an integral part of our common Franciscan vocation, which we share with the OFS. A very important point is that we are not working for the OFS; we assistants are working for our Orders, carrying out a task entrusted to us by the Church and which belongs to us as friars. Therefore we should not even expect any remuneration from the OFS. If, out of a sense of family, the Seculars also want to help us financially, we can only be grateful to them for this.

Article 26 of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order is rich in content when it asks the superiors of the four Franciscan families for suitable religious for assistance to the fraternities at the various levels, as a sign of communion and co-responsibility:

- a sign of communion in one and the same charism, which gives life to the whole Franciscan Family, and which is understood only in face of the plurality of manifestations of this charism: men religious, women religious and laity. A charism of many colors for the good of the Church: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4-7).

- a sign of co-responsibility, in the life (not in the government) of the Secular Franciscan Order, since as the *Constitutions* rightly emphasize, “This service of the religious ministers completes but does not substitute for the secular councils and ministers to whom belong the guidance, co-ordination and animation of the fraternities at the various levels.”⁴⁰⁸

The pastoral visit and the chapter of elections, which we shall speak of later, are special moments in which spiritual assistance, and especially pastoral service, are exercised more concretely.⁴⁰⁹

3.6. Requirements of the assistant

The chief requirements of an assistant are that he or she be suitable and well-prepared.⁴¹⁰ Then, in the context of this suitability, assistants are asked to stand beside the laity, our Secular Franciscans, who have a maturity and responsibility in the Church, as the Second Vatican Council says: “Priests should confidently entrust to the laity duties in the service of the Church, giving them freedom and opportunity for activity and even inviting them, when opportunity offers, to undertake projects on their own initiative.”⁴¹¹ And, paraphrasing a text from *Christifideles laici*, it speaks of helping our Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters to become increasingly conscious, not only of

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibidem*, 37.2, 3.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibidem*, 86.2.

⁴⁰⁹ In this same Chapter, paragraphs 5.4-5.7, and also 6.4.

⁴¹⁰ Cf. *Const OFS*, 87.3; *Rule OFS*, 26.

⁴¹¹ Decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9.

belonging to an Order, the Secular Franciscan Order, but of themselves *being* their Order, in communion with the charism of the brothers of the First Order and the TOR. They *are* the Secular Franciscan Order: “Therefore, they [the laity] in particular, ought to have an ever-clearer consciousness not only of belonging to the Church, but of being the Church.”⁴¹²

Like the theme of autonomy, the theme of the unity of the OFS is also found again in the expressions of our Franciscan maturity and minority. For this reason it seems fitting to quote some lines from a letter sent by Fr. Agostino Gardin, OFMConv, acting president of the Conference of General Ministers, to all provincial ministers of the First Order and TOR in Italy concerning the situation of the Italian OFS. After asking them “not to leave this situation unresolved, even though it is difficult,” Fr. Agostino added a reference to the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: “The Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life the particular task of spreading the spirituality of communion, first of all in their internal life and then in the ecclesial community, and even beyond its boundaries....”⁴¹³

Only a positive response of animation and accompaniment in the pursuit of unity will indicate that we have understood that the OFS is secular, which is “the special characteristic of the laity.”⁴¹⁴ And so, in the great Franciscan Family, “the sharing of the lay faithful has its own manner of realization and function, which, according to the Council, is ‘properly and particularly’ theirs. Such a manner is designated with the expression ‘secular character.’”⁴¹⁵ And for Secular Franciscans it is also manifested in the unity of all the members of the Secular Franciscan Order.

4. Assistant to the local fraternity

4.1 In general

According to the Statutes for Assistance, the local assistant:

- is appointed by the major superior, according to the law of his own Order, after hearing the council of the fraternity concerned (Art. 23.1);
- fosters communion within the fraternity and between the fraternity and the First Order or the TOR. In harmony with the guardian or local superior, the assistant sees to it that a real life-giving union exists between the religious fraternity and the secular fraternity. He or she fosters the active presence of the fraternity in the Church and in society (Art. 23.2);
- together with the fraternity council, the local assistant is responsible for the formation of the candidates and expresses his or her assessment of each of the candidates before profession (Art. 24.1);
- together with the minister, the assistant discusses with the brothers or sisters in difficulty, who want to retire from the fraternity or who act in serious opposition to the *Rule* (Art. 24.2).

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.

⁴¹² CL, 9.

⁴¹³ VC, 51; Cf. also nos. 41, 45, 46, 47.

⁴¹⁴ LG, 31.

⁴¹⁵ CL, 15.

Two extremes should be avoided during meetings:

- First, the temptation to lead the meeting in person, especially if the secular officers appear weak or lack formation.
- Second, the temptation to let things go and limit oneself strictly to the dictates of one's duty, or even to lose interest in the fraternity.

The specific role of the spiritual assistant will vary according to the different types of meetings in which he or she participates: council meetings or fraternity meetings, meetings focusing on spirituality, formation, organization, recreation etc. However it remains true that the spiritual assistant should always play that role in the context of that "life-giving union with each other" which arises from belonging to the same family, even though in different ways.

4.2 In council meetings

The spiritual assistant:

- is by right, with vote, a member of the council of the fraternity which he or she serves, and collaborates with it in all activities,⁴¹⁶ taking part in its meetings and activities in accordance with the law proper to the OFS;
- 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 participation of the spiritual assistant in the meetings and activities of the local council will vary according to the concrete needs and circumstances of the fraternity. The assistant will play a more active role in the council meetings of a newly established or re-activated fraternity than in one already fully established and active. But it remains true that the assistant should always give the seculars priority with regard to the guidance, coordination and animation of the fraternity. His or her role is always spiritual: to nourish the Christian and Franciscan life of the fraternity.

Council meetings will focus on various elements of fraternity life: Franciscan and Christian life, apostolic and charitable activities, initial and continuing formation, fraternal life and contacts between members. The topics to be treated will be many: preparation for fraternity meetings, planning and evaluating fraternity activities, evaluation of candidates for admission to the Order or to profession, preparations for the chapter or special fraternity meetings, formation courses for the officers, actual and prospective, or for members of the fraternity. The role of the spiritual assistant in council meetings is normally limited to active participation in the discussion, offering suggestions based on his or her Franciscan and religious sensibility.

It is important that council meetings be well-prepared and have a clear agenda. The assistant should also be prepared to help the secular councilors with his or her spiritual intuition regarding the topics to be discussed. Prior contact between the minister of the fraternity and the assistant will be useful for passing on information and ensuring better participation during the council meeting.

Council meetings can be structured in different ways, depending on the main topics to be discussed. But it is important to follow a basic framework, which could be as follows:

1. Opening prayer (Assistant)
2. Agenda and modifications (Minister)
3. Minutes of the last meeting (Secretary)
4. Spiritual reflection (Assistant)
5. Reports (Officers)

⁴¹⁶ *Const.*, 90.2.

6. Topics on the agenda (All)
7. Conclusion (Minister)

This structure can be modified depending on the situation and the topics to be covered.

The opening prayer (no. 1) could be inspired by the prayers suggested in the *Ritual* for fraternity meetings (Part II, Chapter 1). It can be just a simple opening prayer, or it can be extended by recitation of some part of the Liturgy of the Hours.

In a meeting for the admission of candidates to profession, the reports (no. 4) will consist of an evaluation of each candidate by the person responsible for formation and by the spiritual assistant, followed by discussion and a secret vote.⁴¹⁷

In other cases the reports could be the treasurer's financial report or reports by officers responsible for the fraternity's charitable and apostolic activities.

In a meeting for planning fraternity activities, the reports could be omitted in order to devote more time to the work of programming or planning these activities, as provided in the agenda.

The spiritual reflection (no. 6) could also take different forms. It can be very short, just a moment of silence followed by a prayer. It can be longer, taking the form of a deeper reflection on some aspect of Franciscan spirituality or on a spiritual text. The spiritual reflection can be given by the the assistant alone, as a conference or a reading followed by meditation. It can also take the form of a common reflection following the "SJA" model (See, Judge, Act),⁴¹⁸ with the active participation of all those present.

The conclusion (no. 7) can be a simple formal conclusion by the minister, or a time to make decisions or to list decisions made, or to fix the day and place for the next council meeting. The whole meeting can be concluded as suggested in the *Ritual*.⁴¹⁹

A smooth-running council meeting needs, on the one hand, an agenda for dealing with things, and on the other, creative flexibility in following it. An agenda facilitates regularity and consistency in meetings. Creative flexibility in following it makes it possible to consider problems in various ways and explore new solutions to routine problems.

4.3. The "SJA" method

The method offers a simple and flexible outline for formation meetings or meetings to study a topic together. The method is used for rural conscientization courses in Latin America, for managerial training in Europe and the United States, and in group dynamics sessions. The method produces best results in small groups of not more than fifteen members. Another possibility is to limit active participation to a restricted number of persons, a panel to whom the others listen. Normally there is no need to prepare specific questions to be answered, unless one wants to direct the discussion toward a certain goal.

The meeting starts with the reading of a written text or the telling of a relevant story. The reading or story is followed by a short period of silence to give each one a chance for personal reflection on the topic. After the reading or story, followed by silence, come the three steps: **See, Judge, Act**.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 41,1.

⁴¹⁸ See below, 4.3.

⁴¹⁹ Part II, Chapter 1.

4.3.1 See

We try to see, to understand or grasp the contents of the topic. Each participant tries to express what he or she has understood, what the text or story is trying to say, as he or she has understood it. It is an analysis done together on the objective meaning of the text or story. One tries to understand the topic as completely as possible. Normally each participant is given a chance to express what he or she has understood of the topic. The order of the contributions can be left free or follow a fixed pattern. This phase can be summarized by the question: *What does the text or story mean?*

4.3.4 Judge

After deepening our understanding of the topic, we start to judge the significance of the topic for the life of the participants. Each participant asks how his or her life relates to the topic, how he or she feels affected by the topic, what impact the topic has on his or her private or social life. The topic is judged in relation to one's life, but one's life is also judged in light of the topic. The OFS *Rule* indicates this process as going from the Gospel to life and from life to the Gospel. This phase can be summarized by the question: *What does the text or story invite us to do?*

4.3.3 Act

In the third phase we move to practice, trying to draw practical conclusions for our life. Each participant asks him- or herself what he or she can or should do to answer the topic's invitation, what can change in one's life in order to follow its appeal. We can also draw common conclusions, make decisions needed to act upon the ideas or proposals identified in the preceding phase. This phase can be summarized by the question: *What should we do to act on this text or story?*

The meeting ends by recalling briefly the process gone through. The topic, the invitation it presents, and the actions to be taken are summarized in a few words.

4.4 In fraternity meetings

4.4.1 Contents

Fraternity meetings are family meetings, of brothers and sisters, of people who want to live the Gospel after the manner of Saint Francis of Assisi. Normally they consist of four elements: prayer, formation, activities and fraternization.⁴²⁰

- a. Common prayer unites the brothers and sisters in praising God, our Father in heaven. It can be a eucharistic celebration, with homily and song, or a celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours, or another form of common prayer.
- b. Formation allows the members to develop their spirituality, their human, Christian, gospel and Franciscan life. It can consist of a conference by the spiritual assistant, a reading of some formative text, or a shared reflection on a spiritual topic.
- c. The apostolic and charitable activities of the members are shared in such a way as to be activities of the fraternity and not just of isolated individuals. Fraternity meetings allow all the members to become aware of what the others are doing individually and to involve

⁴²⁰ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 5; *Ritual*, Part II, Preliminary notes 4.

themselves actively in the commitments made by the fraternity as such. This part of the meeting can be sharing the work of the other members, an evaluation of the work done so far, a division of work, an endorsement of the commitments already made, a suggestion of initiatives to be undertaken.

- d. Fraternization allows all the members to become truly brothers and sisters, to experience that fraternity lived by Saint Francis. It can simply be a moment of being together, to compare notes, to get to know one another better, to meet one another. It can be accompanied by refreshments or a by a potluck meal.

Because the fraternity meetings are meetings of brothers and sisters, every meeting should be characterized by these four elements: prayer, formation, activity and fraternization. It is not necessary, of course, to always give the same importance to each element. During spiritual retreats, the element of prayer will be the most important. In formation meetings, the formative element will take first place. A meeting of the fraternity to evaluate work done or to plan apostolic and charitable activities will be centered on these. And when the fraternity goes on an outing or organizes a pilgrimage, the element of recreation will predominate. It should be remembered, however, that all four elements are essential for the life of the fraternity and should be present in one form or another.

It is important that the contents of the individual elements show a dynamic continuity that can be perceived by the members of the fraternity. Continuity preserves a connection with the past, with the customs and traditions of the fraternity. Dynamism tends toward the future, enters the “road to renewal,”⁴²¹ sustains an “open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity,”⁴²² and helps the brothers and sisters to be “witnessing to the good yet to come.”⁴²³

Dynamic continuity of contents means concretely that the assistant’s interventions should be linked to each other. They should be based on knowledge and convictions already present, while fully open to the impulse of the Holy Spirit who inspires the brothers and sisters to “strive for perfect charity in their own secular state” (*Rule 2*). One should strive for a balance between tradition and innovation, between continuity and creativity, between fidelity and openness to the Holy Spirit. An assistant who is afraid of “dangerous novelties” can bind the fraternity to the past and render it incapable of understanding the signs of the times. Similarly, an assistant who is in love with “liberating innovation” can unleash in the fraternity an unbridled curiosity that prevents it from bearing fruits of patience and perseverance.

4.4.2 Structure

The fraternity meetings can be structured in various ways, keeping in mind here too the need for dynamic continuity. The meetings of the same fraternity can be structured differently depending on the time, alternating from week to week (e.g., the first week a eucharistic celebration, the second week a formation meeting, the third week planning the work, the fourth week spiritual recollection). The fraternity can also establish, “under the guidance of the one council, sections or groups which gather members sharing particular needs.”⁴²⁴ Obviously, the meetings for each group can be structured differently according to the various needs, while keeping a fixed rhythm for the meetings of the whole fraternity.

⁴²¹ *Rule OFS*, 7.

⁴²² *Ibidem*, 6.

⁴²³ *Ibidem*, 12.

⁴²⁴ *Const.*, 34.

It will be useful to describe various types of fraternity meetings.

With a special Eucharistic celebration:

1. Opening prayer (Minister)
2. Formation (Assistant - Officer)
3. Eucharist (Assistant)
4. Evaluation and planning of activities (Officers)
5. Fraternalization (All)

With the parish Eucharistic celebration:

1. Opening prayer (Minister)
2. Formation (Assistant - Officer)
3. Evaluation and planning of activities (Officers)
4. Eucharist with the parish community (All)
5. Short fraternalization (All)

or:

1. Eucharist with the parish community (All)
2. Formation (Assistant - Officer)
3. Evaluation and planning of activities (Officers)
4. Fraternalization (All)
5. Concluding prayer (Minister)

Without Eucharistic celebration:

1. Liturgy of the Word or of the Hours (Minister)
2. Formation (Assistant - Officer)
3. Evaluation and planning of activities (Officers)
4. Fraternalization (All)
5. Concluding prayer (Minister)

Each element can vary depending on circumstances. The eucharistic celebration can be simple, without songs, or solemn, with a short homily or a longer sermon. The formative moment can consist of a reading or a conference given by the assistant, or a sharing of life experiences by the members. It can also be an in-depth reflection on a text by all the members together, facilitated by the assistant. The evaluation and planning of activities can be a simple communication of things to be done together, or a common evaluation of work done with a view to future activities. The fraternalization can be a brief moment to say good-bye or a longer get-together. The concluding prayer can be a spontaneous prayer by the minister, a written formula, or a simple blessing by the assistant.

4.5 In the formation of the fraternity

We have to admit that in the past the Secular Franciscan Order was not very attentive to the formation of its leaders, leaving that task to the assistant and occasional experts. This situation is now undergoing a radical change, a development that is also required by the changing times into which we are moving. Above all, it is demanded by the new dimension of responsibility to which the lay faithful are called within the Church and society. However, this change must be made with intelligence and caution. Let no one think that replacing the friar with the secular will solve everything. What we are talking about is a joint task patiently carried out, where each one pulls his own weight.

In this paragraph we consider the sensitive tasks and responsibility of the assistant as formator in the local fraternity. It must be borne in mind that the assistant's role becomes even more

significant today when we remember that Christian values are losing a lot of ground, while other values not always in tune with the following of Christ are gaining in strength.

To speak of the spiritual assistant as being responsible for formation is not easy, particularly in view of all that the assistant is involved in, and the relationships that have to be maintained, e.g., with the minister, with the council, with the staff of the formation team and with all the members of the fraternity, both as a group and as individuals.

We are not dealing here with the requirements for developing the role of formator or the preparation needed. We confine ourselves to a consideration of the assistant as a leader entrusted with the task of collaborating in the sensitive area of formation. Hence we will deal with the assistant's relationships with the other leaders.

The assistant is by a right a member of the council; his or her role consists in being the privileged formator of the entire fraternity. The *General Constitutions* say: "The principal task of the assistant is to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to cooperate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters."⁴²⁵ The assistant must be fully aware of this fact in order to convey a good understanding of "things Franciscan" with the presence and competence required.

- The assistant participates (even if this is not always necessary) in the fraternity meetings, being actively present and alert to the dynamics of the group.
- The assistant lives, expresses and facilitates that life-giving union with each other that arises from belonging to the same Franciscan Family, even if in different ways. Respectful of the role of each one, the assistant is concerned with pastoral and spiritual formation, as well as the fraternity's liturgical and sacramental life.
- The assistant ensures the biblical-theological content of formation. The assistant speaks of God and is sensitive to such spiritual aspects as prayer, listening to the Word, and spiritual direction.
- As witness to fraternal life, the assistant becomes the bond of unity within the fraternity, with the community of the friars, with other Franciscan religious communities in the area and with the ecclesial community.
- The assistant is on the lookout so that the fraternity does not close in on itself and become a "parish group."
- The assistant enlivens the fraternity's interest in the life of the local Church through collaboration in diocesan and parochial initiatives.
- Being the spiritual and "prophetic" counselor of the fraternity government, it falls to the spiritual assistant to encourage all towards "unity in charity" and a *sensus ecclesiae*.

The assistant is not to be the director or factotum, yet he is not simply a priest or chaplain (according to the terminology used by some Church groups) who limits his presence to celebrating the Eucharist and administering the sacraments. Like all the council members, the assistant has the duty to serve as best he or she can, as the *Rule* requires. The assistant is pastor, guide and teacher, and must get to know the brothers and sisters individually, in order to form them by harmonizing the education and abilities of each so that no one remains isolated or on the fringes. This is an in-depth work, carried on discreetly and quietly, yet very effectively for the growth of the fraternity in all its members.

The assistant often has to make people feel that they belong to a fraternity, and must persuade all to use their talents. At times we underrate the members of the OFS. Many of our brothers and sisters have special gifts and abilities which they often do not see and realize. Sometimes it is enough to encourage them and give them a chance.

⁴²⁵ *Const.*, 90.1.

4.6 On the formation team

As a member of the formation team, the assistant is not the only leader, nor should he behave as if he were. There is also the formator, and even though they are not present, the minister and the council with their guidelines. The assistant's task is to give witness to the authenticity of the charism and to be a safe and enlightened guide. Therefore the assistant neither commands nor directs, neither administers nor organizes, but rather gives witness to the Word of God, of which he or she is the representative and signpost.

The assistant must collaborate in the formation of all, especially initial and ongoing formation. The assistant will find out how to exercise the role of formator in the council meetings, in assemblies, in spiritual direction, in celebrations and when animating the prayer. The following factors must be kept in mind.

Objectives:

- To help new members prepare themselves for the definitive "proposal."
- To accompany the professed in persevering and entering more fully into their commitment.

Method:

- By the example and witness of a Franciscan life.
- By collaborating as a member with the formation group, without imposing his or her own ideas, but instead forming the group itself, helping especially in dealing with areas that are often unfamiliar to seculars; by evaluating together the progress already made and that which still remains.
- By offering support through what he or she has to say and by the preparations made.

4.7 In initial formation

The assistant has the principal duty of:

- *Counselor:* The assistant enters into personal dialogue and, if requested, sacramental dialogue with the aspirant. The assistant helps the aspirants to clarify their vocation, to purify it and name it. He offers them his priestly service as a spiritual guide, in prayer and in the journey of conversion. The assistant accompanies them along the way of living the Gospel.
- *Guide:* Together with the council, the assistant will organize the formation curriculum, which he will develop further, as "expert" and "guarantor" of the magisterium and fidelity to the Franciscan charism, together with the formator, and where present, the animator. Naturally he will enter into dialogue with the aspirants so as to introduce them gradually and methodically to a deeper understanding of the truths of faith and to a knowledge of Franciscan spirituality.

The assistant plays a particularly delicate and essential role:

- Through his ministerial function.
- Through his spiritual discernment.
- As a guide in the journey of faith and acquisition of the standards of Church life.
- By mediating an authentic Franciscan spirituality.

By virtue of his priestly ministry, he can, in a special way, enlighten and mold the candidate, especially in spiritual direction and the sacrament of reconciliation. In this way the assistant completes the overall formation of the candidates.

It is no coincidence that the *Constitutions* require the opinion of the assistant before the admission of a candidate to profession.⁴²⁶

4.8 In ongoing formation

The assistant will seek to collaborate with the council and minister, giving his support as one who is educated and experienced, so as to offer the brothers and sisters a program of ongoing formation:

- As a help and accompaniment to the continual conversion demanded by the Gospel.
- To form all to fulfill their proper mission in the Church and society through witness and evangelization.
- To teach the fraternity how to discern the signs of the times.

In everything suggested by the *Constitutions*⁴²⁷ and in all initiatives of a formative nature taken by the council, the assistant should be present and should lend as much support as required.

5. Regional and national assistants

5.1. Regional assistants

These are appointed by the major superior who has responsibility for the *altius moderamen* in the region, after consultation with the respective regional council of the OFS. Where more than one major superior is involved in the appointment, the norms established jointly by the superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity shall be followed.⁴²⁸

If there is more than one regional assistant, they form a conference and render their service collegially.⁴²⁹

Within his own Order, the task of each regional assistant is:

- To keep the major superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth in the region.
- To deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by the Order to the OFS and the 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.

The task of the Conference of Regional Assistants, or the regional assistant, if there is only one, is:

- To collaborate with the regional council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and society in the region, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders.
- To provide for the pastoral visits of the local councils of the OFS and to ensure a presence at the local elective chapters.
- To coordinate, at the regional level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the assistants and fraternal union among them.
- To foster the interest of the friars in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth.

⁴²⁶ Cf. *Ibidem*, 41.1.

⁴²⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 44.

⁴²⁸ *Statutes for Assistance*, 21.1.

⁴²⁹ *Ibidem*, 21.2.

5.2. National assistants

These are appointed by the competent major superior, after consultation with the respective national council. Where more than one major superior is involved in the appointment, the norms established together by the superiors in the jurisdiction of the national territory shall be followed. They give their service to the national council and provide spiritual assistance to the national fraternity. If there is more than one national assistant, they form a conference and render their service collegially.

Within his own Order, the task of each national assistant is:

- To keep the major superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth in the country.
- To deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to the 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.

The task of the Conference of National Assistants, or the national assistant, if there is only one, is:

- To collaborate with the national council in the task of spiritual and apostolic animation of the Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and society in the country, and in a special way in the formation of the leaders.
- To provide for the pastoral visits of the regional councils of the OFS and to ensure a presence at the regional elective chapters.
- To coordinate, at the national level, the service of spiritual assistance, the formation of the assistants, and fraternal union among them.
- To foster the interest of the friars in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth.

5.3. Conferences of regional and national assistants

Each conference of regional or national spiritual assistants (CSA) shall function collegially. If it wishes, it can add other members whose task shall be to advise and collaborate. The CSA should also determine which of its members will assume the presidency, the length of the term etc. But all the others should also take an active role in the exercise of pastoral care in the entire region. This is for reasons of practicality and efficiency, and to make sure that all the obediences participate, regardless of the number of fraternities under their pastoral care.

The remarks and directions given in the paragraph on the local assistant apply, with appropriate adaptations, to the CSA, as regards participation in the fraternity council, animation and guidance of the fraternity, in collaboration with the secular leaders (council and minister), co-responsibility in formation etc.

Like the Conference of General Assistants, the conferences of regional and national assistants, as delegates of the major superiors who appointed them, exercise the *altius moderamen* over the fraternities they assist. This duty is expressed particularly in the pastoral visit and by participation in the elective chapters of the lower level fraternities. We will deal with this specifically in the following sections.

5.4. In the pastoral visit

One essential component of the pastoral visit carried out by the assistants to the OFS is a sense of fraternity. It is a meeting between brothers and sisters. The fraternity is the setting whose meetings must be animated. But this is not the whole visit. Although indispensable, the spirit of

fraternity could lead to a kind of mutual self-gratification, which would not be of real service to the brothers and sisters. But neither can the assistant's visit be reduced to a fiscal and purely juridical visit.

It is not easy to find a clear line of demarcation between a pastoral visit by the assistants and a fraternal visit by the lay leaders. But it is useful to at least try to identify certain general principles to keep in mind.

A visit by the assistants should have, first of all, a "promotional" purpose. Presupposing that the assistant has a good knowledge of the common Franciscan charism, he or she can contribute to its deeper understanding, taking into account the difference in its lay expression, in order to avoid a simple projection.

The visit should also have some more concrete benchmarks. For the visit to be an examination, it is necessary to start with the planning: planning for formation, planning for activities, planning for fraternity meetings etc. Where no real planning exists locally, the assistant can ask for and initiate it. Later, there will be other meetings to verify it.

Naturally, one essential point of the examination has to do with the lay nature of the Secular Franciscans, that is, their autonomy from the First Orders and the quality of their mission. Unfortunately, the danger of remaining closed concerning obligations *ad intra* (e.g. meetings, mutual services, practices of piety etc.) is not just hypothetical. Were it necessary to limit it to this, the OFS would lose significance and become outdated.

The examination should also deal with the relationship between time for contemplation and time for social commitment. The two must be kept closely linked and must be Franciscan in character. There is a kind of Franciscan contemplation, different from Benedictine or Dominican; there is a Franciscan spirit in performing social works, different from the Salesian spirit. It is not a matter of wanting at all costs to look for something special; it is a matter of faithfulness to one's specific membership. Above all it is a matter of contributing to the Church's mission through the rich diversity of charisms.

Naturally, underlying all guidelines there should emerge the need to give formation a special place. With so many new things, a profound and ongoing formation is demanded. In formation, continuity and creativity must constantly go together.

Speaking of the pastoral and fraternal visit, the *Rule* of the OFS expresses itself in these terms: "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 or president, with the consent of the council, should take care to ask for a regular pastoral visit by the competent religious superior as well as for a fraternal visit from those of the higher fraternities, according to the norm of the *Constitutions*" (Art. 26).

The *General Constitutions*, in Article 92, state:

With the consent of the appropriate council, the request for a fraternal visit as well as for a pastoral visit is made:

- a. by the minister of the local and regional fraternity, at least every three years, to the council of the immediately higher level and to the respective conference of spiritual assistants;
- b. by the national minister, at least every six years to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS and to the conference of general assistants;

c. by the general minister, at least every six years, to the Conference of General Ministers.

For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the fraternal and pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the respectively competent council or conference of spiritual assistants.

The *General Constitutions* also describe the purpose and manner of the visits:

Art. 92.1 – 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.

Art 93.1 – In the visits to the local fraternities and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will verify the evangelical and apostolic vitality, the observance of the *Rule* and *Constitutions*, and the insertion of the fraternities into the Order and into the Church.

Art. 93.2 – In the visits to the local fraternities and to the councils at the various levels, the visitor will in time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the interested council. He or she will examine the registers and the records, including those relative to the preceding visits, to the election of the council and to the administration of goods.

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.

A pastoral or fraternal visit can be made to the whole fraternity or to the council of the fraternity. The purpose of the visit must be clearly defined and the visitor should communicate to the council the prearranged objectives. The purpose of both 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 fraternity's bond of unity, to foster its insertion into the Franciscan Family and into the Church. The ordinary points to be verified are the evangelical and apostolic vitality, the insertion of the OFS fraternity into the Franciscan Family and the Church, and the examination of the registers and records, including those those relative to the election of the council and to the administration of goods.

We continue with Art. 93 of the *General Constitutions*:

In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. He or she 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, he or she will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings eventually encountered.

During the visit to the local fraternity, it is useful to meet twice with the council, once at the beginning in order to allow the visitor to learn about the fraternity, and again at the end to communicate the recommendations to the council and to plan together for the future. Besides the time devoted to personal meetings, provision is made for meeting with the assistant, with the entire fraternity (and its various groups), with the candidates in initiation and formation, and with the council of YouFra that is part of the local OFS fraternity. Also to be considered is the possibility of meeting with the parish priest, whether he is a Franciscan or not, and with the guardian when the fraternity is located in a Franciscan house.

After the part common to both visits, the *General Constitutions* of the OFS describe separately the fraternal visit and the pastoral visit. With regard to the pastoral visit, Art. 95.1 says:

The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion with the First Order and the TOR. It is carried out also 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 law proper to the OFS itself.

Here we are speaking about the assistant visitor, not the assistant of the local fraternity. Indeed, the latter is among the ones who receive the visit.

According to Art. 95, the pastoral visit is also an exercise of jurisdiction, that is, an expression of the *altius moderamen* mentioned in Art. 85.2 and 86.1 of the *General Constitutions* of the OFS:

The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR is the duty, above all, of their general and provincial ministers. The *altius moderamen*, of which Canon 303 speaks, belongs to them....

The *altius moderamen* is meant 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” (Art. 85.2).

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

- the establishment of fraternities;
- the pastoral visits
- the spiritual assistance to the fraternities at the various levels.

They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate (Art. 86.1).

The regional and national assistants are delegates of the provincial ministers.

With regard to jurisdiction, we read in Canon 129 of the Code of Canon Law:

1. Those who are in sacred orders are, in accordance with the provisions of law, capable of the power of governance, which belongs to the Church by divine institution. This power is also called the power of jurisdiction.
2. Lay members of Christ’s faithful can cooperate in the exercise of this same power in accordance with the law.

In order to exercise the power of jurisdiction during the pastoral visit, the delegate referred to in Art. 86.1 of the *General Constitutions* of the OFS must be in sacred orders. Therefore a spiritual assistant who is not a priest is allowed to make only a fraternal visit to an OFS fraternity.

In carrying out a pastoral visit in the name of the Church, the visitor should guarantee and promote observance of the *Rule* and *Constitutions* and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. Regarding the specific tasks of the assistant in the pastoral visit, the *General Constitutions* of the OFS say in Art. 95:

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 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 their 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.

This means that the pastoral visitor must:

- Verify the canonical establishment of the fraternity; if this has not been done, he will suggest the formalities to be followed.
- Give special attention to programs, methods and experiences of formation; to the liturgical and prayer life; to the apostolic activities of the fraternity.
- Give attention to the relations between the fraternity and the spiritual assistant, meeting with the pastors in order to foster communion and build up the Church on the parish and diocesan level.
- Promote collaboration and co-responsibility among the lay and religious leaders, examining the quality of the spiritual assistance given by the friars, encouraging the spiritual assistant in his service, promoting the assistant's continuing and pastoral formation.

In the meetings provided for during the visit, the pastoral visitor should give everyone a chance to dialogue in an exchange of questions and answers, sharing faith, hope and love with all. For the pastoral visitor to carry out his role, it is essential that he pray with the fraternity the Liturgy of the Hours and the Eucharist, or in some other way (e.g. spontaneous prayer, Way of the Cross, Rosary), and that he proclaim the Word of God with homilies that are well-prepared and that cite the *Rule*, the *Ritual* and the *General Constitutions*.

5.5. Connection between the pastoral visit and the fraternal visit

In Art. 93.4 of the *General Constitutions* of the OFS it says: "If it is useful for the service of the fraternity, the two visitors, secular and religious, may make the visit at the same time, agreeing beforehand on the program, in a way most consonant with the mission of each of them."

There are certain advantages in making the two visits, pastoral and fraternal, together. In this way personal impressions can be compared, methods to adopt can be discussed, and perhaps mistaken judgments can also be avoided. When they are together, the two visitors have more chances to listen and evaluate. If the pastoral visitor is alone, he has less chance to dialogue with the lay leaders. Initiatives involving greater responsibility can be taken if both visitors are present.

Yet a joint visit can make it harder to grasp the importance of the two things. Indeed, it can sometimes happen that the participants attach more importance to one visitor than to the other. In some cultures little attention is paid to the lay visitor (especially if it is a woman!) if a priest visitor is also present. Or even if the two visitors are men, it can happen that the secular finds it hard to place himself on an equal footing with the priest.

It is essential to avoid situations in which one can overshadow the other. The visitors themselves will have to be careful to maintain a balance between jobs that are of equal importance and see to it that each one has a chance to present himself and get on with his job. Each of the two visitors is important and performs a specific task. To ignore the importance of either visit, fraternal or pastoral, would leave a bad impression with the fraternity and the assistant.

A single report can be drawn up for both visits. However, each visitor is free to express him- or herself in a separate report. In reality, the visits have different purposes, and there are things that need to be said to one visitor or to the other. In the same way, the visitors remain free to make separate visits when asked or when useful.

5.6. In the elective chapters

The *OFS Rule* says very little about elections. In Art. 21 we read: “On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president) who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions.”

The *General Constitutions* of the OFS say in Art. 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 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....

3. The president of the chapter and the assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.

The assistant (or assistants) of the fraternity that is holding an elective chapter does not enjoy active voice, as explained in the *Statutes for Assistance*, Art. 12.3: “Only in economic matters and in elections at any level does he or she not enjoy the right to vote.”

It is necessary to keep in mind:

- In the local fraternity this right belongs solely to the professed members of the same fraternity.⁴³⁰
- At the other levels, “the *secular* members of the outgoing council” have active voice.⁴³¹

The assistant of the next higher level does not act as president of the elective chapter, nor does he vote. He is present as witness of the communion that should exist between the lay leaders and the friars, and between the fraternity and the First Order and TOR.

On the occasion of the chapter he shall carry out his specific duty, which is that of spiritual and apostolic animator and formator of the lay leaders, stimulating the chapter’s interest in the pastoral problems and plans of the Church.

In order to present himself as a witness of communion, the assistant shall live it in his attitude, words and actions. He must be convinced that the Franciscan vocation and charism, lived by both religious and laity, demonstrate the vitality of the Franciscan Family. His service as witness of communion is of great help, but he must not take the place of the president of the chapter, to whom belong the guidance, coordination and animation of the chapter.

5.7. Connection between the visits and the elective chapter

Experience has shown the need to connect the visits and the elective chapter. This connecting can be done in two ways.

⁴³⁰ Cf. *Const.*, 77.1.

⁴³¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, 77.2.

The visits can be made immediately before the elective chapter. In this way the fraternal visitor will assume the role of president of the elective chapter, and the pastoral visitor the role of assistant of the higher level (or his delegate). This solution responds to practical concerns (e.g. to cut down on travel expenses, to avoid duplicate moves, the lack of available time), but it takes the “edge” off the visit because the attention of the outgoing council and the assembled Secular Franciscans is already focused on the elections that are to follow.

The visits can be made at least three months before the chapter. This solution is much better because the fraternity has a chance to reflect on itself and on the role of the council. It also gives a chance to prepare adequately for the chapter by involving not only the present council but all who have the right to vote. If it is foreseen that some capitulars will be absent (e.g. the elderly, the sick or those prevented for various reasons), it is possible to ask them for suggestions about names to be placed on the list.

The whole fraternity should be involved in a program of prayer to the Holy Spirit to beg for discernment and total submission to his promptings.

6. Experience of the Conference of General Spiritual Assistants (CAS)

6.1 Role of the CAS

The Conference of General Spiritual Assistants has an important role in the international council and in the presidency of the International Council of the OFS, to which its members belong.⁴³²

The role of the CGA can be considered under two aspects: charism and collaboration.

Under the charismatic aspect, it is important to recognize in the Secular Franciscan Order a charismatic life that takes its origin from Francis of Assisi, the same as for religious of the First and Second Order, even though it is distinct by reason of its secular expression. This is a sign of the expressive richness of the gift of the Spirit, communicated through the man Francis, and the rich complementarity that arises within the Franciscan Family, in which the religious and secular expression live side by side, elements that emphasize the life-giving union existing among the different Orders within the same Franciscan Family.⁴³³ To this must be added the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, which the Holy See has entrusted to the First Order and the TOR. Spiritual and pastoral assistance can be likened to the service of the Good Shepherd (Cf. Jn 10:1-1), by rendering assistance, “a fundamental element of communion.”⁴³⁴ By living the same charism, the Franciscan charism, assistants are “witnesses of Franciscan spirituality.”⁴³⁵ As members of the same family, they are witnesses of the “fraternal affection” of the religious Franciscans toward the Secular Franciscans and a bond of communion between the Orders.⁴³⁶

Under the aspect of collaboration,⁴³⁷ the general assistants collaborate in all the activities that pertain to the international fraternity. This happens with the International Council of the OFS in both ordinary and extraordinary chapters. With the presidency of the International Council, they lend their assistance on four occasions: in the ordinary and extraordinary meetings of the

⁴³² Cf. *Const.*, 72.1.

⁴³³ Cf. *Rule OFS* 26; Cf. *Const.*, 89.1.

⁴³⁴ Cf. *Const.*, 89.1.

⁴³⁵ *Ibidem*, 89.3.

⁴³⁶ *Ibidem*, 89.3.

⁴³⁷ *Ibidem*, 89.4.

presidency, in carrying out the programs of the various activities (courses of study, formation seminars), in the pastoral visits and in attending the national chapters.

6.2. CGA and its connection with the Conference of General Ministers

The assistant's two special tasks, assistance and animation, are carried out in an intense spirit of collaboration in the Conference of General Assistants, and of the latter with the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

One expression of collegiality for the assistance to the OFS is the meetings had by the Conference of General Assistants for the OFS, in the person of its president, with the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR. In addition, the CAS should give an account of its work to the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR by means of an annual report.

6.3. CGA and its connection with the national assistants

Assistance to the OFS, whose goal and objective is to foster communion with the Church, bear witness to the fraternal affection and bond of communion among all who wish to live the charism of Francis, as well as collaboration in formation, is carried out in collegial fashion.

Animation of the friars through knowledge and assistance to the OFS is the duty and job of each general assistant within his own Order. But even here he is working in collaboration in order to emphasize two things: collegiality, which must always be safeguarded except in the local fraternities, and preservation of the unity and autonomy of the OFS.

Expressions of collegiality, which the four general assistants of the OFS animate, are: their monthly meetings, the high points (live-in meetings lasting several days), the monthly prayer meetings with the lay leaders and the collaborators from the secretariate, presence at the national chapters, the pastoral visits, the writing and publication of *Koinonia*, a small quarterly periodical that helps keep in touch with the assistants and contributes to their formation and is sometimes also used by the OFS fraternities themselves. Worthy of special mention are the formation seminars put on by the Conference for Assistants in continents, sub-continents or for individual countries.

6.4. Pastoral visits and national chapters

Of particular importance in collaboration with the Secular Franciscans are the pastoral visits and the presence at national chapters by the general assistants.

As mentioned before, the purpose of the visits, including those initiated for urgent and grave reasons,⁴³⁸ is to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to aid and animate the fraternity in its journey, to reinforce the Order's bond of unity and its autonomy, in collaboration and co-responsibility between the assistants and the Secular Franciscans,⁴³⁹ as well to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan Family and into the life of the Church.⁴⁴⁰

The national chapter is an essential time for review, for decisions and choices, as well as for planning by the national fraternity. The presence of the general assistant is a witness of communion with the First Order and the TOR.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁸ *Ibidem*, 94.4.

⁴³⁹ *Ibidem*, 94.4.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 95.2.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibidem*, 76.2.

Both the visit and the chapter, provided they are well-organized, are a precious time for continuing formation.⁴⁴²

7. Concept of assistance: project and mission

7.1. Communion and co-responsibility

Article 26 of the *Rule* of the OFS is rich in content when it asks the superiors of the four religious Franciscan families for suitable and well-prepared religious for assistance to the fraternities at the various levels, as a sign of communion and co-responsibility:

- As a sign of communion in the same charism that animates the whole Franciscan Family and can only be understood in light of the rich plurality of its manifestations: men and women religious and seculars. It is a charism with many facets for the good of the Church: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit.... To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good” (1 Cor 12:4-7).
- As a sign of co-responsibility, but not in the government of the Secular Franciscan Order, since as the *General Constitutions* of the OFS rightly emphasize, “this service of the religious ministers completes but does not substitute for the secular councils and ministers to whom belong the guidance, coordination and animation of the fraternities at the various levels.”

Co-responsibility arises, not from inability or lack of government or animation on the part of the Secular Franciscans, but rather from the charism, which needs to express the manifold riches poured out by the Spirit upon the Franciscan Family through Francis, a man of profound ecclesial vision. In order to be joyful and communicative, this ecclesiology must bear the sign of mission and proclamation through the apostolic life of the Lesser Brothers, through the contemplative life of the Poor Clares, and through the family life and social action of the Secular Franciscans.

7.2. Characteristics of the mission of the assistant

7.2.1. Fraternalization

The text of the *Constitutions* is extremely meaningful and important when it speaks of the spiritual assistant’s mission: “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.”⁴⁴³

The assistant is a witness to the charism that permeates the life of the entire Franciscan Family through spirituality, fraternal affection and the bond of communion. This fraternization complements assistance with “familial” duties on the part of the First Order and the TOR, in order to cultivate the Franciscan charism and help it to grow in the OFS fraternities at the various levels. This fraternal and family aspect will be complemented with communion and mission.

7.2.2. Animation

This is another aspect of the assistant’s mission. He or she collaborates in the animation by the secular leaders in the fraternity and in the council. The assistant’s task is to enlighten without imposing. The assistant does not have the last word. That belongs to the council with its minister.

⁴⁴² *Ibidem*, 89.4.

⁴⁴³ *Ibidem*, 89.3.

Animation occupies a big place in the fraternity's life: formation, reflection, prayer, the apostolate in its many expressions, by the fraternity as a whole as well as by the individual members sent and supported by the fraternity, which is responsible for their work when they present themselves as Secular Franciscans.

7.2.3. Formation

Assistance in formation arises from the common charism, to help the members of the OFS acquire a better knowledge of Franciscan tradition and spirituality, which will help them grow in their Franciscan and secular vocation.

The assistant's collaboration in formation will allow for growth in solidarity with the Secular Franciscans, while at the same time the assistant will learn from them. The assistant is like a vessel of communication through which talents and abilities are transferred from the religious Franciscans to the seculars, and vice versa. In this way the charism is complemented and enriched in the members of both Orders, in their way of living it and expressing it in mission.

Today, when there is so much talk about collaboration between religious and laity, the Franciscan Family should look to its past in order to understand better the collaboration maintained in different areas between the OFS and the First Order and the TOR. Then, in the present, it can choose to invest in a rich and complete formation for the Secular Franciscans, who collaborate with the religious in so many tasks of everyday life. Why not count on their collaboration in our missions and apostolic activities, or on our help in theirs?

The future of the OFS depends on the investment made in the formation of its members, not only on the part of the OFS, but also on the part of the First Order and the TOR which live in communion and solidarity with it. The assistant is a sign of these values. Formation helps increase the ability to listen, learn and collaborate within the religious family and also with respect to the OFS and its mission.

7.2.4. Collaboration

The post-conciliar exhortation *Vita Consecrata* invites us to a re-reading of the relationship between religious and seculars in light of the ecclesiology of communion: "In recent years, one of the fruits of the teaching on the Church as communion has been the growing awareness that her members can and must unite their efforts, with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church's mission. This helps to give a clearer and more complete picture of the Church herself, while rendering more effective the response to the great challenges of our time, thanks to the combined contributions of the various gifts."⁴⁴⁴

This exchange, says the Pope, will benefit the seculars, who "will experience at first hand the spirit of the evangelical counsels, and will thus be encouraged to live and bear witness to the spirit of the Beatitudes, in order to transform the world according to God's design." It will also benefit the religious, who will see the richness of the charism shine beyond the boundaries of their own Order. Animated by the participation of the seculars, they will study more deeply "certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate."⁴⁴⁵

7.2.5. Reciprocity

Assistance is also ordered toward reciprocity, which does not exclude differences but rather demands them. Reciprocity between the First Order and TOR and the Secular Franciscan Order,

⁴⁴⁴ VC, 54.

⁴⁴⁵ VC, 55.

between religious and secular Franciscans, is charismatic. Its goal is to overcome existing ruptures or inequalities of level by emphasizing the distinctive forms in which the charism is lived.

Christifideles laici reminds us, using the words of Paul VI, that “the Church has an authentic secular dimension, inherent to her intimate nature and mission, which is deeply rooted in the mystery of the Word Incarnate, and which is realized in different forms through her members.”⁴⁴⁶ And Canon Law confirms this: “Flowing from their rebirth in Christ, there is a genuine equality of dignity and action among all of Christ’s faithful. Because of this equality they all contribute, each according to his or her own condition and office, to the building up of the Body of Christ.”⁴⁴⁷ This reciprocity among Franciscans becomes a life project, lived in its specific religious or secular form.

Reciprocity expresses mutual recognition achieved through sincere relationships. Reciprocity implies recognition of the ways that lead to a sharing based on reflection and deliberation, a sharing that is active in the mission. It seeks authenticity without forgetting the differences, which themselves are precious, because these constitute the limits of reciprocity while at the same time they are its requirement.

7.3. Collaboration in the mission

The relationship between the OFS and the First Order and TOR does not arise, or should not arise, so much from lack of personnel, which in part has accelerated and given rise to collaboration between religious and laity. It arises from living the same charism from two complementary perspectives, secular and religious, for the benefit of the Church. The author of the *Legend of the Three Companions* points this out so well: “And thus, through blessed Francis...the Church of God was renewed in three orders....”⁴⁴⁸

Deeper study of these aspects, which are also dealt with in the exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, can promote them and serve as a stimulus to study and analyze our own vocation to follow Christ after the manner of Francis of Assisi. It commits the religious Franciscans, through the assistants, “to be, before all else, expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate ‘the most precious gift: the spirit.’ For their part, the laity should offer Religious families the invaluable contribution of their ‘being in the world’ and their specific service.”⁴⁴⁹

In this collaboration and interchange a spiritual environment will grow and be created to the benefit of both parties, religious and seculars. This will help in the discernment of their own identity and in collaboration in the mission or apostolic activities, which will complement the features they have in common.

7.4. Mission in common

It is well to remember that it is communion that leads us to unity in the different vocations existing within the Franciscan charism. Unity and communion are based on our common belonging to Christ in the unique call to follow him,⁴⁵⁰ and on our sharing in the same Spirit. The primacy of the charism in the whole Franciscan Family lies in choosing and following Jesus of Nazareth, and in the free decision to share his life.

Francis’s originality in giving seculars a life project for their state, similar to that he gave the brothers for their religious state, is interpreted for today by Hans Urs von Balthasar. He says that the

⁴⁴⁶ CL, 15.4.

⁴⁴⁷ Can. 208.

⁴⁴⁸ L3C, 60; FA:ED II, 103.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵⁰ “The rule and life of the Lesser Brothers is this: to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (LR I, 1). “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi” (*Rule OFS*, 4).

disciples are called by Jesus to continue his mission by going from place to place, while the multitude of hearers and sick who crowd in around Jesus are transformed into new persons, even though he leaves them in their own state as a leaven of transformation.⁴⁵¹

The Franciscan Orders will realize Francis's charism and interpret it for today only by living it together as a family in the life and mission of the Church. Seen this way, spiritual assistance, as animation, includes the life of mission, presence and openness to new ways of collaboration, the sign of communion. In the same way, collaboration between religious and seculars will improve in the family when there is better formation for all.

At the same time, the life of communion that arises from the charism and from the theology of communion in the Church will help us overcome the "uniformity" into which ecclesial life, both lay and religious, often falls. Communion within the Franciscan Family shows us the richness of the charism in the diversity of its expressions, which arises from the creative power of the Spirit, through Francis. Thomas of Celano says of him: "He is without question an outstanding craftsman, for through his spreading message, the Church of Christ is being renewed in both sexes according to his form, rule and teaching, and there is victory for the triple army of those being saved."⁴⁵²

7.5. Conclusion

What could we add to the topic of sharing, collaboration and exchange between the Secular Franciscans and the religious Franciscans, anchored and animated as we are by the same charism?

Collaboration and exchange in mission are required of Franciscans, both religious and secular, by the mission of the Church itself. In looking more deeply at these aspects, the exhortation *Vita Consecrata* could serve as a stimulus to both groups to study and analyze their vocation to follow Christ after the manner of Francis of Assisi.

We should consider assistance as a service in which two currents come together. One flows from the First Order and TOR toward the Secular Franciscans; the other flows from the OFS toward the religious. This will happen if we know how to be welcoming and receive the vitality of our Franciscan charism expressed in a secular key, which enriches us as a Family and in our mission.

If the work of assistance has no common platform for secular and religious Franciscans, there will arise in both groups a self-marginalization that will be costly for both us and the Gospel. Assistance should be the environment in which there is room for mutual exchange, for respect for the prerogatives of both parties, religious and secular, and for collaboration in apostolic activities and the mission *ad gentes*.

The conclusions arrived at by the major superiors of Italy during their day of reflection on "Religious and Lay Relations" in November 2000, also hold true for us. For most religious families this is a new topic. The Franciscan Family, however, has a whole heritage of history and spirituality that should urge us to be pioneers, opening new paths for collaboration, starting with spiritual assistance. In this respect the resolutions approved by the fortieth assembly of the Conference of Major Superiors of Italy can help us: "Religious should continue to revitalize the formulas for participating in the spirituality of the mendicant Orders (Third Orders)...so as to renew a monastic tradition that has had a great impact on the Church, as a still-valid proposal for formation and collaboration with the laity."

⁴⁵¹ H.U. von Balthasar, *Los estados de vida*, pp. 233 and 286.

⁴⁵² IC 37; FA:ED I, 216.

In order to form laity and religious in a culture of collaboration, cooperation and co-responsibility:

- Superiors should encourage the creation of projects in which religious and laity are involved.
- Collaboration between laity and consecrated religious should take place especially at the local level.
- Formation courses for leaders and on roles of responsibility should be organized, so that Institutes of Consecrated Life might contribute to a significant growth in ecclesial awareness on the part of the laity.
- In the context of sharing the charism of the Order, use should be made of the seculars' ability to run services (administrative, organizational...) that are normally performed by religious.
- There should be formed a group (permanent or ad hoc) of seculars who share the charism and are professionally qualified to support the formators in the processes of vocational discernment and initial and ongoing formation.
- Development projects in the younger Churches should be encouraged through cooperation and exchange of laity and religious in the mission *ad gentes*.
- Initiatives by seculars and religious to promote an ecclesial culture of collaboration should be proposed.

These conclusions⁴⁵³ can help us to reflect on the same charism lived by religious and seculars, the Franciscan charism, which by means of assistance can flourish again in each part, with areas of genuine cooperation and with a mutual exchange of the talents that have been given to both.

8. The OFS in the formation programs of the First Order and the TOR

8.1. Suitability and formation

In the request for “suitable and well-prepared” religious for assistance, two adjectives appear. These encompass qualities that will help the spiritual assistant fulfill his primary task of animation and formation. “Suitable” speaks to us of the quality of the religious, fit and suited to fulfill this service to the fraternities of the OFS. “Prepared” means having an adequate formation that will allow the assistant to be available and at the service of the OFS. The most important thing is that the assistant be “suitable.” One who is capable and open is suitable. Such a person is able to collaborate and be open to the Spirit, able to return to the sources of the charism. Assistance will be suitable if the assistant is open to formation, to knowing the OFS and collaborating with it.

Those ultimately responsible for assistance have been and continue to be the major superiors: ministers and custodes. This means that the brother ministers must be fully open to dialogue with the council and ministers of the OFS in general, and in particular for the appointment of assistants and for knowing the state of assistance in the fraternities, at whatever level pertains to them as major superiors.⁴⁵⁴

The *Constitutions* of 2000 introduced some interesting notes with regard to assistance. Concretely, they offer a wide range of possible candidates for assistance, always bearing in mind

⁴⁵³ Cf. AA.VV., *Laici e Religiosi; quale relazione ecclesiale? Nuove progettualità per i nostri Istituti*, Il Calamo, Roma 2001, pp. 237-239.

⁴⁵⁴ Cf. *Const.*, 89.1-2.

that this wide range of choices must never be to the detriment of the suitability and good formation of the assistant, at whatever level.⁴⁵⁵

Called by the Church to provide spiritual assistance to the Secular Franciscans, we will be able to do this suitably and effectively as long as we are able to use formation to get to know the OFS, to know it in order to love it, and to love it in order to serve it. In this way we will create much greater communion, as the *General Constitutions* of the Secular Franciscan Order remind us: “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.”⁴⁵⁶

8.2. Importance of formation

We see that there are assistants who carry out their task diligently, conscious of their mission. They dedicate themselves to knowing, loving and appreciating the OFS and YouFra. For this reason they are motivated to update themselves constantly in order to accompany the Secular Franciscans and the Franciscan Youth with a fraternal spirit. For this we express our gratitude to them, to their superiors and to God. Yet we also see many cases where the OFS and YouFra are not known as they exist today, in the process of renewal and in the new documents. This creates apathy and indifference on the part of some religious brothers, to the detriment of our Franciscan Family.

For this reason the subject of presenting the OFS in the programs of formation and studies of the First Order and TOR—for the knowledge, study, understanding and appreciation of the OFS on the part of the religious—is very important and necessary. Only by knowing the OFS will it be loved, and only by loving it will it be assisted with fraternal affection.

To this basic consideration we can add two others:

1. Making the OFS part of the study plans of religious Franciscans would be like giving them an identity card within the Franciscan Family. We would go from the short summaries that were offered in the novitiate, in which the the OFS was considered a simple appendix to the history of the First Order and TOR, to giving it its place in the Franciscan Family and in the Church.
2. The second arises from a sense of complementarity in the same charism, the charism of Francis of Assisi. Or, as it is expressed in the OFS *Rule*: “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.” This charism, which includes the women religious, is manifested as a mosaic, much richer, more colorful and complementary than the single hue of the friars.

Inclusion of the OFS in the formation programs of the religious of the First Order and TOR would help us understand better our identity in the Franciscan Family. It would give us the opportunity to understand the generative power of the Spirit, when we allow ourselves to be invaded by him, as did Francis. The wind of communion and co-responsibility—what would it not do in a family such as the Franciscan Family?

In other words, inclusion of the OFS in the formation programs of the friars would serve to reinvigorate it and enrich it with the energy of the Franciscan charism in all its shades, going beyond its present generic nature, which is chiefly pastoral and functional.

⁴⁵⁵ Cf. *Ibidem*, 89.4.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibidem*, 89.3.

Some essential elements for initial and ongoing formation can be singled out in the following areas: ecclesiology of the laity; mission of the Secular Franciscan in the Church and in the world; history and spirituality of the OFS. We have already spoken about these in the previous chapters. We will turn briefly only to the first of these areas because of its great importance.

8.3. Ecclesiology of the laity

It seems fitting to stress the ecclesiological aspect of the laity, because the Secular Franciscan Order is a Franciscan Order, as is ours, but with its lay characteristic.

The laity, and therefore the Secular Franciscans also, have received “the call of the Lord Jesus, ‘You go into my vineyard too....’ The call is a concern not only of Pastors, clergy, and men and women religious. The call is addressed to everyone: lay people as well are personally called by the Lord, from whom they receive a mission on behalf of the Church and the world.”⁴⁵⁷

The ecclesiology of the laity contains within itself a “rich doctrinal, spiritual and pastoral patrimony...on the nature, dignity, spirituality, mission and responsibility of the lay faithful.”⁴⁵⁸

Post-conciliar ecclesiology speaks of great changes introduced by Vatican II and of a new image sketched out by the Council, in which the laity - and this applies also to the Secular Franciscans - grow in awareness of their gift and responsibility in the communion and mission of the Church.

Among the main points are:

- the doctrine of the Church as communion and People of God hierarchically structured;
- the fundamental equality of all its members;
- the co-responsibility of the members in the Church’s mission;
- the universal priesthood of the faithful and the sharing of all the baptized in the priesthood of Christ and in his threefold prophetic, priestly and kingly function (cf. 2 Pt 2:9; Rev 1:6);
- the reality of the charisms the Spirit bestows on all the members of the Church community;
- the responsibility of the Church and Christians in the face of present-day problems of humanity on a local and world level.

In particular, we friars of the First Order and TOR would do well to remember that the Church also includes the Secular Franciscans, and to reject certain attitudes that are more or less classist or paternalistic. Similar to the priest-laity relationship in the Church, in the Franciscan Family we must strive to live the triple relationship of friars-sisters-Secular Franciscans.

If we religious Franciscans could create true communion with the Secular Franciscans in the search for faith and in mission, there would arise, thanks to their common priesthood, the mysterious joy of a fullness that expands the heart. This was the lived experience of Saint John Chrysostom, which he summed up by saying that the laity are “the priestly fullness of the bishop.”⁴⁵⁹

8.4. Guidelines on the formation of religious for understanding and assisting the OFS

Based on the criteria set forth above, the Conference of General Assistants has drawn up “Guidelines for the Formation of Religious for Understanding and Assisting the OFS.” These are

⁴⁵⁷ CL, 2.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁴⁵⁹ PG, 62, col. 204.

meant to answer a felt need of the part of Franciscans, religious and secular, to prepare better to “walk together in the ways of the Lord.”

Among all Franciscans there exists a mutual knowledge and life-giving communion demanded by the fact that they belong to the same spiritual family. The different components “can and must unite their efforts, with a view to cooperation and exchange of gifts, in order to participate more effectively in the Church’s mission.”⁴⁶⁰ This exchange of gifts “often brings unexpected and rich insights into certain aspects of the charism, leading to a more spiritual interpretation of it and helping to draw from it directions for new activities in the apostolate.”⁴⁶¹

The *OFS Rule and Constitutions* repeat many times the principle of membership in the same spiritual family, life-giving and mutual communion, and the duty of the First Order (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap) and Third Order Regular (TOR) to provide pastoral care and assistance.

Between the OFS, the First Order and TOR there exists a twofold and essential relationship:

1. Sharing a common charism

The *Rule* of the OFS speaks of the “life-giving and mutual communion” that must exist between the Seculars and all the branches of the Franciscan Family, in order to make present, in various ways and forms, the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.⁴⁶²

2. Spiritual and pastoral assistance

Because of this communion and according to an age-old tradition, it rests with the superiors of the First Order and TOR to provide for spiritual assistance by “suitable and well-prepared religious” and through the pastoral visit to the fraternities of the OFS.⁴⁶³

The Secular Franciscan Order—committed to the renewal of its life, formation and organization of its fraternities—needs to count on spiritual assistance that is updated and dynamically coordinated with the other components of the Franciscan Family in its single mission. “Consecrated persons should remember that before all else they must be expert guides in the spiritual life, and in this perspective they should cultivate ‘the most precious gift: the spirit.’”⁴⁶⁴

The OFS general chapter of Fatima (1990) put it this way: “For the role of animation that belongs to the spiritual assistants formation is needed, in other words, special preparation of the friars with regard to the OFS. This preparation must be conscious and incorporated into the formation program—initial and ongoing—of all the friars. Even if not all are or will be spiritual assistants, it is certainly necessary for the realization of their own personal vocation that all should know, understand and affirm the truly essential role of the OFS.”⁴⁶⁵

The OFS general chapter of Rome (1996), in its conclusions, says again: “The Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, in collaboration with the national councils, will seek times and ways to...stimulate a deeper formation of all the friars with regard to the OFS, so that they might help the brothers and sisters to better live their form of life.”⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶⁰ VC, 54.

⁴⁶¹ VC, 55.

⁴⁶² *Rule OFS*, 1.

⁴⁶³ Cf. *Ibidem*, 26.

⁴⁶⁴ VC, 55.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Conclusions of the General Chapter of the OFS, Fatima 1990, in *Bollettino CIOFS*, XII, n. 2, 1990 p. 6.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. *Koinonia*, 1996, n. 4; Internet document <http://www.ofs.it/per/lc96it28.html>; *Statutes for Assistance* 5.4; *Const.*, 95.3.

The OFS general chapter of 2002, held again in Rome, re-emphasizes “the importance of fully implementing the words of the *Rule* about the suitability and preparation of assistants, both religious and lay, hoping for a significant addition of suitable historical, theological and spiritual topics in programs of initial and ongoing formation for the friars, sisters and seculars.”⁴⁶⁷

The religious Franciscan Orders, to whom belongs the *altius moderamen*, not only have accepted and emphasized the principle of “life-giving and mutual communion” in their legislation, but the general and provincial ministers, through letters and various speeches, are constantly urging the friars to an ever greater and better knowledge of the OFS, demanding adequate preparation for spiritual assistants.

The CSA guidelines will be presented to all religious Franciscans for possible use in the various formation plans. The goals are knowledge of the OFS within the Franciscan Family and in its mission in the Church and the world, and the preparation of those who are called to serve as spiritual assistants.

8.5. Programs of instruction on the OFS

1. In initial formation

A. Postulancy:

- Francis, the “founder” of three Orders.
- History:
 1. General introduction on the Franciscan Family
 2. First Order of Friars Minor (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap)
 3. Second Order, the Order of Saint Clare
 4. Third Order of the “Brothers and Sisters of Penance”
 - Secular Franciscan Order (OFS, Franciscan Youth)
 - Third Order Regular, men and women
 5. Other Franciscan movements: Secular Institutes etc.
- Experience:
 1. Contacts with an OFS fraternity and YouFra
 2. Visit by the Secular Franciscans to the house of formation
 3. Visit by the postulants to secular fraternities
 4. Celebration of the major Franciscan feasts together

B. Novitiate:

- Repeat in greater depth what was done during postulancy.
- In the general discussion of the universal call to holiness and the religious vocation, talk also about the Secular Franciscan vocation seen in the sharing of the common charism in life-giving and mutual communion in the Church’s mission: “Go and rebuild....”
- In dealing with the history of the Franciscan Family, talk about the Penitents and the origins of the Third Order.
- Reading: Rules of the First, Second and Third Orders (Later Rule, 1223; Rule of Saint Clare, 1253, and Rule of the Order of Saint Clare, the so-called Rule of Urban IV, 1263; *Seraphicus Patriarcha* of Paul VI, 1978, for the OFS, and *Franciscanum vitae propositum* of John Paul II, 1982, for the TOR).

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. Atti del Capitolo, p. 210.

- Experiences: take part in some fraternity meetings, times of prayer, celebrations in the various phases of the life of the OFS fraternity.

C. Post-novitiate:

- History of the Franciscan Family, including the OFS, in its essential lines through the centuries; presence and development in one's own country; relationships with the First Order and TOR; birth of new Orders and Congregations from the OFS.
- Nature, identity, structure and organization of the OFS according to the new *Rule and Constitutions*, stressing its secular nature and its unity.
- Emphasize the vision of the Church as People of God and communion (*Lumen Gentium, Gaudium et Spes*, final document of the 1985 Synod).
- Study the role of the lay faithful, co-responsibility and collaboration between clergy and laity, religious and seculars in the mission of the Church (*Evangelii nuntiandi, Christifideles laici*, Letter of the General Ministers on the Lay Franciscan Faithful).
- In studying the Church's social teaching (beginning with *Rerum novarum*), pay special attention to the duties and responsibilities of the laity.
- Study the nature of spiritual and pastoral assistance to the OFS, its collegiality and the identity of the assistant.
- Reading: Earlier Rule (1221), *Memoriale propositi* (1221), *Supra Montem* of Nicholas IV (1289), *Misericors Dei Filius* of Leo XIII (1883) and *Seraphicus Patriarcha* of Paul VI (1978).
- Group pastoral experiences, led by the spiritual assistant, taking part in fraternity meetings, times of prayer, celebrations in the various phases of the life of the OFS fraternity.

It is good to remember that what is suggested in this section is not to be understood as the addition of other material to the program. Rather, it is intended to develop, in the areas indicated, the material in the existing curriculum, such as history, spirituality, ecclesiology, social teaching etc.

2. In ongoing formation

Express mutual communion, by reason of the common charism and as a sign of witness in the Church, according to the guidelines given in the *General Constitutions* and the *General Statutes* of the First Order and TOR, and the *General Constitutions* of the OFS:

- Plan and celebrate together the main liturgies, especially on Franciscan feasts, and create community prayer experiences.
- Plan and carry out pastoral, charitable and social activities together, with courageous initiatives according to the needs of time and place.
- Study together, friars and seculars, the documents on the theology of the laity (Cf. 8.3 above).
- Organize common get-togethers, assemblies, spiritual chapters, retreats.
- In formation meetings and in the celebration of chapters, plan times for the seculars to be present with a message or witness talk.

8.6. Formation of spiritual assistants

New spiritual assistants need to have an opportunity to prepare for their special task. It does not seem too much to have a school for special preparation at the provincial, national or

international level. The subjects to be dealt with will be those indicated earlier under the heading of initial formation, or:

- History and sources of the OFS.
- Vision of the specific identity of the OFS.
- Ecclesiology and the OFS.
- Secular Franciscan spirituality.
- The Secular Franciscan in the Church and society.
- Franciscan values of the OFS.
- Formation of the friars with regard to the OFS.
- Practical aspects of assistance to the OFS.
- OFS, Franciscan Youth and Little Heralds.
- Members who want to belong to an OFS fraternity and Friends of Saint Francis.

Updating

For continual updating of the assistants, the following are suggested:

- Annual formation courses; information on assistance, on various problems, on what is happening in the OFS.
- Reading periodicals and informational material from the different Orders concerning the OFS and assistance on the national and international level.
- Knowledge and exchange of programs and initiatives between general, national, regional and local assistants.

8.7. Leaders or agents

1. General and provincial ministers

- Foster interest among their own friars in the OFS, and communion between religious and secular Franciscans.
- See to the formation of the formators and the interest of all their religious in the OFS.
- See to it that the OFS and YouFra have a place in the programs of initial and ongoing formation for their religious.
- In visits to the friars' fraternity and at chapters inquire about the OFS and YouFra and the quality of the assistance.

2. Spiritual assistants

- Should be the first to promote, organize and animate formation courses and meetings, in agreement with the major superiors and those responsible for formation.
- Recommend formators, religious and lay, who are suited for this special formation of the friars at all levels.
- Arrange for times of guided experiences, especially with the friars in temporary vows.
- In pastoral visits, try to have contacts with the religious houses of formation and give information on the life and commitment of the Secular Franciscans, in the Church and in society.

3. Religious formators

- Should be able to show the young religious "the beauty of following Christ and the value of the charism"⁴⁶⁸ they share with the OFS.
- Offer "opportunities to grow in their commitment to the charism and mission" of the Franciscan Family.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁸ VC, 66.

- Be “very familiar with the path of seeking God,” undertaken together with the Secular Franciscans, “so as to be able to accompany others on this journey.”⁴⁷⁰

8.8. Methodological guidelines

1. Experiential method

- Use an experiential method at all levels. Integrate the formation programs with concrete experiences followed by guided reflection on these experiences.

2. Collaboration on the part of the formators

- The service of formation should be done as a team.
- Taking part in it should be formators and leaders of the OFS and of the other components of the Franciscan Family.
- There should be an exchange of ideas and teaching materials among formators of the same linguistic region, and also with those of other regions.

3. Collaboration on the part of those being formed

- Shared periods of time, at the various levels, with those being formed from the other components of the Franciscan Family.

4. Formation at a distance

- Make use of the methods of formation at a distance, through correspondence courses or networks for discussion and study together.
- Utilize the modern means of communication, which offer new opportunities for formation or collaboration in formation through e-mail and the Internet.

5. Teaching materials

- It should be the responsibility of the national and/or regional spiritual assistants to collect and constantly update material specifically for the formation of assistants with regard to the OFS, such as sources, documents, texts of the magisterium, manuals, lecture notes, historical evidence, periodicals, various publications, posters, brochures, videos, music cassettes, web pages etc.
- The materials should be made available to the educators and to the friars.
- If necessary, all aids that are needed but are non-existent or hard to find should be prepared.
- There should be fraternal collaboration not only among the different linguistic regions, but also with other geographical areas, especially with those that have a harder time finding materials and providing for their translation.

⁴⁶⁹ VC, 65.

⁴⁷⁰ VC, 66.

CHAPTER V

FRANCISCAN YOUTH, LITTLE HERALDS AND HERALDS

1. Saint Francis and youth

Saint Francis began his journey of faith during his youth. He was always seeking something greater. He had plans and projects for his life, he was a youth with great desires, and he sought answers to his questions about the meaning of life. Growing up, however, Francis felt that something was missing, especially after his experience of war and the terrible illness that struck him. And so Francis began to listen, seeking a response that could calm his heart.

We could say that he was a young man like so many others who in our times seek answers to the many questions they bear in their hearts. In the field of pastoral ministry to youth we find many young people who are attracted to Saint Francis and wish to deepen their faith by following his example.

1.1. “Lord, what do you want me to do?”

At the beginning of his conversion, following a mysterious dream at Spoleto, the Lord made him return to Assisi, and, with internal expectancy, he repeated many times with his whole heart the question: Lord, what do you want me to do? This question is also the question of many young people today.

With this question in his heart, Francis adopted an attitude of profound listening, trying to perceive what the Lord wanted of him. This could be the starting point for all of us. Lord, what do you want me to do? What do you want from me? These are the questions that many young people put to the Lord, seeking his will. To seek the will of God, as in the experience of Francis, means to adopt an attitude of listening—listening and waiting until the Lord speaks.

One day, before the Crucifix in the chapel of San Damiano, Francis heard the Lord saying to him: “Francis, go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed.”⁴⁷¹ For Francis this was a real encounter with Jesus Christ, risen and alive. It was an encounter that gave new direction to his life. Not immediately understanding the meaning of the command, Francis became a restorer of churches, seeking only to respond to the Lord’s wishes.

This second powerful moment in the personal experience of Saint Francis could help us to understand that a profound journey of faith cannot be ours without a real encounter with Jesus Christ. The fundamental question for young people is: Is it possible to meet Jesus Christ even today? Where can he be found? How and in what way?

The response to questions like these could bring about a profound journey of faith. To have a real experience of an encounter with the Lord very often means, for young people, to enter into a more profound listening to the Word of God.

1.2. Living the Gospel

Another moment in Francis’s experience that could help us understand the second step in the service of youth is his encounter with the Word of God. Listening to the Word of God had a

⁴⁷¹ Cf. 2 C 10; FA:ED II, 249

decisive importance for Francis. Not knowing what was the second step to be taken, Francis, in the little church of Saint Mary of the Angels, called the Portiuncula, listened to the excerpt from the Gospel of Matthew where the Lord was telling his apostles how they should go through the world preaching the Gospel. Then he fully understood that his vocation was go throughout the world announcing the Good News to all. After the priest explained the meaning of those words Francis exclaimed with great joy: “This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.”⁴⁷²

Understanding their vocation is very hard for many young people today. However, many of them have found and are finding in the experience of Francis a possibility and a way to understand how one’s vocation can be discovered by listening to the Word of God.

Sometimes, especially in the beginning, we will need to go out to meet the young, to be where they are, and not wait for them to come to us. This means going out of our own environment and going among them, sharing their life. Later it will be they, once they are convinced of the beauty of being together, who will bring their friends along to share the same experience. We must help them to discover that God has a life project for each one of us. To discover such a project means entering into communion with God. And that means entering and living in true joy and love.

Many see all of this in Francis: a person full of joy, love and peace. But Francis found this interior peace, which he sought with all his heart, only through accepting God’s project. For that reason his life became a hymn to the Most High God and a continuous act of thanksgiving to the Lord.

From the moment he experienced the full sweetness and power of the Word of God, the Gospel became for Francis his rule of life. He heard his Lord who spoke to him in the Gospel. How beautiful it is to have an experience of friendship with the Word of God, following the example of Saint Francis. How many young people need exactly this experience. How beautiful it is to hear a young person, who, after an authentic encounter with the Word of God, confesses: God has also spoken to me; he loves me; the Lord loves me greatly, he has forgiven me.

To make the Gospel the rule of life is the primary duty of all Christians. Young people, especially those attracted to Saint Francis because of his way of living and expressing his faith in Jesus Christ, can be a true sign of life for the world of today.

To these young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to live this experience together, in fraternity, we can propose the form of life of the Franciscan Youth Movement or of the Secular Franciscan Order.

2. A short history of the Franciscan Youth

Franciscan Youth was officially born in Italy in 1948. Among the Friars Minor, the general minister Pacifico Perantoni joined together all the youth circles led by the friars of his Order into a single federation (at first it was called Franciscan Youth of Catholic Action). Among the Capuchins, Franciscan Youth was founded as a confederation of youth groups in Milan, Ascoli Piceno and Florence, a confederation gradually extended in the following years to other youth circles led by the Capuchin Friars Minor. In the 1950s, the Conventual Friars Minor also began to gradually promote YouFra among their youth groups. In 1958, after just ten years, there were already 453 YouFra groups throughout the entire country.

⁴⁷² Cf. 1 C 22; FA:ED I, 201-02.

In 1954, the Capuchins approved the first YouFra statutes (accepted by the Conventuals in 1958). In 1968, the Capuchins began to draw up the second YouFra statutes (“Il Nostro Volto” approved in 1971), which were immediately applied to the groups led by the Friars Minor and later accepted, in 1974, by the Conventual Friars Minor.

In the late 1970s, the need for a new national document for all the youth belonging to the YouFra fraternities was evident. The national interobediential assemblies at Viterbo (1977), Nola (1978) and Seiano (1980) led to the drawing up of a first draft of what would become, after a few years, the *forma di vita* or third YouFra statutes.

The provisional text was brought to the attention of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, which was also asked to formulate guidelines for Franciscan Youth throughout the world. Meanwhile, the experience of the Italian YouFra had spread to other nations. Various countries (especially Argentina and Brazil) were expressing the need for a common direction. To meet these needs, the International Presidency of the OFS issued a document with the “basic outlines” that would remain the basis of the Articles on YouFra contained in the OFS *General Constitutions*. The national interobediential assembly of the Italian YouFra, meeting in Paestum, approved the definitive text of the Statutes, adapted to the international nature of YouFra.

3. The Franciscan Youth: a Franciscan vocational journey

3.1. Specific characteristics of the Franciscan Youth

In the area of pastoral ministry to youth, we find young people attracted by Saint Francis who want to deepen their Christian and Franciscan vocation. To these young people we should offer the option of the form of life of the Franciscan Youth or the OFS, respecting the needs of the world of youth with its crises, problems and questions.

Some essential elements of their vocational journey are:

- a feeling of being called by the Holy Spirit to experience the Christian life in fraternity;
- a gradual discovery of Saint Francis, his life project and his values;
- an ecclesial and social presence, as a condition for realizing concrete experiences of apostolate.

The Franciscan Youth, as understood by the OFS *General Constitutions*, is distinguished from other groups of young Franciscans:

- by acceptance of the OFS *Rule* as its document of inspiration;
- by personal and formal commitment, made before God and the fraternity, to live by this inspiration;
- by membership in the Franciscan Family as an integral part of the OFS;
- by spiritual assistance from religious Franciscans;
- by accompaniment and animation by the Secular Franciscans;
- by an organizational structure and specific formation methods for a vocational journey that normally, although not necessarily, leads to the OFS;
- by its own national Statutes, approved by the respective national council of the OFS or, if there is none, by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, which regulates the requirements for membership in YouFra.

3.2. What is the Franciscan Youth?

3.2.1. Spiritual characteristics:

a. The Franciscan Youth...is formed by those young people... (Const., 96.2).

The Franciscan Youth is formed by young people, which means that it is intended to be a specific period of life, limited to youth, which starts at the beginning of adolescence and ends upon reaching personal maturity.

b. ...who feel called by the Holy Spirit...deepening their own vocation... (Const., 96.2).

The Franciscan Youth engage in a vocational journey, which presupposes an initial call developing unto a lasting choice of life. The call solicits a personal answer from the young, confirmed by a personal promise before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.

c. ...to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity... (Const., 96.2).

The Franciscan Youth is an experience of fraternity, that is, a community of young believers, children of the one Father, sharing their faith on the basis of love. This fraternity forms part of the ecclesial community in which it lives and works.

d. ...in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order (Const., 96.2).

The Franciscan Youth journeys in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, that is, it discovers and progressively assimilates this life-project and its values. The Franciscan Youth belongs to the Franciscan family as an integral part of the OFS and accepts the *Rule* of the OFS as its document of inspiration. It requests spiritual, pastoral and fraternal assistance from the religious superiors and from the competent Secular Franciscan leaders.

3.2.2. Organizational characteristics:

a. The Franciscan Youth has a specific organization... (Const., 96.5)

The Franciscan Youth has its own organization, which can be specified in its Statutes. It has its own fraternities, its own leaders at all levels, and its own spiritual and fraternal assistance.

b. ...methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth... (Const., 96.5).

The Franciscan Youth adapts itself to the needs of the world of youth in its formation methods and content. This formation is organized in such a way that the young person develops mature vocational choices and enters fully into the world where he or she lives.

c. ...according to the existing realities in the various countries (Const., 96.5)

The Franciscan Youth is present in many countries and is extremely varied, defying uniformity. The socio-cultural situation determines what it is to be young, what responsibilities young people can assume and what possibilities of formation and action are open to them.

3.2.3. Relationship between YouFra and the OFS:

a. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra), as understood by these Constitutions and insofar as the OFS considers itself to be particularly responsible for it... (Const., 96.2).

The Franciscan Youth presupposes a special commitment of the OFS as a part of its own pastoral and vocational youth work. For this reason the OFS needs to accompany the youth, help them develop a mature vocation and introduce them into the life of the fraternity.

b. The members of the Franciscan Youth consider the Rule of the OFS as an inspirational document... (Const., 96.3).

The Franciscan Youth accepts the *Rule* of the OFS as an inspirational document for the growth of its own Christian and Franciscan vocation, either individually or in a group. The relations between the Franciscan Youth and the OFS should be marked by a spirit of reciprocal life-giving communion. For this reason, the vocational journey of the Franciscan Youth leads generally, although not necessarily, to the OFS.

c. The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan Family... (Const., 96.6).

The Franciscan Youth belongs to the Franciscan family as an integral part of the OFS, and will therefore be accompanied and animated by the Secular Franciscans. In addition, its leaders at the higher levels are to be professed Secular Franciscan youth (cf. *Const.* 97.3).

d. A representative of the Franciscan Youth is to be designated by his or her council to form part of the OFS council... (Const., 97.4).

At all levels of the OFS fraternity there should be a member of the Franciscan Youth, designated by his or her council, who will form part of the OFS council. The representative of the Franciscan Youth has a vote in the OFS council only if he or she is a professed Secular Franciscan. Likewise, a member of the OFS designated by his or her council forms part of the YouFra council on the same level.

e. The representatives of the Franciscan Youth in the international council of the OFS are elected according to the international statutes... (Const., 97.5).

The international statutes of the OFS determine the number of representatives from the Franciscan Youth on the international council, what fraternities they represent, and what their responsibilities are.

3.3. Vocational journey

The Young Franciscans deepen their personal vocation in the light of the message of Saint Francis by a program of progressive formation. Vocational discernment will be the focus during the entire journey. This vocational journey will normally consist of the following periods:

3.3.1. Initiation

This is a period of seeking, of making contact, of approaching, of welcome, which ends with the decision to begin the period of formation for the promise in the Franciscan Youth. For the young person this is the first experience of the Franciscan Youth, centering on the question of what the fraternity means for him and what he can bring to the group. On its part, the Franciscan Youth informs the young person about the ideals and requirements, about the method and style that characterize the Franciscan Youth. The length of this period depends on the personal situation of each candidate and on the Franciscan Youth fraternity. If appropriate, the national statutes can determine the length of this period, e.g. between three and six months, taking into account the situation of youth coming from other Franciscan groups. The minimum age for entering the Franciscan Youth will depend on the development of the individual young person and on the cultural situation. One should, however, keep in mind that the Franciscan Youth is not for children. If appropriate, the national statutes can determine the minimum age to enter the Franciscan Youth, e.g. between 14 and 17 years.

3.3.2. Formation for the promise in the Franciscan Youth

This is a period of formation and full integration of the candidates into the life of the youth fraternity. At the end of this period, they confirm this option with a personal promise before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters. For the young person this is the time to discover and live the Gospel according to the example of Saint Francis from within this specific youth fraternity.

This always requires a willingness and constancy to confront one's own life with the Gospel, to gradually acquire Franciscan values, lived in a spirit of dedication and service to others. On its part, the Franciscan Youth fraternity accompanies the young person on this journey of searching and spiritual growth. The national statutes of the Franciscan Youth can establish the minimum length of this period, which cannot be less than one year, nor more than two years. If it seems appropriate, they can also determine the maximum length of this formation for the promise in the Franciscan Youth. It belongs to the local council of the Franciscan Youth to admit candidates to the promise, according to the provisions established in the national statutes.

3.3.3. Deepening one's vocation

This is a period for testing the call, in which the young person grasps and deepens the values comprising Secular Franciscan spirituality and its mission in the Church and society. For the young person this is the moment to assimilate the inspiration of the OFS *Rule* and to translate it into daily life, in order to test his or her true vocation in life and what answer to give to God's call. It entails lived experiences of communion and sharing with the brothers and sisters in the context of the Franciscan Family, and experiences of mission and service in the Church and society. On its part, the fraternity helps the young person to clarify and discern which vocation better responds to one's own abilities and desires. This period is temporary and cannot be prolonged indefinitely. The simple fact is that the period of initial life choices, the stage of discernment, is only a passing moment in any person's life. The national statutes must determine the end of this stage, according to the cultural and social situation of the place. In no case can it extend beyond the age of 30.

3.4 Relationship between the YouFra and the OFS

3.4.1. Joining the OFS

The members of the YouFra who wish to profess in the OFS are to observe the provisions of the Rule, the Constitutions and the Ritual of the OFS (Const. 96.4).

The vocational journey of the YouFra normally, though not necessarily, leads to the OFS. That is why the Franciscan formation received in the YouFra as a young person who wants to enter the OFS can be considered valid as a period of initiation into the OFS. The period of initial formation for the OFS has to take place under the responsibility of the council of the OFS to which he/she wants to belong, in conformity with what is prescribed in the Rule and the Constitutions of the OFS. In the case where there is a group of young people in the YouFra who want to undergo initial formation together, they can form their own group, at the discretion and under the guidance of the council of the OFS fraternity to which they want to belong.

3.4.2. Belonging simultaneously to YouFra and to OFS

Due to the continuity of the vocational way of the YouFra towards the OFS, the profession in the OFS does not necessarily exclude the young person from [belonging to] his/her YouFra fraternity.

The young person who, by profession in the OFS, makes the Rule of the OFS his/her project of life, can continue his/her journey with his brothers and sisters in the YouFra.

There may be a number of reasons why a young person may simultaneously be an active member in both fraternities, his YouFra fraternity and his OFS fraternity. It may well happen that the YouFra fraternity needs the expertise of the young professed for the animation of the other young members, either as the one in charge of the YouFra fraternity or an active member of the same.

In any case, it is necessary that the young professed be active in the two fraternities, even if his/her activities, in accordance with the council of the OFS, may be mostly geared toward the YouFra.

3.4.3. Animation of the YouFra

25. The OFS shall seek the most suitable means to foster the vitality and growth of the YouFra; it shall stand by the side of the young to encourage them, and shall provide for them all possible means to help them advance in their journey of human and spiritual growth. (Constitutions 97,1).

The said means will vary according to circumstances; however, one of the most important ones will always be close contact with the OFS. For this reason, the local fraternities should make room for the young, either by allowing them to participate in their meetings, or by entrusting to them specific tasks in the fraternity. It is equally important that the OFS fraternities be flexible in their organization, and that they seek creative ways of forming special groups in the fraternity, under the guidance of the council of the fraternity.

Another indispensable means is the direct accompaniment of the young by suitable members of the OFS. The OFS Constitutions enjoin fraternal animation to the YouFra as well as the presence of a OFS representative in the YouFra council at all levels. Usually, though not necessarily, the OFS representative in the council of the YouFra will also act as fraternal animator of the YouFra.

3.5. Spiritual assistance

Spiritual assistance to the Franciscan Youth on the part of the First Order and the TOR (cf. *Const.*, 96.6) is also indispensable. The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan Family, needs spiritual assistance in order to guarantee its fidelity to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and its union with the Franciscan Family (*Const.*, 85.2). The appointment of spiritual assistants belongs to the competent Franciscan major superiors, by analogy with what is laid down in the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS* (cf. 5.2; 11.2). As much as possible, the service of assistance to the Franciscan Youth and the OFS should be carried out by the same person.

Sometimes the young people prefer certain assistants because they are more attuned to their problems. But this natural facility on the part of an assistant can also constitute a very subtle temptation to “command,” to appropriate power to oneself and dominate the young people. For this reason, Francis often calls for the expropriation of everything in order to be “subject to every human creature for love of God.” All good that the Lord accomplishes through the brother assistants must not be clung to, but placed at the humble service of the young people.

3.6. Form and content of formation

a. The Franciscan Youth has specific... methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth... (Const., 96.5).

To be adequate for the needs of the world of youth, the methods of formation must be flexible in their form and content. Youth trends in all countries change continuously and develop rapidly. On the other hand, it is necessary to keep a sense of one’s own identity and not be swept away by passing fads.

b. ... according to the existing realities in the various countries (Const., 96.5).

Existing realities in various countries also present an element of diversity in the form and content of formation. On the other hand, this diversity should never invalidate the basic unity of formation criteria. To reach its goals, formation should incorporate human, Christian and Franciscan aspects.

3.7. Franciscan Youth organization

3.7.1 The local fraternity

The local fraternity is the constitutive cell of the Franciscan Youth and the context in which the young share their experience of our Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi. The fraternity should meet frequently, e.g. each week, to live together its relationship with God and with the brothers and sisters. It is important that the meetings integrate moments of prayer and formation with elements of action and recreation. The meetings should be organized in such a way as to favor the insertion of the Franciscan Youth fraternity into the Franciscan Family and into the local Church.

Official recognition of the local fraternity of the Franciscan Youth belongs to the Franciscan Youth council of a higher level in collaboration with the council of the local OFS fraternity, i.e. the two councils with which the new Franciscan Youth fraternity will be in relation. In the absence of YouFra structures, the interested OFS councils should provide. The competent religious superior from whom spiritual assistance is to be requested should be informed.

The local fraternity is animated and guided by a council of at least three members, elected, for a limited period, by and from among the members of that fraternity who have made their promise in the Franciscan Youth. The representative of the OFS and the spiritual assistant are also members of the council. It belongs to the local council of the Franciscan Youth to admit candidates to formation for the promise in the Franciscan Youth and, after completing formation, to the promise itself.

3.7.2. The regional fraternity

If deemed appropriate, the national statutes of the Franciscan Youth can determine whether regional fraternities of the Franciscan Youth should exist in a country and how they should be established. In such a case, these statutes should also determine the composition and competencies of the regional chapter and council.

3.7.3. The national fraternity

The national fraternity of the Franciscan Youth is the union of all local Franciscan Youth fraternities existing in the territory of the corresponding national OFS fraternity. The official recognition of new national fraternities of the Franciscan Youth belongs to the presidency of the International Council of the OFS, after consultation and in collaboration with the corresponding national council of the OFS. The national fraternity of the Franciscan Youth can draft its own statutes, which should be presented by the National Council of the OFS to the presidency of the International Council of the OFS for approval (*Const.*, 96.5).

3.8. Other Franciscan youth groups

For a long time there have existed, in the context of the Franciscan Family, groups of youngsters or of children, who are called Heralds, Cordbearers, Franciscan Children, Little Flowers,

Troubadours, Micro-Franciscan Youth, Mini-Franciscan Youth etc. Many of these groups are animated by members of the Franciscan Youth or by secular or religious Franciscans. Sometimes it is easier to start and to animate groups of children, mostly of Secular Franciscans, than groups of adolescents or youth.

The life of these groups will be very much linked to the local fraternity of the Franciscan Youth and the OFS, and its development will depend heavily on the presence of suitable animators. In any case it is important that the national councils of the OFS and YouFra, in collaboration with interested religious, coordinate this service of animation and prepare teaching material to support these groups (cf. *Const.*, 25).

4. Franciscan Youth from the viewpoint of vocational pastoral care

4.1. Nature of YouFra

In recent decades Franciscan Youth has discovered its own more distinctive physiognomy, accepting it as a real gift of the Spirit. It is not an association or a movement, but rather a fraternity composed of young people who have heard a call to live the Gospel in the ordinary situations of life according to the spirit of Saint Francis.

This statement lies at the center of YouFra's identity and calls for ever-renewed attention. From what premises does this picture of Franciscan Youth derive? From the fact, of course, that the vocational dimension is a key to understanding the very existence of the human person. Persons, in fact, are dialogical beings, constituted by relationships, in a movement of call and response that accompanies human development on all levels.

Within their human reality, recognized as a gift, persons can recognize and accept the call to faith, addressed to them through the proclamation of the Word of God, which culminates in the Good News of Jesus Christ. He is the one called and the one who calls, unceasingly. In the power of the Spirit each person can listen to his voice, especially in the inner sanctum of conscience, and therefore in history and in others, all the way to explicit proclamation of the faith. The vocational dimension is truly constitutive of the person and the faith experience.

In this context we see that YouFra, as a fraternity that offers the young an integral life proposal, is naturally vocational. Indeed, it accompanies the young in the encounter with self, the world, creation and others, with the God of Jesus Christ. It is an encounter that awaits a response in the form of a gift of oneself and one's life. It is not an intimate kind of experience that seeks only the person's well-being, but rather an encounter that blossoms fully in the creative gift of self.

4.2. YouFra: an ecclesial experience

Franciscan Youth can be an authentic place of growth and gradual maturing of the young if they are accompanied in this journey. This requires the development of educational programs that take into account the human and dialogical dimension of personal growth from the viewpoint of fraternity. Young people can grow and integrate their great energies so as to become fraternal persons in solidarity with others. At a time that fosters the growth of a mentality of violence and war, which tramples upon others under the pretext of lifting them up, it is even more urgent that the integral vocation of believers discover in their own hearts the dimension of justice, peace, reconciliation and care for all creation. It is an urgent and exciting task for the Franciscan Youth also! This is the first point of a process in a naturally vocational YouFra.

A young person who grows in this human dimension opens up to the proclamation of faith and deepens it. Franciscan Youth responds to its vocation and mission in the Church and in our Family if it accompanies this explicit growth in faith, without hesitation and without yielding to the fragmentation of individual experiences, which do not constitute a united and integral faith journey.

This care expresses itself in the development of programs of progressive growth, in the assimilation of faith experiences and knowledge of the faith, in harmony; faith as the heart of a life that recognizes in Jesus Christ the hope that gives light and color to existence, the very heart of the world, the glory that enlightens our exhausting pilgrimage; faith as a gift awaiting a response that is original because it is in close contact with the reality of the world and the history in which the young person lives. Cultivating the vocational dimension of faith in YouFra will then also be expressed in special attention to the lay and secular dimension of the human and Christian vocation of the young Franciscans. Today, faced by the risk of remaining on the margins of the life of all people and the changes in history and cultures, this care is more urgent than ever.

Franciscan Youth will be an authentically vocational place if it becomes an environment of mutual acceptance, sharing of gifts, service in active and heroic charity. It will not be a fraternity turned in on itself, but rather ever more able to open up to what is different, to begin from within itself. A fraternity is served and cared for. Would training the young today to this dimension not be an authentic school of vocations?

Our main concern should never be that YouFra be a “vocational nursery” for the OFS or for the First Order. It is much more: it is a place of vocations where the young can mature in an integral way as persons, Christians and Franciscans. Franciscan Youth thus becomes a place of ongoing vocational deepening for the assistants also, especially if they are religious. Indeed, it is with the young that we ourselves can rediscover and live in an original manner today our one vocation and mission.

Youth is a transitional stage in life; it begins with adolescence and continues until one attains personal maturity. It is a rich stage, characterized by great vitality and a strong manifestation of individuality. It is a very positive period, with a great capacity for action. But at the same time, because of its vitality, its overflowing energy—and its desire to search for success, recognition and growth—it is a time life when one has a foot on the accelerator, so to speak. This makes the time of youth a period of great tension and instability, of temporary and brief commitments charged with altruistic feelings.

4.3. Identity and structure of the Franciscan Youth

The general characteristics of youth described above are also those which describe the Franciscan Youth. YouFra contains certain distinctive features which identify and enrich its members. It is a vocational journey intended to develop and cultivate the seed of an initial call. It is an experience of fraternity lived within an ecclesial community. It is a following of Jesus of Nazareth in light of the life and message of Francis of Assisi. It also forms part of the Franciscan Family as an integral component of the Secular Franciscan Order with whom it shares an existential relationship permeated with a spirit of mutual and life-giving communion. As such, it considers the *Rule* of the OFS to be its inspirational document. Franciscan Youth “offers to this life project enthusiastic contribution of its youth, animated by the fervor of its ideals.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷³ John Paul II, “La gioventù francescana un luminoso ideale di vita,” in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10 May 1998, p. 5.

5. OFS Rule: inspirational document for YouFra

5.1 The Rule as a “form of life”

The drafting of the OFS *Rule* has meant a return to the Franciscan sources and the origins of the Order. This is attested in the prologue which, even though it does not form part of the *Rule*, is the text of the first version of Francis’s Letter to the Faithful. In reality, it is as Kajetan Esser calls it, the Exhortation of Saint Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance. In it he presents two ways of life, something very common in the Church: the path of good and the path of evil, the path of those who do penance and the path of those who do not do penance.

The *Rule* presents itself, first of all, as a vocational proposal in which Christ is the center of the life project: “The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi.”⁴⁷⁴ The *General Constitutions* make this more explicit: “The spirituality of the Secular Franciscans is a plan of life centered on the person and on the following of Christ.”⁴⁷⁵ Vocation is a following, a road to be followed. To the young man who asked Jesus: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Jesus answers: “Go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me” (Mk10:17, 21). Saint Clare presents this very well in her Testament: “The Son of God has been made for us the Way, which our blessed father Francis, his true lover and imitator, has shown and taught us by word and example.”⁴⁷⁶

It is this plan of life which the OFS “ought to be ready to share...with the youth who feel attracted to Saint Francis of Assisi.”⁴⁷⁷ John Paul II said to the Italian YouFra that this vocational proposal is “the ascetical and apostolic journey that characterizes you as Franciscan youth; it helps you to become adults in the faith, to be apostles in the ecclesial community and to conduct yourselves in society as responsible persons, capable of courageously assuming the role to which Providence calls you.”⁴⁷⁸

In this vocational journey, which contains, as St. Paul says when writing to the Church in Ephesus, an election and blessing of the Father for us in his Son Jesus (cf. Eph 1:3-4), YouFra considers “the *Rule* of the OFS as an inspirational document for the growth of its Christian and Franciscan vocation.” And the Young Franciscans confirm this call and blessing “with a personal promise before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.”⁴⁷⁹ With this option begins a process of formation and growth for the members of YouFra using “methods of formation and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth.”⁴⁸⁰

The *Rule* offers not just a simple devotion to Francis of Assisi according to the many forms that exist. It offers a true program of gospel life, which commits one to be a credible witness because it demands fidelity to the Word that enables us to become children of God (cf. Jn 1:12) by “going from Gospel to life and life to the Gospel.”⁴⁸¹ This form of life is a call to holiness, in which the YouFra member is profoundly involved. As Francis of Assisi says: “We are mothers when we carry him [Christ] in our heart and body through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.”⁴⁸²

⁴⁷⁴ *Rule OFS*, 4.

⁴⁷⁵ *Const.*, 9.1.

⁴⁷⁶ TestCl 5; CA:ED, 56-57.

⁴⁷⁷ *Const.*, 96.1.

⁴⁷⁸ John Paul II, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁷⁹ *Const.*, 96.3.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibidem*, 96.5.

⁴⁸¹ *Rule OFS*, 4.

⁴⁸² 1LrF 10; FA:ED I, 42.

The *Rule* is for the youth a form of life leading to holiness, just as it is for the members of the OFS. Hence it is impossible to think of YouFra as a separate entity from the OFS. In this sense Pius XII described the Secular Franciscan Order as a “school of perfection, of a genuine Franciscan spirit and of decided and generous action,” pointing out that “the Third Order wants souls who, in their state of life, aspire to perfection.”⁴⁸³ We must tend toward holiness with joy, for as Vatican II states: “It is...quite clear that all Christians in whatever state or walk in life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity.”⁴⁸⁴ John Paul II underlines this conciliar affirmation in *Christifideles laici*: “It is ever more urgent that today all Christians take up again the way of gospel renewal, welcoming in a spirit of generosity the invitation expressed by the apostle Peter ‘to be holy in all conduct’ (1 Pt 1:15)... Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness.”⁴⁸⁵

The OFS *Rule* offers YouFra a path to perfection which Saint Catherine of Genoa, a lay Franciscan, saw very clearly. Responding to a religious man who suggested that he was in a better condition to live perfect charity, she said: “If I believed that your habit would kindle in my heart a spark of greater love, I would take it off of you if I could not obtain it in any other way. As for you having greater merit than I because of what you have renounced for God..., that is your path; but that I cannot love God as much as you, this you will never make me believe.”⁴⁸⁶

5.2. In order to live in fraternity

In the audience granted to the Italian Franciscan Youth in May 1998, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of its birth, the Pope emphasized: “Franciscan Youth is by its nature a vocation to grow in fraternity.”⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, the form of life offered by the OFS *Rule* is an invitation to live the Gospel as Francis did, that is, in fraternity. Life in fraternity is a common feature of the whole Franciscan Family. The *General Constitutions* describe the vocation of the OFS and of YouFra as a “vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion.”⁴⁸⁸ This explains why there can be no Secular Franciscans voluntarily living in isolation. The members of the OFS and YouFra are called to live in fraternity. The Franciscan charism cannot be lived in isolation. As the Pope clearly points out in his talk to the above-mentioned audience, the fraternity is a “community of love and privileged environment in which the sense of Church and the Christian and Franciscan vocation develop.”⁴⁸⁹

The great novelty of Francis is not that he invented something, but that he read the Gospel attentively and put it into practice. Fraternity is born from the very heart of the Word who pitches his tent next to ours and makes us brothers and sisters of the same Father (cf. Jn 1:14). The Italian Franciscan Youth highlights this founding aspect of the Franciscan vocation in its Statutes (“Il Nostro Volto”): “The young Franciscans live in fraternity as a visible sign of the Church... and as a place where the apostolic life of its members is naturally animated.”⁴⁹⁰

5.3. The Rule, a document of creativity

The *Rule* is a document of inspiration to live the Gospel as Francis did, without forgetting, as the Pope reminds us, that “each is called by name to make a special contribution to the coming of the Kingdom of God. No talent, no matter how small, is to be hidden or left unused.”⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸³ Pius XII, to the *Tertiaries of Italy* assembled in the Vatican Basilica, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 2-3 July 1956.

⁴⁸⁴ LG, 40.

⁴⁸⁵ CL, 16.

⁴⁸⁶ *Vita di Santa Caterina da Genova compilata per cura del suo confessore*, Genoa 1887, Tip.Archiv., pp. 60-61.

⁴⁸⁷ John Paul II, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁸⁸ *Const.*, 3.3.

⁴⁸⁹ John Paul II, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

⁴⁹⁰ *Il Nostro Volto*, 7 a.

⁴⁹¹ CL, 56.

It is impossible to imagine YouFra apart from the OFS, just as it is difficult to think of the OFS as being indifferent to YouFra. All OFS fraternities ought to feel this need to share their experience of gospel life with the young people who “make up an exceptional potential and a great challenge for the future of the Church”⁴⁹² and for the OFS itself, insofar as YouFra is the fruit of its own pastoral youth ministry and promotion of vocations. The future and creativity of the Church and the OFS is reflected in the depth of the source of its being. They keep themselves fresh and alive when they address the present culture of youth, unstable—yes, but capable of being molded to and converted into the hope of a mature and loving future. We must keep alive hope and trust in the young, as did John, when he was an old man. He said: “ I am writing to you, young people, because you have conquered the evil one.... I write to you, young people, because you are strong and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one” (I Jn 2:13-14).

The OFS must present to young people the Franciscan proposal and help them to attain maturity in their vocation and in the project of fraternal life, with the joy with which Jesus looked at the young man in the Gospel (cf. Mk 10:21). It must try to help them discover new horizons and grow “in wisdom, age and grace before God and men” (Lk 2:52). The OFS fraternities should consider the members of YouFra not just as passive subjects in their vocation, but as active ones. They should create a spirit of welcoming acceptance in the life of the fraternity and allow the youth to be engaged and involved in its meetings and activities.

The OFS should be generous in offering options to YouFra. It must not forget that the one who really calls is the Lord. YouFra is not the nursery of the OFS from which it will take members to transplant when it feels convenient for the fraternity. This is short-sighted and stingy. On the contrary, the OFS should regard YouFra as a garden that can be cultivated and in which, with confidence, are sown the seeds of the many states of Christian life: family life, consecrated life, priestly life, OFS, Secular Institutes, and many other ways and forms in which the Franciscan Family expresses the same charism of its common Seraphic Father.

The broader and richer the options presented to the Young Franciscans, the better it will be. This will give them a greater ability to contemplate, reflect and decide, to become agents of evangelization and the Church’s mission, and to be available for simple and dedicated service to the poor. We must go from theory to providing effective experiences in order to offer YouFra opportunities for human, Christian and Franciscan growth. As *Novo Millennio Ineunte* says, we trust that “if Christ is presented to young people, as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross.”⁴⁹³

5.4. Presence and mission

The Pope, in his address to the Italian YouFra, stresses that “a central element of your Franciscan identity...is the presence of the brother to be welcomed, listened to, forgiven and loved.”⁴⁹⁴ Using the identity of the OFS as its starting point, the *Rule* offers YouFra a wide field of presence and mission: building a more fraternal and evangelical world (Art. 14), promoting human dignity (Art. 14), promoting justice, with concrete choices in harmony with their faith (Art. 15), work as an extension of God’s creating hand (Art. 16), the challenge of family values (Art. 17), universal kinship and respect for the goods of creation (Art. 18), building peace through dialogue, love and pardon (Art. 19).

⁴⁹² *Ibidem*, 46.

⁴⁹³ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 9.

⁴⁹⁴ John Paul II, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

The above-mentioned challenges implicitly contain others: the world of politics, social reality, finance, culture, arts and sciences, research, social communication, and suffering. All this points to the young Franciscan's need of new light and energy to carry out the mission, "without in any way losing or sacrificing their human content but rather pointing to a transcendent dimension which is often disregarded."⁴⁹⁵ The general ministers of the First Order and the TOR trust, as they say in their letter, "Vocation and Mission of the Franciscan Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World" (1989), that the OFS and YouFra will be able to use, for a more creative and fruitful service, the spiritual and cultural heritage they have, and at the same time make use of the resources offered by the Franciscan tradition.

5.5. Formation

If the young Franciscans are to carry out the creative and demanding mission presented to them by the OFS *Rule*, they need much formation. It must be an integral and solid formation: human, Christian and Franciscan. Formation is one of the priorities of the OFS and YouFra. The former general minister, Emanuela De Nunzio, was asked in an interview what was the most important priority for the OFS. Her answer was formation. The journalist asked her what the second priority was. Her answer once again was formation. In response to the question about the third priority she responded a third time: formation. This is because without formation, the vocation, prayer and mission of the OFS and YouFra are lackluster. But if formation reaches to the base of the YouFra fraternities, there will be a vocational springtime and an authentic osmosis between the living spaces of the lay Franciscan vocation. The young Franciscans will be formed with a capacity for self-giving, for deciding, and for giving a Christian and Franciscan witness. In this, the YouFra council has an important role to play, along with the fraternal animator and the spiritual assistant.⁴⁹⁶

It is very interesting to cite the exhortation given in *Christifideles laici* on formation, which corresponds very well to the concerns of YouFra: "The fundamental objective of the formation of the lay faithful is an ever-clearer discovery of one's vocation and the ever-greater willingness to live it so as to fulfill one's mission."⁴⁹⁷

5.6. The Rule, a document of co-responsibility

Through the details provided by the OFS *Rule* we can enter into the life of the YouFra fraternity: its organization, animation and direction, communion among its members etc.

It is an urgent task, not to be done hastily. But after each OFS fraternity has reflected and shared, it should look at itself in the mirror of the Church, which "sees her path towards the future in the youth, beholding in them a reflection of herself and her call to that blessed youthfulness which she constantly enjoys as a result of Christ's Spirit."⁴⁹⁸ The OFS must show the same sensitiveness. It is time to go out and meet the youth and hold an open dialogue that favors an encounter and exchange between generations, in such a way that the riches of both—OFS and YouFra—may benefit, revitalize and strengthen both.

The Franciscan Family in general, but the OFS specifically, has a host of opportunities to relate with today's youth. This is provided, first of all, by the person of Francis of Assisi, his life and spirituality; second, by the heart of the OFS *Rule*, which beats in unison with the heart of youth who seek fraternity, justice, harmony with creation, peace, ecology etc..., always studying the living and acting person of Christ, aspiring to become his witness by their life and words,⁴⁹⁹ third,

⁴⁹⁵ EN, 70.

⁴⁹⁶ *Const.*, 97.2.

⁴⁹⁷ CL, 58.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, 46.

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 6.

the Franciscan Youth expects the OFS to “see to the vitality and the expansion of the Franciscan Youth fraternities.”⁵⁰⁰

This demands effort on the part of the OFS, which the *General Constitutions* describe as accompaniment of “the youth in their journey of human and spiritual growth with proposals for specific activities and contents”⁵⁰¹ Accompaniment includes completing vocational promotion and taking care of the life that is being born, without neglecting the young person’s own personality. In accompaniment, one must pay attention to the person’s feelings and listen to the person. One must know how to care for the seed, watering it as well as protecting it from the heat, so that too much water will not drown it or too much sun suffocate it.

The one who accompanies, who is usually also the “fraternal animator,”⁵⁰² must become a companion. While he is accompanying the young Franciscan, he is growing at the same time. He identifies with the youth, without mixing up or breaking down the roles of each, which are different. The fraternity as well as the fraternal animator must meet frequently, not only with YouFra, but also with one another to evaluate the progress that has been made.

The fraternal animator must create a close communion between the OFS and YouFra. Formation is the principal task of the animator, along with the YouFra council and the spiritual assistant, so that the Young Franciscans may grow as Christians and Franciscans, convinced of their identity and belonging.

6. Call and mission in YouFra

6.1. YouFra in the OFS Constitutions

The Franciscan Youth, “as a component of the Franciscan Family,”⁵⁰³ seems to have little place in the OFS *General Constitutions*, which devote only two Articles to it (96, 97). But what is not in the *Constitutions* and *Statutes of the International Fraternity of the OFS* is left to the creativity of YouFra in its own international or national statutes, and its “specific organization, methods of formation, and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth, according to the existing realities in the various countries” is recognized.⁵⁰⁴

The aspects we want to discuss here—call and mission—do appear in the OFS *Constitutions*.

The *call* of youth to YouFra is described in the *Constitutions*, which say that these young people are “called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.”⁵⁰⁵ In these statements we find the elements of a vocation: a call to live the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the charism of Francis, and with a deepening of one’s vocation.

The *mission* of YouFra, like that of the OFS, is marked by its secular nature, in accord with its spirituality, inasmuch as its members are called to contribute “to building up the Kingdom of

⁵⁰⁰ *Const.*, 97.1.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰² *Ibidem*, 97.2.

⁵⁰³ *Ibidem*, 96.6.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibidem*, 96.5.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibidem*, 96.2.

God by their presence in their life-situations and in their temporal activities.”⁵⁰⁶ It goes on to say that they are “inspired by the gospel options of Saint Francis of Assisi, committing themselves to continue his mission with the other components of the Franciscan Family.”⁵⁰⁷ The areas of mission are sufficiently described in the OFS *Rule*⁵⁰⁸ and *General Constitutions*.⁵⁰⁹

6.2. Call and vocation

It is opportune to begin the discussion with some general observations. Even if these things are already known, they will help us enter fully and more easily into the subject matter.⁵¹⁰

In salvation history and in the following of Jesus, a vocation is a gratuitous call from God. When God calls, he creates. We see this in the change of name. When God makes a covenant with Abram, he says to him: “No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham” (Gen 17:5). Jacob, after he has struggled with the angel of the Lord, will hear the words: “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel” (Gen 32:28). When Simon is introduced to Jesus, the Teacher says to him: “You are to be called Cephas (which is translated Peter)” (Jn 1:42). And Saul changes his name to Paul (cf. Acts 13:9).

God acts and saves by calling. Among the calls in the Old Testament, we can read about that of Abraham (Gen 12-25; Heb 11:8-19; Rom 4; Gal 3), Moses (Ex 2:23-4:18; 6:2-12; 7:1-8), Joshua (Josh 1:1-18), Gideon (Judg 6:11-24), Isaiah (Isa 6:1-13), Jeremiah (Jer 1:4-19) and Ezekiel (Ezek 1:1-3, 15). Important and well-known vocations in the New Testament include that of the Twelve (Mk 3:13-16), the first four disciples (Mk 1:16-20; Mt 4:18-22; Lk 5:1-11), Matthew (Mt 9:9), Andrew, Peter, Philip and Nathanael (Jn 1:35-51), and Paul (Acts 9:1-30; 22:3-21; 26:9-23; Gal 1:11-24; 1 Cor 15:8-11).

God’s call is always a free choice, and his blessing extends to all others. The call and blessing of Abraham also includes a blessing for him and his descendents (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). Mary’s vocation and her response carries with it a blessing and joy for all people: the birth of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Lk 2:10-11).

A vocation in the Bible does not present us with perfect men or women. All have some faults. Abraham, in order to save his skin in Egypt, allows Sarah to become part of Pharaoh’s harem (cf. Gen 12:10-20). Sarah herself laughs when she hears talk about her future pregnancy (cf. Gen 18:9-15). Jacob deceives his brother Esau (cf. Gen 25:29-34). David seems to be a man without too many scruples (cf. 2 Sam 11:1-27, 12:1-25). The disciples themselves betray, like Judas (cf. Mt 26:14-16; Mk 14:10-11; Lk 22:3-6; Mt 26:48-50; Mk 14:44-45; Lk 22:47-48; Jn 18:2-3); they deny, like Peter (Mt 26:69-75; Mk 14:66-72; Lk 22:55-62; Jn 18:15, 18:25-27); all of them flee (Mt 26:56; Mc 14,50); they leave for Emmaus (Lk 24:13-14); they persecute, like Paul (Acts 9:1-2, 13-14). In a vocation the most important thing is not the qualities of the one called, but the graciousness of God.

A vocation to be a disciple of Jesus can be understood as a kind of following that requires a response to the call and invitation to follow him (Mt 8:21-22; 9:9; Mk 10:17-22; Lk 9:23).

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibidem*, 3.2.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁰⁸ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 14-19.

⁵⁰⁹ Cf. *Const.*, 17-27.

⁵¹⁰ Cf. Uribarri, Gabino, *La vida cristiana como vocación*, Revista de Pastoral Vocacional: Todos Uno, n. 149, genero-marzo 2002, pp. 40-62.

Jesus still calls today, and the quality of discipleship and Christian life lies in the response each of us gives to God's personal call. Each of us is called, and gathered together we form the Church, the community of those who have been called, chosen, and gathered together.⁵¹¹

Seculars, lay people, are called by the Lord to live the Christian life in the ordinary situations of the world, family, secularity and work. In their Christian vocation they discover their own particular way: in their choice of profession, their involvement in politics, in leisure and the use of free time, in managing money, in participating in their parish, in volunteer work, in the university and teaching, research, culture and the fine arts. Seculars are called to live their faith in the world, which is called to be transformed into the Kingdom of God.

In responding to a vocation, the greatest enemies are fear, comfort, haste (craving for security, certainty), an inferiority complex (lack of self-confidence), indecision, disillusionment (lack of hope), self-sufficiency (the person is unwilling to be accompanied, helped), habit, mediocrity, lack of faith (a personal, living and adult faith). We must take part in the celebration; often we are just spectators. Being a spectator is not the same as participating. Let us remember that at the wedding at Cana it is the servants who fill the stone jars, and it is they who know where the *new wine* comes from. Not so the chief steward, who had not participated in the work (cf. Jn 2:6-9). A vocation requires reflection, study and prayer.

By following the different steps in the vocation of Francis of Assisi, we can get some pointers for the vocation of the young Franciscans. Francis, too, was a youth who needed a rather long time, with various stimuli, to bring his vocation to fruition. Even though they appear as a series of steps, they could have been taken either gradually or simultaneously, and their relationship is dialectical.⁵¹²

6.3. Entering into oneself

Francis led a normal life, with the more-or-less clear goals of a member of the middle class in a city like Assisi, where he wanted to make a place for himself in society and make a bid to take over. Everything seemed clear in his life until the day he was taken prisoner in the battle of Collestrada, near the Ponte San Giovanni, and transported to the prison in Perugia. There he began to reflect on himself and his future. Fundamental changes in his personality began to show themselves, a result of the internal struggle he endured for a long time.

In conversation with his prison mates, dispirited by the loss of freedom, by the chains and darkness, Francis was joyful and said to them: "What do you think will become of me? Rest assured, I will be worshiped throughout the whole world."⁵¹³ He was thinking of human greatness. What greatness? To move up socially and become a knight and a noble?

The illness that accompanied him after he gained his freedom forced him to look at and examine his own limitations more closely. But it also gave him the ability to face life more realistically. He entered into himself and began "to regard himself as worthless and to hold in some contempt what he had previously held as admirable and lovable, though not completely or genuinely. For he had not yet been freed from the bonds of vanities."⁵¹⁴ Imprisonment and illness, with their discomfort and suffering, had managed to help Francis take a more serious look at his future.

⁵¹¹ Cf. LG 9.

⁵¹² Cf. Uribe, Fernando, *El proceso vocacional de Francisco de Asís: los seis encuentros que determinaron su vida*, Revista de Pastoral Vocacional: Todos Uno, n. 151, julio-septiembre 2002, pp. 5-31.

⁵¹³ L3C 4; FA:ED II, 70.

⁵¹⁴ 1 C 4; FA:ED I, 185.

The dream about the palace full of arms, which he had in Assisi,⁵¹⁵ made him think even more about becoming a knight and a noble. Francis “thought he would become a magnificent prince.”⁵¹⁶

The dream in Spoleto,⁵¹⁷ together with news of the death of John of Brienne, which he learned about upon his arrival in the city, made him reconsider his personal plans. He gave up the idea of going to Apulia and went back to Assisi. There are also overtones of Saint Paul that cause him to go from the merely personal “listen to yourself,” to asking and acting in such a way that the Lord enters the picture: “‘Lord, what do you want me to do?’ ‘Go back,’ [the voice] said, ‘to your own land to do what the Lord will tell you.’”⁵¹⁸

Francis went back to Assisi. Again he spent time with his friends, went to the feasts, was chosen king of the group. But in all this Francis reflected and pondered. Although he had the leader’s baton, the scepter, Francis remained alone. He was out of step with his companions, who were surprised and concerned “at seeing him already changed into another man.”⁵¹⁹

After that, Francis gave up external things, but “since he was not entirely detached from worldly vanities, this change was not yet perfect.”⁵²⁰ He began a gradual process of praying and entering into himself. His first biographer says that he retired often, almost every day.⁵²¹ This would enable him to go through a process of inner liberation and descend to the very core of his being.

Self-encounter, as we see in Francis, can also be experienced by the young Franciscans. It is slow and sometimes painful as well, because it requires changes in our personal project, in which our situation and our life require a correct reading of the signs of the times. Self-encounter requires entering into oneself, much prayer and reflection, and encountering the basic values of life, in order to attain inner freedom.

6.4. Going out of oneself

After gaining knowledge of ourselves, we must go out to meet others, open ourselves to others, especially the poor. This means a new openness to our surroundings, and sometimes there are prejudices that have to be overcome. In Francis this process manifested itself in his meetings with the poor, whom he received courteously, with good manners, with joy and generosity. And so, for love of God, who is most generous in rewarding, he was generous and kind to the poor: “From that day he looked on poor people generously and provided them affluently with alms.”⁵²²

When, through forgetfulness, he failed to give alms to a poor man who had asked him for the love of God, he resolved in his heart “from then on, not to deny a request to anyone asking in the name of so great a Lord.”⁵²³ Saint Bonaventure adds: “Immediately turning back to his heart, he ran after him, and gently with extravagant alms, he promised God that from that moment, while he had the means, he would not refuse those who begged from him for the love of God.”⁵²⁴ Francis opened himself to others by being generous, with the resolve not to refuse alms to any poor person. If he had no money, he would give his belt or his shirt.⁵²⁵

⁵¹⁵ Cf. AP 5 [FA:ED II, 35]; 1 C 5 [FA:ED I, 185]; 2 C 6 [FA:ED II, 245]; LMj 1, 3 [FA:ED II, 532]; L3C 5 [FA:ED II, 70].

⁵¹⁶ AP 5; FA:ED II, 35.

⁵¹⁷ AP 6 [FA:ED II, 36]; 2 C 6 [FA:ED II, 245]; LMj 1,3 [FA:ED II, 532]; L3C 6 [FA:ED II,71].

⁵¹⁸ AP 6; FA:ED II, 36.

⁵¹⁹ L3C 7; FA:ED II, 72.

⁵²⁰ L3C 8; FA:ED II, 72.

⁵²¹ Cf. 1 C 6; FA:ED I, 187.

⁵²² L3C 3; FA:ED II, 69.

⁵²³ L3C 3; FA:ED II, 69. Found also in AP 4 [FA:ED II, 34]; 1 C 17 [FA:ED I, 195]; 2 C 15 [FA:ED II, 253].

⁵²⁴ LMj 1, 1; FA:ED II, 531.

⁵²⁵ Cf. 2 C 8 [FA:ED II, 247]; LMj 2,6 [FA:ED II, 539]; L3C 8 [FA:ED II, 72].

In going out of himself, Francis goes out to meet others, especially the poor. And here the terms of his relationships are reversed. Once he had shown solidarity and been conscientious in spending time with his friends: “Now, however, his whole heart was intent on seeing the poor, listening to them, and giving them alms.”⁵²⁶ His respect and love for the poor led Francis to identify with them on the steps of the Saint Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.⁵²⁷ Moreover, a major and radical change was taking place in his social horizon because of his option for the poor.

In his encounter with the poor Francis also began his encounter with the suffering Christ: “Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). From there is was only one more step to meeting the leper, the social reject. The saint’s biographies tell us that one day, getting off his horse, he gave alms to a leper and kissed his hand.⁵²⁸ Francis, before the beginning of his conversion, would flee and avoid meeting lepers: “When I was in sin, it seemed to bitter for me to see lepers.”⁵²⁹ When he went out of himself and tried to meet others, especially the outcast, the poor and the lepers, he tells us in his Testament that “the Lord himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them. And when I left them what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness of soul and body.”⁵³⁰ In other words, for Francis the meeting with the leper meant an effort to overcome himself in the vocational process and an embrace of the outcast.

After this first meeting, Francis returned to meet with them and spend time with them at the leprosarium in Assisi. He gave them alms and kissed their hands,⁵³¹ becoming “a servant and friend of lepers,”⁵³² so that his biographies often contain passages telling us of the meetings of Francis and his companions with lepers.⁵³³ Saint Bonaventure writes: “From then on he clothed himself with a spirit of poverty, a sense of humility, and an eagerness for intimate piety. For previously not only had association with lepers horrified him greatly, so too did even gazing upon them from a distance. But now, because of Christ crucified, who according to the text of the prophet appeared despised as a leper, he, in order to despise himself completely, showed deeds of humility and humanity to lepers with a gentle piety.”⁵³⁴

From this meeting with the leper, Francis deepened his vocation and began his *fuga mundi*, that is, remaining *in* the world without being *of* the world. Francis’s kissing the leper, by which the leper, without ceasing to be a leper, was admitted into society and into the company of Francis, was like a social and moral resurrection for the leper. This meeting with the leper and service to the needy resulted in Francis’s taking a step forward in his vocational process and in his encounter with the Church.

6.5. Meeting the Church

Meeting the Church would take place through meeting Christ crucified. Passing over a text in the *Major Legend*, which tells how Christ appeared to Francis as fastened to a cross,⁵³⁵ let us highlight the meeting that we know and the conversation Francis had with the image of Christ crucified at San Damiano. It is a biographical text that appears in Celano’s *Second Life*.⁵³⁶ Francis

⁵²⁶ L3C 9; FA:ED II, 73.

⁵²⁷ Cf. 2 C 8 [FA:ED II, 247]; LMj 1, 6 [FA:ED II, 534]; L3C 10 [FA:ED II, 73].

⁵²⁸ Cf. 1 C 17 [FA:ED I, 195]; 2 C 9 [FA:ED II, 248]; LMj 1, 5 [FA:ED II, 533]; L3C 11 [FA:ED II, 74].

⁵²⁹ Test 1; FA:ED I, 124.

⁵³⁰ Test 2-3; FA:ED I, 124.

⁵³¹ Cf. 1 C 17 [FA:ED, 195]; 2 C 9 [FA:ED II, 248]; LMj 1, 6 [FA:ED II, 534]; L3C 11 [FA:ED II, 74].

⁵³² L3C 11; FA:ED II, 74.

⁵³³ Cf. 1 C 39 [FA:ED I, 218], 103 [FA:ED I, 272]; 2 C 66 [FA:ED II, 291], 122 [FA:ED II, 327]; LMj 2, 6 [FA:ED II, 539], 10, 2 [FA:ED II, 606], 14, 1 [FA:ED II, 640]; L3C 55 [FA:ED II, 99]; AC 64 [FA:ED II, 166], 65 [FA:ED II, 167], 9 [FA:ED II, 123]; 2MP 44 [FA:ED III, 290], 58 [FA:ED III, 303], 59 [FA:ED III, 304].

⁵³⁴ LMj 1, 6; FA:ED II, 534.

⁵³⁵ Cf. LMj 1, 5; FA:ED II,

⁵³⁶ Cf. 2 C 10-11 [FA:ED II, 249]; LMj 2, 1 [FA:ED II, 536]; L3C 13 [FA:ED II, 75].

enters the church of San Damiano to pray. Christ crucified asks him to do a job: “Francis, go rebuild my house; as you see, it is all being destroyed.”⁵³⁷ And Francis answers: “I will do so gladly, Lord.”⁵³⁸

The mystical impressions described by his biographers—“From that hour, therefore, his heart was wounded and it melted when remembering the Lord’s passion. While he lived, he always carried the wounds of the Lord Jesus in his heart.”⁵³⁹—lead us to Francis’s mystical embrace of Christ crucified and to the impression of the Lord’s wounds in his servant on Mount LaVerna.

The conversation with the crucifix of San Damiano also has an ecclesial meaning. Francis needed time to grasp the step he still had to take, from the material rebuilding of the chapel of San Damiano to the rebuilding of the Church as a community of faith acquired with Christ’s own blood.⁵⁴⁰

This text emphasizes the importance of prayer for Francis. It leads him to interior joy and complete openness to the voice of the Spirit. Francis would encounter the Church as a material building, which he would always venerate,⁵⁴¹ and as a community of faith, at whose feet he wanted himself and his brothers to be “steadfast in the Catholic faith.”⁵⁴²

6.6. Meeting the Gospel

In the Church Francis met the Gospel. It would illuminate, clearly and decisively, his vocational journey and would be for him a constant point of reference. From that moment he would be a conscientious observer of the Gospel.

This step in Francis’s vocational journey took place while listening to the Gospel about the sending of the disciples.⁵⁴³ He did not understand it and asked the priest to explain it. In this entire journey Francis senses the presence of an accompanier who helps him discern his call. So, filled with joy, he cries out: “This is what I want, this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.”⁵⁴⁴ He hastens to change his hermit’s clothes and put on the garb of an apostolic missionary: barefoot, without staff, one tunic in the form of a cross, a cord around his waist. And he begins to preach penance. Francis takes important steps through his assimilation of the Gospel, as Saint Bonaventure says: “Hearing, understanding, and committing this to memory...to carry out what he had heard.”⁵⁴⁵

The Gospel is decisive in Francis’s vocation, and he acts in such a way that this vocation is not just evangelical but also evangelizing, as we have seen: “He then began to preach penance to all with a fervent spirit and joyful attitude.”⁵⁴⁶ Thomas of Celano says that when finished repairing the little church of the Portiuncula, he was “in the third year of his conversion.”⁵⁴⁷ This tells us that the process Francis went through in his vocational journey was a long one.

⁵³⁷ 2 C 10; FA:ED II, 249.

⁵³⁸ L3C 13; FA:ED II, 76.

⁵³⁹ L3C 14; FA:ED II, 76. “From that very hour his soul melted as the Beloved spoke to him. A little while afterward his heart’s love showed in the wounds of his body” (2 C 11; FA:ED II, 250).

⁵⁴⁰ Cf. 2 C 11; FA:ED II, 250.

⁵⁴¹ “And the Lord gave me such faith in churches that I would pray with simplicity in this way and say: ‘We adore you, Lord Jesus Christ, in all your churches through the whole world and we bless you because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world’” (Text 4-5; FA:ED I, 124-25).

⁵⁴² LR 12, 4; FA:ED I, 106.

⁵⁴³ We find the account in 1 C 22 [FA:ED I, 201]; LMj 3, 1 [FA:ED II, 542]; L3C 25 [FA:ED II, 84].

⁵⁴⁴ 1 C 22; FA:ED I, 202-02.

⁵⁴⁵ Cf. LMj 3, 1; FA:ED II, 542.

⁵⁴⁶ 1 C 23; FA:ED I, 202.

⁵⁴⁷ 1 C 21; FA:ED I, 201.

6.7. Opening up to his brothers

Francis's vocational journey, which at this point is characterized by a shift from "I" to "we," enables him to meet his outcast neighbor, the Church and the Gospel. It also makes it possible for him to be approached, that is, to be close to those who want to live his form of life. Francis is transformed into a point of reference, a witness to the Gospel.

"Almost everyone considered him mad. But he did not care, nor did he answer them; instead, he strove with all eagerness to fulfill the task God had shown him.... When they saw and heard these things, two men from Assisi, inspired by divine grace, humbly approached him. One of these was Brother Bernard, and the other, Brother Peter. They told Francis simply: 'We wish to live with you from now on and do what you are doing. Tell, us, therefore, what we should do with our possessions.' Overjoyed at their coming and their resolve he answered them kindly: 'Let us go and seek counsel from the Lord.'"⁵⁴⁸

Francis accompanied them to the church of Saint Nicholas in Assisi, and there they opened the Gospel three times in order to learn the requirements for following Christ. After reading the gospel texts, "they were filled with great joy and exclaimed: 'This is what we want, this is what we were seeking.' And blessed Francis said: 'This will be our rule.' Then he told both of them: 'Go and may you fulfill the Lord's counsel as you heard it.'"⁵⁴⁹

Afterward, slowly, others came to join the brothers:⁵⁵⁰ the priest Sylvester,⁵⁵¹ another citizen of Assisi named Giles,⁵⁵² Brothers Sabbatino, John de Cappella and Morico the Short,⁵⁵³ Brother Philip the Tall and another anonymous brother.⁵⁵⁴ They would increase in number with the missions the brothers undertook after being instructed by Francis,⁵⁵⁵ who gave them faculties to receive those who wished to live the same life, and they were brought to the Portiuncula.⁵⁵⁶

The biographies of Francis never say that he ever went looking for brothers. Francis lived as a penitent, and it was the brothers who came to him, sent by the Lord, as he writes in his Testament: "And after the Lord gave me some brothers...."⁵⁵⁷ Francis welcomed kindly and with gratitude the brothers the Lord sent him. The brothers were a gift from the Lord. They were the fruit of Francis's witness of gospel life.

When they had become a group of twelve, Francis decided to go to Rome so that the Pope might approve this fraternity: "Brothers, I see that the Lord intends to make of us a large congregation. Therefore, let us go to our mother, the Roman Church, and inform the Supreme Pontiff about what the Lord is doing through us so we may continue doing what we have begun by his will and command."⁵⁵⁸

6.8. Call of the Franciscan Youth

The call of the members of the Franciscan Youth may have all these steps we have seen in the life of Francis of Assisi, and even more or fewer. But more than the steps themselves, which

⁵⁴⁸ AP 9-10 [FA:ED II, 37-38]. Cf. 1 C 24 [FA:ED I, 203]; 2 C 15 [FA:ED II, 253]; LMj 3, 3 [FA:ED II, 543]; L3C 17 [FA:ED II, 78].

⁵⁴⁹ AP 11; FA:ED II, 38.

⁵⁵⁰ Cf. 2 C 15 [FA:ED II, 253]; LMj 3, 4 [FA:ED II, 544].

⁵⁵¹ Cf. 2 C 109 [FA:ED II, 319]; LMj 3, 5 [FA:ED II, 544]; AP 12-13 [FA:ED II, 39-40]; L3C 30-31 [FA:ED II, 86-87].

⁵⁵² Cf. 1 C 25 [FA:ED I, 204]; LMj 3, 4 [FA:ED II, 544]; AP 14 [FA:ED II, 39]; L3C 32 [FA:ED II, 87].

⁵⁵³ Cf. AP 17 [FA:ED II, 41]; L3C 35 [FA:ED II, 88].

⁵⁵⁴ Cf. 1 C 25 [FA:ED I, 204].

⁵⁵⁵ Cf. 1 C 26-28 [FA:ED I, 205-06]; LMj, 3, 7 [FA:ED II, 546]; AP 18 [FA:ED II, 41-42]; L3C 36-37.40 [FA:ED II, 89-90.92].

⁵⁵⁶ Cf. AP 24 [FA:ED II, 45]; L3C 41 [FA:ED II, 92-93].

⁵⁵⁷ Test 14 [FA:ED I, 125].

⁵⁵⁸ AP 31 [FA:ED II, 48]. Cf. 1 C 32 [FA:ED I, 210]; LMj 3, 8 [FA:ED II, 547]; L3C 46 [FA:ED II, 95].

always change according to the persons and the vocation to which they are called, it is the process and inspiration we can take from a thirteenth-century Umbrian youth, as was Francis of Assisi.

There are vocational values that seem to be common to Francis, to the brothers and sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order, and to the young Franciscans. These include the call to holiness,⁵⁵⁹ observance of the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ after the example of Francis of Assisi,⁵⁶⁰ going out of themselves in order to live in fraternity,⁵⁶¹ “deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.”⁵⁶²

The vocation of the young Franciscans is to “share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of Saint Francis of Assisi.”⁵⁶³ It is to “chose a life rooted in Christ and completely dedicated to the Church.”⁵⁶⁴

In order to give strength and roots to the Christian and Franciscan call, and in order that this call might take form and be well expressed, the Secular Franciscan Order and the Franciscan Youth must favor and “promote opportunities for encounter among young people, so as to foster a climate of mutual listening and prayer.... The way of holiness *should be pointed out to them* and they should be encouraged to make demanding choices in their following of Jesus..., and become *young Franciscans* capable of demonstrating a Christian *and Franciscan* approach to every sphere of life, including entertainment and leisure.”⁵⁶⁵

7. Mission of the Franciscan Youth

7.1. From call to mission

Going from call to mission means giving great importance to gratuitousness, commitment and solidarity in one’s life project. It means, as Karl Barth says, “Listening to God with the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other.” When God calls, it is always in connection with a mission. We see this in the great heroes of salvation history: Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, the apostles, and Francis and Clare of Assisi. The response to the call is directed toward mission. For this reason the call needs to be constantly reaffirmed.

Mission invites us, through the affirmation of justice, to love, trust, solidarity and commitment to human dignity, to give life where nothing seems able to grow. The one called and invited must have a compassionate heart in order to be God’s spokesperson, for God loves passionately and deeply. The one invited must be able to grieve with those who grieve, rejoice with those who rejoice, hope with those who are doubtful and anxious.

Mission—done through and in the name of the one who has called us, Jesus of Nazareth, Son of the Father—shows us the value of service, of being yeast that leavens the mass of injustice and feels the birthpangs of the new reality that is appearing on the horizon. It enables us, like sunflowers, to keep turned toward the sun, toward the source of our life.

Mission makes us trust in God and place ourselves in his hands, like clay in the potter’s hands (Jer 18:4), letting ourselves be formed by him in the course of our life. In her *Magnificat*,

⁵⁵⁹ Cf. LG, 40; *Const.*, 1.1; 96.1.

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. *Rule OFS*, 4; *Const.*, 1.2; 96.1.

⁵⁶¹ *Ecclesia in Europa*, 40 (= EE).

⁵⁶² *Const.*, 96.2

⁵⁶³ *Ibidem*, 96.2.

⁵⁶⁴ EE, 40.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 62. Emphasis mine. Cf. *Const.*, 97.1.

Mary presents us with a whole message of proclamation for the work God is doing in and through her. Mary teaches us to look to God, and at the same time teaches us to let ourselves be looked upon by him (cf. Lk 1:46-49). This is followed by a denunciation (cf. Lk 1:51-53) in which she speaks for all who are hoping for God's salvation: the poor, the humble, the outcasts. We are placed in a subversive paradox, in which God takes sides and shows the strength of his arm to all who oppress the defenseless. She ends her song by again praising God (cf. Lk 1:54-55), who shows his faithfulness from generation to generation. God, who is the Alpha and the Omega, reaches all. His promise is fulfilled and will be fulfilled, because God's love does not depend on the fidelity of the person but on the depth of his heart.

7.2. Serving the Gospel

Let us look now at some steps we must take in order to enter into mission, for "serving the Gospel of hope by means of a charity which evangelizes is the commitment and the responsibility of everyone. Whatever the charism and ministry of each individual, charity is the royal road prescribed for all and which all can travel: it is the road upon which the whole ecclesial community [*and therefore also the Franciscan fraternity*] is called to journey in the footsteps of its Master."⁵⁶⁶

We need clear vision to be able to distinguish the wheat from the weeds. Often we must ask for the gradual healing of our sight, as we are told in the healing of the blind man (Mk 8:23). We need time in order to see. We must learn to focus, to have the sharpness of vision that enables us to see human beings as wounded companions along the wayside: derelicts, immigrants, drug addicts, people with AIDS, battered and exploited women, children forced into delinquency. Seeing with eyes that are healed and made well means removing the faces of our brothers and sisters from anonymity and bringing them into the light of recognition. The look of these eyes does not dissemble, does not avoid reality; it gives hope. This look is humanizing and healing, because the crucified Christ goes before us, and he is the pledge of our hope.

We need to ask the Lord to open our ears to hear (cf. Isa 50:4). If we plunge deep into our hearts, we will find—locked in the trunk in the attic—words, gestures, silences, fears, worries..., because someone refused to enter into our personal story. We can think of so many people who lack bread, a roof, those whose bodies are exploited as objects of pleasure to be used and thrown away. Coming into contact with these people, listening to their stories, their desire for freedom, their falls and their longing to get up again, their fears and anxieties, leads us to a knowledge of the mysteries hidden in the deepest corners of our person.

Hearing must go with seeing, because it surpasses words. Actions are added, eyes meet, hands.... Seeing and hearing give us a chance to be missionaries of the Kingdom on Samaritan roads, where it does no good to pass by, as did the priest and the levite in order to get to the temple quickly. We must approach the brother or sister we find lying on the ground on the world's road, which goes down from Jerusalem to Jericho and is a physical and existential sacrament of Jesus.

Time for silence, time to keep quiet. Job asked his friends not to crush him with their words (Jb 19:1), not to comfort him with empty nothings (Jb 21:34). Many times, when we find ourselves in difficult life situations, with problems that overwhelm us, we must remain in silence before giving answers that are vague or do not respond to the real situation.

Mary is a sign and example of silence, a silence we can feel in the Gospels. Silently she goes through the mountains of Judah, carrying in her womb Jesus, concerned for her elderly cousin who needs her. Silently she accompanies her Son. Silently she remains beside the cross. Silently and

⁵⁶⁶ EE, 33.

prayerfully she waits for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Silently she dies and is taken up to heaven, body and soul.

In silence, reflection and prayer we rely on the God of life and hope, and the consolations we receive from him enable us to console those we meet on our journey (cf. 2 Cor 1:4).

In the story of the woman with hemorrhages (Mk 5:25-34), the hemorrhages, which made the woman religiously and socially impure, stopped when she touched Jesus' cloak. The Teacher was pressed by the crowd, but the touch of the woman with hemorrhages caused a flow of grace to go out from him. His question, "Who touched my cloak?" and his looking around restored the woman to the synagogue and to society.

The body is important. It is our way of being present in and to the world. The body is a sea of feelings and relationships. We should not be afraid to let ourselves be kissed, hugged, touched by tender and meaningful action that goes beyond words.

Letting ourselves be touched has much to do with vulnerability. There are many outcasts, many vulnerable fringe groups in our society. Contact with our complex society makes us vulnerable and shakes our view of the future. Mission requires letting ourselves be touched, making people and today's reality the center of our lives, allowing what is best in us to blossom, as in Jesus and Francis, in order to overcome those areas of vulnerability and help to heal—socially, psychologically and spiritually.

In the book of the prophet Isaiah there is a text that shows God's anger and irritation, his concern for his People and the lack of available persons. A cry is heard: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" To this question from God an answer is heard: "Here I am; send me" (Isa 6:8).

Today, as then, God need prophets, messengers for the mission. He needs people who are trustworthy and faithful, who can speak in his name, who will collaborate in the Father's mission by accompanying his People, even though trembling, like Isaiah, or not knowing how to speak because one is a child, like Jeremiah (Jer 1:6-7). An available missionary is "fire by night and and cloud by day, to show you the route you should take" (Dt 1:33).

7.3. Poverty

In setting out on mission we should travel light, with neither bag, sandals, purse or staff (cf. Lk 9:1-6). Francis understood and was exultant. Thomas of Celano says that, once he understood the Gospel reading of the sending of the disciples, "he immediately exulted in the spirit of God. 'This is what I want,' he said, 'this is what I seek, this is what I desire with all my heart.'"⁵⁶⁷

Having too many things with us, like the young man in the Gospel (Mk 10.7), prevents us from setting out. We can follow Jesus only if we sell our things. That is why getting rid of things is stressed in the Secular Franciscan mission project: "Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs."⁵⁶⁸ And again: "A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ."⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ 1 C 22; FA:ED I, 201-02.

⁵⁶⁸ *Rule OFS*, 11.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 13.

In order to be close to the lesser ones in society and the Church we must become lesser ones ourselves. We can help others to rise only if we stoop down and support others in their rise from the bottom. The best experience in this regard is that of God in Jesus, who in order to save us is not afraid to become human. More yet, he stoops even lower than human beings: to death, desolation and non-being, to the hell of our world, to the disfiguring of his face (Isa 53:2). All of this to help human beings rise and give them a face. In other words, we must live the *kenosis* of Jesus that Paul has described for us (Phil 2:5-11).

In the Creed we say that Jesus “descended into hell” in order to bring light and begin from there “the ascent to life.” God is found because he descended into hell, where life was violated, dignity trampled upon, hope denied, hunger unsatisfied, thirst unquenched, where one becomes a slave, inwardly and outwardly. That is his place, because life cannot exist with death.⁵⁷⁰ This is the place of the young Franciscan if he or she wants to experience resurrection and the hope of life.

Francis of Assisi’s true and perfect joy, insofar as it fulfills the request of Paul to the Philippians (Phil 4:4) and is full of hope, must adorn the missionary and the mission environment.

Joy must have deep roots and long branches that are able to cover conscious concerns, deep happiness, sincere compassion and sympathy, personal involvement in transforming our society and proclaiming the good news to those suffering the challenges of the moment and the malaise of injustice.

For mission we must extend the ladder of prayer between heaven and earth (cf. Gen 28:12). We must go to our inner room, close the door and pray to the Father (Mt 6:6).

Jesus, sent by the Father, was always in relationship with his Father. He prepared for his major decisions—choosing the apostles (Lk 6:12), his passion (Mk 14:32-42)—with prayer. Often he would withdraw to the mountain to pray (Jn 6:15), he would leave the crowd in order to discern with the Father, in prayer, what path he should take so that the presence of God’s Kingdom would be living, real and effective.

To be missionaries dedicated to the mission, we must be tuned in to the frequency of the Kingdom. We do this by praying and not losing heart (Mt 7:7-11).

7.4. YouFra: hope for and in the mission

After some of these points, which complete and shape our way of being in mission, let us spend a moment on the mission of the Young Franciscans in the Church and society. Throughout the world the whole Church is committed to inspiring hope. In this mission “the contribution of the *lay faithful* to the life of the Church is essential: they have an irreplaceable role in the proclamation and the service of the Gospel of hope, since ‘through them the Church of Christ is made present in the various sectors of the world, as a sign and source of hope and of love.’”⁵⁷¹

The *OFS Rule* describes the mission of the Secular Franciscans and the Franciscan Youth as the faithful fulfillment of their duties: “Let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life,”⁵⁷² because “modern man ‘listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses.’”⁵⁷³ The *General Constitutions* emphasize that mission is like the mature fruit that comes from life in fraternity:

⁵⁷⁰ López Alonso, Marta, *Sintonizar con la frecuencia del Reino: diez actitudes bíblicas para vivir la llamada del Dios de los pobres*, Revista de Pastoral Vocacional Todos Uno, n. 151, julio-septiembre 2002, p. 42.

⁵⁷¹ EE, 41.

⁵⁷² *Rule OFS*, 10; Cf. *Const.*, 17.1, 20.2.

⁵⁷³ Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 41.

“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. They should be recognized in it by their ‘being,’ from which their mission springs.”⁵⁷⁴

Young Franciscans, conscious of having a place in the Church and society, are invited “to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the Kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.”⁵⁷⁵ Mission requires that all the faithful, including the Secular Franciscans, be active in promoting justice: “Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.”⁵⁷⁶ To carry out this mission, continuing formation is suggested, along with the foundations of a deep spiritual life and prayer, so that they may continue to be fearless witnesses “of charity and forgiveness, values which bring the Gospel to the vast frontiers of politics, social life, the economy, culture, ecology, international life, family life, education, professional life, the world of labor and the caring professions.”⁵⁷⁷

Also invited into all these aspects and mission fields of the Seculars are the Franciscan Youth, “the true hope of the Church and of the world and an eloquent sign of the Spirit who unceasingly causes new energies to arise.”⁵⁷⁸

7.8. Characteristics of the mission of YouFra

To conclude this topic, it may be useful to point out some characteristics of the call and mission of the Franciscan Youth. The mission springs spontaneously from the call.

The call:

- brings with it an exodus, a going out from the familiar homeland to a land that is new and unknown;
- involves a change of life;
- is accompanied by:
 1. *Joy*, because every vocation is gratuitous, a gift and good for the whole community, the fraternity;
 2. *Gratitude*, because a vocation is a blessing and involves finding a way to respond to God, to serve one’s brothers and sisters,⁵⁷⁹ to testify to a Christian and Franciscan life,⁵⁸⁰ and to to commit oneself “to continue his [Saint Francis’s] mission with the other components of the Franciscan Family”;⁵⁸¹
 3. *Freedom*, openness to the call, a free response, obedient and open to God’s plan, because the one called has been invited, not forced, and finds fulfillment in otherness, in freely trusting in God, Jesus, the Kingdom, the Church, the poor;⁵⁸²
 - 4 *The power of the Spirit with his gifts and fruits*, for he is “the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission;⁵⁸³
 5. *Discernment*, with the necessary factors for living as a Christian and Franciscan.

The mission that accompanies the call:

- is always for the good of people and is not carried out with one’s own strength and personal qualities, but rather with the help of the Spirit and the grace of God;

⁵⁷⁴ *Const.*, 100.3.

⁵⁷⁵ *Rule OFS*, 14.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, 15; *Cf. Const.*, 23.1.

⁵⁷⁷ *EE*, 41.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibidem*, 62.

⁵⁷⁹ *Cf. Rule OFS*, 14.

⁵⁸⁰ *Cf. Ibidem*, 15.

⁵⁸¹ *Const.*, 3.2; *Cf. Const.*, 20.1.

⁵⁸² *Cf. Rule OFS*, 13.

⁵⁸³ *Const.*, 11; *Cf. Const.*, 12.1.

- gives rise to and involves a close, personal and non-transferable relationship with God, with Jesus, through prayer: “Let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do”,⁵⁸⁴
- involves renunciation and trust in the One who calls;
- requires maturity in one’s faith and Christian commitment,⁵⁸⁵
- demands sincerity and transparency;
- calls for generosity and detachment;
- requires service⁵⁸⁶ and availability;⁵⁸⁷
- demands an ability to deal positively with failure.

8. Spiritual assistance to the Franciscan Youth

The spiritual assistant of YouFra is normally the assistant of the OFS. His or her function is that of spiritual assistance. The assistant will strive to work in close collaboration with the fraternal animator and the YouFra council.

8.1. Concept of assistance

The specific goals of the spiritual assistant are to be a witness of Franciscan spirituality, fraternal affection for YouFra, and communion between the religious Franciscans and the members of YouFra. This does not mean just giving, but being able to receive, to let oneself be drawn in by the mutual communion and fraternal affection of the Young Franciscans. At the same time, this makes them a bridge of communication and exchange of goods between the religious fraternity and the YouFra fraternity. Spiritual assistance to YouFra demands that the assistant be an active member in the formation process of the young Franciscan. His or her duty is to collaborate in the process of formation and discernment with the fraternal animator. The assistant must not forget that the role is one of collaboration, and must leave room for the Secular Franciscans.

The spiritual assistant must know how to listen, wait, be patient and be faithful. Faithful, especially in the hard times of discouragement and dejection. The assistant must live with the Franciscan Youth, sharing and offering content, always bearing in mind that the starting point and goal is the same for all YouFra members, yet mindful of the fact that not everyone travels the course at the same speed. Hence the assistant must keep an eye on those most in need. Having a spiritual assistant and fraternal animator in no way diminishes YouFra’s responsibility to accompany its members. The two figures complement, but do not replace, the YouFra’s work as a council, as a fraternity and as individuals.

YouFra, using categories and teaching methods suited to the world of youth,⁵⁸⁸ presents to its members fraternal life. Its goal is to develop in them an ecclesial sense and a Christian and Franciscan vocation; insertion into the life of the local Church; service as a mission in the Church and society; integration of prayer, contemplation and the sacraments into the spiritual journey; dialogue and collaboration with the Franciscan fraternities and other ecclesial groups; formation suited to the youthfulness of its members; celebration of moments of recreation, so that they themselves will become “capable of demonstrating a Christian approach to every sphere of human life, including entertainment and leisure.”⁵⁸⁹ On the other hand, YouFra is also co-responsible in the

⁵⁸⁴ *Rule OFS*, 8.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. *EE*, 62.

⁵⁸⁶ Cf. *Const.*, 17.1.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. *Ibidem*, 32.2.

⁵⁸⁸ Cf. *Ibidem*, 96.5.

⁵⁸⁹ *EE*, 62.

OFS fraternity council of the corresponding level.⁵⁹⁰ Both fraternities, OFS and YouFra, can be thought of as communicating vessels, through which both fraternities share in each other's values, including the responsibilities of each.

The YouFra fraternities take very seriously their use of the OFS and the spiritual assistance of the First Order and the TOR:

- *The Secular Franciscan Order*, because the young Franciscans want to participate in the Franciscan and secular charism. They are talents that cannot and should not remain in one's pocket, but should be used in the game. The OFS, which has received this talent, assumes a risk, and in the risk is life, and life, from a gospel perspective, is won only by giving it away. YouFra is the fruit of the donation and gift made by the Secular Franciscans, if they accept it as part of their pastoral activity among youth and vocational promotion.

- *The First Order and the Third Order*, because they have promised before the Church that they would provide spiritual assistance. Not only because of this, but also as members of the Franciscan Family, they should know and love YouFra and its vocational journey, in which it expresses, in forms and ways different from the religious, the charism of their common Seraphic Father.

In conclusion, the YouFra fraternities are invited not only to feel the assistant's human and spiritual warmth, but also feel themselves deeply part of the OFS fraternities, which are "particularly responsible" for the Franciscan Youth.⁵⁹¹

8.2. Methodology of assistance

To assist the Franciscan Youth means to immerse oneself in a method of experiential formation that helps the young person to arrive at his or her choice of life through lived experience rather than through theoretical knowledge. The Franciscan Youth is an experience of fraternity, where the young person deepens his or her vocation, under the inspiration of the gospel choices made by Saint Francis. The first and most important aspect is the life lived in fraternity by the young Franciscans among themselves and with their spiritual assistant. The assistant must be with the young people and, together with them, participate in the life of fraternity. He must be there in order to get a better knowledge of the young people themselves and their ideas, dreams, concerns, hopes, optimism and difficulties. He must be present primarily in heart and soul, full of idealism.

The presence of the assistant is necessary, not just because of what he does, but because of the person he is. He does not have to do much, but he must be there, take part in the discussions, share his own experiences, give expression to his ideas, dreams and concerns. The assistant must know how to listen, wait, have patience and be faithful. It is not enough to be there on some occasions; he must be present regularly, without ever allowing himself to get discouraged. The young people need to know that the assistant is faithful and will be with them in moments of difficulty and disappointment. Actions speak louder than words ("*Do* it, don't just *say* you'll do it!"). Faithful presence is the basis of the whole ministry of assistance, because it is an unequivocal expression of the assistant's good will towards the young people.

At times, especially in the beginning, we will need to go out to meet the young people, to be where they are and not wait for them to come to us. It means leaving our own place for the sake of

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. *Const.*, 97.4.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibidem*, 96.2.

being with them and sharing their life. Then, once they are convinced of how good it is to be together, the young people will start to bring in their friends to share the same experience.

Living together is not the same thing as letting people do what they want or go where they want. Rather it means knowing how to share, being able to give of ourselves, having something to offer. We need to have a plan and be prepared, know what we mean and how it should be said. However, there should be great flexibility in this approach, because there will always be times when other experiences surface, more important than the ones prepared in advance. Above all, we need to have clear ideas and values for our own sake and for the sake of the others, and distinguish between what is essential and what is secondary.

8.3. Journeying together

Living together is the point of departure for journeying together. The experience of the Franciscan Youth is an experience of growth, both individual and in groups. It is a process, a journey, and must be understood as such by the young people. Things are done because they are part of a journey towards a clear and well-defined goal. The assistant must know where to go. Some doubts may arise regarding the road to be taken, but there must be no doubts about the goal to be attained.

In journeying together we take into account that not all can walk to the same rhythm. One sets a brisk pace while another needs more time. But the journey is undertaken together, where those in front wait for the stragglers, and the slower ones make an effort to keep up with the leaders. In this way, the more advanced have a chance to help the others, to hold back so that they can walk together with the others. All must advance, all must journey together.

This means that the assistant needs to have a flexible plan, whereby individuals find challenges they are able to meet. The assistant must accompany everyone, but with great attention to individuals. He must be with all, not just with the vanguard or the ones bringing up the rear. At one moment he must slow his own pace so that those trailing behind can catch up with him; at another moment he must up his pace so as not to lose sight of the leaders.

8.4. Vocational discernment

In the Franciscan Youth, journeying together is undertaken in order to deepen one's vocation in the light of the Franciscan ideal. The goal is to attain a clear vision of one's vocation, that is, an answer to the question, "Lord what do you want me to do?" The experiences of Christian life in fraternity should lead to this goal.

The lived experiences need to be evaluated so that one can derive some meaning from them and see what significance they hold for this young person. Each experience must be planned, prepared, lived, and evaluated. The assistant's role will be to help the young person discern whether or not what he feels in his heart is good and comes from God. The spiritual assistant needs the gift of spiritual discernment.

At the beginning, the question is posed in more unreflective terms: "What do I want to do with my life; what do I want to achieve with my life; how can I fully realize myself?" Little by little one grasps what the question is all about: fulfilment of the whole human person, body and spirit, natural and supernatural. Progress is made from "what I want" to "what God wants." We need to be able to listen, to explore together with the young person, to help him or her to understand the voices of the heart, to distinguish between suggestions, to make choices. There is a need to accompany

young people, to be patient with them, to know how to wait, inviting them to open their souls to God, to help them in the process of conversion to God, of *metanoia*, of spiritual renewal.

Vocational discernment is a service we give to the young person, not to our Order. This is a new concept of vocational apostolate, that is, of helping a young person to identify his or her vocation. It is a genuine ministry in the true sense of the term. It means a great readiness and openness of mind to put young people in contact with the various expressions of Franciscan life. It will be for the Lord to choose whom he wants; we can only help young people discover the Lord's saving plan for them.

8.5. Formation

Vocational discernment relies on an integral formation: human, Christian and Franciscan. Basic to all is the need to form the young person to become mature, because only a mature person can make free and lasting choices.

Living the Christian life in fraternity requires a solid Christian formation. Young people need to know their religion, their catechism, the teaching of the Church. They need to feel at home in the Church, to know how to accept the Church as it is, not just as an ideal, but in the concrete with this pope, this bishop, this pastor, these priests, religious and lay people. The task of the assistant will be to help young people deepen their faith through the experience of faith lived in the Franciscan Youth fraternity, in the parish, and in the various pastoral activities of the parish and diocese.

The journey is undertaken in the light of the message of Saint Francis. We need to help young people get a better knowledge of the Franciscan Family, the ideal and the gospel choices of Francis, Clare, and the other members of the Franciscan Family. It is a matter of getting to know the Franciscan movement and Franciscans who are both religious and secular, active and contemplative. Here too it is a question of an education that is practical rather than theoretical, based on contacts with living people and lived experiences with other Franciscans, religious and secular.

The assistant is a sign of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the young. The assistant's enthusiasm for his own ideal, lived personally, is very important. We have so much to give to young people, but we must be convinced that it is worthwhile to live it ourselves in everyday life. Franciscan formation is carried out through direct contact with members of the various branches of the Franciscan Family, inviting them to bear witness, participating in their life and activities. Often it will be for the spiritual assistant to expedite these contacts, by preparing and then evaluating together these experiences.

9. Children in the Franciscan Family

Among the many references to children in the Franciscan sources, one of the most important is found in the Assisi Compilation, speaking of the friary at Greccio to which Saint Francis liked to withdraw: "Many of these people [at Greccio], with the grace of God, entered religion because of his example and preaching and that of his brothers.... For frequently, when the brothers of that place used to praise the Lord in the evening, as the brothers at that time were accustomed to do in many places, the people of that town, both the great and the small, would come outside. Standing on the road in front of the town, they would respond to the brothers in a loud voice: 'Praised be the Lord God!' Even children, who could not yet speak, when they saw the brothers, would praise the Lord as best they could."⁵⁹²

⁵⁹² AP 74; FA:ED II, 177.

This passage is important for the history of the Secular Franciscan Order. Where it says that “many of these people...entered religion,” it can be understood to mean that they became members of the Franciscan Family, either as friars or nuns or, more frequently, as seculars—including children. The reasons why they entered are said to be the example, preaching and liturgical prayer of Saint Francis and his friars. The grace of God is also stressed.

Children the world over are still attracted by Saint Francis and his friars and are happy to accompany their parents in the Franciscan Family. Anyone who has had contact with the groups of Franciscan Children that have sprung up spontaneously in many countries is struck by the beautiful presence of God among the children and by the impact of Saint Francis on their impressionable spirit.

Cardinal Daneels has made an important observation about childhood impressions. He said in an interview: “The big religious impressions are experienced before the age of six. At eight years of age, when the child is left to the tutelage of the school, it is already too late. An altogether different visible world will already be set in place: Martians, dwarfs and fairy tales. Educating tiny tots to pray and to be in touch with God is therefore extremely important” (*L’humanité de Dieu*, 95).

9.1. Little Heralds (children)

The purpose of the Little Heralds is to form Incarnational persons, in the footsteps of Saint Francis. The perfect model of a human being was realized in the Incarnate Word, Jesus of Nazareth. All of Saint Francis’s choices were inspired by this model. We are convinced that our life is fully realized through this same model. It is characterized by certain traits that constitute the outline of our formation methodology:

- an active and tireless search for God’s plan, and total availability to adapt to it gradually, deepening our understanding of it through prayer, reflection and experience, both personal and communal;
- full availability to our brothers and sisters in a constant attitude of service; a love that gives its all, even to “excess” (the death of a totally innocent man as a criminal).

These are the basic traits of Christ that Francis reproduced in himself. To these are linked others that together provide the means for revealing them and their consequences. These are the spirit of poverty (freedom from the influence of material things and goods in general, not by scorning them but by giving them their rightful place in the scale of values), minority (overcoming dominion over others so as to be with them instead, power understood as service), recognition of creation as the marvellous work of God given to everyone to use, without privileges (thus worthy of respect, care and promotion), a sense of relativity (all things, even the noblest values, find their place and their true value only in relation to God, who remains the only stable point of reference. He alone is the Lord of life).

An Incarnational person recognizes the law of love as the way to achieve all this. Love that urges us to seek God unceasingly and to love him as the highest good, from whom every other good comes. Love that passes through God and is poured out on our brothers and sisters and on all creation in the most authentic and sure way. The Son of God who became flesh out of love is the goal, the way, the model, encouragement and guarantee, all in one. This is why we make the law of love the foundation of education and propose it unceasingly and in every way, including naturally all those ways that help to overcome the daily expressions of selfishness (at times subtly defended

even by some educators in the name of spontaneity and freedom, values to be promoted always with careful testing).

Summing up:

- God has loved us, loves us now, and will love us always, with an absolutely faithful love (1 Thes 5:23-34; 2 Tim 2:13; 1 Pt 4:19; 1 Jn 2:3-11; Jn 14:23-24).
- God in loving us arouses in us love for our brothers and sisters. Only from God can we draw the direction and the ability to love everyone without discrimination, fully and consistently (1 Jn 4:7-21).
- God's love for us urges us to "excess" (Eph 2:1-5), which is expressed especially in dying on the cross.
- A love that becomes "service" (Mt 20:28; Jn 13:1-20).
- A love that is expressed in the absence of goods and power (Mt 8:18-21; Lk 2:1-20; 2 Cor 8:9).
- A love that welcomes creation as an act of love given to us by God.

9.1.1. Pedagogy

The law of the Little Herald is:

- 1. I love God my Father.*
- 2. I love all the children of God my Father.*

Children need a norm that dominates everything and everyone, and is at the same time "theirs," covering their group, their activities, their games, their relations with others. They also need a norm that is simple but not banal; "theirs," that is, perceived as belonging to them from the moment they have chosen to be part of the group that observes it, but not theirs alone. The proposed law aims to satisfy these needs. One must appeal to it constantly, because the entire group depends on it and is guided by it. Its text will have a place of honor. Those who ask to become Little Heralds and make the promise must be questioned on their understanding and observance of this law, naturally in a way corresponding to their abilities. Here the sensitivity and balance of the animator must come into play.

The animator will have to show that he or she lives the law at his level, and thus much more consistently.

9.1.2. The promise

The promise is the act by which the Little Heralds pledge to observe the law. With this they enter the group as members. The group of Little Heralds may have a special name. Candidates make the promise after a suitable time of preparation, during which, through playing, praying and taking part in all the activities of the group, they will show that they have understood, at their level naturally, what is being asked of them. Preparation for the promise should not be longer than three months, but it should not be shorter than the time necessary to participate in at least five or six meetings.

The contents of the promise, which can be formulated by each group, thus making the law concrete, should contain the following elements of commitment: following Jesus with Francis, friendship with everyone, the daily good deed. It should be personalized as to the preparation,

which should take into account each one's ability and actual preparation, and also as to the date. Little Heralds must feel that the promise is their personal commitment to live with the help of the group, a tiny cell of the Church.

The love Christ showed us and to which we want to introduce the Little Heralds has the spirit of service as its essential component. This service may consist of great deeds, but it consists primarily of everyday things: little acts of kindness, expressions of concern, random acts of helpfulness etc. Through these small things they can develop an attitude of availability to their brothers and sisters. We cannot ask more of a boy or girl than this as a beginning. However, it will contribute to creating a new mentality, that of Christ. This gesture is called in Italian *Pace e Bene* because it is a gesture of peace and a gift of goodness, and because this is how the Franciscan greeting and best wishes takes on flesh. The Heralds must be constantly challenged along these lines, with imagination and creativity. They will respond very well because they are still "uncorrupted."

The Little Heralds also have their own motto, a word that sums up their commitment and becomes part of their jargon, which they need psychologically. They can use this motto in a thousand ways: as a shout to begin their games, as a motto to display on their notebooks and drawing pads, as a word of recognition among themselves etc. It is "Always Better!" It indicates a commitment not to grow tired of improving and growing. It is in line with the reference in Luke's Gospel to Jesus, who "advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and men" (Lk 2:52).

9.1.3. Poverty

Franciscan poverty is not flight but a loving choice. Christ chose it to be near us, and Francis also made it his choice out of love for Christ. Through gospel poverty everything is judged in relation to God, the only Lord of all. Through gospel poverty we understand better the value of wealth and riches themselves. We understand that we are stewards of things and not owners of what belongs to God and what God provides for everyone. If our heart is not stripped of power and possessions, it does not know how to love. If it loves to possess, it is not free from material influences, consumerism and conformism (the excuse of calling necessary that which everyone is running after, even though we do not need it). We strive to help the Little Heralds appreciate and be satisfied with the essentials (a significant aspect of poverty) when it comes to their needs, and in their use and choice of things.

Knowing how to provide for oneself so as not to be a burden to others, but instead have extra opportunities to serve them, is also an expression of poverty that should be part of our educational concerns. The acquisition of some manual skills is also part of the same picture. It favors creativity and is a way of approaching material things correctly.

9.1.4. Exercise of responsibility

Duties towards God, one's neighbor and creation call for responsible sharing. This means that it is conscious, motivated, constructive and competent.

Children first learn to become responsible through the exercise of simple tasks commensurate with their abilities. Tasks that are simple, but not contrived, tasks that are real with all their consequences. Formative tasks include those of messenger (spreading news), caring for some or all of the gear for activities, checking whether the youngest ones (or a particular one) have what is needed for an outing, activity etc.

It will also be formative not to make up for lack of responsibility by coming to the rescue at the last minute. Everyone should gradually develop the habit of considering the discomfort they cause others through their negligence.

9.1.5. Relations with others

Relations with others—with individuals, but especially with other groups and institutions—should be regarded as important moments from a formational point of view. Therefore they should be suitably prepared for, either specifically, one at a time, or in general, so that they might be occasions for examination and dialogue.

9.2 Heralds (pre-adolescents)

The boy or girl we are considering as a Herald presents these features (with different stages, patterns and expressions for boys and girls):

- a need for adventure;
- a sense of the “band” or exclusive group of persons of the same age;
- a desire to face reality (expressed through adventure and the band);
- a demand for consistency, justice and absolute loyalty;
- a need and search for models (with a tendency to be indiscriminate);
- an affective need, different from the preceding, to seek the opposite sex, but also shifting between love and hate;
- on a religious level, acceptance of a Christ who is real (historical and personal, not doctrinal), with whom the boys want to “do something” and the girls want to “share his company.”

The responses are given in the course of a gradual journey, marked by stages.

The need for adventure is met by:

- appropriate surroundings;
- ventures planned and carried out.

The need to deal with persons and things is met by:

- what we have just said above;
- the law and the promise;
- the Heralds and their groups;
- the good deed.

The affective need and sexual impulses are met by:

- coeducation;
- a spirit of service;
- a clear and positive moral catechesis.

The need for a band or exclusive group is met by the Heralds.

9.2.1. Pedagogy

The Herald to whom we devote our service has, as we have seen, needs to which we must give formative answers. The pedagogical method adopted is offered as a life experience that is faithful to the individual's personality and clearly inspired by the Franciscan spirit of fraternity, simplicity, commitment strongly motivated by the following of Christ, and love for creation.

The basic outline of the method is this:

- **Means of formation:** instruments of growth through the exercise of commitment (law and promise), availability (the good deed), responsibility (teams, spelling out services within the group), poverty (the use of things without enslavement to them, a sense of indebtedness to God's love), humility in commitment, also in awareness of one's own weakness (the motto).

- **Agents of formation:** persons and events which, by using the means of formation, promote the individual's growth. These include the animator, who is called and regarded primarily as an "elder brother," the Heralds' fraternity (the group and its organization, as a place of formative experience), the surroundings (psychological place of fraternity, creativity and adventure), the journey (means of formation considered in the dynamic of activities led by the animator and experienced by the boys or girls as agents), coeducation (boys and girls sharing the formative journey and fostering enriching relationships).

The boy or girl needs a norm beyond self and others to identify with as an ideal, a consistent line, a relationship of equality with others and reassurance.

The law of the Heralds is this:

1. I am on the way to discovering God my Father with the help of Jesus Christ, who reveals the Father to me in his Gospel.
2. I want to accept and use all the gifts that God, the Lord of my life, gives me (Word, sacraments, prayer; relations with others, with creation, with God).
3. I commit myself completely to overcoming my selfishness and being simple and humble, generous with others and accepting of them, respecting my home which is creation and my body which God has given me.
4. I seek every day to do something good for others and with others, even if they do not ask me.
5. I am always loyal and truthful with myself and with everyone so as to merit their trust.

The boys or girls seek a norm to appeal to in order to validate their rights. This is a very limited and utilitarian concept of law from which we must free them so that they can acquire a norm and plan of life, a moral norm to guide the growth in relationships that every person has with God and neighbor, even when the person rejects those relationships. Since it is a question of a norm and plan, what is preferred is a positive formulation based on the commitment.

The animator, especially in one-to-one conversations with Heralds, must stress this commitment, going over again, with examples, the gospel commandment of love, in order to animate them, especially in the areas of greater need. But discussion of the law must also constantly take place with the whole group, as a purposeful stimulus and a reference point for checking.

Obviously this law does not take the place of the Ten Commandments, much less the gospel Commandment. It is intended to be an expression of both that reaches the Heralds in their psychological and moral life. On the other hand, it is not an exhaustive expression, but it highlights those areas in which the boy or girl needs more prodding.

9.2.2. The promise

The promise is a commitment to live the law and thus becomes the will to carry it out. Essentially, it is a commitment to allow oneself to be led along the paths of Francis of Assisi's spiritual experience.

It is to be made after a suitable period of preparation, during which the promise must be explained, so that the Herald has a first clear sense of what the commitment involves. It must be adapted to the age of the boy or girl, but it must be real. Possibly, the promise should be made no later than a month after the candidate has been accepted. If the candidate comes from the Little Heralds, the time can be shortened by half.

The content of the promise expresses a commitment to observe the law of the Heralds and strongly emphasizes Christ, the Lord of life and creation, and availability to others. The promise should be personalized as to the preparation and date. In any case it is a major event for the whole group.

The love Christ showed us and to which we want to introduce the Heralds has the spirit of service as its essential component. This service can consist of great deeds, but it consists primarily of everyday things: little acts of kindness, expressions of concern, random acts of helpfulness, etc. Through these small things they can develop an attitude of availability to their brothers and sisters. We cannot ask more of a boy or girl than this as a beginning. But it will contribute to creating a new mentality, that of Christ. This gesture is called in Italian *Pace e Bene* because it is a gesture of peace and a gift of goodness, and because this is how the Franciscan greeting and best wishes takes on flesh. The Heralds must be constantly challenged along these lines, with imagination and creativity.

The Heralds also have their own motto, a word that sums up their commitment. They can use it in a thousand ways: as a shout to begin their games, as a motto to display on their notebooks and drawing pads, as a word of recognition among themselves etc. It is "Always Better!" It indicates a commitment not to grow tired of improving and growing. It is in line with the reference in Luke's Gospel to Jesus, who "advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and men" (Lk 2:52).

9.2.3. Exercise of responsibility

Formation to conscious, motivated, constructive and competent sharing, to promotion of one's duties towards God, neighbor and creation, takes place through everyday things and through experiences commensurate with the person's intellectual and psychological abilities.

The group of Heralds must make this a living experience in order to introduce the boy or girl to a sense of responsibility. Many are the duties they can perform within the group, so that it might be like a body with many members, each having its own specific function. At this age it is a good idea to have assignments that are permanent, or at least kept for a longer period of time, for example a month.

Besides observance of the law, the completion of assigned tasks must also be considered when checking on the group. Not in order to put the group on trial, but to identify the kinds of help to be given to those in difficulty and to modify the task in order to make it more useful and more effectively doable. Here, even more than with the group of Little Heralds, the animator must not function as a magician who comes to the rescue at the last minute. The discomforts arising from someone's lack of responsibility must be borne patiently and quietly, remedying them if possible, but without the extraordinary interventions available only to adults. One must get used to living with the consequences of one's actions, without getting angry. These consequences are already a silent and quiet punishment for pride and fickleness.

9.2.4. Poverty

What has already been said above concerning the Little Heralds also holds for the Heralds.

9.2.5. Relations with others

Relations with others - with individuals, but especially with other groups and institutions - should be regarded as important moments from a formational point of view. Therefore they should be suitably prepared for, either specifically, one at a time, or in general, so that they might be occasions for examination and dialogue.

CHAPTER VI

COLLABORATION OF THE OFS WITH OTHER GROUPS

1. Introduction

In view of the fact that many people see Saint Francis of Assisi as God's gift not only to the Roman Catholic Church, but to all people of good will, and recognizing that many people, even outside the Catholic Church, feel called in various ways to associate their lives with that of Saint Francis without being able to enter the Secular Franciscan Order, the *General Constitutions* of the OFS, Art. 103, leave open the possibility of various forms of collaboration and exchange between OFS fraternities and persons who are supportive but cannot or do not wish to belong. In practice, the situations in which this might be the case are:

- Associate members of a fraternity;
- Friends of Saint Francis;
- Members of other ecclesial groups or movements.

2. Associate members of a fraternity

The reasons preventing full membership may be various. In some cases the person is not a Catholic, in others he or she may for personal reasons be unable or unwilling to meet the requirements for full membership.

Since the status of persons who wish only to participate in the life of the fraternity, without juridical ties to the Order, is different from that of the professed members, the *General Constitutions*, Art. 53.5, say: "The national statutes can indicate special forms of association with the fraternity, for those who, without becoming a member of the OFS, want to participate in its life and activities." On the one hand, it is important to ensure that the Franciscan charism is as open as possible to all; on the other hand, it is also important to ensure the identity of the OFS as an Order within the Catholic Church, consisting of people who have professed a Rule of Life, and whose fraternities are juridical persons under the Code of Canon Law.

For an OFS fraternity to accommodate those who wish only to share in its life and activity, the fraternity itself must be well established, led by an elected council and regularly accompanied by a spiritual assistant. Moreover, to ensure the identity of the fraternity, the number of simple associates in the fraternity must remain low. The national statutes should give directions for this, establishing the maximum number admissible for each fraternity.

2.1. Commitment

For this form of membership, a procedure similar to that for admission of candidates to ordinary membership must be followed. In dialogue with the candidate, the local minister (or the formation director, or whoever has the responsibility in the local situation) must carefully ascertain if the person is prepared to make a serious commitment. As with ordinary membership, the candidate's motivation must be examined, as well as his or her readiness to undergo formation, to attend meetings regularly, and in general to participate in the life of the fraternity. As in the case of ordinary members, the local fraternity council decides on the acceptance or non-acceptance of candidates for associate membership. After completion of the formation process, the associate member's position is formalized publicly before the OFS fraternity.

Associate members have the same rights and duties, including those of a financial nature, as ordinary members, except that they do not enjoy active or passive voice in elections. The national statutes can provide for associate members to have their own observers on the OFS councils.

2.2. Catholic associate members

In the case of a Catholic who wishes associate membership, the reasons for choosing this type of commitment rather than membership through profession must be examined. If in the particular case there are factors in the candidate's personal life that make profession impossible, or if the candidate is prevented by psychological, cultural or other barriers from making profession in the OFS, associate membership may be granted. If the candidate is able to undergo formation and live the life of the fraternity in a normal manner, associate membership may be granted. Otherwise, associate membership cannot be granted. Whatever the impediments to full membership may be, each case should be studied and decided on its own merits.

2.3. Associate members from other Christian confessions

While this form of membership and participation in the life and activities of the fraternity opens up great possibilities for ecumenism, it is important that both the ordinary members and the associate members have a true ecumenical understanding of the situation. The associate members are not to be regarded as prospective converts, but in the case of Christians from other denominations as representatives of their own ecclesial community. The associate members must not consider an OFS fraternity as a place for non-committed involvement with the Catholic faith. Just as the ordinary members, the associate members must continue to deepen their understanding of their own faith. Only in this way can all members develop an ecumenical spirit that is both enlightened and responsible. The presence of associate members in a fraternity must challenge all members to a deeper ecumenical understanding, which involves respect both for one's own Church and that of others. For this reason also, associate members should not be accepted in a Roman Catholic OFS fraternity if there is a Franciscan fraternity of lay people of their own denomination within a reasonable distance.

All members must respect the current rules on eucharistic sharing between the Catholic Church and other Christian churches. The present impossibility of eucharistic sharing was reaffirmed by the Holy Father in the Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, where he said: "The path towards full unity can only be undertaken in truth. In this area, the prohibitions of Church law leave no room for uncertainty, in fidelity to the moral norm laid down by the Second Vatican Council" (no. 44).

2.4. Associate members from other religions

There could be special circumstances where a non-Christian could be an associate member of the OFS. However, this associate membership must in no way obscure the Christian, Catholic and Franciscan nature of the fraternity.

3. Friends of Saint Francis (FOSF)

Groups that call themselves "Friends of Saint Francis" or "Companions of Saint Francis," or by other names, already exist in some countries, especially in those where English or French is spoken. Often, these groups have sprung up spontaneously, without any reference to the Secular Franciscan Order or to any Order of Friars, and even without reference to the Catholic Church. Faced with these groups, the Secular Franciscan Order can decide not to get involved at all, or it can decide to reach out to them, in the spirit of Article 45 of the *General Constitutions*, which speaks

about promotion of vocations to the OFS. A local OFS fraternity could decide to take an apostolic initiative by leading its own group of Friends of Saint Francis. In view of this possibility, the following guidelines are offered as suggestions.

3.1. Membership

Anyone may apply to belong to the Friends of Saint Francis (FOSF), including the very young and the elderly, Catholics, Christians and non-Christians. The only qualifications required are that the member has a personal devotion to Saint Francis of Assisi, or at least wants to know about him. Admission must be approved by the team, as described in the next section. Members have no obligations or commitments besides those of their state in life, unless they voluntarily assume a responsibility in the FOSF group. Members are not admitted to meetings of the OFS or of the Franciscan Youth or of the Franciscan Children, unless by invitation on a particular occasion.

Adult Catholics should be informed about the OFS. If it appears that they might be suitable members, they should be encouraged to join a local fraternity. In places where the Franciscan Youth Movement and/or the Franciscan Children exist or can be organized, Catholic youth and children should be referred to those fraternities rather than to the Friends of Saint Francis.

3.2. Responsibility of the OFS

The leader of the FOSF group is a professed Secular Franciscan, who is either an elected member of the council of the local OFS fraternity or is appointed by the council (in which case he or she has no vote in the council). The leader is the fraternal animator of the FOSF group. If problems of a theological, spiritual or pastoral nature arise, the leader seeks to resolve them with the help of the spiritual assistant of the local OFS fraternity. The leader forms a team of helpers who are not necessarily Franciscans or Catholics or Christians. The team members, if they are not elected by the FOSF group, are to be approved by the council of the local OFS fraternity.

The team of helpers assumes the responsibility of deciding on the suitability of persons wishing to join the FOSF group, of admitting them, and of organizing the regular meetings of the FOSF.

3.3. Meetings of the FOSF

The meeting caters to the particular needs of the FOSF group, which may consist of young people only or adults only or a mixture of both. The meeting opens and closes with a prayer of Saint Francis. In this way, its Franciscan inspiration is affirmed and recognized. The meeting includes an element of formation at the human or Christian or Franciscan level, depending on the needs of the members.

The meeting also includes an element of building fraternity among the members by their getting to know one another and sharing interests. The members are encouraged to be actively involved in service to their civil society and to the faith-community to which they belong.

An integral part of the meeting is time for recreation, for chatting and sharing some refreshment before leaving for home.

3.4. Application to join the OFS or YouFra or the Franciscan Children

Adult members of the FOSF who are practicing Catholics and who are attracted to the local Secular Franciscan Fraternity may apply to the fraternity council for admission. Likewise, young

people or children who are practicing Catholics may ask to join the Franciscan Youth or the Franciscan Children, where these movements exist or can be organized.

Upon admission, they no longer belong to the FOSF as members, but they enter the period of initiation and proceed through initial formation to their commitment as Secular Franciscans, Franciscan Youth or Franciscan Children.

4. Members of other groups or ecclesial movements

Since its beginning, the Franciscan Movement has accepted the Word of God, lived in fraternity, as its plan of life. Thus, through a gospel life, it has influenced the renewal of the Church and cooperated in its mission in the world. But the Holy Spirit has continued and continues to enrich the Church. For several decades there have been present in the Church new charisms and new movements, the latest gifts of the Holy Spirit for our time. Pope John Paul II recalled this when he said: “One of the gifts of the Spirit in our time is the flowering of ecclesial movements, which since the beginning of my pontificate I have continued to point to as a reason for hope for the Church and for humankind.”⁵⁹³

Seeing the beauty and diversity of the charisms that the Spirit of the Lord awakens in the Church, we feel the need for greater communion among the various charisms. It is well, however, to stress that “communion” should not be confused with “double membership.” In other words, the individual members must remain faithful to their membership in the OFS. In general they should avoid joining a number of lay groups, each of which has its own charism and specific purposes. Within the movements, the experience of community life is very deep, and their proposal embraces every Christian dimension, so that membership in the OFS would end up devoid of content.

The invitation to communion concerns the local fraternity as a whole, which must strive to bear witness, together with the other groups, that they form one People of God. Thus it is very important to know and love each other, to be familiar with other experiences and above all, in our specifically Franciscan formation, make more and more room for the Holy Spirit, who will help us to understand and accept his gifts and his projects.

To avoid any risk of confusion and misdirection, it is necessary that fraternities, in identifying the movements and communities with which to collaborate, keep in mind the criteria for discerning lay groups. These are also called the “criteria of ecclesiality” and were spelled out by John Paul II in his Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church and in the world:

- The primacy given to the call of every Christian to holiness, as it is manifested “in the fruits of grace which the spirit produces in the faithful”⁵⁹⁴ and in a growth towards the fullness of Christian life and the perfection of charity.⁵⁹⁵
- The responsibility of professing the Catholic faith, embracing and proclaiming the truth about Christ, the Church and humanity, in obedience to the Church’s magisterium, as the Church interprets it. For this reason every association of the lay faithful must be a forum where the faith is proclaimed as well as taught in its total content.
- The witness to a strong and authentic communion in filial relationship to the Pope, in total adherence to the belief that he is the perpetual and visible center of unity of the universal

⁵⁹³ Homily for the Vigil of Pentecost, *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II*, XIX, 1 (1996), 1373.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. LG, 39.

⁵⁹⁵ *Ibidem*, 40

Church,⁵⁹⁶ and with the local bishop, “the visible principle and foundation of unity”⁵⁹⁷ in the particular Church, and in “mutual esteem for all forms of the Church’s apostolate.”⁵⁹⁸

- Conformity to and participation in the Church’s apostolic goals, that is, “the evangelization and sanctification of humanity and the Christian formation of people's conscience, so as to enable them to infuse the spirit of the Gospel into the various communities and spheres of life.”⁵⁹⁹

- A commitment to a presence in human society, which in light of the Church’s social doctrine, places it at the service of the total dignity of the person.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibidem*, 23.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹⁸ Cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 23

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

CHAPTER VII

**THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER
AND
STATUTES FOR SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE
TO THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

**The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order
is Approved and Confirmed
Pope Paul VI**

In perpetual remembrance - The Seraphic Patriarch Saint Francis of Assisi, during his life and even after his beautiful death, not only attracted many to serve God in the religious family founded by him but also drew numerous members of the laity to enter his communities while remaining in the world as far as possible. Moreover, to use the words of our predecessor Pius IX: "it seems . . . that there was never anyone in whom there shone forth more vividly and who resembled more the image of Jesus Christ and the evangelical form of life than Francis. Accordingly he who was called the *Herald of the Great King*, was rightly hailed as *Another Christ* for he presented himself to his contemporaries and to future ages as Christ returned to life. Consequently, he still lives as such in the eyes of men and will continue to live for all ages to come." (Encycl. *Rite Expiatis*, April 30, 1926: AAS, 18, 1936, p. 154). We are happy that the "Franciscan Charism" today is still a force for the good of the Church and the human community, despite the infiltration of doctrines and tendencies that alienate people from God and from the supernatural. With praiseworthy initiative and with common accord the four Franciscan families have striven for ten years to prepare a new Rule for the Franciscan Third Order Secular, or as it is now called, the Secular Franciscan Order. This was necessary because of the changed conditions of the times and because of the teaching and encouragement given them by the Second Vatican Council. Therefore, our dearly beloved Sons, the four Ministers General of the Franciscan Order, have requested that we approve the Rule presented to us. Following the example of some of our predecessors, the latest being Pope Leo XIII, we have willingly decided to grant their request. In this way, we nurture the hope that the form of life preached by that admirable man of Assisi will gain a new impetus and will flourish vigorously. Having consulted with the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, which has diligently examined and carefully evaluated the text, we approve and confirm with our apostolic authority and sanction the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order, provided that it agrees with the copy in the archives of the Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes, beginning with the words "The Franciscan Family" and ending with "according to the norms of the Constitutions." By this Letter and our apostolic authority, we abrogate the previous Rule of what was formerly called the Franciscan Third Order. Finally we decree that this letter remain in effect now and in the future, regardless of anything contrary.

Given at Rome at St. Peter's, under the ring of the Fisherman, on June 24, 1978, the 16th year of our pontificate.

John Cardinal Villot
Secretary of State.

Prologue: Exhortation of St. Francis to the Brothers and Sisters of Penance

In the name of the Lord!

Chapter One

Concerning Those Who Do Penance

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (cf. *Mk.* 12,30), and love their neighbors as themselves (cf. *Mt.* 22,39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance.

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them” (cf. *Is.* 11,2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (cf. *Jn.* 14,23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (cf. *Mt.* 5,45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Mt.* 12,50).

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to him when we fulfil “the will of the Father who is in heaven” (*Mt.* 12,50).

We are mothers, when we carry him in our heart and body (cf. *I Cor.* 6,20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give light to others by example (cf. *Mt.* 5,15).

Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and holy Father in heaven! Oh (how glorious it is) to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete.

Oh, (how glorious it is) to have such a Brother and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, loveable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (cf. *Jn.* 10,15) and prayed to the Father saying:

"Oh holy Father, protect them with your name (cf. *Jn.* 17,11) whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours and you gave them to me (*Jn.* 17,6). I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you, they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these I pray, not for the world (cf. *Jn.* 17,9). Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (cf. *Jn.* 17,20) that they may be holy by being one as we are (cf. *Jn.* 17,11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom (cf. *Jn.* 17,24; *Mt.* 20,21)."

Chapter Two

Concerning Those Who Do Not Do Penance

But all those men and women who are not doing penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and live in vices and sin and yield to evil concupiscence and to the wicked desires of the flesh, and do not observe what they have promised to the Lord, and are slaves to the world, in their bodies, by carnal desires and the anxieties and cares of this life (cf. *Jn.* 8,41); slaves of the devil whose sons they are and whose works they do.

These are blind, because they do not see the true light, our Lord Jesus Christ; they do not have spiritual wisdom because they do not have the Son of God who is the true wisdom of the Father. Concerning them, it is said, “Their skill was swallowed up” (*Ps.* 107,27) and “cursed are those who turn away from your commands” (*Ps.* 119,21). They see and acknowledge, they know and do bad things and knowingly destroy their own souls.

See, you who are blind, deceived by your enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, for it is pleasant to the body to commit sin and it is bitter to make it serve God because all vices and sins

come out and “proceed from the heart of man” as the Lord says in the Gospel (cf. *Mk.* 7,21). And you have nothing in this world and in the next, and you thought you would possess the vanities of this world for a long time.

But you have been deceived, for the day and the hour will come to which you give no thought and which you do not know and of which you are ignorant. The body grows infirm, death approaches, and so it dies a bitter death, and no matter where or when or how man dies, in the guilt of sin, without penance or satisfaction, though he can make satisfaction but does not do it;

The devil snatches the soul from his body with such anguish and tribulation that no one can know it except he who endures it, and all the talents and power and “knowledge and wisdom” (2 *Chr.* 1,12) which they thought they had will be taken away from them (cf. *Lk.* 8,18; *Mk.* 4,25), and they leave their goods to relatives and friends who take and divide them and say afterwards, “Cursed be his soul because he could have given us more, he could have acquired more than he did.” The worms eat up the body and so they have lost body and soul during this short earthly life and will go into the inferno where they will suffer torture without end.

All those into whose hands this letter shall have come we ask in the charity that is God (cf. *Jn.* 4,16) to accept kindly and with divine love the fragrant words of our Lord Jesus Christ quoted above. And let those who do not know how to read have them read to them.

And may they keep them in their mind and carry them out, in a holy manner to the end, because they are “spirit and life” (*Jn.* 6,64).

And those who will not do this will have to render “an account on the day of judgement” (cf. *Mt.* 12,36) before the tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *Rom.* 14,10).

Translated by Marion A. Habig, OFM

Chapter One

The Secular Franciscan Order⁶⁰⁰

1. The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church⁶⁰¹, 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 Assisi⁶⁰².

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 Church⁶⁰³.

2. The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of St. Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church⁶⁰⁴.

3. The present rule, succeeding *Memoriale Propositi* (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

⁶⁰⁰ Also known as the Secular Franciscan Fraternity or, its earlier designation, the Franciscan Third Order, with the initials T.O.F.

⁶⁰¹ Vatican II. Const. on the Church, 43

⁶⁰² Pius XII, Discourse to the Tertiaries, 1/7/1956

⁶⁰³ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

⁶⁰⁴ Can. 702,1 [314]

Chapter Two

The Way of Life

4. The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people⁶⁰⁵.

Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly⁶⁰⁶.

Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel⁶⁰⁷.

5. Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said "I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood", should be the inspiration and pattern of their eucharistic life.

6. They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity⁶⁰⁸.

7. United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance"⁶⁰⁹, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls "conversion". Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily⁶¹⁰.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace⁶¹¹.

8. As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do⁶¹².

Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

9. The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family⁶¹³. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently⁶¹⁴.

⁶⁰⁵ *1 Celano* 18,115

⁶⁰⁶ *Jn.* 3,16; 14,6

⁶⁰⁷ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30

⁶⁰⁸ Paul VI, Discourse to the Tertiaries, 19/5/1971

⁶⁰⁹ First Rule – T.O.F.

⁶¹⁰ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 8; Decree on Ecumenism, 4; Const. Ap. "Paenitemini", preamble

⁶¹¹ Vatican II, Decree on Priestly Ministry, 18

⁶¹² Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

⁶¹³ *2 Celano*, 198

⁶¹⁴ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 67; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 4

10. Uniting themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfil the duties proper to their various circumstances of life⁶¹⁵. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions⁶¹⁶.

11. Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life⁶¹⁷, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.

Thus, in the spirit of “the Beatitudes”, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power⁶¹⁸.

12. Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters⁶¹⁹.

13. As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters⁶²⁰, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ⁶²¹. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ⁶²².

14. Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone “who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself,” let them exercise their responsibilities competently in Christian spirit of service⁶²³.

15. Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith⁶²⁴.

16. Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community⁶²⁵.

17. In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ⁶²⁶.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child⁶²⁷.

⁶¹⁵ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41

⁶¹⁶ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 42

⁶¹⁷ First Letter of St. Francis, 5

⁶¹⁸ *Rom.* 8,17; Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 7

⁶¹⁹ Admonitions of St. Francis, 16; First Letter, 70

⁶²⁰ *Rom.* 8,29

⁶²¹ 2 *Celano* 85; First Letter, 26; First Rule, 7,13

⁶²² First Rule, 9,3; *Mt.* 25,40

⁶²³ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 31; Const. Church in the Modern World, 93

⁶²⁴ Vatican II, Decree on Lay Apostolate, 14

⁶²⁵ Vatican II, Church in the Modern World, 67; First Rule 7,4; Second Rule, 5,1

⁶²⁶ Rule of Leo XIII, II,8

⁶²⁷ Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30

18. Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High”⁶²⁸, and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

19. Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon⁶²⁹.

Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others⁶³⁰. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father⁶³¹.

Chapter III

Life In Fraternity

20. The Secular Franciscan Order is divided into fraternities of various levels — local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own moral personality in the Church⁶³². These various fraternities are co-ordinated and united according to the norm of this rule and of the constitutions.

21. On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president) who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions⁶³³.

Their service, which lasts for a definite period, is marked by a ready and willing spirit and is a duty of responsibility to each member and to the community.

Within themselves the fraternities are structured in different ways according to the norm of the constitutions, according to the various needs of their members and their regions, and under the guidance of their respective council.

22. The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members⁶³⁴.

23. Requests for admission to the Secular Franciscan Order must be presented to the local fraternity, whose council decides upon the acceptance of new brothers and sisters⁶³⁵.

Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule⁶³⁶. The entire community is engaged in this process of growth by its own manner of living. The age for profession and the distinctive Franciscan sign are regulated by the statutes⁶³⁷. Profession by its nature is a permanent commitment⁶³⁸.

Members who find themselves in particular difficulties should discuss their problems with the council in fraternal dialogue. Withdrawal or permanent dismissal from the Order, if necessary, is an act of the fraternity council according to the norm of the constitutions⁶³⁹.

⁶²⁸ *1 Celano* 80

⁶²⁹ Rule of Leo XIII, II,9; Legend of the Three Companions 14,58

⁶³⁰ Admonitions of St. Francis, 21; First Rule, 7,15

⁶³¹ Vatican II, Const. on Church in Modern World, 78

⁶³² Can. 687 [309]

⁶³³ Can. 697 [309]

⁶³⁴ Pius XII, Discourse to the Tertiaries 1/7/1956

⁶³⁵ Can 694 [307]

⁶³⁶ First Rule of T.O.F., 29-30

⁶³⁷ *1 Celano* 22

⁶³⁸ First Rule of T.O.F., 31

⁶³⁹ Canon 696 [308]

24. To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity⁶⁴⁰. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them⁶⁴¹.

25. 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 councils⁶⁴².

26. 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 or president, 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 constitutions⁶⁴³.

“And may whoever observes all this be filled in heaven with the blessing of the most high Father, and on earth with that of his beloved Son, together with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.”

(Blessing of St. Francis – Testament)

⁶⁴⁰ Canon 697 [309]

⁶⁴¹ First Rule of T.O.F., 23

⁶⁴² First Rule of T.O.F., 20

⁶⁴³ Second Rule of T.O.F., c. 16

STATUTES FOR SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE TO THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

CONFERENCE OF THE MINISTERS GENERAL OF THE FRANCISCAN FIRST ORDER AND TOR

Dearest brother Ministers Provincial and Custodes,

May the Lord give you peace!

With this letter, the Conference of Minister Generals of the First Order and the TOR has wanted to reach out to all of you in order to express our gratitude for the generous service of pastoral and spiritual care that you offer in the area of your respective jurisdictions. We especially appreciate your service to the fraternities of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) and the Franciscan Youth (YouFra) dispersed throughout the world. Such assistance, which is the most important service entrusted to us by the Church with regard to the secular Franciscans, has been in existence for eight centuries now and it manifests itself as a true sign of our extraordinary sense of family, in the context of our life-giving reciprocal communion. This communion among Franciscan Orders should be always stronger, more appealing and prophetic within our common mission in the Church and society.

In this year, as we celebrate the VIII Centennial of the birth of our charism, our hearts are filled with gratitude and marvelous memories of the already historic Chapter of Mats – celebrated as Franciscan Family in Assisi last April. We want to encourage you to continue accompanying the OFS and YouFra fraternities with a new enthusiasm and a new impetus. To this end we also recall the invitation of our Holy Father Benedict XVI at Castel Gandolfo, in the unforgettable encounter at the end of the aforementioned Chapter. On that occasion he encouraged us, with paternal love, to go out, with confidence and courage, to proclaim Christ's Gospel and its beauty to all, and to set out again to repair today the Lord's house, the Church, as Francis did.

Aware of our common calling and mission, we wish therefore to make together the charism of our common Seraphic Father present in the life and mission of the Church, in various ways and forms, yet in life-giving reciprocal communion, which is characteristic of our Order from the earliest days. In fact, from the beginning of the charism, the bonds between Friars Minor and secular penitents who wished to follow a way of life similar to that of Francis and his friars were very much alive and fraternal. From their testimony and from the itinerant preaching, other forms of Franciscan life were born around the friars – either active or eremitic and contemplative – that brought together religious, lay people and clerics in a new spiritual family, the Franciscan family.

Among the diverse ways of life that still exist in the Franciscan Family, that of 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 (the *altius moderamem*, of which can. 303 CCL speaks), 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. OFS Const 85.1-2).

This is where our office and our responsibility derive from, since we are called, as major Superiors, to exercise this office personally or through our delegates, the spiritual Assistants, to guarantee pastoral and spiritual care to every single fraternity.

Even today, after 31 years since the approval of the latest Rule by Pope Paul VI, and with the General Constitutions approved in October 2000 by the CIVCSVA, the OFS and YouFra are in need of spiritual and pastoral assistance which help them in their journey of faith and of holiness, in their specific mission and to acquire a sound Christian and Franciscan formation.

For this reason, and as a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, upon request of the Councils at the various levels, we Major Superiors are called to appoint spiritual Assistants, selecting them with careful discernment so that they may be suitable for this service. Besides this, we should foster their specific formation so that they may also be prepared to offer an authentic spiritual assistance, which is well grounded in Franciscan spirituality. In this way, they can effectively support seculars who are responsible for formation and their respective Councils in the field of initial and ongoing formation of secular Franciscans. This is also valid for all other persons which we can appoint as spiritual Assistants, in cases where no friars are available, according to the new OFS General Constitutions (art. 89). Once they are appointed, spiritual Assistants should not be left on their own, but rather supported and encouraged by their community and their major Superior, with a true sense of family, so that they may work with our secular brothers and sisters with enthusiasm and love. Likewise, it is absolutely necessary to make sure that fraternities are not deprived of this essential guide and that, at the same time, the indisposition of Franciscan friars or sisters does not result in the disappearance of any secular fraternity.

A subject which we consider equally important is collegiality in the service of spiritual assistance to the OFS-YouFra fraternities at the levels above the local Fraternity. This characteristic offers, first of all to us friars, a valuable occasion to collaborate among ourselves in the field of assistance and, at the same time, it becomes a concrete sign of the fraternal affection which the First Order and the TOR foster for the OFS and YouFra.

Certainly a key instrument that helps us to better understand and carry out this service well are the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS*, approved by our Conference in March 2002. After seven years since their approval, the Conference of General Assistants has informed us that the Statutes have been received very well throughout the world and have produced indeed abundant fruit in the service of the OFS and YouFra.

And so now, based on their experience, the General Assistants have now presented to us new changes to some articles of the Statutes for our approval. In their opinion these changes can help to better clarify the service of spiritual assistance. After a careful examination, we have approved them and we now send them to you as an attachment to this letter.

To conclude this letter we want to thank you and all spiritual Assistants again for your service and to encourage you even more in assisting, promoting and taking care of the OFS and YouFra fraternities throughout the world, with interest and special affection, as we remind you of the words addressed by Encarnacion del Pozo, OFS Minister General, to the friars present at the International Chapter of Mats (Assisi, April 16, 2009): “Pastoral care and spiritual assistance to the OFS should flow from love and fidelity to one’s vocation and from the desire to share it, rather than from the juridical norm, respecting the nature of the secular fraternity and giving preference to the testimony of Franciscan life and especially to fraternal presence”.

We thank the Lord for each one of our brothers and sisters of the OFS and YouFra who, with love and courage, follow in the footprints of our seraphic father St. Francis in the joys and sufferings of

this world, promoting Franciscan spirituality in the spheres of family life, work, culture, politics, sports and in many other areas of ecclesial and social life.

Let us always remain united in the journey and in bearing witness, together with the OFS and YouFra, in the ways of the Lord, and in the realities where men and women of our time live.

May the Lord be with us through his Spirit so that we may be faithful to our calling and our mission.

Rome, October 4, 2009.

Fr. José Rodríguez Carballo, OFM
Minister General

Fr. Marco Tasca, OFMConv.
Minister General

Fr. Mauro Jöhri, OFMConv.
Minister General

Fr. Michael Higgins, TOR
Minister General

CONFERENCE OF GENERAL MINISTERS
OF THE FRANCISCAN FIRST ORDER AND THE TOR

Rome, March 28, 2002

Dear Br. Valentín,

In a letter of last February 13, in the name of the Conference of General Assistants of the Secular Franciscan Order, you sent us the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order*, revised after a careful and thorough study and based on the General Constitutions of the OFS, definitively approved on December 8, 2000 by the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

It is my pleasure to inform you that our Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR, at its meeting of March 25, 2002, **approved these Statutes** which, by the act of approval, enter immediately into force, substituting the preceding ones approved in 1992.

The general Ministers entrust to the Conference of General Assistants the task making these new Statutes known to all brothers of the Franciscan First Order and the TOR and to foster its understanding and study. This instrument can thus serve as a basis for our fraternal service to the OFS and guide us all in our relations with the OFS according to our own vocation and the specific nature of the OFS itself.

On this occasion, also in name of the other general Ministers, I thank you and the other general Assistants of the OFS for your generous and constant service.

Wishing you and the other Assistants a Happy Easter,

Your Brother,

Fr. Joachim Giermek OFMConv
General Minister
President

C.c.: Emanuela De Nunzio

Fr. VALENTÍN REDONDO, OFMConv.
President of the Conference of General Assistants, Rome

**STATUTES FOR SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE
TO THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

Title I: General Principles

Art. 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 centuries⁶⁴⁴.
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 society⁶⁴⁵.
3. Therefore, as a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, religious superiors must assure spiritual assistance to all the fraternities of the OFS⁶⁴⁶.

Art. 2

1. The spiritual and pastoral care is provided as a two-fold service:
 - a) the fraternal office of the *altius moderamen* on the part of the major Superiors⁶⁴⁷;
 - 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 union with the Franciscan family⁶⁴⁸.
3. 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 on-going formation of secular Franciscans and to express the fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS⁶⁴⁹.

Art. 3

1. This two-fold service completes but does not substitute for the secular councils and ministers whose responsibility it is to guide, coordinate, and animate the fraternities at the various levels⁶⁵⁰.
2. It is exercised according to these present Statutes, common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap, TOR) and must be performed collegially at all levels above the local level⁶⁵¹.

Art. 4

1. The purpose of the present Statutes is to define, in a unified and concrete way, the service of the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, taking into account the unity of that same Order.
2. These Statutes are approved by the Conference of General Ministers. The Conference has the right of modification and authentic interpretation.
3. Those provisions which do not agree with the present Statutes are abrogated.

⁶⁴⁴ See *OFS Const* 85.1: "From Franciscan history and from the Constitutions of the First Order and the TOR, it is clearly 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. See *Constitutions OFM*, 60; *Constitutions OFM Conv.*, 116; *Constitutions OFM Cap.*, 95; *Constitutions TOR*, 157; *Rule of the Third Order of Pope Leo XIII*, 3,3; *Rule approved by Paul VI*, 26.

⁶⁴⁵ see *OFS Rule* 1

⁶⁴⁶ see *OFS Const* 89.1

⁶⁴⁷ see *CCL* 303

⁶⁴⁸ *OFS Const* 85.2

⁶⁴⁹ see *OFS Const* 89.3; 90.1

⁶⁵⁰ see *OFS Const* 86.2

⁶⁵¹ see *OFS Const* 87.1; 88.5; 90.3

Title II: The Role of the Major Superiors

a. General Principles

Art. 5

1. The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, is the duty above all of their general and provincial ministers⁶⁵².
2. They exercise their office through:
 - a) the establishment of local fraternities;
 - b) pastoral visits;
 - c) spiritual assistance.They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate⁶⁵³.
3. 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 Assistant⁶⁵⁴.
4. They should also foster the formation and the interest of their own religious in the OFS and ensure a specific preparation for the Assistants so that they will be suitable and well-prepared⁶⁵⁵.
5. Finally, they should approve the internal by-laws of the Conference of the Spiritual Assistants at all levels.

Art. 6

1. The canonical establishment of new fraternities is done at the request of the secular Franciscans concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the OFS council at the higher level, to which the new fraternity will be related according to the national statutes. The written consent of the local Ordinary is necessary for the canonical establishment of a fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the First Order or the TOR⁶⁵⁶.
2. Any transfer of a local fraternity to the pastoral care of another religious Franciscan Order is done according to the procedures established by the national statutes of the OFS⁶⁵⁷.
3. The pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion of the First Order and the TOR with the OFS. It is carried out also in the name of the Church and serves to guarantee fidelity to the Franciscan charism and to foster communion with the Church and with the Franciscan Family⁶⁵⁸.

Art. 7

1. The major Superiors of the First Order and the TOR are to establish together the most adequate means to guarantee spiritual assistance to local fraternities which, because of causes beyond their control, could remain without such assistance⁶⁵⁹.

b. The General Ministers

Art. 8

1. The general Ministers exercise collegially the *altius moderamen* and the pastoral assistance in regard to the OFS as a whole⁶⁶⁰.
2. It belongs specifically to the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR:

⁶⁵² see *OFS Rule 26; OFS Const 85.2*

⁶⁵³ see *OFS Const 86.1*

⁶⁵⁴ see *OFS Const 89.5*

⁶⁵⁵ see *OFS Const 87.3; OFS Rule 26*

⁶⁵⁶ *OFS Const 46.1*

⁶⁵⁷ see *OFS Const 47.2*

⁶⁵⁸ see *OFS Const 95.1 and 3*

⁶⁵⁹ *OFS Const 88.4*

⁶⁶⁰ *OFS Const 87.1*

- a) to conduct relations with the Holy See concerning legislative or liturgical texts requiring the approval of the Holy See;
- b) to visit the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS⁶⁶¹;
- c) to preside over and to confirm the election of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS⁶⁶²;
- d) if the case arises, to accept the resignation of the general Minister of the OFS⁶⁶³.

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. They have the faculty to establish, visit, and meet the 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:
 - a) to appoint the general Assistant of the OFS, who, under the authority of the general Minister, looks after all things regarding service to the OFS⁶⁶⁴;
 - b) if needed, to confirm or to appoint the national Assistants belonging to his own Order.

c. Provincial Ministers

Art. 10

1. The provincial Ministers and the other major Superiors exercise their responsibilities towards the OFS in the territory of their own jurisdiction.
2. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order have jurisdiction in the same territory, they are to establish together the most adequate means for carrying out collegially their mission with respect to the regional and national fraternities of the OFS⁶⁶⁵.
3. They are likewise to jointly draw up procedures for the appointment of the national and regional Assistants and also to establish from which Superiors the national and regional Councils of the OFS should request an Assistant⁶⁶⁶.

Art. 11

1. The provincial Ministers and the other major Superiors assure spiritual assistance to the local fraternities entrusted to their own jurisdiction⁶⁶⁷.
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 Assistants⁶⁶⁸;
 - 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 Youth⁶⁶⁹.

Title III: The Role of the Spiritual Assistants

a. General principles

Art. 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 Youth⁶⁷⁰.

⁶⁶¹ see *OFS Const* 92.2-3

⁶⁶² see *OFS Const* 76.2

⁶⁶³ see *OFS Const* 83.1

⁶⁶⁴ see *OFS Const* 91.2-3

⁶⁶⁵ *OFS Const* 88.5

⁶⁶⁶ see *OFS Const* 91.2

⁶⁶⁷ see *OFS Const* 88.1

⁶⁶⁸ see *OFS Const* 89.2; 91.3

⁶⁶⁹ see *OFS Const* 88.2

⁶⁷⁰ see *OFS Const* 89.2; 96.6

2. In order 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 preferably be a Franciscan religious, a member of the First Order or the TOR⁶⁷¹.
3. 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 vote⁶⁷².

Art. 13

1. The principal task of the assistant is to foster a deeper insight into Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the secular Franciscans⁶⁷³.
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, co-ordination, 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 of the Chapter.

Art. 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 also 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 the unity of the OFS, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church⁶⁷⁴.
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 formation⁶⁷⁵.
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 law⁶⁷⁶. 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 level⁶⁷⁷.
4. It is recommended that the pastoral and fraternal visits be carried out together, with agreement beforehand on the program. The visitor or the visitors will in good time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the council concerned. 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 which has conducted the visit⁶⁷⁸.
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

⁶⁷¹ see *OFS Const* 89.3

⁶⁷² *OFS Const* 90.2; 77.1-2

⁶⁷³ see *OFS Const* 90.1

⁶⁷⁴ see *CCL* 305.1; *OFS Const* 92.1; 95.1

⁶⁷⁵ see *OFS Const* 95

⁶⁷⁶ see *OFS Const* 92.2

⁶⁷⁷ see *OFS Const* 92.3

⁶⁷⁸ see *OFS Const* 93.2 and 4

meeting. Where required, they will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings possibly encountered⁶⁷⁹.

Art. 15

1. The Assistant is appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the council of the fraternity concerned⁶⁸⁰.
2. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment of an Assistant, the norms established jointly by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory should be followed⁶⁸¹.
3. The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve years.
4. When it is not possible to give the fraternity a Spiritual Assistant who is a member of the First Order or the TOR, the competent major Superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:
 - a) religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
 - b) secular Franciscans, cleric or lay, specially prepared for such service;
 - c) other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious⁶⁸².

Art. 16

1. The number of Assistants who are members of the Councils at the various levels shall correspond to the number of Orders which in fact provide assistance to the local fraternities in the sphere of the international, national, or regional fraternity.
2. At the international, national, and regional level, the Assistants, if there are more than one, form a Conference and give their service collegially to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth⁶⁸³.
3. Each Conference of Assistants functions according to its own internal by-laws, approved by their respective major Superiors.
4. The national and regional Statutes of the OFS establish the number of Assistants who will participate at the national or regional Chapter, the way they are selected, and what kind of participation they will have.

b. General Assistants

Art. 17

1. The general Assistants are appointed by their respective general Minister, after consultation with the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS⁶⁸⁴.
2. They give their service to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, form a conference, and collegially see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS as a whole⁶⁸⁵.
3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of general Assistants:
 - 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;

⁶⁷⁹ *OFS Const* 93.3

⁶⁸⁰ see *OFS Const* 91.3

⁶⁸¹ see *OFS Const* 91.2; see *above* art. 10

⁶⁸² *OFS Const* 89.4

⁶⁸³ see *OFS Const* 90.3

⁶⁸⁴ see *OFS Const* 91.3

⁶⁸⁵ see *OFS Const* 90.3

- d) to provide for the pastoral visits of the national Councils of the OFS⁶⁸⁶ and the presence at the national elective Chapters⁶⁸⁷.

Art. 18

1. The general Assistant must keep his general Minister and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth.
2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth, meet the local fraternities assisted by his own Order and keep constant fraternal contacts with the Assistants of his own Order.

c. National Assistants

Art. 19

1. The national Assistants of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the respective national council⁶⁸⁸. 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 followed⁶⁸⁹.
2. They give their service to the national council and see to the spiritual assistance to the national fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a Conference and render their service collegially⁶⁹⁰.
3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of national Assistants, or to the national Assistant if there is only one:
 - a) to collaborate with the national 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 OFS⁶⁹¹ and to ensure a presence at the regional elective Chapters⁶⁹²;
 - 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 in the Franciscan Youth.

Art. 20

1. The national Assistant must keep the major Superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and the Franciscan Youth in the country.
2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and to the 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.

d. Regional Assistants

Art. 21

1. The regional Assistants to the OFS and the Franciscan Youth are appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the respective regional council⁶⁹³. Where more than one major Superior of the same Order is involved in the appointment, the norms established jointly

⁶⁸⁶ see *OFS Const* 92.2

⁶⁸⁷ see *OFS Const* 76.2

⁶⁸⁸ see *OFS Const* 91.2

⁶⁸⁹ see *OFS Const* 91.2

⁶⁹⁰ see *OFS Const* 90.3

⁶⁹¹ see *OFS Const* 93.1-2

⁶⁹² see *OFS Const* 76.2

⁶⁹³ see *OFS Const* 91.2

- by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the regional fraternity shall be followed⁶⁹⁴.
2. They give their service to the regional council and see to the spiritual assistance to the regional fraternity. If they are more than one, they form a conference and render their service collegially⁶⁹⁵.
 3. It is the responsibility of the Conference of regional Assistants, or to the regional Assistant if there is only one:
 - a) to collaborate with the regional 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 OFS⁶⁹⁶ and to ensure a presence at the local elective Chapters⁶⁹⁷;
 - 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 in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth.

Art. 22

1. The regional Assistant must keep the major Superiors and his Order informed on the life and activities of the OFS and of the Franciscan Youth in the region.
2. He shall also deal with matters regarding the service of assistance given by his Order to the OFS and the 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.

e. Local Assistants

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 concerned⁶⁹⁸.
2. The local Assistant fosters communion within 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 or she fosters the active presence of the fraternity in the Church and in society.

Art. 24

1. The local Assistant, together with the Council of the fraternity, is responsible for the formation of the candidates⁶⁹⁹ and expresses his or her assessment of each of the candidates before profession⁷⁰⁰.
2. Together with the Minister, the Assistant discusses with the brothers or sisters in difficulty, who want to retire from the fraternity or who act in serious opposition to the Rule⁷⁰¹.

⁶⁹⁴ see *OFS Const* 91.2

⁶⁹⁵ see *OFS Const* 90.3

⁶⁹⁶ see *OFS Const* 93.1-2

⁶⁹⁷ see *OFS Const* 76.3

⁶⁹⁸ see *OFS Const* 91.3

⁶⁹⁹ *OFS Const* 37.2

⁷⁰⁰ *OFS Const* 41.1

⁷⁰¹ *OFS Const* 56.1-2; 58.1-2

APPENDICES

PREVIOUS RULES OF THE OFS

Memoriale propositi 1221

Here begins the Rule of the Continent Brothers and Sisters
IN THE NAME of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The memorial of what is proposed for the Brothers and Sisters of Penance living in their own homes, begun in the year of our Lord 1221, is as follows.

CHAPTER I DAILY LIFE

1. The men belonging to this brotherhood shall dress in humble, undyed cloth, the price of which is not to exceed six Ravenna soldi an ell, unless for evident and necessary cause a temporary dispensation be given. And breadth and thinness of the cloth are to be considered in said price.
2. They shall wear their outer garments and furred coats without open throat, sewed shut or uncut but certainly laced up, not Open as secular people wear them; and they shall wear their sleeves closed.
3. The sisters in turn shall wear an outer garment and tunic made of cloth of the same price and humble quality; or at least they are to have with the outer garment a white or black underwrap or petticoat, or an ample linen gown without gathers, the price of an ell of which is not to exceed twelve Pisa denars. As to this price, however, and the fur cloaks they wear a dispensation may be given according to the estate of the woman and the custom of the place. They are not to wear silken or dyed veils and ribbons.
4. And both the brothers and the sisters shall have their fur garments of lamb's wool only. They are permitted to have leather purses and belts sewed in simple fashion without silken thread, and no other kind. Also other vain adornments they shall lay aside at the bidding of the Visitor.
5. They are not to go to unseemly parties or to shows or dances. They shall not donate to actors, and shall forbid their household to donate.

CHAPTER II ABSTINENCE

6. All are to abstain from meat save on Sundays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays, except on account of illness or weakness, for three days at blood-letting, in traveling, or on account of a specially high feast intervening, namely, the Nativity for three days, New Years, Epiphany, the Pasch of the Resurrection for three days the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, St John the Baptist, the Assumption of the glorious Virgin Mary, the solemnity of All Saints and of St Martin. On the other days, when there is no fasting, they may eat cheese and eggs. But when they are with religious in their convent homes, they have leave to eat what is served to them. And except for

the feeble, the ailing, and those traveling, let them be content with dinner and supper. Let the healthy be temperate in eating and drinking.

7. Before their dinner and supper let them say the Lord's prayer once, likewise after their meal, and let them give thanks to God. Otherwise let them say three Our Fathers.

CHAPTER III FASTING

8. From the Pasch of the Resurrection to the feast of All Saints they are to fast on Fridays. From the feast of All Saints until Easter they are to fast on Wednesdays and Fridays, but still observing the other fasts enjoined in general by the Church.
9. They are to fast daily, except on account of infirmity or any other need, throughout the fast of St Martin from after said day until Christmas, and throughout the greater fast from Carnival Sunday until Easter.
10. Sisters who are pregnant are free to refrain until their purification from the corporal observances except those regarding their dress and prayers.
11. Those engaged in fatiguing work shall be allowed to take food three times a day from the Pasch of the Resurrection until the Dedication feast of St Michael. And when they work for others it will be allowed them to eat everything served to them, except on Fridays and on the fasts enjoined in general by the Church.

CHAPTER IV PRAYER

12. All are daily to say the seven canonical Hours, that is, Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline. The clerics are to say them after the manner of the clergy. Those who know the Psalter are to say the Deus in nomine too and the *Beati immaculati* up to the *Legem pone* for Prime, and the other psalms of the Hours' with the Glory be to the Father; but when they do not attend church, they are to say for Matins the psalms the Church says or any eighteen psalms; or at least to say the Our Father as do the unlettered at any of the Hours. The others say twelve Our Fathers for Matins and for every one of the other Hours seven Our Fathers with the Glory be to the Father after each one. And those who know the Creed and the *Miserere mei Deus* should say it at Prime and Compline. If they do not say that at the Hours indicated, they shall say three Our Fathers.
13. The sick are not to say the Hours unless they wish.
14. All are to go to Matins in the fast of St Martin and in the great fast, unless inconvenience for persons or affairs should threaten.

CHAPTER V THE SACRAMENTS, OTHER MATTERS

15. They are to make a confession of their sins three times a year and to receive Communion at Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost. They are to be reconciled with their neighbours and to restore what belongs to others. They are to make up for past tithes and pay future tithes.
16. They are not to take up lethal weapons, or bear them about against anybody.

17. All are to refrain from formal oaths unless where necessity compels, in the cases excepted by the Sovereign Pontiff in his indult, that is, for peace, for the Faith, under calumny, and in bearing witness.
18. Also in their ordinary conversations they will do their best to avoid oaths. And should anyone have sworn thoughtlessly through a slip of the tongue, as happens where there is much talking, he should the evening of the same day, when he is obliged to think over what he has done, say three Our Fathers In amends of such oaths. Let each member fortify his household to serve God.

CHAPTER VI
SPECIAL MASS AND MEETING EACH MONTH

19. All the brothers and sisters of every city and place are to gather every month at the time the ministers see fit, in a church which the ministers will make known, and there assist at Divine services.
20. And every member is to give the treasurer one ordinary denar. The treasurer is to collect this money and distribute it on the advice of the ministers among the poor brothers and sisters, especially the sick and those who may have nothing for their funeral services, and thereupon among other poor; and they are to offer something of the money to the aforesaid church.
21. And, if it be convenient at the time, they are to have some religious who is informed in the words of God to exhort them and strengthen them to persevere in their penance and in performing the works of mercy. And except for the officers, they are to remain quiet during the Mass and sermon, intent on the Office, on prayer, and on the sermon.

CHAPTER VII
VISITING THE SICK, BURYING THE DEAD

22. Whenever any brother or sister happens to fall ill, the ministers, if the patient let them know of it, shall in person or through others visit the patient once a week, and remind him of penance; and if they find it expedient, they are to supply him from the common fund with what he may need for the body.
23. And if the ailing person depart from this life, it is to be published to the brothers and sisters who may be present in the city or place, so that they may gather for the funeral; and they are not to leave until the Mass has been celebrated and the body consigned to burial. Thereupon each member within eight days of the demise shall say for the soul of the deceased: a Mass, if he is a priest; fifty psalms, if he understands the Psalter, or if not, then fifty Our Fathers with the *Requiem aeternam* at the end of each.
24. In addition, every year, for the welfare of the brothers and sisters living and dead, each priest is to say three Masses, each member knowing the Psalter is to recite it, and the rest shall say one hundred Our Fathers with the *Requiem aeternam* at the end of each.
25. All who have the right are to make their last will and make disposition of their goods within three months after their profession, lest anyone of them die intestate.
26. As regards making peace among the brothers and sisters or nonmembers at odds, let what the ministers find proper be done; even, if it be expedient, upon consultation with the Lord Bishop.

27. If contrary to their right and privileges trouble is made for the brothers and sisters by the mayors and governors of the places where they live, the ministers of the place shall do what they shall find expedient on the advice of the Lord Bishop.
28. Let each member accept and faithfully exercise the ministry of other offices imposed on him, although anyone may retire from office after a year.
29. When anybody wishes to enter this brotherhood, the ministers shall carefully inquire into his standing and occupation, and they shall explain to him the obligations of the brotherhood, especially that of restoring what belongs to others. And if he is content with it, let him be vested according to the prescribed way, and he must make satisfaction for his debts, paying money according to what pledged provision is given. They are to reconcile themselves with their neighbours and to pay up their tithes.
30. After these particulars are complied with, when the year is up and he seems suitable to them, let him on the advice of some discreet brothers be received on this condition: that he promise he will all the time of his life observe everything here written, or to be written or abated on the advice of the brothers, unless on Occasion there be a valid dispensation by the ministers; and that he will, when called upon by the ministers, render satisfaction as the Visitor shall ordain if he have done anything contrary to this condition. And this promise is to be put in writing then and there by a public notary. Even so nobody is to be received otherwise' unless in consideration of the estate and rank of the person it shall seem advisable to the ministers.
31. No one is to depart from this brotherhood and from what is contained herein, except to enter a religious Order.
32. No heretic or person in bad repute for heresy is to be received. If he is under suspicion of it, he may be admitted if, otherwise fit, upon being cleared before the bishop.
33. Married women are not to be received except with the consent and leave of their husbands.
34. Brothers and sisters ejected from the brotherhood as incorrigible are not to be received in it again except it please the saner portion of the brothers.

CHAPTER VIII **CORRECTION, DISPENSATION, OFFICERS**

35. The ministers of any city or place shall report public faults of the brothers and sisters to the Visitor for punishment. And if anyone proves incorrigible, after consultation with some of the discreet brothers he should be denounced to the Visitor, to be expelled by him from the brotherhood, and thereupon it should be published in the meeting. Moreover, if it is a brother, he should be denounced to the mayor or the governor.
36. If anyone learns that scandal is occurring relative to brothers and sisters, he shall report it to the ministers and shall have opportunity to report it to the Visitor. He need not be held to report it in the case of husband against wife.
37. The Visitor has the power to dispense all the brothers and sisters in any of these points if he finds it advisable.

38. When the year has passed, the ministers with the counsel of the brothers are to elect two other ministers; and a faithful treasurer, who is to provide for the need of the brothers and sisters and other poor; and messengers who at the command of the ministers are to publish what is said and done by the fraternity.
39. In all the above mentioned points no one is to be obligated under guilt, but under penalty; yet so that if after being admonished twice by the ministers he should fail to discharge the penalty imposed or to be imposed on him by the Visitor, he shall be obligated under guilt as contumacious.

Here ends the Rule of the Continent.

**SUPRA MONTEM
1289**

by
Pope Nicholas IV

Rule and Form of Life of the Brothers and Sisters
of the Order of Penance

In the name of the Lord.

Here begins the Rule and Form of Life of the brothers and sisters of the Order of Continents, or of Penance, instituted by Blessed Francis in the year of the Lord 1221 and approved by Pope Nicholas IV in the Year of the Lord 1289, on 18 August, the second year of his Pontificate.

Nicholas, Bishop, servant of the servants of God, to his beloved sons and daughters in Christ, Sisters of the Order of the Brothers of Penance, [both present and future], greetings and the apostolic blessing.

It is known that the solid basis of the Christian religion, which no “turbine” could ever shake and no flood drown is built ON THE ROCK of the Catholic faith, that faith which the sincere devotion of the disciples of Christ, burning with the fire of charity, taught to the nations who wandered in darkness with the word of their convincing preaching, the same faith which the Roman Church professes and “preserves”.

This, in fact, is the true and wise faith, without which no one is acceptable in the sight of the Most high, and no one is welcome in his presence. This is the faith which prepares the way of salvation and is a pledge of the immense gift of eternal happiness.

For that reason the glorious confessor of Christ, St. Francis, founder of this order, showing, in his age by word and deed the way to the Lord, trained his sons in the sincerity of this same faith e commanded that they profess it, always hold to it and express it in their works so that, walking in the way of salvation along safe paths, they may deserve to arrive at eternal beatitude at the end of their earthly pilgrimage..

I.
ON THE MANNER OF EXAMINING
THOSE DESIROUS OF ENTERING THE ORDER

We, therefore, honoring this Order with fitting favors and very readily attending its growth, decree that,

1. All who may happen to take upon themselves the observance of this form of life, before the undertaking or their reception, be subjected to a diligent examination on the Catholic faith and their obedience to the aforesaid Church. And if they have firmly their faith and obedience and truly believe in them, they may safely be admitted or received to it.
2. Solicitous precautions must be taken, however, lest any heretic or one suspected of heresy, or even one of ill-repute be in any way admitted to the observance of this life.
3. And if it happen that such a one was found to have been admitted, he should be turned over to the inquisitors as quickly as possible, to be punished for heretical depravity.

II.
ON THE MANNER OF RECEIVING INTO THE ORDER

1. When anyone, however, wishes to enter such a fraternity, let the ministers assigned for the reception of such, diligently investigate his office, state and condition, explaining to him very clearly the duties of this fraternity and his fraternity and especially the restitution of goods of others.

After this, if he so wishes, he may be clothed after the manner of the fraternity, and let him strive to make satisfaction for the goods of others, should any be in his possession, in money or by giving a pledge of security, and let him take no less care to reconcile himself with his neighbors.

2. A year after all these things had been done, he may, on the advice of some discreet brothers, if he shall appear fit to them, be received in this manner, namely, that he promise to keep all the divine precepts, and also to appear when summoned at the will of the visitor to make satisfaction, as it behooves, for all transgressions which he might commit against this manner of life.
3. After having been made, let this promise be set down in writing there by a notary public. Let no one be received by these ministers in any other manner unless it should appear otherwise to them after having discussed with solicitous consideration the condition and dignity of the person.
4. Moreover, We ordain and decree that after entering this fraternity, no one may leave it to return to the world; he may, however, freely transfer to another approved religious order.
5. Married women may not be admitted to membership in this fraternity without the permission and consent of their husbands.

III.
ON THE MANNER OF DRESS

1. Let the brothers of this fraternity be clothed alike in cloth of low price and of a color neither entirely white nor entirely black, unless, for a legitimate and apparent reason the visitors,

upon the advice of their ministers, have temporarily dispensed someone with regard to the price. Let the above mentioned brothers also have cloaks and furred outer garments without an opening at the neck, divided or in one piece, and not open but fastened together as becomes modesty, and let the sleeves be closed.

2. Let the sisters also wear a cloak and tunic made of the same common cloth, or at least with the cloak let them have a black or white skirt or dress or an ample robe of hemp or linen, sewn without any pleats.
3. According to the condition of each of them and the local custom, a dispensation may be granted to the sisters concerning the quality of the cloth and the furred outer garments.
4. Let the brothers and sisters, however not use ribbons or silk cords. Let them have furs only of lambskin, purses of leather and the thongs made without any silk, and none others shall they have. Other ornaments of the world are to be set aside according to the salutary counsel of St. Peter, Prince of the Apostles (1 Peter 3:3).

IV.

ON AVOIDING IMMODEST GATHERINGS

1. Let attendance at unseemly banquets, or shows or public festivals and dances be absolutely forbidden to them.
2. They should give nothing to actors or for the sake of vanity, and let them take care to prohibit that anything be given by family.

V.

ON ABSTINENCE AND FASTING

1. Let all abstain from meat on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday, unless a condition of sickness or weakness would suggest otherwise. Let meat, however, be given on three successive days to those who have been bled, and it should not be denied to those making a journey.
Let the eating of meat be lawful for all when a special solemnity occurs on which all other Christians, from ancient times, are wont to eat flesh foods; on other days, however, when fast is not observed, eggs and cheese should not be denied. When they are with other religious in their convents they may licitly eat what is placed before them.
They should be content with dinner and supper, unless they are weak, sick or on a journey. Let the food and drink of the healthy be moderate, for the Gospel text has: But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be overburdened with self-indulgence and drunkenness (Luke 2:34).
Dinner or supper should not be eaten until the Lord's Prayer has been said once; after the meal it should be repeated together with "Thanks be to God". But if it is omitted, then let three Our Fathers be said.
2. Let them fast on every Friday throughout the year unless the Feast of the Nativity of our Lord fall on that day; but from the Feast of All Saints until Easter they shall fast on Wednesdays and Fridays. No less shall they observe the other fasts prescribed by the Church or imposed by the Ordinaries for common cause.

During the Lent from the Feast of Blessed Martin until Christmas and from Quinquagesima Sunday until Easter, except Sundays, they should take care to fast every day, unless perhaps sickness or another necessity suggest otherwise.

3. Pregnant sisters may abstain, if they wish, from all bodily mortification, except prayer, until the day of their purification.

Workers, on account of the demands brought on by fatigue, may licitly take food three times a day on any day they are engaged in labor from Easter until the Feast of St. Francis.

When it happens that they are engaged in labor for others, they are allowed every day to eat of all things placed before them except on Friday or a day on which it is known that a fast for all has been instituted by the Church.

VI. ON CONFESSION AND HOLY COMMUNION

Let each of the brothers and sisters not neglect to confess their sins and devoutly receive the Eucharist three times a year, namely, on the Feasts of the Nativity of the Lord, the Resurrection of the Lord and Pentecost, reconciling themselves with their neighbors and restoring the goods of others.

VII. ON NOT BEARING ARMS

Let the brothers not carry offensive weapons with themselves, unless in defense of the Roman Church, the Christian faith, or their country, or with the permission of their ministers.

VIII. ON PRAYER

Let all say the seven canonical hours daily, namely, Matins, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline.

The clerics, namely, knowing the psalter, should say for Prime (Psalm 53) *Deus in nomine tuo* and (Psalm 118, verses 1-32) *Beati immaculati* up to *Legem pone*, and also the other psalms of the hours with the Glories according to the rite of clerics.

However, when they do not come to church, they should strive to say the psalms for Matins which are said by the clerics or the Cathedral Church, or at least, like the illiterate others, let them not neglect to say for Matins twelve Our Fathers and Glories, and for each other hour, seven Our Fathers and Glories.

Those who know the minor Creed and the (Psalm 50) *Miserere mei*, Deus should add it for the hours of Prime and Compline. But if they have not said them at the appointed hours let them say three Our Fathers.

The infirm, however, unless they wish to, shall not be obliged to say these hours.

In the Lent of Blessed Martin and also during the Greater Lent, let them see to it that they be present in their parish churches for morning hours unless they are excused by a reasonable cause.

IX.
ON MAKING A WILL

Besides, let all who have the right by law, draw up or make a testament, and arrange and dispose of their goods within the three months immediately following their admission, lest any of them die intestate.

X.
ON MAINTAINING PEACE

Let the peace which must be made among the brothers and sisters or even among outsiders who are in dissension, be brought about as it shall seem proper to the ministers, on the advice, if possible, of the diocesan bishop in this matter.

XI.
ON CONDUCT DURING PERSECUTION

If, contrary to law, the brothers or sisters or their privileges are assailed with molestations by those having authority or the magistrates of the places where they dwell, let the ministers try to have recourse to the bishops and other local ordinaries, and proceed according to their counsel and disposition in such matters.

XII.
On Taking Oaths

1. Let all abstain from solemn oaths unless forced by necessity in the cases excepted through the indulgence of the Apostolic See, namely, for peace, faith, calumny, and affirming a testimony, and also when it shall seem expedient in a contract of buying, selling, or giving.
2. Furthermore, in their ordinary conversation, let them avoid oaths as much as they are able, and whoever on any day carelessly swears by a slip of the tongue, as it usually happens in much talking, that evening when he must reflect on what he had done, let him say the Lord's Prayer three times for having taken such oaths carelessly.
3. And let everyone remember to encourage his own family to serve God.

XIII.
ON HEARING MASS AND THE MONTHLY MEETINGS

1. Let all healthy brothers and sisters of every city or locality hear Mass daily if they conveniently are able to do so, and every month let them assemble at a Church or place which the ministers have been careful to announce in order to hear Mass there.
2. Let each member give a piece of the usual money to the treasurer who shall collect such money and, on the advice of the ministers, suitably divide it among the brothers and sisters oppressed by poverty, and especially among the infirm and those who are known to lack the means for a funeral service, and finally among the other poor.
3. Let them also offer some of this money to the aforesaid church.

And then, if they can do so conveniently, they should have a religious, one ably instructed in the word of God, who will earnestly exhort, admonish and arouse them to penance and the exercise of the works of mercy.

Let everyone strive to observe silence while the Mass is being celebrated and the sermon preached, and be intent upon the prayer and office, unless the common good of the fraternity impede.

XIV. OF SICK AND DEPARTED MEMBERS

1. When any of the brothers happens to take ill, the ministers either themselves or through another or others, are bound, if the sick person has notified them of the illness, to visit him once a week and earnestly urge him, as they shall judge it to be of greater advantage and profit, to receive penance, and provide for the necessities of the sick person from the common fund.
2. If the aforementioned sick person should depart from the present life, it should be announced to the brethren and sisters then present in the city or locality where he happened to die, that they might be sure to attend personally the obsequies of the deceased from which let them not depart until after the Mass has been celebrated and the body placed in the grave. We wish that this be observed also with regard to sick and deceased sisters.
3. Moreover, during the eight days immediately following the death of the one interred, let each of the brothers and sisters say for his soul, namely: a priest, one Mass; one who knows the psalter, fifty psalms; and the illiterate, Our Father fifty times, and let them add at the end of each the Eternal rest.

And after this, during the year they should have three Masses celebrated for the welfare of the brothers and sisters, living and dead. Let those who know the psalter say it, and the rest should not fail to say the Our Father one hundred times, adding at the end of each the Eternal rest.

XV. Of Ministers

Also let everyone on whom the ministerial or other offices mentioned in the contents of this present document are imposed, undertake them devoutly and take care to exercise faithfully. Let each office be limited to a definite period of time and let no minister be installed for life, but let his ministry extend over a definite time.

XVI. CONCERNING THE VISITATION AND CORRECTION OF DELINQUENTS

1. For these things, let the ministers, brothers and sisters of every city and locality convene for a visitation in common at some religious place, or in a church when it happens that a place of this kind is lacking, and they should have as visitor a priest who belongs to some approved religious order and who shall impose a salutary penance on those who have committed digressions.
Nor may any other perform this office of visitation for them.
2. Because this present form of life took its origin from the aforementioned Blessed Francis, We counsel that the visitors and instructors should be taken from the Order of Friars Minor, whom the custodes or guardians of the same Order shall appoint, when they have ken

requested in the matter. However, We do not want a congregation of this kind to be visited by a lay person.

3. Let such an office of visitation be exercised once a year, unless some necessity urges that it be made more often. Let the incorrigible and disobedient be forewarned three times, and if they should not try to correct themselves, then, on the counsel of the discreet, let them be totally deprived of membership in this congregation.

XVII. ON AVOIDING LAWSUITS

Moreover, as far as they are able, let the brothers and sisters avoid quarrels among themselves, suppressing those which might happen to arise, otherwise, let them answer to the law before one vested with judicial power.

XVIII. CONCERNING DISPENSATIONS

Local ordinaries or the visitor may dispense all the brothers and sisters from abstinences, fasts and other austerities, when for a legitimate cause it shall seem expedient.

XIX. ON DECLARATION OF FAULTS

Let the ministers denounce the manifest faults of the brothers and sisters to the visitor that they may be punished.

And if any one might be incorrigible, after a third admonition, the ministers, on the advice of some of the discreet brothers should report him to the visitor that he deprive him of membership in the fraternity. Afterwards, this fact must be made known to the congregation.

XX. CONCERNING THE BINDING FORCE OF THE RULE

Finally, We wish that none of the brothers and sisters be obliged under pain of mortal sin to all the foregoing, except where they are bound by divine precepts and statutes of the Church. However, let them promptly and humbly receive the penance imposed upon them according to the gravity of the transgression, and effectively serve to fulfill it.

*Given at Rieti, on the sixteenth of the calends of September, and the second year of our pontificate
(August 17, 1289).*

MISERICORS DEI FILIUS

1883

by
Pope Leo XIII

Constitution on the Law of the Franciscan third Order Secular

LEO BISHOP
SERVANT OF THE SERVANTS OF GOD

As a perpetual remembrance

THE MERCIFUL SON OF GOD, who, having placed a sweet yoke and light burden upon men, has looked to the interests of the life and salvation of all, (and) has left the Church founded by Himself as the heir not only of His power but also of His mercy, to propagate the good deeds brought forth through Him to all the ages of generations with always the same tenor of charity. On that account just as among these, which Jesus Christ did or precepted throughout His life, that gentle wisdom and greatness of unconquered kindness shown forth, so equally among each institute of Christendom [*rei christianae*] a certain wonderful indulgence and leniency stands out, so that plainly even in this very matter the Church may seem to bear the likeness of God, who is Charity (1 John 4:16). Moreover that is the gift most proper to Her maternal piety, to wisely accommodate laws, as much as this can be done, to the times, to morals, yet always using the highest equity in precepting and adapting these. And yet this is accomplished at once with Her custom of charity and wisdom, so that the Church may conjoining the absolute immutability and sempiternity of doctrine with a variety of prudent discipline.

Conforming Our soul and mind with this reasoning in the exercise of the Pontificate, We have reckoned by that judgement of Our office, to the extent that it is fair, to estimate the nature of the times, and to circumspect all things, lest any difficulty deter from the exercise of useful virtues. And now it has pleased Us to carefully weigh according to this norm the Franciscan sodality of the Third Order, which is called secular, and to diligently establish whether or not it be proper for its laws to be tempered in a limited manner because of the changed times.

That remarkable institution of Our Father Francis We have vehemently recommended to the piety of Christians by means of Our Encyclical Letter *Auspicato*, which We issued on September 17th last year. Moreover We issued it with this will and this unique purpose, that as many as possible be called back to the praise of Christian sanctity by Our timely invitation. Certainly the greatest origin both of the evils which press Us and of the dangers, which are feared, is the neglect of virtue by Christians: but men cannot for any reason attend to some of these, and yet disparage others, than by a quickened return privately and publicly to Jesus Christ, who can forever salve those approaching God through Him. (Heb. 7:25) All of the Franciscan institutes have already been set up to care for] the precepts of Jesus Christ: for neither did (their) most holy author intend any other end, than that the Christian life be more diligently exercised in them, as in a certain gymnasium. Truly did the first two Franciscan Orders, formed with the disciplines of great virtues, follow after him more perfectly and divinely: but these belonged to a few, namely to those to whom it was conceded by a gift of God to contend with a certain singular alacrity for the sanctity of the evangelical counsels. However, the Third Order was born fitted to a multitude: and (thus) it proclaims the monuments and reality of the just, integral, and religious morals of a superior age, as much as this is possible.

But We ought to prefer what has been accepted by God, the Author and Helper of good counsels, because the ears of the Christian people were not closed to those Our encouragements. Nay rather, from very many places there was brought forth a lively piety towards Francis of Assisi, and, far and wide, an increased number of those seeking to enter the sodality of the Third Order. On account of which, as an incitement to those running to drink (from its spirit), We have decided to undertake a plan, lest that salutary concourse of souls seem to be able to be impeded or retarded in any degree. And indeed, at first, We have ascertained that the Rule of the Third Order which Our predecessor, Nicholas IV, approved and confirmed by His Apostolic Constitution *Supra Montem* on August 18 [sic], 1289, does not entirely correspond those times and morals which now prevail. Hence since the duties undertaken cannot be completed without very great trouble and work, it was necessary to commute the very many chapters of its laws on the prayers of the members to this extent: that indeed, it is easily understood, they could not be accomplished without detriment to common discipline.

Then, also, there were other reasons in the same sodality, which claimed Our own attention. Most of all, the Roman Pontiffs, Our Predecessors, already having embraced the Third Order from the time of its birth with the highest benevolence, conceding to the members to be admitted several and sufficiently ample indulgences for the expiation (of their sins). The count of which has proved to be more confused in the course of years: and this is often disputed, whether or not in certain cases it depends upon the Pontifical indulgence, and in what season, or by what kind, it is lawful that it be used. Certainly the desired prudence did not belong to the Apostolic See in this matter: and namely Pope Benedict XIV, in His Constitution *Ad Romanum Pontificem* on March 15, 1751, cared to remove prior doubts; nevertheless as soon as a (new) day began, not a few (more) were added.

Wherefore induced by the thought of disadvantages of this kind, We have appointed several Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church from the pre-existing Council for the Care of Indulgences and Sacred Relics, to review the earlier laws of the Tertiaries with care; likewise to examine all the indulgences and privileges related in the Registry [*commentarium*]: and having employed intelligent judgement, to refer to Us concerning this matter, what they judged to be retained and what to be renewed in accord with present conditions. Having accomplished this business, as commanded, they indeed were the ones to recommend [*auctores fuerunt*] to Us, that it was proper that (such) old laws be bent and accommodated to current [*has recentes*] customs of living, with not a few things unchanged [*immutacione nonnulla*] in certain chapters. But concerning the indulgences (which have been granted), so that no place be left for hesitation, and no cause for danger be protected, they have judged-lest anything come to pass unlawfully-that We decree, according to the example of Benedict XIV-on the condition that all their indulgences, which have heretofore been in force, be revoked and abrogated- that certain others be granted [*facturos*] for the benefit of [*ex*] the entire membership of the same.

Therefore that it be good and fruitful [*felix*], amplify the glory of God, and greatly ignite the studies of piety and of the rest of the virtues, We renew and sanction in this Letter by Our apostolic authority the Law of the Franciscan Third Order, which is called secular, to the extent that it is described below. Nevertheless, having done this, let nothing be thought to have been subtracted from the nature itself of the Order; rather We wish entirely that it continue to remain unchanged and whole. Besides We wish and command that the same members can employ the remissions of punishments, or indulgences, and the privileges, which are recounted in that index below, having preserved each and every [*sublatis penitus universis*] indulgence and privilege, which this Apostolic See at whatever time, and/or in whatever name, and/or form had conceded to the membership of the same in the past [*ante hanc diem*].

Chapter I

ON ADMISSION, NOVITIATE, PROFESSION.

§ I. Let it not be licit to admit [cooptari] anyone, except those older than fourteen years, and those (of) good morals, keepers of the peace, and in the first place proven in the sanctity of Catholic profession, and in a visible obedience [spectato obsequio] towards the Roman Church and the Apostolic See.

§ II. Let wives, except those with the knowledge and consent of (their) husband, not be admitted, unless it seems otherwise to be done, by their priest-spiritual director [*auctore*], the judge of their consciences.

§ III. Let those admitted [*adlecti*] into the sodality wear, according to custom, the small scapular and one cord: let those who have not worn (these), not enjoy [*careant*] the established privileges and rights [*iuribus*].

§ IV. Let those men or women who would enter the Third Order, complete one entire [*ipsum*] year: then, having with due ceremony [*rite*] promised the Order, that they will observe the laws [*iura*] of God, be obedient to the word [*dicto*] of the Church; let them each pledge that if they have neglected [*deliquerint*] anything among these, which have been promised [*professi*], that they will satisfy for it (in the future).

Chapter II

ON THE DISCIPLINE OF LIVING.

§ I. Let members [*sodales*] of the Third Order in every refinement [*cultu*] and apparel [*habitu*], having disdained [*posthabita*] more sumptuous elegance, hold that, which is befitting to each (of them), the rule of moderation.

§ II. Let them with extreme caution [*perquam caute*] abstain from dances [*choreis*], public spectacles [*ludis*], and the more shameless plays [*scaenis*], likewise from riotous processions [*comissionibus*].

§ III. Let them frugally use food and drink: and let them neither sit down or rise from the table before having piously and gratefully invoked God.

§ IV. Having each observed the fast (for the Feast) of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, (as) likewise for (their) Father Francis, on the day before (each) solemnity: they are completely worthy of praise, if besides either the fast on Fridays, or the abstinence from meat on Wednesdays which are ferial days, they observe the ancient disciplines of the Tertiaries.

§ V. Let those admitted with due ceremony receive the Sacrament of Penance [*expianto*] during each month; likewise let them approach the Divine Table each month.

§ VI. It is pleasing that the Tertiaries who are members of the Clergy, because they daily recite the Psalms as a duty [*Psalmis dant operam*], be obliged to do nothing else in this regard [*in hoc nomine*]. Let laity, who neither fulfill (the duty of) the canonical (hours), nor the Marian prayers, known popularly as the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary, employ the Lord's Prayer with the Angelic Salutation [i.e. the Hail Mary] and the Glory Be, twelve times each day, except if one's strength does not allow it.

§ VII. Let each of those to whom the drawing up [*factio*] of a (last will and) testament belongs, make a will in their own time concerning their affairs.

§ VIII. In family life let them strive to precede the others in (good) example: to promote the arts of piety, and the (very) best things. Let books or daily publications [*diaria*], from which destruction comes to virtue, be feared to be brought into their homes, and let them not permit (these) to be read by those, who are under their authority.

§ IX. Let them sedulously guard benevolent charity both among themselves and towards outsiders. Let them take care to reconcile discords, wherever they are able.

§ X. Let them not ever swear an oath, unless necessary. Let them flee from foul speech, (and) from uttering scurrilous jokes. Let them examine their consciences at Vespers, (concerning) whether they have done any such thing: if they have, let them correct the error by doing penance.

§ XI. Let them daily attend the divine services [*rei divinae*], who can do so in the proper manner [*commode*]. Let them convene at the monthly meetings, which the Prefect has indicated.

§ XII. Let them contribute in common as they can [*pro facultate*] each one something of his own, from which either the more feeble of the number of the members, especially (those) weakened in strength, may be alleviated, or the dignity of the divine cult may be supplied [*consulatur*].

§ XIII. Let the Prefects, either themselves go to visit the sick member, or let them send one, who is to fulfill these duties of charity. Let the same, in the danger of death, warn and persuade the sick (member) so that he soon takes care of those things which pertain to the purification [*expiandum*] of the soul.

§ XIV. Let the members (who are) fellow city-dwellers, guests or hosts [*hospites*] convene at the funeral of a deceased member, and together recite [*adhibeant*] the Marian prayers instituted by Father Dominic, that is the Rosary, a third part for the heavenly solace of the deceased. Likewise let the priests during the divine service [*inter rem divinam*], (and) the laity, if they can, having received the Eucharist, pray piously (and) willingly for the sempiternal peace of (their) departed brother.

Chapter III

ON OFFICES, ON VISITATION, AND ON THE LAW ITSELF.

§ I. Let the offices be passed on [*deferantur*] to the members called together to the Chapter [*conventum*]. The same shall be once every three years. Let the one who has been removed (from office), lest he protest without just cause, bear it as something to be yawned at [*oscitanter*].

§ II. Let the Curator, who is called the Visitor, diligently inquire, whether the laws have been sufficiently kept [*salvae leges*]. Therefore it pertains to him [*eius rei*] to go about in his official capacity [*pro potestate*] to the places of the sodalities each year, and so far more frequently, if the matter requests it, and to hold a meeting (at which) the Prefect and all the members have been commanded to be present. If the Visitor recalls anyone to (his) duty by warning (and/or) commanding, or if he has decreed anything against anyone, let the latter accept this modestly, and let the same not refuse [*abnuat*] to pay (the penalty).

§ III. Let Visitators be picked from the First Order of the Franciscans or from the Third Order Regular, whom the Custodes or Guardians, if they have been asked, will designate. The duty of Visitator shall be forbidden to lay men.

§ IV. Let the members [*sodales*] (who) are disobedient and noxious be admonished of their duties two and three times: let those who do not obey, be commanded to leave the Order.

§ V. In these laws if any by chance be delinquent, let them know that they have undertaken no fault in name, except those which are otherwise precepted by divine law and the laws of the Church.

§ VI. If a grave and just cause prohibits anyone from observing any chapter of this law, it is licit that he be absolved from that part of the law, and that the same chapter be prudently commuted (to another obligation). Of which matter let the faculty and authority over the (afore)said pertain to the ordinary Prefects of the Franciscans both of the First and Third Order, likewise to the Visitators.

And these things, each and every, as have been decreed above, We will that they be thus firm, stable, and approved in perpetuity: not withstanding the Constitutions, Letters Apostolic, statutes, customs, privileges, and the Our other rules and those of the Apostolic Chancery and whatever things the (are) to the contrary. Therefore let it be licit to no one among men to violate these Our Letters in any manner, or in any part. If anyone, however, dares such a thing whatsoever against these, he will let him know that he has incurred the indignation of the Omnipotent God, and of His blessed Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given in Rome at St. Peter's, in the one thousand eighteen-hundred and third year of the Incarnation of the Lord, on the third day before the Calends of June, in the Sixth Year of Our Pontificate.

Pope Leo XIII

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