

# Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

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## CELEBRATING 40 YEARS THE RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER (Part 5)

### *Permanent Commitment*

In Chapter Three of the **Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order**, we find the “Rite of Profession or Permanent Commitment to the Gospel Life.” These are the words by which a Candidate for Profession makes his or her lifelong commitment to God and the Fraternity. The words of that commitment are very important.<sup>1</sup> Please take time to read them through carefully:

**I, N.N., by the grace of God,  
renew my baptismal promises  
and consecrate myself to the service of his Kingdom.  
Therefore, in my secular state  
I promise to live all the days of my life  
the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ  
in the Secular Franciscan Order  
by observing its rule of life.**

**May the grace of the Holy Spirit,  
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
and our holy father St. Francis,  
and the fraternal bonds of community  
always be my help,  
so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.<sup>2</sup>**

By the words of this commitment, a person binds themselves to God in “*the fraternal bonds of community*”<sup>3</sup> so that they may continually strive to cooperate, throughout their life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to reach, in love, towards the perfection of Christian charity – holiness. Love is the goal;<sup>4</sup> love is the way!<sup>5</sup> St Francis tells us that it is through perfect joy,<sup>6</sup> which is none other than the way of the cross, that we make this ascent towards the fullness of psychological and spiritual transformation into the best of what we may become as a person. It’s not an easy journey, this earthly pilgrimage.<sup>7</sup> In the words of the song **Going Home**<sup>8</sup> “*I’ve a long way to go, the stars tell me so, on this road that will take me home.*” This pilgrim’s way<sup>9</sup> to heaven is the humble, and honest way of magnanimity<sup>10</sup> self-sacrifice and loving service in fraternity.

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<sup>1</sup> St Thomas More, was a Franciscan Tertiary. In speaking about the taking of an oath he said: “*When a man takes an oath, he's holding his own self in his own hands.*”

<sup>2</sup> It is the custom in some fraternities of friars for one of the friars to renew his vows each Friday.

<sup>3</sup> Mark 12 :30 & 31; “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.*”<sup>31</sup> *The second is this: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'* There is no commandment greater than these.” See also: Matthew 22:34; Luke 10:25.

<sup>4</sup> “*The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*” 1 Timothy 1:5.

<sup>5</sup> “*The fire that totally inflames and carries us into God by ecstatic unctions (anointings) and burning affections.*” St Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey*. Ch. 7. No.

<sup>6</sup> To suffer trials and tribulations and to offer this to Jesus is the perfect joy of which St Francis speaks. “*I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul, would consist in this.*”

<sup>7</sup> From the Mass for Funerals: “*Lord God, your Son Jesus Christ gave us the sacrament of his body and blood to guide us on our pilgrim way to your kingdom. May our brother (sister) N. who shared in the Eucharist, come to the banquet of life Christ has prepared for us. We ask this through Christ our Lord.*” The Eucharist is seen as guide and sustenance on our journey home. It focuses our attention and strengthens our will, to make the journey in love.

<sup>8</sup> The song “Going Home” Can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iPMmwuUJGmg>

<sup>9</sup> Testament of St Francis 24: “*As pilgrims and strangers, let them always be guests.*”

<sup>10</sup> Magnanimity, a difficult word for some people to pronounce; it means: generosity, big-heartedness, great-heartedness. The only saying of Jesus not in the Gospels is from St Paul in Acts 20:35, “*It is more blessed to give than to receive.*”

Can a friar be a friar, if he does not live in a fraternity? The answer is No!<sup>11</sup> He cannot live outside of obedience unless he has the permission of his Provincial and his Council. Can a Secular Franciscan not attend his or her local Fraternity meetings? The answer is the same, No! A Secular Franciscan cannot stop attending fraternity meetings without the permission of the Local Minister and his or her Council.<sup>12</sup> Attending our fraternity meeting is a part of our commitment as a Secular Franciscan. It is part of the law of Christ.<sup>13</sup> This law does not say “love your family as you love yourself” that is part of the natural law, but loving our neighbour often requires a special grace and commitment that takes us well beyond our family and out into the community. This lifelong commitment requires a special grace that we should pray for constantly<sup>14</sup> perhaps by someone renewing their commitment to God and the fraternity each month at the fraternity meeting.<sup>15</sup>

Fraternity is the place where we meet Christ.<sup>16</sup> But, every so often, fraternity can become a place of friction and “*we can become allergic to each other.*”<sup>17</sup> We need to remember that it is of course very rare that any family let alone any fraternity remains free of conflict. It is in this crucible of conflict, that true fraternity is often forged by great patience and sincere love. It is important to remember that the theological virtues, faith, hope and charity are not gifts of nature, but must be prayed for ardently, because they are a pure grace from God. The Catechism of the Church Article 7. II. The Theological Virtues 1812 states this clearly:

“The theological virtues are the foundation of Christian moral activity; they animate it and give it its special character. They inform and give life to all the moral virtues. They are infused by God into the souls of the faithful to make them capable of acting as his children and of meriting eternal life. They are the pledge of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the faculties of the human being. There are three theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity.”

Sometimes the devil will try to hang us with our own talents, and our sense of self-importance and our constant counting up of “all I have done for this fraternity” can turn sour and our attitude “I am not appreciated.” can turn us bitter in regards to fraternity. However, the OFS Rule of Life is very clear:

7. United by their vocation as “*brothers and sisters of penance,*” and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ using that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls “conversion.” Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal, the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace.

If you seek true conversion, then attend Fraternity Meetings. The opportunity for conversion is truly found in service to the fraternity, because as soon as you are responsible for something, all your short-comings will be revealed and you will enter into the way of humility, which is the way of learning with the pure heart of a child. again. Very soon you will, if you desire it, begin to grow and understand and master the task. You will find that the grace promised is yours, so you can do the service required of you. The fastest way to conversion is the way of service to others.<sup>18</sup>

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*PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message to **all MEMBERS** of your FRATERNITY including Spiritual Assistants and isolated members.*

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<sup>11</sup> Canon 608 “A religious community must live in a legitimately established house under the authority of a superior designated according to the norm of law.”

<sup>12</sup> OFS Rule 23. “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 Constitutions.” OFS Constitutions Art. 56. Code of Canon Law. 697.

<sup>13</sup> Jesus gives a new Commandment John 13:34. “*A new command I give you, Love one another as I have loved you, you must love one another.*”

<sup>14</sup> One might suggest that the matter is so important, because it is a permanent commitment, to be a confessional matter. Something very serious for a friar who has made solemn or perpetual vows.

<sup>15</sup> After the renewal the Minister says these words of St Francis: “*And if you keep these things may God give you eternal life.*”

<sup>16</sup> OFS Rule No 5. “Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters...”

<sup>17</sup> A saying of Br Albin Henniquin OFM Cap

<sup>18</sup> St Francis of Assisi, Letter to a Minister. No 8 “*And let this be more valuable to you than a hermitage.*” In this context, *isolating yourself from fraternity.*