GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS
OF THE
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

December 8, 2000

DECREE OF APPROVAL
OF THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

CONGREGATION
FOR THE INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE
Prot. N. T. 144-1/2000

DECREE

The Conference of General Ministers of the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular has presented to the Apostolic See for approval, the text of the Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, previously approved by the General Chapter of the same Secular Franciscan Order, celebrated in the month of October 1999.

After careful examination of the above-mentioned text of the Constitutions, the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life, by this present Decree *approves and confirms the text* according to the copy written in Italian, conserved in its Archives, all requirements of law being observed.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the Vatican, December 8, 2000,
Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception
of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Eduardo Card. Martínez Somalo
Prefect

Piergiorgio Silvano Nesti, C.P.
Secretary

Note: The words: "Anything to the contrary notwithstanding." means this approved document is binding and invalidates any act or statement or decree not made by this authority.

LETTER OF THE CONFERENCE OF GENERAL MINISTERS OF THE FIRST ORDER AND THE T.O.R.

Rome, January 1, 2001. Feast of Mary, Mother of God.

Dear Sister Emanuela, the Lord give you peace!

The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life has on December 8, 2000, issued the Decree (Prot. N. T. 144-1/2000) of approval of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, as revised by the General Chapter of the OFS at Madrid in October 1999, and subsequently submitted by the President of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the T.O.R.

Now, also in name of the other General Ministers, I am entrusting the approved text of the Constitutions to you, and through you, to all brothers and sisters of the OFS. The common vocation of the whole Franciscan family, from its very beginning in the overpowering spiritual experience of Francis and Clare, is "to live according to the form of the Holy Gospel."

The Constitutions reveal themselves to be an ever more important help to incarnate this one vocation in the rich variety of its manifold expressions, wherever and whenever the Lord sends us. They are not just "one more document" or the final stage of a journey, but an essential and dynamic instrument helping us to delineate our identity and to structure our life and our vocation progressively as Franciscans.

The work of reflection and revision by so many brothers and sisters all over the world and the approval by holy mother Church, commit us to make these Constitutions the central axis of our life's project according to the gospel.

In name of the Church and of the General Ministers, I express this wish to all Secular Franciscans; that you may be convincing witnesses of the evangelic fire which inflamed the whole existence of Francis and Clare of Assisi, and made them models of a fully given and thus completely realised life.

Your brother,
Giacomo Bini, ofm
President of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

PROMULGATION OF THE GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

Rome, 6th February 2001.
Circ. 21/96-02

To the National Councils of the OFS
To the International Councillors of the OFS

Object: Promulgation of the amended General Constitutions approved by the Decree of the Congregation for ICLSAL on the 8th of December 2000.

Dear brothers and sisters,

The General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, intended to apply the renewed Rule of 1978, were approved by the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Societies of Apostolic Life through the Decree of the 8th of September 1990, for six years to be tried out. Before the end of this period, the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, through the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and T.O.R., asked for an extension of the time of trial, taking into account the time necessary to translate the Constitutions into the other official languages of the International Fraternity and, then, into the languages of each country. The Congregation acceded to the request and conceded an extension of three years.

During this time, the Constitutions have been studied and put into practice by the Fraternities of the OFS on all levels and, little by little, have marked them with the characteristics of the *secularity, unity, and autonomy* of our Order. Not all has been easy, and some aspects have still to be assimilated fully in order that, at the dawn of the Third Millennium, the OFS should really become “an army that can be in the vanguard in the Church and in the world to build a more human and Christian society” as Cardinal Hamer, Prefect of the Congregation for ICLSAL wished in 1990. The experience gained has shown the substantial validity of the General Constitutions of 1990, and only some aspects required revision. The work which had to be done was started in time by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS and was carried out through ample consultation involving all the National Fraternities and International Counsellors as well as the Presidency

itself and some experts belonging to the OFS or assigned by the Franciscan General Ministers. In the General Chapter of Madrid (23-31st October 1999) a text was proposed that gathered and co-ordinated the suggestions and petitions received and also presented alternative proposals when there was no possibility of finding an univocal formulation from among those that the National Fraternities had expressed. The text presented to the Chapter was inspired by the following criteria:

- adhesion to the common law and the law proper to the OFS,
- respect for the text approved in 1990 by the Holy See,
- organisational flexibility,
- cultural and linguistic adaptability.

The General Chapter has attentively and profoundly examined the text presented, together with the oral and written interventions made during the work of the Chapter.

The result of the discussions and votes cast, article by article and on each of the amendments, was presented on the 21st of December, 1999 to the Conference of the Franciscan General Ministers who, after a final revision by experts in canon law of the four Curia's, forwarded the text on the 1st of August 2000 to the Congregation for ICLSAL for approval. The Congregation has approved the text by the decree bearing the date of the 8th of December 2000, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

And now, brothers and sisters of the OFS, on the 6th of February 2001, the approved General Constitutions are promulgated and consequently should be observed from 6th of March 2001. It rests on each one of us to ensure that they are "spirit and life", an instrument of consolidation and growth of our Order so that with full sail ("*Duc in altum*"), we can go on with hope, according to the exhortation given by the Holy Father to all Christians with the Apostolic Letter "*Novo Millenio ineunte*" at the end of the Great Jubilee of 2000. We also, Secular Franciscans, are called to be witnesses, that is to say, martyrs for Christ, in the original meaning of the word, during the new millennium.

It wasn't by chance that we chose the date of the 6th February for the promulgation of the amended General Constitutions. On this date, we commemorate the Proto-martyrs of Japan, witnesses per excellence, with 17 Franciscan Tertiaries crucified in Nagasaki, along with Peter

Baptist, Paul Miki, and their other companions. We know very little about these distant brothers of ours, apart from their unwavering will to remain firm in faith, to continue witnessing to the Gospel by their very lives, whatever the cost.

During the past century, there have also been Secular Franciscans who have manifested, with the sacrifice of their lives, their fidelity to baptism and resistance to evil, anchored in the faith. We remember our brother Ceferino Giménez Malla, a victim of the persecution of religion during the Spanish civil war (1936 – 1939), who was beatified on the 4th of May, 1997. We remember the Servant of God Frantisek Nosek, a politician from Bohemia and a secular Franciscan, another victim of communist violence. We also remember Juvénal Kabera, Minister of the OFS Fraternity of Kigali, assassinated during the massacres of the tribal wars in Rwanda. These are only some examples, but for them also the recent words of the Holy Father remain true: "It has been thanks especially to the brave witness of lay faithful, not seldom to the point of martyrdom, that the faith has not disappeared from the lives of entire peoples."

Perhaps we will not be asked to give witness by shedding our blood, but we will certainly be asked to give witness by being coherent and firm in the fulfilment of our baptismal promises, renewed and re-affirmed through profession in the OFS. In virtue of our Profession, the Rule and the application that the General Constitutions make of it represent for each one of us the point of reference for daily experience, beginning with a specific vocation and precise identity. On this basis we need to re-shape our existence and find a project of life (Franciscan evangelical radicalism) and a place of Church communion (the Fraternity), in which it should be possible for us to "learn the purpose and the way of living, loving and suffering" (Const., art 10).

With this desire, the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS, having received the approved General Constitutions, transmits them to the whole Order so that, as with the Rule, they be studied, loved, and lived.

Emanuela De Nunzio
Minister General of the OFS

CHAPTER 1
THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

NB: References to the Rule at the beginning of Articles means refer to the Rule. Originally these were Marginal Notes not part of the text.

Article 1

1. All the faithful are called to holiness and have a right to follow their own spiritual way in communion with the Church.[1]

2. *Rule 1.* There are many spiritual families in the Church with different charisms. Among these families, the Franciscan Family, which in its various branches recognises St. Francis of Assisi as its father, inspiration, and model, must be included.

3. *Rule 2.* From the beginning, the Secular Franciscan Order[2] has had its own proper place in the Franciscan Family. It is formed by the organic union of all the Catholic fraternities whose members, moved by the Holy Spirit, commit themselves through profession to live the Gospel in the manner of St. Francis, in their secular state, following the Rule approved by the Church.[3]

4. The Holy See has entrusted the pastoral care and spiritual assistance of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS), because it belongs to the same spiritual family, to the Franciscan First Order and Third Order Regular (TOR). These are the "Institutes" who are responsible for the *altius moderamen*, referred to by Canon 303 of the Code of Canon Law.[4]

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[1] See Can. 210; 214; *Lumen Gentium* 40.

[2] See Rule 1., Footnote 1 and Rule 2., Footnote 5. Canon 303 of the CCL defines Third Orders: "Associations whose members live in the world, but share in the spirit of some religious institute, under the overall direction (*altius moderamen*) of the same institute, and who lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection, are known as third orders, or are called by some other suitable title." i.e. "Secular Franciscan Order."

[3] After the Rules approved by Pope Nicholas IV in 1289 and by Pope Leo XIII in 1883, the present Rule was approved by Pope Paul VI June 24, 1978.

[4] See *General Constitutions OFS* 85.2. When the Constitutions are cited without any other specification, the reference is to the present text.

5. The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Church.[5] It is divided into fraternities at various levels; local, regional, National, and International. Each one has its own juridical personality within the Church.

Article 2

1. The vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members. Therefore, those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life cannot belong to the OFS.

2. The OFS is open to the faithful of every state of life.
   The following may belong to it:
   - the laity (men and women);
   - the secular clergy (deacons, priests, bishops).

Article 3

1. The secular state characterises the spirituality and the apostolic life of those belonging to the OFS.

2. Their secularity, with respect to vocation and to apostolic life, expresses itself according to their respective state, that is:
   - for the laity, contributing to building up the Kingdom of God by their presence in their life-situations and in their temporal activities,[6]
   - for the secular clergy, by offering to the people of God the service which is properly theirs, in communion with the bishop and the presbytery.[7]

Both 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.

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[5] See Can. 116; 301.3; 312; 313.

[6] See Can. 225, and the Discourse of Pope John Paul II to the OFS, September 27, 1982 in *L'Osservatore Romano,* September 28, 1982.

[7] See Can. 275 ff, *Presbyterorum ordinis* 12; 14; 15 ff.

3. The vocation to the OFS is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities.

Article 4

1. The OFS is governed by the universal law of the Church and by its own: the Rule, the Constitutions, the Ritual, and the particular Statutes.

2. The Rule establishes the nature, purpose, and spirit of the OFS.

3. *Rule 3.* The Constitutions have as their purpose:
   - to apply the Rule;
   - to indicate concretely the conditions for belonging to the OFS, its government, the organisation of life in fraternity and its seat.[8]

Article 5

1. *Rule 3.* The authentic interpretation of the Rule and of the Constitutions belongs to the Holy See.

2. The practical interpretation of the Constitutions with the purpose of harmonizing its application in different areas and at the various levels of the Order belongs to the General Chapter of the OFS.

3. The clarification of specific points which require a timely decision is the competence of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS (CIOFS). Such a clarification is valid until the next General Chapter.

Article 6

1. The International Fraternity of the OFS has its own Statutes approved by the General Chapter.

[8] See Can. 304.

2. National Fraternities have their own Statutes approved by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.
3. The Regional and the Local Fraternities may have their own Statutes approved by the Council of the higher level.

Article 7

All regulations not in accordance with the present Constitutions, are abrogated.

CHAPTER II
FORM OF LIFE AND APOSTOLIC ACTIVITY

Title I
THE FORM OF LIFE

Article 8

1. The Secular Franciscans commit themselves by their profession to live the Gospel according to Franciscan Spirituality in their secular condition.

2. They seek to deepen, in the light of faith, the values and choices of the evangelical life according to the Rule of the OFS:
   - *Rule 7.* in a continually renewed journey of conversion and of formation;
   - *Rule 4. Par. 3.* open to the challenges that come from society and from the Church's life situation, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel";
     in the personal and communal dimensions of this journey.

Article 9

1. *Rule 5.* The spirituality of the Secular Franciscan is a plan of life centred on the person and on the following of Christ,[9] rather than a detailed program to be put into practice.

2. *Rule 4. Par. 3.* The Secular Franciscan committed to following the example and the teachings of Christ, must personally and assiduously study the Gospel and Sacred Scripture. The fraternity and its leaders should foster love for the Word of the Gospel and help the brothers and sisters to know and understand it as it is proclaimed by the Church with the assistance of the Spirit.[10]

Article 10

Rule 10. "Christ, poor and crucified," victor over death and risen, the greatest manifestation of the love of God for humanity, is the "book" in which the brothers and sisters, in imitation of Francis, learn the purpose and the way of living, loving and suffering. They discover in Him the value of contradictions for the sake of justice and the meaning of the difficulties and the crosses of daily life. With Him, they can accept the will of the Father even under the most difficult circumstances and live the Franciscan spirit of peace, rejecting every doctrine contrary to human dignity.

Article 11

Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission, Secular Franciscans should seek to imitate the faithfulness of Francis to His inspiration. They should listen to the exhortation of the Saint to desire above all things "the Spirit of God at work within them."[11]

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[9] See *Rule* of 1221, Chapter 22; (The Saint p. 79); *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 51. (The Saint p. 49)

[10] See *Dei verbum* 10.

[11] *Rule* of 1223, Chapter 10:8. (The Saint p.105)

Article 12

1. Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of Francis and above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father. They should bear witness to this faith before all.
   - in their family life;
   - in their work;
   - in their joys and sufferings;
   - in their associations with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father;
   - in their presence and participation in the life of the society;
   - in their fraternal relationships with all creatures.

2 *Rule 10.* With Jesus, obedient even to death, they should seek to know and do the will of the Father. They should give thanks to God for the gift of freedom and for the revelation of the law of love. In order to carry out the will of the Father, they should accept the help which is offered to them through the mediation of the Church by those who are constituted as authority in her and by their confreres. They should take on the risk of courageous choices in their life in society with decisiveness and serenity.

3. *Rule 8.* The brothers and sisters should love meeting God as His children, and they should let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. They should seek to discover the presence of the Father in their own heart, in nature and in the history of humanity in which His plan of salvation is fulfilled. The contemplation of this mystery will dispose them to collaborate in this loving plan.

Article 13

1. *Rule 7.* Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times “The Brothers and Sisters of Penance,” propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in

fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity or with the whole people of God.[12]

2. In this spirit of conversion, they should live out their love for the renewal of the Church, which should be accompanied by personal and communal renewal. The fruits of conversion, which is a response to the love of God, are the works of charity in the interactions with the brothers and sisters.[13]

3. Traditional among Franciscan penitents, penitential practices such as fasting and abstinence should be known, appreciated, and lived out according to the general guidelines of the Church.

Article 14

1. Aware that God wanted to make of us all a single people and that he made his Church the universal sacrament of salvation, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to a faith-inspired reflection on the Church, its mission in today's world and the role of the Franciscan laity within it. They should take up the challenges and accept the responsibilities that this reflection will lead them to discover.

2. *Rule 8.* The Eucharist is the centre of the life of the Church. Christ unites us to himself and to one another as a single body in it. Therefore, the Eucharist should be the centre of the life of the fraternity. The brothers and sisters should participate in the Eucharist as frequently as possible, being mindful of the respect and love shown by Francis, who, in the Eucharist, lived all the mysteries of the life of Christ.

[12] *Ordo Poenitentiae. Praenotanda* 22 ff.

[13] See *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 25 ff. (The Saint p. 47)

3. They should participate in the sacraments of the Church, attentive not only to personal sanctification but also to fostering the growth of the Church and the spreading of the Kingdom. They should collaborate in achieving living and conscious celebrations in their own parishes, particularly in the celebrations of baptism, confirmation, marriage, and the anointing of the sick.

4. The brothers and sisters, as well as the fraternities, should adhere to the indications of the Ritual with respect to the different forms of participating in the liturgical prayer of the Church, giving priority to the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours.[14]

5. In all places and at all times, it is possible for true worshippers of the Father to give him adoration and to pray to him. Nevertheless, the brothers and sisters should try to find times of silence and recollection dedicated exclusively to prayer.

Article 15

1. *Rule 11.* Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to live the spirit of the Beatitudes and in a special way, the spirit of poverty. Evangelical poverty demonstrates confidence in the Father, creates interior freedom, and disposes them to promote a more just distribution of wealth.

2. Secular Franciscans, who must provide for their own families and serve society by means of their work and material goods, have a particular manner of living evangelical poverty. To understand and achieve it requires a strong personal commitment and the stimulation of the fraternity in prayer and dialogue, communal review of life and attentiveness to the instructions of the Church and the demands of society.

3. Secular Franciscans should pledge themselves to reduce their own personal needs so as to be better able to share spiritual and material goods with their brothers and sisters, especially

[14] *Ritual OFS,* Appendix 26, 27.

those most in need. They should give thanks to God for the goods they have received, using them as good stewards and not as owners.

They should take a firm position against consumerism and against ideologies and practices which prefer riches over human and religious values and which permit the exploitation of the human person.

4. They should love and practice purity of heart, the source of true fraternity.

Article 16

1. *Rule 9*. Mary, Mother of Jesus, is the model of listening to the Word and of faithfulness to vocation; we, like Francis, see all the gospel virtues realised in her.[15]

   The brothers and sisters should cultivate intense love for the most Holy Virgin, imitation, prayer, and filial abandonment. They should manifest their own devotion with expressions of genuine faith, in forms accepted by the Church.

2. Mary is the model of fruitful and faithful love for the entire ecclesial community.

   Secular Franciscans and their fraternities should seek to live the experience of Francis, who made the Virgin the guide of his activity. With her, like the disciples at Pentecost, they should welcome the Spirit to create a community of love.[16]

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[15] *Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. (The Saint p. 163)

[16] See *2 Celano*, 198. (The Founder p. 374) "He embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love, since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. He honoured her with his own Praises, poured out prayers to her, and offered her his love in a way that no human tongue can express. But what gives us greatest joy is that he appointed her the Advocate of the Order, and placed under her wings the sons to be left behind, that she might protect and cherish them to the end. " Oh Advocate of the Poor! Fulfil towards us your duty as protectress until the time set by the Father!"

Title II
ACTIVE PRESENCE IN THE CHURCH AND IN THE WORLD

Article 17

1. *Rule 6. 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 in personal witness[17] in the environment in which they live and service for building up the Kingdom of God within the situations of this world.

2. The preparation of the brothers and sisters for spreading the Gospel message "in the ordinary circumstances of the world"[18] and for collaborating in the catechesis within the ecclesial communities should be promoted in the fraternities.

3. Those who are called to carry out the mission of catechists, presiders of ecclesial communities, or other ministries, as well as the sacred Ministers, should make the love of Francis for the Word of God their own, as well as his faith in those who announce it, and the great fervour with which he received the mission of preaching penance from the Pope.

4. Participation in the service of sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and finally through their active presence in the local Church and in society.

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[17] See *Rule* 1221., 17.3; (The Saint p. 75) *Legend of the Three Companions* 36; (The Founder p. 89 & 90.) *Second Letter to All the Faithful* 53. (The Saint p. 49*"We are brothers, moreover, when we do the will of His Father Who is in heaven."*)

[18] *Lumen Gentium* 35.

For a Just and Fraternal Society

Article 18

1. Secular Franciscans are called to make their own contribution, inspired by the person and message of Saint Francis of Assisi, towards a civilization in which the dignity of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities.[19]

2. *Rule 13.* They should deepen the true foundations of universal kinship and create a spirit of welcome and an atmosphere of fraternity everywhere. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others.

3. *Rule 13.* They should work together with movements which promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to "create worthy conditions of life" for all and to work for the freedom of all people.

4. Following the example of Francis, patron of ecologists, they should actively put forward initiatives that care for creation and should work with others in efforts that both put a stop to polluting and degrading nature and also establish circumstances of living and environment which would not be a threat to the human person.

Article 19

1. *Rule 14.* Secular Franciscans should always act as a leaven in the environment in which they live through the witness of their fraternal love and clear Christian motivations.

2. In the spirit of minority, they should opt for relationships which give preference to the poor and to those on the fringe of society, whether these be individuals or categories of persons or an entire people; they should collaborate in overcoming the exclusions of others and those forms of poverty that are the fruit of inefficiency and injustice.

[19] See *Gaudium et Spes* 31 ff.

Article 20

1. *Rule 14.* Secular Franciscans, committed by their vocation to build the Kingdom of God in temporal situations and activities, live their membership both in the Church and in society as an inseparable reality.

2. As the primary and fundamental contribution to building a more just and fraternal world, they should commit themselves both to the generous fulfilment of the duties proper to their occupation and to the professional training that pertains to it. With the same spirit of service, they should assume their social and civil responsibilities.

Article 21

1. *Rule 16.* For Francis, work is a gift, and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood but the opportunity to serve God and neighbour as well as a way to develop one's own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane.

2. Leisure and recreation have their own value and are necessary for personal development. Secular Franciscans should maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to create meaningful forms of using leisure time.[20]

Article 22

1. *Rule 15.* Secular Franciscans should "be in the forefront ... in the field of public life." They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances.

2. The fraternities should engage themselves through courageous initiatives, consistent with their Franciscan vocation and with the directives of the Church, in the field of

[20] *See Gaudium et Spes* 67; *Laborem exercens* 16 ff.

human development and justice. They should take clear positions whenever human dignity is attacked by any form of oppression or indifference. They should offer their fraternal service to the victims of injustice.

3. The renunciation of the use of violence, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. However, the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love.

Article 23

1. *Rule 19.* Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and of fraternal love.[21] Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society:
   - they should see to the proposal and spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes;
   - they should develop their own initiatives and should collaborate, individually and as a fraternity, with initiatives of the Pope, the local Churches, and the Franciscan Family;
   - they should collaborate with those movements and institutions which promote peace while respecting its authentic foundations.

2. While acknowledging both the personal and National right to legitimate defence, they should respect the choice of those who, because of conscientious objection, refuse to bear arms.

3. To preserve peace in the family, the brothers and sisters should, in due time, make a last will and testament for the disposition of their goods.

[21] See *Gaudium et Spes* 78.

In the Family

Article 24

1. *Rule 17.* Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death.

   Married couples find in the Rule of the OFS an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

2. In the Fraternity:
   - the spirituality of the family and of marriage and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;
   - they should share the important moments of the family life of their Franciscan brothers and sisters, and they should give fraternal attention to those – single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced – who are living difficult situations;
   - *Rule 19.* they should create conditions suitable for dialogue between generations;
   - the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered.

3. The brothers and sisters should collaborate with the efforts undertaken in the Church and in society to affirm both the value of fidelity and respect for life and to provide answers to the social problems of the family.

Article 25

Out of the conviction of the need to educate children to take an interest in community, "bringing them the awareness of being living, active members of the People of God,"[22] and because of the fascination which Francis can exercise on them, the formation of groups of children should be encouraged. With the help of a pedagogy and an organisation suitable to their age, these children should be initiated into a knowledge and love of the Franciscan life. National Statutes will give appropriate orientation to the organisation of these groups and their relationship to the fraternity and to Franciscan youth groups.

Messengers of Joy and Hope

Article 26

1. Even in suffering, Francis experienced confidence and joy from:
   - the experience of the fatherhood of God;
   - the invincible faith of rising with Christ to eternal life;
   - the experience of being able to meet and praise the Creator in the universal fraternity of all creatures.[23]

   Rule 19. Following the Gospel, Secular Franciscans, therefore, affirm their hope and their joy in living. They make a contribution to counter widespread distress and pessimism, preparing a better future.

2. In the fraternity, the brothers and sisters should promote mutual understanding, and they should see to it that the atmosphere of their meetings is welcoming and that it reflects joy. They should encourage one another for the good.

[22] *Apostolicam actuositatem* 30.

[23] See *2 Celano*, 125; (The Founder p. 329) *Legend of Perugia* 43; *Major Life*, 9. (The Founder p. 596. "Aroused by everything to divine love…")

Article 27

1. *Rule 19.* The brothers and sisters, progressing in age, should learn to accept illness and increasing difficulties and to give a deeper sense to their life. This should be undertaken with increasing detachment as they set out for the Promised Land. They should be firmly convinced that the community of those who believe in Christ and who love one another in him will go forward into eternal life as the "communion of saints."

2. Secular Franciscans should commit themselves to create in their environment and above all, in their fraternities, a climate of faith and hope so that "Sister Death" may be regarded as a passage to the Father, and all may prepare themselves with serenity.

CHAPTER III
LIFE IN FRATERNITY

Title 1
GENERAL ORIENTATIONS

Article 28

1. The fraternity of the OFS finds its origin in the inspiration of Saint Francis of Assisi to whom the Most High revealed the essential gospel quality of life in fraternal communion.[24]

2. *Rule 20.* "The OFS is divided into fraternities of various levels," the purpose being to promote in an orderly form, the union and mutual collaboration among the brothers and sisters and their active and communal presence in both the local and the universal Church. The OFS shall also support the commitment of the fraternities in their service to the world, and specifically to the life of society.

[24] See *Constitutions* 3.3; *Testament* 14. (The Saint p. 125 *"…the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.")*

3. The brothers and sisters gather in Local Fraternities established in connection with a church or a religious house, or in personal fraternities, constituted for specific and valid reasons recognised in the decree of establishment.[25]

Article 29

1. Local Fraternities are grouped into fraternities at various levels: regional, National, and International according to criteria that are ecclesial, territorial, or of another nature. They are co-ordinated and connected according to the norm of the Rule and the Constitutions. This is a requirement of the communion among the fraternities, of the orderly collaboration among them, and of the unity of the OFS.

2. *Rule 20.* These Fraternities that each have their own juridical personality in the Church should acquire, if possible, a civil juridical personality for the better fulfilment of their mission. It pertains to the National Councils to give guidelines concerning the motivations and the procedures to be followed.

3. National Statutes should indicate the criteria for the organisation of the OFS in the nation. The application of these criteria is left to the prudent judgement of the leaders of the fraternities concerned and of the National Council.

Article 30

1. The brothers and sisters are co-responsible for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the OFS as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world.

2. 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.

[25] See Can. 518.

3. *Rule 25.* In a family spirit, each brother and sister should make a contribution to the fraternity fund, according to each one's means, to provide the financial means needed for the life of the fraternity and for its religious, apostolic and charitable works. The brothers and sisters ought to provide the means necessary for supporting the activities and the operations of the fraternities at higher levels, both by their financial assistance and by their contributions in other areas as well.

Article 31

1. *Rule 21.* On various levels, each Fraternity is animated and guided by a Council and Minister (or President). These offices are conferred through elections, in accordance with the Rule, the Constitutions, and their own Statutes. Only by way of exception or in the first phase of their establishment may fraternities exist without a regular Council. The Council of the higher level will make the arrangements necessary for this inadequate situation only for the specific amount of time it takes to get a fraternity back on sure footing or to establish a new fraternity; to give its leaders the proper formation and to carry out the elections.

2. The office of Minister or Councillor is a fraternal service, a commitment to hold oneself available and responsible in relation to each brother and sister and to the fraternity so that each one will realise his or her own vocation, and each Fraternity will be a true community, ecclesial and Franciscan, actively present in the Church and in society.

3. The leaders of the OFS at every level should be perpetually professed, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan evangelical way of life, attentive to the life of the Church and of society with a broad and encompassing vision, open to dialogue and ready to give and receive help and collaboration.

4. The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings both of the fraternities and of the Councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness,

suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out, and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters.

Article 32

1. The Ministers and Councillors should live and foster the spirit and reality of communion among the brothers and sisters, among the various fraternities and between them and the Franciscan family, They should, above all, cherish peace and reconciliation in and around the fraternity.

2. *Rule 21.* The Ministers' and Councillors' task to lead is temporary. The brothers and sisters, rejecting all ambition, should show love for the fraternity with a spirit of service, prepared both to accept and to relinquish the office.

Article 33

1. In the guidance and co-ordination of the fraternities and of the Order, the personality and capacity of the individual brothers and sisters and of the individual fraternities should be promoted. The plurality of expressions of the Franciscan ideal and cultural variety must be respected.

2. The Councils of higher levels should not do what can be adequately carried out either by the local fraternities or by a Council of a lower level. They should respect and promote their vitality so that they fulfil their duties properly. The Local Fraternities and Councils concerned should commit themselves to carry out the decisions of the International Council and of the other Councils of higher levels and to implement their programs, adapting them when necessary to their own situation.

Article 34

Where the situation and the needs of the members require it, sections or groups which gather members sharing particular needs, common interests, or the same choices, may be established within the Fraternity under the guidance of the one Council.

Such groups can give themselves specific norms relative to their meetings and activities, firmly remaining faithful, however, to the requirements which arise from membership in the one Fraternity. National Statutes may establish criteria suitable for the formation and functioning of these sections or groups.

Article 35

1. Secular Priests who recognise that they are called by the Spirit to participate in the charism of Saint Francis of Assisi within the Secular Fraternity should find in it specific attention in conformity with their mission among the People of God.

2. Secular Franciscan priests may also gather in personal fraternities in order to pursue the ascetical and pastoral incentives which the life and doctrine of Francis and the Rule of the OFS offer them to live their vocation in the Church better. It is proper that these fraternities have their own Statutes which envision concrete forms for their composition, their fraternal meetings and for spiritual formation as well as for making their communion with the whole Order living and functional.

Article 36

1. The brothers and sisters 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 can be a great help in the spiritual and apostolic development of the OFS.

2. 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.

3. Such Statutes should be in harmony with the present Constitutions.

Title II

ENTRANCE INTO THE ORDER AND FORMATION

Article 37

1. *Rule 23.* Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the profession of the Rule.

2. The journey of formation, which should develop throughout life, begins with entrance into the fraternity. 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 as Spiritual Guide.

3. The brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord. The fraternity is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer, and example.

4. The elaboration and adoption of means of formation, adapted to the local situations and offered as a help to those responsible for formation in the individual fraternities, belong to the National and Regional Councils in common agreement.

The Time of Initiation

Article 38

1. *Rule 23.* The time of Initiation is a phase preparatory to the true and proper time of formation and is intended for the

discernment of the vocation and for the reciprocal acquaintance between the fraternity and the aspiring member. It should guarantee the freedom and the seriousness of entrance into the OFS.

2. The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development are established by the National Statutes.

3. It belongs to the Fraternity Council to decide possible exemptions to this time of initiation, keeping in mind the guidelines of the National Council.

Admission to the Order

Article 39

1. *Rule 23.* The request for admission to the Order is presented by the Aspirant to the Minister of a local or personal fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.

2. Conditions for admission are: to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of a vocation.[26]

3. The Council of the fraternity decides collegially on the request, gives a formal answer to the Aspirant, and communicates this to the fraternity.

4. The rite of admission is performed according to the Ritual.[27] The act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

The Time of Formation

Article 40

1. *Rule 23.* The time of Formation lasts at least one year. The National Statutes can establish a longer period. The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of the evangelical life in fraternity and a better knowledge of

[26] See Can. 316.

[27] See *Ritual OFS,* Preface n. 10 ff.; Chapter I.

the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with the candidates of other fraternities.

2. The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her teaching. The laity practice living their Secular commitment in the world in an evangelical way.

3. Participation in the meetings of the Local Fraternity is indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life.

4. A style of teaching which is Franciscan in character and which fits the mentality of the persons concerned should be adopted.

The Profession or Promise of Evangelical Life

Article 41

1. *Rule 23.* Having completed the time of Initial Formation, the candidate submits to the Minister of the Local Fraternity a request to make his or her profession. Having heard the Master of Formation and the assistant, the Fraternity Council decides by secret ballot on the admission to profession, gives its reply to the candidate and informs the fraternity.

2. The conditions for the profession or promise of evangelical life are:
   - attainment of the age established by the National Statutes;
   - active participation in the time of formation for at least one year;
   - the consent of the Council of the Local Fraternity.

3. Where it is held to be opportune to lengthen the time of formation, it must not be extended to more than a year beyond the time established by the National Statutes.

Article 42

1. Profession is the solemn ecclesial act by which the candidate, remembering the call received from Christ, renews the baptismal promises and publicly affirms his or her personal commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to the example of Francis and following the Rule of the OFS.

2. *Rule 23.* Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual Profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a Temporary Profession, renewable annually. The total time of Temporary Profession may not be longer than three years.[28]

3. Profession is accepted by the Minister of the Local Fraternity or by his or her delegate in the name of the Church and of the OFS. The rite is carried out according to the norms of the Ritual.[29]

4. Profession does not only commit those professed to the fraternity but also in the same way it commits the Fraternity to be concerned with their human and religious well-being.
5. The act of Profession is registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

Article 43

The National Statutes establish:
- *Rule 23.* the minimum age for Profession which, however, may not be less than eighteen years completed;
- the distinctive sign of membership in the Order (the “Tau” or other Franciscan symbol).

[28] See *Ritual OFS*, Preface n. 18.

[29] See *Ritual OFS*, Preface n. 13 ff.; Part I, Chapter II.

Continuing Formation

Article 44

1. Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each[30] and every one and in the fulfilment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.

2. The Fraternity has the duty 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.

3. Ongoing formation – accomplished by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experience aims to assist the brothers and sisters:
   - *Rule 4.* in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, "going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel;"
   - in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions;
   - in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of Saint Francis, Saint Clare, and other Franciscan authors.

Promotion of Vocations

Article 45

1. The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.

[30] See *Constitutions* 8; *1 Celano* 103. (The Saint p. 272 & 173. "*Let us begin, to serve the Lord God, for up until now we have done little or nothing*.")

The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members.

2. Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, the Councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the Secular Franciscan vocation.

Title III

THE FRATERNITY AT THE VARIOUS LEVELS

The Local Fraternity

Article 46

1. *Rule 22.* The canonical establishment of the Local Fraternity belongs to the competent religious Major Superior at the request of the brothers and sisters concerned and with the prior consultation and collaboration of the Council of the higher level to which the new fraternity will be related according to the National Statutes.

   The written consent of the Local Ordinary (Bishop) is necessary for the canonical establishment of a fraternity outside the houses or churches of the Franciscan religious of the First Order or the TOR.[31]

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

[31] See Can. 312 §2. Where houses and parishes of the 1st Order are established consent of the Bishop for the erection of the OFS is automatic.

the records of the fraternity. Copies are sent to the Council of the higher level.

3. If there is not yet a fraternity of the OFS in a nation, it belongs to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS to make provision in this regard.

Article 47

1. *Rule 22.* Each Local Fraternity, the primary cell of the one OFS, is entrusted to the pastoral care of the religious Franciscan Order that canonically established it.

2. A Local Fraternity may pass to the pastoral care of another religious Franciscan Order in the ways determined by the National Statutes.

Article 48

1. In the case of cessation of a Fraternity, the patrimonial goods of the same, the library and the records are acquired by the fraternity of the immediately higher level.

2. In the case of revival, according to the canonical laws, the Fraternity will repossess any remaining goods, its own library, and records.

The Fraternity Council

Article 49

1. The Council of the Local Fraternity is composed of the following offices: Minister, Vice-Minister, Secretary, Treasurer and Master of Formation. Other offices may be added according to the needs of each fraternity. The Spiritual Assistant of the fraternity forms part of the Council by right.[32]

2. The Fraternity, meeting in an Assembly or Chapter, discusses questions regarding its own life and organisation. Every three

[32] See *Constitutions* 90.2.

years, in an elective Assembly or Chapter, the fraternity elects the Minister and the Council in the way established by the Constitutions and Statutes.

Article 50

1. It is the duty of the Council of the Local Fraternity:
   - to promote the initiatives necessary for fostering fraternal life, for improving the human, Christian and Franciscan formation of its members and for sustaining their witness and commitment in the world;
   - to make concrete and courageous choices;
   - appropriate for the situation of the fraternity, from among the numerous activities possible in the field of the apostolate.

2. The duties of the Council are also:
   a) to decide on the acceptance and admission to profession of new brothers and sisters;[33]
   b) to establish a fraternal dialogue with members in particular difficulties and to adopt consequent measures;
   c) to receive the request for withdrawal and to decide on the suspension of a member from the fraternity;
   d) to decide on the establishment of sections or groups in conformity with the Constitutions and the Statutes;
   e) to decide on the destination of available funds and in general, to deliberate on matters concerning financial management and economic affairs of the fraternity;
   f) to assign duties to the Councillors and to the other professed members;
   g) to request from the competent superiors of the First Order and the T.O.R. suitable and prepared religious as assistants;
   h) to perform such other duties as are required by these Constitutions or which are necessary to carry out its proper purposes.

[33] See *Constitutions* 39.3; 41.1.

The Offices in the Fraternity

Article 51

1. While firmly upholding the co-responsibility of the Council to animate and guide the fraternity, the Minister, as the primary person responsible for the fraternity, is expected to make sure that the directions and the decisions of the Council are put into practice and will keep the Council informed about what he or she is doing.

2. The Minister also has the following duties:
   a) to call, to preside at, and to direct the meetings of the fraternity and Council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the fraternity, having heard the Council on the formalities of the convocation;
   b) to prepare the annual report to be sent to the Council of the higher level after it has been approved by the Council of the fraternity;
   c) to represent the fraternity in all its relations with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the fraternity acquires a juridical personality in the civil order, the Minister becomes, when possible, its legal representative;
   d) to request, with the consent of the Council, the pastoral and fraternal visits, at least once every three years;
   e) to put into effect those acts which the Constitutions refer to his or her competence.

Article 52

1. The Vice-Minister has the following duties:
   a) to collaborate in a fraternal spirit and to support the Minister in carrying out his or her specific duties;
   b) to exercise the functions entrusted by the Council and/or by the assembly or chapter;
   c) to take the place of the Minister in both duties and responsibilities in case of absence or temporary impediment;

d) to assume the functions of the Minister when the office remains vacant.[34]

2. The Secretary has the following duties:
   a) to compile the official acts of the fraternity and of the Council and to assure that they are sent to their respective proper recipients;
   b) to see to the updating and preservation of the records and the registers, noting admissions, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers from the fraternity;[35]
   c) to provide for the communication of the more important facts to the various levels and, if appropriate to provide for their dissemination through the mass media.

3. The Master of Formation has the following duties:
   a) to co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of the Council, the formative activities of the fraternity;
   b) to instruct and enliven the inquirers during the time of initiation, the candidates during the period of initial formation, and the newly professed;
   c) to inform the Council of the fraternity prior to profession, concerning the suitability of the candidate for a commitment to live according to the Rule.

4. The Treasurer, or Bursar, has the following duties:
   a) to guard diligently the contributions received, recording each receipt in the appropriate register, with the date on which it was given, the name of the contributor, or the one from whom it was collected;
   b) to record in the same register the items of expense, specifying the date and the purpose, in conformity with the directions of the fraternity Council;
   c) to render an account of his or her administration to the assembly and to the Council of the fraternity according to the norms of the National Statutes.

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[34] See *Constitutions* 81.1.

[35] Each local fraternity is to have at least a register of enrolments (admissions, professions, transfers, deaths, and every other important annotation relative to the individual members), the register of minutes of the Council and the register of administration.

5. The provisions regarding the rights and duties of the Vice-Minister, the Secretary and the Treasurer apply, with the appropriate adaptations, to all levels.

Participation in the Life of the Fraternity

Article 53

1. *Rule 24.* The fraternity must offer to its members opportunities for coming together and collaborating through meetings to be held with as great a frequency as allowed by the situation and with the involvement of all its members.

2. *Rule 6-8.* The Fraternity should come together periodically, also as an ecclesial community to celebrate the Eucharist in a climate which strengthens the fraternal bond and characterises the identity of the Franciscan family. Where for whatever reason, this particular celebration may not be possible, they should participate in the celebration of the larger ecclesial community.

3. Insertion into a Local Fraternity and participation in fraternity life is essential for belonging to the OFS. Appropriate initiatives should be adopted according to the directives of the National Statutes, to keep those brothers and sisters united to the fraternity who – for valid reasons of health, family, work, or distance – cannot actively participate in community life.

4. The Fraternity remembers with gratitude, its brothers and sisters who have passed away and continues its communion with them by prayer and in the Eucharist.

5. 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.

Article 54

1. In cases where the fraternity of whatever level has property or real estate at its disposal, the procedures necessary for that fraternity to acquire a juridical personality in the civil order must be followed in conformity with the National Statutes.

2. Based on the respective civil legislation, the National Statutes must establish precise criteria regarding the purpose of the juridical person, the administration of its material goods and the relevant internal controls. They must also contain instructions so that the establishing document may provide for the disposal of its property in case the juridical person ceases to exist.

3. The National Statutes must also set up precise criteria for local fraternities that possess or administer property or real estate, so that the respective Council, before its term of office is finished, has the fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the Council or by the fraternity's board of examiners.

Transfer to another Fraternity, Withdrawal, Suspension, and Dismissal from the Fraternity and from the Order

Transfer

Article 55

If a brother or sister, for any reasonable cause, desires transfer to another fraternity, he or she first informs the Council of the fraternity to which he or she belongs and then makes the request including the reasons for the transfer, to the Minister of the fraternity to which he or she wishes to belong. The Council makes its decision after having received the necessary information in writing from the fraternity of origin.

Temporary Provisions

Article 56

1. *Rule 23.* Members who find themselves in difficulty may ask, with a formal act, temporary withdrawal from the fraternity. The Council will evaluate the request with love and prudence after a fraternal dialogue between the Minister and the assistant with the person concerned. If the reasons appear to be well-founded, after the brother or sister in difficulty has been given time to reconsider, the Council agrees to the request.

2. The repeated and prolonged default in the obligations of the life of the fraternity and other conduct in serious opposition to the Rule have to be discussed by the Council in dialogue with the person at fault. Only in the case of obstinacy or relapse may the Council decide, with a secret vote, to suspend someone. It communicates its decision in writing to the person concerned.

3. Voluntary withdrawal or the provision for suspension must be noted in the registers of the fraternity. It involves exclusion from the meetings and activities of the fraternity, including the right of active and passive voice, but membership in the Order itself is not affected.

Article 57

1. In the case of voluntary withdrawal or of suspension from the fraternity, the secular Franciscan may ask to be readmitted by addressing an appropriate written request to the Minister.

2. After examining the reasons offered by the person involved, the Council evaluates whether the causes which led to the withdrawal or suspension can be considered as overcome. If the conclusion is affirmative, it readmits him or her, and the decision is recorded in the proceedings of the fraternity.

Definitive Provisions

Article 58

1. The brother or sister, who intends to withdraw definitively from the Order, communicates so in writing to the Minister of the fraternity. The Minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the person concerned and keep the Council informed. If the brother or sister confirms the decision in writing, the Council takes notice and communicates it in writing to the person concerned. The definitive withdrawal is recorded in the register of the fraternity and communicated to the Council of the higher level.

2. In case of serious causes, provided that they are external, imputable and juridically proven, the Minister and the assistant of the local fraternity, with charity and prudence, discuss the matter with the brother or sister concerned and keep the Council informed. The brother or sister is given time to reflect and to discern, possibly with the help of an external and competent expert. If the time set aside for reflection passes without any result, the Council of the fraternity request the Council of the higher level to dismiss the brother or sister from the Order. The request must be accompanied by all the documentation relative to the case. The Council of the higher level will issue the decree of dismissal after having collegially examined the request with the relative documentation and having verified observance of the directives of the Law and of the Constitutions.

3. The brother or sister who publicly rejects the faith or defects from ecclesiastical communion, or upon whom an excommunication is imposed or declared, by the fact itself ceases to be a member of the Order. This does not exonerate the Council of the local fraternity from discussing the matter with the person concerned and offering fraternal help. The Council of a higher level, upon request of the Council of the local fraternity, collects the proofs and officially declares that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order.

4. The decree of dismissal or the declaration that the person has ceased to be a member of the Order, in order to become effective, must be confirmed by the National Council to whom all the documentation will be sent.

Article 59

If anyone is convinced that he or she has been wronged by a measure adopted, that person may appeal within three months to the Council above the one that adopted the decision in question and, in successive cases, to further levels all the way up to the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS and, in the final instance, to the Holy See.

Article 60

What is said in these Constitutions with respect to the local fraternities is valid, to the extent that it is applicable, for the personal fraternities also.

The Regional Fraternity

Article 61

1. 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 co-operative efforts of the Franciscan religious orders to provide spiritual assistance within the area.

2. It is for the National Council to compose the Regional fraternity according to the Constitutions and to the National Statutes. The competent religious superiors, from whom spiritual assistance must be sought, should be informed of it.

3. The Regional fraternity:
   - is animated and guided by Council and a Minister;
   - is ruled by the National Statutes and by its own Statutes;
   - has its own seat.

Article 62

1. The Regional Council is constituted according to the provisions of the National Statutes and of its own Regional Statutes. At the heart of the Regional Council, there can be set up an Executive Council (or Board) whose duties are determined by those same Statutes.

2. The Regional Council has the following duties:
   a. to prepare the celebration of the elective chapter;
   b. to promote, animate and co-ordinate the life and activities of the OFS and its insertion into the local Church within the regional area;
   c. to detail the action plan of the OFS within the region according to the directives of the National Council and in collaboration with it and to publicize that program to the local fraternities;
   d. to communicate the directives of the National Council and of the local Church to the local fraternities;
   e. to provide for the formation of those responsible for animation;
   f. to offer to local fraternities activities which support their formative and operative needs;
   g. to discuss and approve the annual report to the National Council;
   h. to schedule, when circumstances recommend so, the fraternal visit to the local fraternities, even if it is not requested;
   i. to make decisions regarding the use of available funds and, in general, to deliberate on matters regarding the financial management and the economic affairs of the regional Fraternity;
   j. to have, before its term of office is finished, the Regional Fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the Council or by the fraternity's board of examiners;
   k. to perform such other duties as are indicated by the Constitutions or necessary to achieve its own aims.

Article 63

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the Council for the animation and guidance of the Regional Fraternity it is the duty of the Minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the Council are put into practice. He or she will keep the Council informed concerning his or her activities.

2. In addition, the Regional Minister has the duty:
   a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the Regional Council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the fraternity after having listened to the Council on the formalities of the convocation;
   b. to preside at and to confirm the elections of the local fraternities either in person or through a delegated member of the Regional Council, with the exception of the Spiritual Assistant;
   c. to make fraternal visits to the local fraternities, personally or through a delegate who is a member of the Council;
   d. to participate in the meetings called by the National Council;
   e. to represent the Fraternity whenever it has acquired juridical personality in the civil order;
   f. to prepare the annual report to the National Council;
   g. to request the pastoral and fraternal visits with the consent of the Council, at least once every three years.

Article 64

The Regional chapter is the representative organ of all the fraternities existing within the confines of a Regional Fraternity, with elective and deliberative power.

The National Statutes provide for the formalities of convocation, its composition, frequency, and powers.

The National Fraternity

Article 65

1. 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.

2. It is the duty of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS to provide for the establishment of new National Fraternities upon request and in dialogue with the Councils of the fraternities concerned. The competent religious superiors of the nation, of whom spiritual assistance will be requested, should be informed.

3. The National Fraternity:
   - is animated and guided by a Council and a Minister;
   - is governed by its own Statutes;
   - has its own seat.

Article 66

1. The National Council is constituted according to the provisions of the National Statutes. At the heart of the National Council, there can be set up an Executive Council (or board) whose duties are determined by those same Statutes.

2. The National Council has the duty:
   a. to prepare the celebration of the National Elective Chapter according to its own Statutes;
   b. to make known and to promote the secular Franciscan spirituality in the whole area of its own National Fraternity;
   c. to decide upon programs of annual activities of a National character;
   d. to seek, indicate, publish and distribute the necessary instruments for the formation of the Secular Franciscans;
   e. to animate and co-ordinate the activities of the Regional Councils;

f. to maintain the connection with the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS;
g. to make sure that the National Fraternity be represented in the International Council and to assume the responsibility for the expenses involved;
h. to discuss and approve the annual report to Presidency of the International Council of the OFS
i. to see the presence of the OFS in the ecclesial bodies at the National level;
j. to schedule, when circumstances recommend so, the fraternal visit to the Regional and Local Fraternities, even if it is not requested;
k. to make decisions regarding the management of the available funds and, in general, regarding the economic affairs of the Fraternity;
l. to have, before its term of office is finished, the National Fraternity's financial and real estate situation audited either by an expert who is not a member of the Council or by the Fraternity's board of examiners;
m. to perform such other duties as are indicated by the Constitutions or necessary to achieve its own aims.

Article 67

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the Council for the animation and guidance of the National Fraternity it is the duty of the Minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the Council are put into practice. He or she will keep the Council informed concerning his or her activities.

2. In addition, the National Minister has the duty:
   a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the National Council; to convoke every three years the elective chapter of the National Fraternity, according to the National Statutes, after having listened to the Council on the formalities of the convocation;
   b. to direct and co-ordinate with the National leaders the activities at the National level;

c. to give a report to the National Council and chapter on the life and activity of the OFS in the country;
d. to represent the National Fraternity in contacts with ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the National Fraternity has a civil juridical personality, its legal representation belongs to the Minister;
e. to preside at and to confirm the elections of the Regional fraternities either in person or through a delegated member of the National Council, with the exception of the Spiritual Assistant;
f. to make fraternal visits to the Regional Councils, personally or through a delegate who is a member of the National Council;
g. to request the fraternal and pastoral visits, with the consent of the Council, at least once every six years.

Article 68

1. The National Chapter is the representative organ of the fraternities existing within the confines of a Fraternity. It has legislative, deliberative, and elective powers. In conformity with the Rule and Constitutions, it may make legislative decisions and give norms valid within its National confines. The National Statutes determine the composition of the National Chapter, its frequency, its powers, and how to convoke it.

2. The National Statutes may envisage other forms of meetings and assemblies to promote the life and apostolate at the National level.

The International Fraternity

Article 69

1. The International Fraternity is constituted by the organic union of all the Catholic secular Franciscan fraternities in the world. It is identical to the OFS. It has its own juridical personality within the Church. It is organised, and it functions in conformity with the Constitutions and its own Statutes.

2. The International Fraternity is 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.

Article 70

1. The International Council is composed of the following members, elected according to the norms of the Constitutions and its own Statutes:
   - professed brothers and sisters of the OFS;
   - representatives of the Franciscan Youth.

   In addition, the four General Assistants to the OFS form part of the International Council.

2. The Presidency of the International Council of the OFS is constituted within the International Council of which it forms an integral part.

3. The International Council convened in General Chapter is the highest governing body of the OFS with legislative, deliberative and elective powers. It can make legislative decisions and give norms in conformity with the Rule and the Constitutions.

4. The International Council meets every six years in elective General Chapter and at least once between two elective General chapters, according to the norms established by the Constitutions and by the International Statutes.

Article 71

1. The purposes and duties of the International Council of the OFS are:
   a. to promote and sustain the evangelical life according to the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi within the secular condition of the faithful living throughout the world;
   b. to increase the sense of unity of the OFS while respecting the pluralism of the persons and groups, and

to strengthen the bond of communion, collaboration and sharing among the National fraternities;

c. to harmonise the sound traditions, according to the original nature of the OFS, with advances in theological, pastoral and legislative fields, with a view to a specific evangelical Franciscan formation;
d. to contribute, in line with the tradition of the OFS, to the spreading of ideas and initiatives which are valuable for promoting the availability of Secular Franciscans in the life of the Church and of society;
e. to determine the orientations and establish priorities for the actions of its Presidency;
f. to interpret the Constitutions according to article 5. 2.

2. The International Statutes specify the composition of the International Council and how to convoke its meetings.

Article 72

1. The Presidency of the International Council of the OFS is composed of:
   - the General Minister;
   - the Vice-Minister;
   - the presidency Councillors;
   - a member of the Franciscan Youth;
   - the General Assistants of the OFS.

2. The presidency Councillors are elected according to the International Statutes, which determine their number and the areas represented.

Article 73

The duties and tasks of the Presidency are:

a. to see that the decisions and orientations of the General chapter are carried out;
b. to co-ordinate, animate, and guide the OFS at the International level, in order to make the interdependence and reciprocity of the OFS a reality at the various levels of fraternity;

c. to intervene in a spirit of service, according to the circumstances, providing fraternal aid in the clarification and resolution of grave and urgent problems of the OFS, informing the National Council concerned and the next General Chapter;
d. to strengthen reciprocal relationships of collaboration between the OFS and the other components of the Franciscan family at the world level;
e. to organise meetings or assemblies, according to the norms of the International Statutes to promote the life and the apostolate of the OFS at the International level;
f. to collaborate with organisations and associations which defend the same values;
g. to fulfil the other duties indicated in the Constitutions or needed in order to reach its own proper goals.

Article 74

1. While firmly preserving the co-responsibility of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS in the guidance and animation of the International Fraternity, it belongs to the General Minister, who has the primary responsibility, to see that the directions and decisions of the General Chapter and of the Presidency are put into practice and to inform them concerning his or her activities.

2. In addition, the General Minister has the duty:
    a. to convoke and preside at the meetings of the Presidency according to its own Statutes;
    b. to convoke the meetings of the General Chapter, with the consent of the Presidency, and to preside at them;
    c. to be a visible and effective sign of the communion and life-giving reciprocity between the OFS and the General Ministers of the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, among whom he or she represents the OFS, and to preserve the bond with the conference of General Assistants;
    d. to represent the OFS at the world level before ecclesiastical and civil authorities. When the International Fraternity has a civil juridical personality, its legal representation belongs to the Minister;

e. to make the fraternal visit to the National Councils, personally or through a delegate;
f. to preside at the elections of the National Councils, personally or through a delegate;
g. to request with the consent of the Presidency, the pastoral visit by the Conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR;
h. to intervene in urgent cases, informing the Presidency of them;
i. to sign the official documents of the International Fraternity;
j. to exercise, with the consent of the Presidency, the property rights of the International Fraternity together with another Councillor of the Presidency designated by that same body;
k. before every General Chapter, have the financial and property situation of the International Fraternity verified by a qualified accountant who is not involved in the economic and financial management of the Presidency.

Article 75

The specific duties of the International Councillors are determined by the International Statutes.

Title IV

ELECTION TO AND TERMINATION OF OFFICES

Elections

Article 76

1. The elections at the various levels will take place according to the norms of the law of the Church[36] and of the Constitutions.

[36] See Can. 164 ff.

The convocation should be carried out at least one month in advance, indicating the place, the day and the time of the election.

2. The Elective Assembly, or Chapter, will be presided over by the Minister of the immediately higher level, or by his or her delegate, who confirms the election.

   The President or the Delegate cannot preside at the elections in his or her Local Fraternity, nor the elections of the Council of a higher level, of whose Council he or she is a member.

   The Spiritual Assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the T.O.R.

   A representative of the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the T.O.R. presides at and confirms the elections of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

3. The President of the Chapter and the Assistant of the higher level do not have the right to vote.

4. The president of the chapter designates, among the members of that chapter, a Secretary and two Scrutineers.

Article 77

1. In the Local Fraternity, the Perpetually Professed of the same fraternity have active voice, that is can elect, and passive voice, that is can be elected. The Temporarily Professed have only active voice.

2. At the other levels, the following have active voice: the secular members of the outgoing Council, the representatives of the immediately lower level and of the Franciscan Youth, if professed. It belongs to the particular Statutes to establish more concrete norms in application of the preceding norm, taking care to assure the broadest elective base. The Perpetually Professed Secular Franciscans of the corresponding area have passive voice.

3. Both the National and the International Statutes – each for its own area – can establish objective qualifications regarding who can be elected to the various offices.

4. The presence of more than half of the number of those having the right to vote is required for the valid celebration of an Elective Chapter. For the local level, the National Statutes can establish a different norm.

Article 78

1. An absolute majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret, is required for the elections of the Minister. After two inconclusive ballots, the voting continues between the two candidates who have obtained the largest number of votes or, in case there are more than two, between the two candidates who are oldest by profession. If there is still a tie after the third ballot, the older by profession will be considered elected.

2. The election of the Vice-Minister proceeds in the same manner.

3. For the election of the Councillors, after a first ballot without an absolute majority, a relative majority of the votes of those present, cast in secret is sufficient, unless the particular Statutes require a greater majority.

4. The Secretary announces the result of the elections; the President confirms the election according to the Ritual[37] if all has been carried out properly and those elected have accepted their office.

Article 79

1. The Minister and Vice-Minister may be elected for two consecutive terms of three years each. For a third and final successive election to the office of Minister or Vice-Minister, a

[37] See *Ritual OFS,* Part II, Chapter II.

majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.

2. The out-going Minister cannot be elected Vice-Minister.

3. The Councillors may be elected for additional successive terms of three years. Beginning with the third successive election, a majority of two-thirds of the votes of those present, which must be obtained on the first ballot, will be necessary.

4. The General Minister, Vice-Minister and Presidency Councillors can only be elected for two consecutive terms of six years.
5. The Council of the higher level has the right and duty to invalidate the elections and to call them anew in all cases of inobservance of the preceding norms.

Article 80

The particular Statutes may include further directives concerning elections, as long as they are not contrary to the Constitutions.

Provisions for Vacancy, Resignation and Dismissal

Vacant Offices

Article 81

1. When the office of Minister remains vacant as a result of death, resignation or other impediment of a definitive character, the Vice-Minister assumes the office until the end of the term for which the Minister was originally elected.

2. If the office of Vice-Minister becomes vacant, one of the Councillors is elected to the office of Vice-Minister by the Council of the Fraternity, to serve until the next Elective Chapter.

3. When the office of Councillor becomes vacant, the Council will proceed to substitute for him or her in conformity with its own Statutes, to serve until the next Elective Chapter.

Incompatible Offices

Article 82

The following are incompatible:

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

Resignation of Office

Article 83

1. When a Minister of whatever level resigns during a Chapter, that same Chapter can accept the resignation. When a Minister resigns outside the time of Chapter, that resignation must be presented to the Council. If the resignation is accepted, it must be confirmed by the Minister of the higher level; if the General Minister is resigning, the confirmation comes from the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

2. The resignation of other offices is presented to the Minister and to his or her Council, who are competent to accept the resignation.

Removal

Article 84

1. In the case in which the Minister does not fulfil his or her duties, the Council concerned manifests its concerns in a fraternal dialogue with the Minister. If this does not produce positive results, the Council should inform the Council of the higher level whose competence it is to examine the case and, if needed, by secret ballot, decide to remove the Minister.

2. For a serious public, and proved reason, the Council of a higher level, after a fraternal dialogue with the person

concerned, may, by a secret ballot, order the removal of a Minister of a lower level.

3. When there is a serious reason to remove those who hold other offices of the Council, it is the responsibility of that Council to which they belong to make its decision by a secret ballot after there has been a fraternal dialogue with the person involved.

4. A recourse which by itself suspends the action to remove someone from office can be presented within thirty days to the Council of the level immediately higher than the one which imposed the sanction.

5. The removal of the General Minister belongs to the competence of the conference of the General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR.

6. When there is a case of serious lack of concern or evidence of irregularities on the part of a Minister or a Council, the Council of the next higher level conducts a fraternal visit of the Council in question and, if necessary, requests a Pastoral Visit. With charity and prudence, it will evaluate the circumstances uncovered and decide on the best way to proceed, not excluding the possibility of removal of the Council or leaders involved.

Title V

SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE OF THE OFS

Article 85

1. 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.[38]

[38] From Franciscan history and from the Constitutions of the First Order and the T.O.R., it is

2. 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 purpose of the *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the Secular Franciscans.

Article 86

1. 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.

2. This service of the religious Ministers completes but does not substitute for the Secular Councils and Ministers to whom belongs the guidance, co-ordination, and animation of the fraternities at the various levels.

Article 87

1. For all that concerns the OFS as a whole, the *altius moderamen* must be exercised by the General Ministers collegially.

2. It belongs to the Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR:

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clearly evident that these Orders recognise 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 O.F.M., 60; Constitutions O.F.M. Conv., 116; Constitutions O.F.M. Cap., 95; Constitutions T.O.R, 157; Rule of the Third Order of Pope Leo XIII, 3.3; Rule approved by Paul VI, 26.

a. to take care of the relations with the Holy See concerning the approval of the legislative or liturgical documents, which need to be approved by the Holy See;
b. to visit the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS;
c. to confirm the election of the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

3. Each General Minister, for his own Order, sees to the interest of the religious for the OFS and to their preparation for service to it according to the respective Constitutions and the Constitutions of the OFS.

Article 88

1. The Provincial Ministers and the other Major Superiors, in the area of their own jurisdiction, guarantee spiritual assistance to the Local Fraternities entrusted to the jurisdiction. They foster the interest of their own religious in the OFS and ensure that suitable and well-prepared persons are appointed for the service of spiritual assistance.

2. It is the specific competence of the Major Superiors, in name of their jurisdiction:
   a. to establish canonically new local fraternities and guarantee them spiritual assistance;
   b. to animate spiritually and visit the local fraternities assisted by their own jurisdiction;
   c. to keep themselves informed on the spiritual assistance given to the OFS.

3. The Major Superiors are responsible for the spiritual assistance to the local fraternities which they have established.

4. The Major Superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory 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 assistance.

5. The Major Superiors with jurisdiction in the same territory are to establish together the most adequate means for carrying out collegially their mission with respect to the Regional and National fraternities of the OFS.

Article 89

1. By virtue of the vital reciprocity between the religious and the secular members of the Franciscan Family and in regard to the responsibilities of Major Superiors, spiritual assistance to the fraternities of the OFS at all levels must be assured as a fundamental element of communion.

2. The Spiritual Assistant is the person designated by the competent Major Superior to carry out this service for a specific fraternity of the OFS.

3. 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 T.O.R.

4. When it is not possible to give such a Spiritual Assistant to the fraternity, the competent Major Superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:
   a. religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
   b. diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the OFS;
   c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious.

5. The previous authorisation of the Superior or the Local Ordinary, when needed, does not exempt the Franciscan Major Superior of the responsibility for the quality of the pastoral service and of the spiritual assistance given.

Article 90

1. The principal task of the Spiritual Assistant is to communicate Franciscan spirituality and to co-operate in the initial and continuing formation of the brothers and sisters.

2 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. The Spiritual Assistant does not exercise the right to vote in financial questions.

3. Specifically:
   a. 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;
   b. the National Assistants give their service to the National Council; see to the spiritual assistance to the OFS in the whole territory of the National Fraternity and, at the National level, to the co-ordination of the Regional Assistants. If they are more than one, they form a conference and give their service collegially;
   c. the Regional Assistants 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 give their service collegially;
   d. the Local Assistants give their service to the Local Fraternity and its Council.

Article 91

1. The Council of the Fraternity at each level requests suitable and prepared assistants from the competent superiors of the First Order and the TOR.

2. Specifically:
   a. the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS requests a General Assistant from the respective General Minister;
   b. the National Council requests a National Assistant from the Major Superior, indicated collegially by the Major

Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the National Fraternity;

c. the Regional Council requests an assistant from the Major Superior, indicated collegially by the Major Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory of the Regional Fraternity;

d. the Local Council requests an assistant from the Major Superior of the jurisdiction responsible for the assistance.

3. The competent Major Superior, having heard the Council of the Fraternity concerned, appoints an Assistant according to the norms of these Constitutions and of the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order.*

Title VI

THE FRATERNAL VISIT AND THE PASTORAL VISIT

Article 92

1. *Rule 26.* 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 to help 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.

2. With the consent of the appropriate Council, the request for the fraternal visit as well as for the 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.

3. 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.

Article 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.

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.

3. 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 possibly encountered.

4. 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.

5. The Fraternal and Pastoral visits, carried out by the immediately higher level, do not deprive the visited fraternity of the right to appeal to the Council or to the Conference of Spiritual Assistants of a higher level.

The Fraternal Visit

Article 94

1. The Fraternal Visit is a moment of communion, an expression of the service and concrete interest of the secular leaders at the various levels, so that the fraternity may grow and be faithful to its vocation.[39]

2. Among the various initiatives to achieve the purpose of the visit, the Visitor will give special attention:
   - to the validity of the formation, both initial and permanent;
   - to the relations entertained with other fraternities at the different levels, with Franciscan Youth, and with the entire Franciscan family.
   - to the observance of the directives and of the guidelines of the International Council of the OFS and of the other Councils;
   - to the presence in the Local Church.

3. The Visitor will check the report of the previous audit or verification of the financial and property management of the Council, the Register of the Accounts and every document pertaining to the property of the fraternity and if applicable, the condition of the juridical personality in the civil order, including the fiscal aspects. In absence of the required audit of the financial and property management of the Council, the Visitor can commission such an audit, to be paid by the visited fraternity, to an expert who is not a member of the Council concerned. Wherever he or she deems it opportune, the Visitor will obtain the assistance of a competent person in these aspects.

[39] Cfr. *Constitutions* 51,1c; 63,2g; 67,2g.

4. The Visitor will check the records of the Election of the Council. He or she will evaluate the quality of the service offered to the fraternity by the Minister and by the other leaders and will study with them the solution to problems which may arise.
   If for whatever reason, he or she should find that their service does not meet the needs of the Fraternity, the Visitor will promote appropriate initiatives, taking into account also the provisions concerning resignation and removal from office, given special circumstances.[40]

5. The Visitor may not carry out the visit of his or her own Local Fraternity, nor of the Council of another level of which he or she is a member.

The Pastoral Visit

Article 95

1. 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 organisation and the law proper to the OFS itself.

2. Having verified the canonical establishment of the Fraternity, the Visitor will give attention to the relations between the Fraternity and its Spiritual Assistant and the Local Church The Visitor will meet 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 Spiritual 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.

[40] Cfr. *Constitutions* 83; 84.

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.

Title VII

THE FRANCISCAN YOUTH

Article 96

1. The OFS, by virtue of its very vocation, ought to be ready to share its experience of evangelical life with the youth who feel attracted to Saint Francis of Assisi and to seek the means of adequately presenting it to them.

2. The Franciscan Youth (YouFra), as understood by these Constitutions and in so far as the OFS considers itself to be particularly responsible for it, 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.

3. 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. After a suitable period of formation, of at least one year, they confirm this option with a personal pledge before God and in the presence of the brothers and sisters.

4. The members of the Franciscan Youth who wish to belong to the OFS should satisfy the requirements of the Rule, the Constitutions, and the Ritual of the OFS.

5. The Franciscan Youth has a specific organisation, methods of formation and teaching methods adequate for the needs of the world of youth, according to the existing realities in the various countries. The National Statutes of the Franciscan Youth should be approved by the respective National Council of the OFS, or in its absence, by the Presidency of the International Council of the OFS.

6. The Franciscan Youth, as a component of the Franciscan family, requests from the competent secular leaders and religious superiors, respectively, fraternal animation and spiritual assistance.

Article 97

1. The OFS fraternities will promote the vocation to the Franciscan Youth by means of appropriate and dynamic initiatives. They should see to the vitality, and the expansion of the Franciscan Youth fraternities and will accompany the youth in their journey of human and spiritual growth with proposals for specific activities and contents.

2. The OFS fraternities commit themselves to give to the Franciscan Youth fraternities a fraternal animator, who together with the Spiritual Assistant and the Council of the Franciscan Youth guarantees an adequate secular Franciscan formation.

3. To promote a close communion with the OFS, all leaders of the Franciscan Youth at the International level and at least two members of the National Council of the Franciscan Youth are to be professed Secular Franciscan youth.

4. A representative of the Franciscan Youth is to be designated by his or her Council to form part of the OFS Council of the corresponding level; a representative of the OFS, designated by his or her own Council, forms part of the Council of the Franciscan Youth of the same level. The representative of the Franciscan Youth has a vote in the OFS Council only if he or she is a professed Secular Franciscan.

5. The representatives of the Franciscan Youth in the International Council of the OFS are elected according to the International Statutes which also determine how many there are, what fraternities they represent and what their responsibilities are supposed to be.

Title VIII

IN COMMUNION WITH THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY AND THE CHURCH

Article 98.

1. *Rule 1.* Secular Franciscans should seek to live in life-giving reciprocal communion with all the members of the Franciscan family. They should be ready to promote common initiatives or participate in them with the religious of the First, Second and Third Orders, with Secular Institutes, and with other lay ecclesial groups that recognise Francis as a model and inspiration in order to work together to spread the Gospel, remove the causes of marginalisation and serve the cause of peace.

2. They must cultivate a special affection, which expresses itself in concrete initiatives of fraternal communion, towards the sisters of the contemplative life who, like Saint Clare of Assisi, bear witness in the Church and in the world and by whose mediation they expect the abundance of grace for the fraternity and for the works of the apostolate.

Article 99

1. *Rule 6.* As a living part of the people of God and inspired by the Seraphic Father, the Secular Franciscans, "living in full communion with the Pope and the bishops", should seek to know and deepen the doctrine proposed by the teaching Church through its more important documents and they should be attentive to the presence of the Holy Spirit who vivifies the faith and charity of the people of God.[41] They should collaborate in the initiatives promoted by the Holy See, in a particular way in those areas in which they are called to work by virtue of their secular Franciscan vocation.

[41] *Lumen Gentium* 12.

2. The OFS, as an International public association, is connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff from whom it has received the approval of its Rule and the confirmation of its mission in the Church and in the world.

Article 100

1. The vocation to "rebuild" the Church ought to induce the brothers and sisters sincerely to love and to live the union with the local Church in which they develop their own vocation and realise their apostolic commitment, aware that in the diocese the Church of Christ is truly functioning.[42]

2. The Secular Franciscans should fulfil with dedication the duties with which they are occupied in their relations to the local Church. They should lend their help to activities of the apostolate as well as to the social activities existing in the diocese.[43] In the spirit of service, they should make themselves present, as the fraternity of the OFS, within the life of the diocese. They should be ready to collaborate with other ecclesial groups and to participate in pastoral Councils.

3. 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 recognised in it by their "being," from which their mission springs.

Article 101

1. The Secular Franciscans should collaborate with the bishops and follow their directions in so far as they are the moderators of the ministry of the Word and of the Liturgy and the co-ordinators of the various forms of apostolate in the local Church.[44]

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[42] *Christus Dominus* 11; Can. 396; See *2 Celano* 10; (The Founder p. 249. *"Francis, go rebuild My house, as you see, it is all being destroyed."*) *1 Celano* 18. (The Saint p.196)

[43] See Can. 311.

[44] See Can. 394; 756; 775 ss.

2. The fraternities are subject to the vigilance of the Ordinary in so far as they perform their activities within the local Churches.[45]

Article 102

1. The fraternities established in a parish church should seek to co-operate in the animation of the parochial community, in the liturgy and in fraternal relations. They should integrate themselves into the pastoral apostolate as a whole, with preference for those activities more congenial to the secular Franciscan tradition and spirituality.

2. In the parishes entrusted to Franciscan religious, the fraternities constitute the mediation and the secular witness of the Franciscan charism in the parochial community through their exercise of the fruitful, life-giving reciprocity. Therefore, united with the religious, they see to the spreading of the gospel message and of the Franciscan lifestyle.

Article 103

1. Remaining faithful to their own identity, the fraternities will take care to make the most of each occasion for prayer, formation, and active collaboration with other ecclesial groups. They should welcome with pleasure those who, without belonging to the OFS, wish to share its experiences and activities.

2. The Fraternities will promote, wherever possible, fraternal relations with non-Catholic associations inspired by Francis.

"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 from the Testament)

[45] See Can. 305; 392.