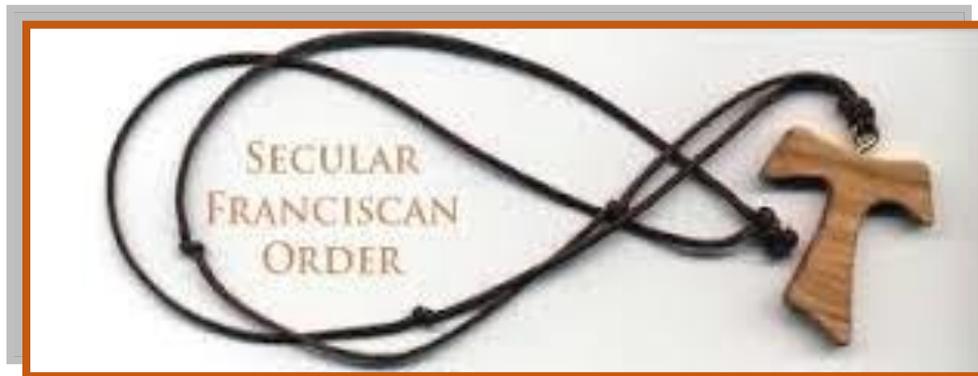


Care and Feeding of Fraternity Councils



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Original – Page Zyromski, OFS & John Petrikovic OFM Cap.

Updated 2010 Cyl Maljan, OFS

2011 Robert Fitzsimmons, OFS

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Purpose of this Booklet

The purpose of this booklet is to serve as a guide to assist newly elected Councils become aware of their duties to animate and guide their fraternity. Fraternity life is based on servant-hood and leadership in the Order is servant leadership.

Congratulations, your sisters and brothers have asked you to guide and assist them in this part of their Franciscan spiritual journey. Your major role as council is to create that loving, safe, trusting environment where they can for a few moments retreat from their hectic everyday lives to a moment where they can be fed and refreshed in body and soul. As council, your goal is to invite them (and of course yourselves) into this holy place, this privileged place we call fraternity, where we can just BE ourselves and enjoy each others' gifts and blessings.

The Fraternity Council

Article 49

From the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, 2000.

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 right¹.

The fraternity, meeting in an assembly or chapter, discusses questions regarding its own life and organization. Every three 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. Duty of the council of the local fraternity:

- to promote 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:

¹ See *Constitutions 90,2*.

- a. to decide on the acceptance and admission to profession of new brothers and sisters²;
- 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 the 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 TOR suitable and prepared religious as assistants;
- h. to perform such other duties as are required by the Constitutions or which are necessary to carry out its proper purposes.

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.

² See *Constitutions* 39, 3: 41,1

From St. Francis' life - Attitudes towards leadership

Embrace all· Francis learned early on that rebuilding God's church meant embracing everyone· He learned to see the gifts that each person brought and to embrace people with gratitude for their contributions·

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 vacant³

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 admission, professions, deaths, withdrawals, and transfers from the fraternity⁴.
- 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 (Canada – formation director) has the following duties:

- a) to co-ordinate, with the help of the other members of 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 initiation 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.

³ See *Constitution* 81,1

⁴ 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.

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 who 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.

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.

Leaders are servants first.

“But among you it will be different. Whoever wants to be a leader among you must be your servant.” Matthew 20:26

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 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 characterizes 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.

For other administration duties and responsibilities, please consult the General Constitution, National Statutes.

Getting Started

Care and feeding of Fraternity Councils

So, you find yourself elected to Council. Now what?

If you're feeling somewhat "in over your head," you're probably in the right place.

Our Franciscan tradition gives us the story of one of the first friars, John the Simple, who likewise felt insecure. He was so unsure of himself, in fact, that he decided the only way around it was to copy Francis in absolutely everything. It got to the point that when Francis coughed, John the Simple coughed; when Francis spat, John the Simple would spit (*Omnibus 996*).

Francis soon put a stop to this sort of blind imitation; but the story of John the Simple is a powerful reminder that the Franciscan charism is not meant to produce carbon copies, but rather **to consecrate individual uniqueness**.

So don't expect your Council or your fraternity to conform too closely to any other group you've belonged to .. or any other fraternity, for that matter. Nor will your council conform to worldly models, or the efficiency of a corporate executive world.

Your model is St. Paul's image of the Body of Christ. Listening and being aware of the needs of the whole body is your goal. Each person has different gifts and serve different functions.

This takes time. It takes practice. Becoming familiar with what's "normal" for YOUR PARTICULAR BODY doesn't happen overnight. And *your* body is not necessarily going to behave the same way someone else's body does.

But there ARE rules of thumb to maintain the health of this body (fraternity) for which you accepted responsibility.

What does a Fraternity need?

It needs nourishment:

Be thinking of ways to feed your brothers and sisters. Vary the diet of your monthly programs. If you have embarked on an in-depth study of one particular topic, don't belabour it for a whole year. Instead, consider presenting a series of three or four sessions and saving further material for another year.

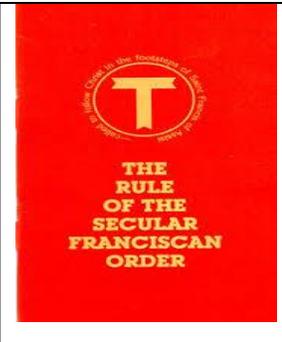
Vary not only the topics, but also the method of presentation.

Have you explored the use of videos, Franciscan websites, podcasts, audio-visual resources from your diocesan libraries or networks; or resources from other fraternities? Are your members being heard through the use of different group process, such as small group discussion, or one on one sharing. Do you use the lecture format *sparingly*?

- Do you constantly let those who are unprepared or who refuse to share off the hook?
- Does the minister and spiritual assistant provide both loving challenge and gentle fraternal correction when needed?
- Does the council remain blind to problems until it is too late, or does it intervene to head off problems and complacency?

Living out our vocation as Secular Franciscans

Our Profession requires an understanding of being in an Order within the Church; we have consecrated ourselves and our lives to God. As professed members of the Franciscan Family, we also have entered into a life-long journey to transform ourselves into better images of Christ, ongoing formation is a key component and active participation in the process is a requirement of profession



- How do members view /understand their 'Profession'?
- Do members see themselves as 'consecrated' people?
- How do we share our stories of God's actions in us?
- Do all members actively invite new people to explore a Secular Franciscan vocation?
- Do all council members actively and joyfully fulfill their individual council responsibilities? Or does everything get dumped on the minister?
- How are council members held accountable to each other and to the fraternity in fulfilling their duties?

We are called to live the Gospel, following Jesus in the mode of St. Francis and that process was not finished when we professed. We share with all parts of the Franciscan Family the obligation to pursue continual conversion / tran-SFO-formation (this is the essence of the penitential movement that has been our foundation for over 800 years).

- Is the fraternity environment / atmosphere truly a privileged place for an encounter with Christ?

The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation, and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.⁵

Formation begins with the council, which should have a brief formation period at every council meeting, learning to be fraternity helps in building up the larger fraternity.

⁵ Rule of the SFO, Chapter 3 Article 22

- Recent General Chapters of the OFS declared formation the number 1 priority of the entire Order. How does this compare with your fraternity priorities?
- Do all council members actively support and participate in the initial formation process of new members, or is it just a one man band?
- Do you take time to pray, form and share or just jump into the business at hand?
- Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of formation, *generally the time period preceding admission to the Order shall be at least six months.*⁶ (Constitutions 38.2, 38.3) Following admission, the time of formation lasts at least one year.⁷ (Rule 23). The entire community is engaged in the process of growth by its own manner of living.

No matter how praiseworthy the structure of your prayer, it needs constant attention, or it will become dry. The Liturgy of the Hours is the preferred format, and the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order gives other suggestions in Appendix II. Another resource on prayer, is the Secular Franciscan Companion by Franciscan Media.

- Do you have the courage to experiment?

How do you feed those fraternity members who are shut-ins or who are not able to participate fully because of personal reasons?

Council members should be arranging for telephone contacts to bring absent members up-to-date about what happened at the last meeting, to share handouts or notes, to communicate to those absent that the fraternity missed them. Is someone from the fraternity making sure that Communion is brought regularly to members who are shut-in? Is there a system for outreach to members who are sick or shut-in? Is there a system for remembering special personal occasions such as birthdays? Have you devised some rituals celebrating 'jubilees' of long-professed members?

- What is the communication within the fraternity? Does the word get out?
Is there a good prayer chain or is communication hit and miss?
- Is there communication and relationship of the members outside the gathering or just at the gathering?
- Are external groups and parish ministries (except ordained) generally a higher priority than fraternity gatherings and commitments? If so, what is the level of understanding of *Order* and also the members own sense of belonging?
- Do your professed members view the fraternity as "simply" another parish group, something to "join"?
- How do you emphasize vocation and profession?
- How do you keep folks interested in fraternal life?

The personal touch is everything!

⁶ National Statutes 8.1 Secular Franciscan Order National Fraternity of Canada

⁷ See *Constitution* 40,1

It needs exercise:

Living in fraternity is not just talking about it. **Making special efforts to meet with brothers and sister will sometimes mean setting other priorities aside.** Being companions to each other on this shared journey is something we have chosen, something we have promised.

- Do fraternity members actively and deliberately pray for each other? Do you encourage prayer partners or spiritual companions?
- How is the spiritual health of your fraternity?

Once-a- month Council meetings and once-a-month fraternity meetings are a minimum. Your Council will '**stay in shape**' better if other opportunities are exercised when they present themselves.



- How often does the fraternity gather? *Fraternities that gather more frequently with a different format are more likely to generate stronger connections between members.*
- Does your current gathering frequency lead to greater communal/ spiritual growth or just looked at as another meeting idea?
- How often does the council meet? Does the current frequency lead to proper animation and spiritual guidance for the fraternity?

Building community

Can you offer to carpool to a seminar or a workshop, or day of recollection or a Regional meeting? Simple conversation in the car can be a powerful community builder.

- Does the fraternity regularly participate in a communal retreat, days of recollection etc? If not, why not? What stands in the way of making fraternal life and growth a priority?
- How often does the fraternity have communal Mass and /or a Eucharistic Liturgy?
- Does the fraternity have nature walks or family picnics?

Do you notice if several members attend the same parish Mass on some days and may be able to go out to breakfast together? Can you invite someone over to see a good video? Is there a book or DVD you ought to share?

How about the muscles of future leadership? Are you flexing them by using the specialized gifts of your members? Can one person be asked to prepare a presentation while another is asked to organize a picnic or a trip? Do you have a newsletter? Are different people being asked to take responsibility for your common prayer?

In all of this, if the feeling of "**being stretched**" is absent, atrophy will quickly set in.

It needs periodic check-ups:

The fraternity minister and council have the responsibility of inviting the Regional Spiritual Assistant and appropriate Regional Council member to local fraternity meetings and to council meetings. A triennial visitation is required, but more frequent “check-ups” are desirable.

The Regional Council is the bond connecting your fraternity with the broader Franciscan reality; our National and International Fraternities. It is becoming more and more imperative to strengthen this bond when there is so many exciting things happening.

Have you scheduled some kind of visitation for this year? When was your last one? What topics would you like the visitor address? How will you communicate your local needs and concerns?

Another form of check-up is peer communication with members from other fraternities. Sharing experiences multiplies enthusiasm. Engaging with other fraternities at inter-fraternal gatherings or regional venues.

Are you on the mailing list for other fraternity newsletters, or connected to other fraternity websites? Do you get publications from the National website, such as the quarterly Newsletter and Formation resource, *Living Fraternity*?

http://www.ofsnational.ca/index_EN.asp

Franciscan Voice Canada – Focussing on Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation, a resource which gives current Franciscan news and a call to action.

<https://www.franciscanvoicecanada.com/blog/the-common-good-an-introduction-part-1>

When was the last Day of Recollection or weekend retreat made available for your fraternity? If you feel your group is too small for an endeavour like this, have you considered joining with a neighbouring fraternity to sponsor one?

An opportunity for annual or bi-annual reflection should be offered to all Secular Franciscans.

Is Council doing its own “ongoing formation” by working through a planned schedule of Franciscan resources or have Council meetings become the dry bones of business busyness?

Are you rotating the responsibility for Council input, or has one person been handling it alone? Have you polled the members about concerns?

When to call the doctor:

Just like the human body, the fraternity’s body sometimes signals its ill health. Contact your Regional Council member or Regional Spiritual Assistant if your fraternity and your local assistant can’t seem to shake these **symptoms**



The feeling of malaise: dryness, being stuck in a rut with your gathering format, programs, materials or even prayer types.

Antidote: (*Variety; Creativity; Courage to experiment: Examples from other fraternities*).

Factions; power struggles; competition, envy; officers or members trying to exercise authority inappropriately.

Antidote: (*Attention to communication skills; Outside mediation: Conflict resolution: Group reconciliation service*)

Lack of new vocations for prolonged periods of time or members deciding to lapse.

Antidote: (*Evangelization; Attention to the image projected by the group; Change in leadership: Renewed enthusiasm*).

One person doing everything.

Antidote: (*Honest discussion by Council; Renewal of commitment; Re-evaluation of priorities of group; Teaching on giftedness*).

Difficulty in accepting changes in formation or other policies aimed to address life of the Order and the needs of the Church.

Antidote: (*Education; Gentleness: Outside speakers: Attendance at regional and national meetings*).

Considering all this, would you say there's any easy formula to follow in guiding the fraternity "from Gospel to life and life to Gospel"?

The answer of course is a resounding "No!" Praise God that this is so.

Another story about Francis – who taught the world that Brother Sun praised God by being uniquely Brother Sun, and Sister Moon by being Sister Moon – tells why:

It seems that the early friars were caught up one day discussing the question. "Who is the perfect friar"? Francis put a stop to this seed of competition and comparison by looking around the room and pointing to each person present, Brother Angelo was the perfect friar for his courtesy, Francis said. And Brother Maseo for his natural good sense. Brother Leo was the perfect friar for his simplicity. Brother Bernard for his faith. Brother Juniper, for his patience. Brother John of Lauds for his sheer physical strength. .. and so Francis continued, pointing to each friar in turn.

The message is clear. The more completely we help each other offer our uniqueness to God, the more truly He is praised.

Francis did what was HIS to do. And as he lay dying, he blessed all of us with the challenge: “May Christ teach *you* what is *yours*.” (*Omnibus 739*)

These are just some of the ideas and signs to consider in helping you to evaluate the life of both your council and fraternity. Some are mentioned more than once – they are important and have borne fruit when council’s have had the courage to actively animate and guide and be more engaged.

So again congratulations on your election and please consider yourself a blessing to the sisters and brothers who called you forth, love and support them and expect the same back from them for your gift of yourself!

peace and All Good



FRATERNITY EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

In planning future directions for our fraternity, it is important for all members to participate in evaluating the quality and life of our fraternity, in its mission to help members live out their Secular Franciscan vocation. In a collective effort, we can work together in identifying opportunities for development, renewal and visioning for the future of our fraternity.

Please complete this questionnaire and return it to a member of Council. Thank you.

1	Does our community prayer offer a sense of connection with God and each other?	
2	Would you say that the fraternity environment is warm and inviting?	
3	How connected do you feel to others as a member of this fraternity?	
4	How impactful is the ongoing formation in helping you to live out your vocation as a Secular Franciscan?	
5	What do you see as important to maintain the vitality of the fraternity?	
6	Do you feel you are given an opportunity to use your gifts within the fraternity? <i>If you answer No, please indicate the ministry you would like to be involved in.</i>	
7	What suggestions do you think would help our fraternity attract new members?	

Additional Comments: