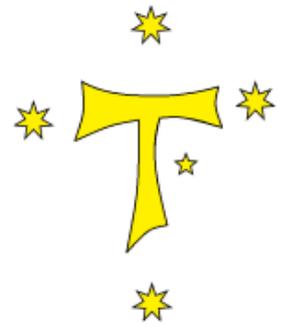


## OFS – Conference of National Spiritual Assistants - Australia

Guardian Angel's Friary  
182 Bay Terrace  
Wynnum Qld Australia 4178

Friary Phone: (07) 33934980  
Br John Cooper OFM Cap: 0412 162 946  
johncap@ozemail.com.au



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### CHARACTERISTICS OF FRANCISCAN FRATERNITY

Fr Norbert Pittorino OFM

From the time of our Franciscan Profession, we were never alone, but we have lived in communion with our brothers and sisters. Our profession to live according to the Gospel meant that we were to live in a community of brothers and sisters. “It is within the community and because of the community that our vocation is brought to maturity, for it is our **Fraternity** which **is the privileged place of our encounter with God**. We share the same goal and help each other to reach it. We turn towards each other in mutual love according to the command and example of Christ.” (*Franciscan Vocation Conference, “Take up the Search”, 1973*)

Therefore, we look to each other with mutual respect and with simplicity, make known our needs to each other in a spirit of service. Such an attitude would avoid any disputes, grumbling and anger or negative judgments of each other. The main characteristic is love, not simply in words but in actions. In other words, we must be genuine, indiscriminating witnesses to the Gospel. Positively, we must seek to be peace-makers and reconciling one with the other both within and outside our communities.

From the absolute primacy of God as Father, the Creator of all creatures, Francis broadened his understanding to a universal brotherhood/sisterhood centred on Christ. That means that we regard everyone as our brother or sister. By following Christ’s teaching and example, Francis’ life would be transformed into a hymn of praise and glory of the Father. He longed to be captured by the love of Christ so that he might die for Christ, just as Christ died for love of us.

In this Christ-centred vision, love for the Son of God and Son of Man is at the basis of the universal brotherhood of all things. This is expressed by Francis in his *Canticle of the Creatures* which we know so well:

Most High, all-powerful Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honour, and all blessing.  
To You alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human is worthy to mention Your name.  
Praised and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve him with great humility.

Francis wanted his brothers to love each other because that is what God wants: “This is my commandment, that you have love one for another as I have loved you.” (Jn 13:35) Thus there is a responsibility of all members of our Fraternity to strengthen the bonds of charity through their personal presence and participation in their meetings and active collaboration with any activities the Fraternity has decided on, as well as praying and witnessing together.

We say, “We are to live the radical Gospel ideal – a Gospel life.” What does that mean to us? It means that any effort we make at re-thinking our identity must be according to the demands of the Gospel and our generous response to it. We must become a witnessing community by the way

we observe the precept “to love one another as I have loved you.” This was Jesus’ last command to his intimate companions in mission.

To sum up: For a Fraternity on any level to be healthy, there are five qualities that express this:

1. Praying together.
2. Studying together.
3. Ministering together.
4. Sharing in conversation together.
5. Having fun together.

If you fulfil these requirements, then your Fraternity is strong.

It is comforting to know that we are not alone in Fraternity. We are travelling with brothers and sisters who share our life. It is within the Fraternity and because of the Fraternity that our vocation is brought to maturity, for – as we said before – the **Fraternity is the privileged place of our encounter with God.**<sup>1</sup>

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PLEASE distribute this Monthly Spiritual Message  
to all members of the National OFS fraternity and Spiritual Assistants.

(There are approximately 629 words in this message)

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<sup>1</sup> Rule Ch: 3:22. “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 members.