

RULE OF
THE
SECULAR
FRANCISCAN
ORDER
STUDY GUIDE

BY FR. JOHN SULLIVAN ofm

RULE OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

PROLOGUE

All who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with all their strength (Mk 12:30), and love their neighbors as themselves (Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance:

Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, because “the spirit of the Lord will rest upon them” (Is 11:2) and he will make “his home and dwelling among them” (Jn 14:23), and they are the sons of the heavenly Father (Mt 5:45), whose works they do, and they are the spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 12:50).

We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ, we are brothers to him when we fulfill “the will of the Father who is in heaven” (Mt 12:50)

We are mothers when we carry him in our heart and body (1 Cor 6:20) through divine love and a pure and sincere conscience; we give birth to him through a holy life which must give light to others by example (Mt 5:16)

Oh, how glorious it is to have a great and Holy Father in heaven! Oh, how glorious it is to have such a beautiful and admirable Spouse, the Holy Paraclete!

Oh, how glorious it is to have such a Brother, and such a Son, loved, beloved, humble, peaceful, sweet, lovable, and desirable above all: Our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave up his life for his sheep (Jn 10:15) and prayed to the Father saying:

“O holy Father, protect them with your name (Jn 17:11) whom you gave me out of the world. I entrusted to them the message you entrusted to me and they received it. They have known that in truth I came from you, they have believed that it was you who sent me. For these I pray, not for the world (Jn 17:9). Bless and consecrate them, and I consecrate myself for their sakes. I do not pray for them alone; I pray also for those who will believe in me through their word (Jn 17:20) that they may be holy by being one as we are (Jn 17:11). And I desire, Father, to have them in my company where I am to see this glory of mine in your kingdom” (Jn 17:6-24)

What is the meaning of “to love” in this context? Is this love primarily a feeling?

How does Francis view us as “mothers” to Jesus?

How does Francis weave the Trinity into this prologue?

When you examine your life, who are the people who gave you your idea of love?

Knowing that Francis does not hesitate to call God his Father, what can God’s parental love mean in your life?

Have you ever thought of Christ as your Brother? & as your blood Brother?

Why does Francis call us “Brothers and Sisters” and “in Penance”?

Are we really expected to “hate” our bodies?

Why does all personal sin have social consequences?

Do I think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a positive celebration of the mercy of God? Is it an act of faith on my part?

What procedure do I use to work on my characteristic fault?

How does spiritual blindness hurt us and deprive us of so much good?

Do we need to offer satisfaction for our own sins and those of others?

CHAPTER ONE-ARTICLE ONE

The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families, raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God-laity, religious, and priests-who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi.

In various ways and forms but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.

- What do you consider the primary purpose of the Secular Franciscan Order?
- What other purposes might the SFO fulfill?
- Does membership in an Order established by the Church call us to changes in our lives?
- How do we explain that we are called to develop a spirituality and lifestyle “in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi”?
- Who are included in the term: “the Franciscan family”? Do we interact as a family?
- Who specifically can become a member of the SFO?
- How did you recognize that you were called to follow Francis?
- Did a person or event awake you to that call?
- What one charism (there are many!!) of Francis speaks the loudest to your spirit?

CHAPTER ONE-ARTICLE TWO

The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.

- Are SFO fraternities to be considered “isolated” and “autonomous”?
- Why are SFO members called secular?
- What does it mean to “make profession”?
- What do SFO’s profess?
- Have I recently reviewed the SFO Ritual for Profession to reflect on those prayers used at the ceremony of my public Profession? Would this be beneficial?
- What is understood by the words “the gospel” the “Good News”?
- How does an Order differ from a parish society?
- What efforts should we be making to carry out this SFO promise?
- What is meant by the common adage: “From Gospel to life and life to Gospel”?
- Is there a starting age limit in becoming an SFO member?
- Do I regularly wear the external sign of my membership in this Order-the Tau Cross?
- Do I have the impression that I am only to wear the Tau Cross at our fraternity gatherings?
- Does your local fraternity feel connected to any other local fraternities?
- Do you feel connected to your regional fraternity? Why or why not?
- How often does your fraternity read and/or study the SFO Rule?
- Do you, individually, read/study/meditate upon the Rule? When was the last time you did so?

CHAPTER ONE-ARTICLE THREE

The present rule, succeeding “Memoriale Propositi” (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

Do we realize that our SFO historical roots reach back to the time of St. Francis?
In the course of the past 800 years, the SFO Rule has undergone several approved revisions; do you know the year of Church approval for the present text of our Rule?
How would you describe the organization of the SFO in the world, and in your region?
Who are called to serve the fraternities of SFOs organizationally?
How do these people get elected?
What are the offices held in each fraternity council?
Clearly the SFO is under the guidance of the Catholic Church, how is this manifested?
Who established this Catholic Church?
Do you ever reflect on Sacred Scripture passages that deal with this authority given by Christ?
In what ways can you say the Church is “human/divine”?
As members of the Body of Christ today, what demands are put upon us by our Baptisms?
How important is my input today into the Body of Christ?
We have many documents to refer to when the need arises: The Rule, the General Constitutions, National Statutes, Regional Guidelines.
Has your Council (local or regional) needed to refer to these documents to solve a problem, clarify a procedure, or emphasize a point?
Does each member of your council have a copy of these documents to guide them in their duties?
Do you own a copy of these documents?
Does your Fraternity library have copies of these documents?
If they do not, do you know where you can get a copy?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE FOUR

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people.

Christ, the gift of the Father’s love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly.

Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.

In the practice of any religion (such as the Catholic Church), what is the function of various spiritualities?
This first sentence is a digest of the SFO vocation, which is?
How serious of a commitment is this for the SFO member?
Do we daily direct our lives using the teaching of Christ that He is the way, the truth, and the life?
Do we depend on all three Persons of the Trinity, as indicated here?
What is your definition of “observe the Gospel”? How do you observe “careful reading of the gospel”?
In what ways can we go “from gospel to life and life to gospel”?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE FIVE

Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of Saint Francis, who often said, “I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except his most holy body and blood,” should be the inspiration and pattern of their Eucharistic life.

Can you list the four basic means for the SFO member to encounter Christ?

Each is a gift; do I use all of these? How?

If Christ is the center and meaning of everything, can you apply this to everyday life?-the videos I watch? The TV programs I enjoy? The books I read? The conversations I have?

Has Francis’ great love and reverence for the Eucharist inspired me to a deeper Eucharistic life?

How might I let this improve my life?

What did Francis mean by calling himself the “herald of the Great King”?

Who are your brothers and sisters? What scripture are you familiar with on a daily basis?

What do you consider your role as a member of the Church?

What liturgical activity(ies) do you participate in? Enjoy the most? The Least?

How do you feel when you accept the Host into your hands/mouth?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE SIX

They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession/ Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words.

Called like Saint Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishop, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness as creativity.

Do I treasure the powerful gifts given to me by God when I received the Sacrament of my Baptism? What happened then? Can I recall some elements of that ceremony?

When I was anointed with the Oil of Chrism at my Baptism, what was the purpose of that anointing? Do I live it out?

What three necessary and privileged roles with Christ are given to us at our Baptism?

What commitment does my Baptism call me to?

As Secular Franciscans, how do we commit ourselves to “rebuild the Church”?

In what ways are we called today to be “witnesses”?

What reverence for the Church did Francis have?

How can the Secular Franciscan Order cooperate with the stated aims of the Church’s teaching on social justice? How do I do my part?

How can the local fraternity work toward these aims?

Francis had great love and respect, and showed obedience to the pope, bishops, and priests.

As Franciscans, we are called to do the same. We may not always agree with them; can you give examples of how these disagreements can be handled in a way that rebuilds the Church, rather than tears it down?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE SEVEN

United by their vocation as “brothers and sisters of penance,” and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls “conversion”. Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.

On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace.

What is the meaning of “conversion” and “penance” in the Franciscan tradition?

How frequently is this needed?

For the Franciscan, can we say “embracing the Gospel” is our “penance”?

Do we recognize and appreciate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a great celebration of the Father’s mercy?

In the process of conversion, what are the purposes for penances?

Do penances serve a positive or a negative purpose?

How can we say that there will always be room for conversion in our lives?

Can I single out one area of my life which needs more discipline on my part?

Do I also have to make atonement and reparation for any past wrongs?

An act of true contrition requires two basic ingredients; which are...?

Do you remember significant conversion experiences in your life? (besides the daily ones)? If you are comfortable, can you share the experience with the group?

Listed are several tools for renewal.

What has been your experience with any/all of these tools? Christ Renews His Parish, RCIA, Charismatic Renewal, Cursillo, Koinonia, Bible Study, Small Group Faith Sharing, Marriage Encounter Retreat week/weekend, other.

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE EIGHT

As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.

Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.

What does “worship” mean?

Why do we say that “prayer and contemplation” are at the heart of our faith?

Can I describe how my prayer has changed through the years since my youth?

In my daily prayers, do I follow the expectation of the Catholic Church (CCC 2699) that I use three expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative? Why or why not?

Have I been neglectful in such styles of prayer? When I pray, is God just to be a listener?

Do I have a clear procedure for praying each day? Should I?

What should I be doing to improve my prayer-time?

How do I pray with the Scriptures (e.g. Lectio Divina; the Liturgy of the Hours)? Should I?

What is meditation and contemplation? How does contemplation differ from meditation?

What is the purpose and advantage of praying the structured “Liturgy of the Hours”?

Ideally, SFOs should attend daily Mass. How often are you able to attend daily Mass?

How often do you stop by church for a visit with our Eucharistic Lord? Do you pray the Liturgy of the Hours at your fraternity meetings? How often between meetings?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE NINE

The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to his every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.

How have we developed the understanding that Mary is our mother?

Why I Mary titled the Mother of the Franciscan Order?

What special virtue(s) do you find that Mary teaches us?

Can you recall anything associated with Francis that would indicate his “indescribable love” for Mary?

Knowing that in Mary’s life joys co-existed with suffering, how might we find joy even in the sufferings and problems of daily life?

How does this article of our Rule ask us to express our ardent love for Mary?

What is the “Franciscan Crown”?

In imitation of Mary, are we open to His “every word and call”? What are some ways we hear His call? How did you hear the call to the Secular Franciscan Order?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE TEN

United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed his will into the Father’s hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ, witness to him even in difficulties and persecutions.

Why do we Christ’s obedience “redemptive”?

Does Christ’s obedience set the pattern for my own obedience to the Father?

Is it true to say that each of our vocational ways of life calls for obedience to God?

How might we witness to the poor and crucified Christ in our own lives?

Does witnessing for Christ even include difficulties and persecutions?

What has been my experience in wearing the Tau-Cross in public places?

How do I handle: ingratitude; treachery; betrayal of friendship; apparent failures; ridicule; mockery; physical agony; spiritual desolation?

Do these sometimes take us to the cross with Christ?

We each have different circumstances: spouse, parent, grandparent, single, doctor, file clerk, bus driver, FBI agent, retired, student, unemployed, (the possibilities go on and on....). Are you aware of times you faithfully fulfill these duties....of time you are not?

In each of these circumstances, can we honestly say: “I witnessed to Christ today by.....”?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE ELEVEN

Trusting in the Father, Christ chose for himself and his mother a poor and humble life, even though he valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children.

Thus, in the spirit of “the Beatitudes”, and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

Is our model in gospel living, following Francis, the poor and humble life of Mary and Jesus?
Should it be? How can this be done in a practical way?
How do some determine “a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods”?
How do some choose to “simplify their material needs”?
Do I distinguish between my “needs” and my “wants” in practical daily events?
When we use our resources, do we do it in the spirit of being “stewards....of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children”?
Do we use our time wisely? Do we exercise power unfairly on others?
The word “humble” is also used here; what is humility?
Stuff!!! I have too much stuff!!!! But my problem is that I feel guilt in throwing things away, because I think someday someone is going to need it and I will be able to supply it!
What do you have too much of? What are you doing about it? What are you having trouble detaching yourself from? Are you using stuff wisely for God’s service and glory, or your own?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE TWELVE

Witnessing to the good yet to come and obliged to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.

What is the scriptural meaning of “purity of heart”?
How can this “purity of heart” be said to give us freedom?
What activities do you like to think you can do without God’s help?
Which saying of St. Francis on humility strikes you most forcibly?
Do I credit God with the talents I have and the good I do?
How does “to love” differ from “to admire”?
How do you celebrate your “finiteness”?
It’s not easy to set oneself free to love everyone. The beautiful are loveable, as are the kind and the clean. Can we....do we....love the unattractive, the mean, and the dirty, too?
In this context, could I have loved Hitler?.....Do I love Saddam Hussein?.....

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE THIRTEEN

As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.

A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.

How flexible are we in accepting differing personalities and people of diverse cultural backgrounds? Do we like only those who like us?
Do I recognize the cultural conflicts that come from differing races? Give examples.....

What efforts might be made to alleviate the tensions among cultural groups to keep our focus on Christian values?

Does it take courage to help develop peace among neighbors and others? Any examples?

What efforts might be made for those who are truly under-privileged in today's American society?

Do any of your tax dollars help alleviate struggles of the poor?

Do we accept the value of each person as being that of Christ?

Ask yourself-what features of Jesus does God the Father see in me? What features of Jesus do I look for-see-love-in others?

Do you feel a sense of community with your fraternity? Your Parish? Have you seen-worked to improve-lowly conditions for others? How? If we have not experienced the lowly, is it our obligation to seek them out?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE FOURTEEN

Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the Kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone “who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself,” let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

As a Secular Franciscan, where is the “Christian spirit of service” calling me this year?

Calling us a fraternity?

Since Christ is our model for service, how did He go about it?

What did Christ teach us about the way we serve?

Does this also include the operation of our local and regional fraternities?

Do I neglect fulfilling the needs that I should be responding to in our fraternities?

Can I be more sacrificing for the sake of others than I presently am?

How fraternal is your world? Your family? Your workplace? What do you do to make it more fraternal?

Can you see a difference since you started as an SFO? Do you feel called to a spirit of service?

In what ways?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE FIFTEEN

Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.

What is the relationship between justice and peace?

What did Pope Paul VI mean when he said: “If you want peace, work for justice?”

How important is this principle?

Where does an SFO start being “an apostle for peace and justice”?

Can we determine any forms of injustice right in our own backyard?

Do I ever consider issues of justice when I make my choice in voting?

Has my faith actually influenced how I vote?

Do I sometimes find my language as prejudicial toward some cultural groups without sufficient reason?

How does terrorism seriously violate the rights of individuals?
How does abortion, which our laws allow, parallel terrorism?
What are the six SFO commissions? Can I name them?
They are an area of focus within our Franciscan vocation based on the SFO Rule, specifically: peace and justice, work, ecology, family, youth, and formation.
These areas of focus are easy to recognize in our everyday living of our Rule.
Peace and Justice....How does the testimony of your life put you in the forefront of promoting justice? What do you do? What more can you do?
Have you ever made a definite choice that favored justice over the “easy way”?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE SIXTEEN

Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.

Do I just tolerate having to work, or do I really see it as “a gift”?
What useful values do I see in the various types of work I am involved in?
Do these motives enliven my spirit? If not, why not?
Can I identify how my various types of work and efforts are really designed to be of service to others, and not just to and for myself in a selfish manner?
Do I see my efforts expended on work as something constructive?
Do I work even when I know it will not be appreciated?
Why is it essential for the Christian to view work as “being of service”?
Do you consider your work (job) as a gift? Do you take the opportunity to let your work BE a gift? What work would you consider your ideal? What work would you refuse to do, no matter what? Does the fact that you are Franciscan affect your work?
Do those you work with know you are Franciscan? (Without blatantly saying “I am a Franciscan.”)
Has your Christianity, Catholicism, and Franciscanism ever been the cause of you changing jobs or changing circumstances at your present job?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE SEVENTEEN

In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ.

By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Is it their responsibility that parents be models and guides for their children?
How can healthy sharing between spouses help create a Christian atmosphere in their home?
How do parents determine what policies of discipline they should be following?
How do the graces from the Sacrament of Marriage help parents?
How do we help be “attentive to the vocation of each child”?
Do we support, encourage and help in the marriage preparation program in our parish?
Do we perhaps as a family pray for those whose planned marriages have been announced in the parish bulletin-for example, at our meal time?

Is it appropriate to have Christian pictures and symbols on the walls of our homes?
What are some of the ways we can cultivate peace within our family?
In what ways are we unfaithful to our family? How do you, as an individual, or as a family member-cultivate respect for life? For those who are married: How do we, as couples, witness to our community that we share love?
It is not always a “joy-filled” journey-raising children. How can we nurture that joy when things go in a different direction than we had hoped?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE EIGHTEEN

Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

What is the difference between showing respect for animals and treating them as if they are humans?
How do we take steps to see that we do not promote exploitation of nature? By the way, what is “exploitation”?
Do humans and animals have equal rights?
Do you know any movements and TV programs that promote such equality?
Are humans just biologically improved animals, as some proclaim?
How do you understand “universal kin-ship” as important to your life? What is the basis for such terminology?
Can clothing be purchased from (as well as donated to) groups like GoodWill make us friendlier with the earth’s resources?
Universal kinship.....Brother shark? Sister slug? Brother man-eating tiger? Sister deadly virus? Brother Hurricane? Sister Earthquake? It is easy to think of Sister Bunny and Brother Puppy. It is harder to think of the more ferocious as our kinship.
What are we doing, individually and collectively, to experience that kinship with all of creation?
Do we care for the earth (our little corner)? Do we own pets and treat them lovingly?
Have we saved any animals from cruelty?
Do we recycle, use less, and refuse extra packaging?
Do we bring our canvas or plastic bags with us to the store?
(There are so many ways we can LIVE this article of the Rule).
(SPP) How else are you inspired to live this article?

CHAPTER TWO-ARTICLE NINETEEN

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.

Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Following Christ’s teaching in the Beatitudes, we are called to be “peace-makers”. How do we accomplish this?

Have I examined the several recommendations listed in the “Peace Prayer” for how I am to behave as a peace-maker? How often do I review those situations in the prayer, one by one, and consider how each applies to my present living?
Should I use this list as a daily guide?
Can I always be at peace in my union with God?
How seriously do I take the demands of the “Peace Prayer of St. Francis”?
Do we appreciate the implications of being members of the Communion of Saints?
Why do you think that the same article that calls us to peace and joy, also speaks of Sister Death?
Do you feel peace and joy when you encounter Sister Death in others?
When you think of your own encounter with Sister Death?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY

The Secular Franciscan Order is divided into fraternities of various levels-local, regional, national, and international. Each one has its own moral personality in the Church. These various fraternities are coordinated and united according to the norm of this rule and of the constitutions.

(SPP) What is our fraternity name? (SPP) Do you know any of the history of its establishment?
(SPP) When was it established?
(SPP) What is the name for the Regional fraternity?
(SPP) Is the Region separated into portions? (SPP) What are the names of those portions?
(SPP) Which portion do you belong to?
Some people question why a program committed to living the Gospel needs to have all this structure; why is this reasonable and needed?
What is your definition of fraternity? Does this definition coincide with the Rule?
(SPP) Where can you find further information regarding the coordination of the various levels of fraternity?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY ONE

On various levels, each fraternity is animated and guided by a council and minister (or president) who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions.

Their service, which lasts for a definite period, is marked by a ready and willing spirit and is a duty of responsibility to each member and to the community.

Within themselves the fraternities are structured in different ways according to the norm of the constitutions, according to the various needs of their members and their regions, and under the guidance of their respective council.

(SPP) What is the purpose of the fraternity council?
(SPP) What is the purpose of the spiritual assistant?
(SPP) Where can I go to find this information?
Why must we be willing to serve the fraternity by accepting positions on the council (through nominations/elections)?
(SPP) What procedure do we as a fraternity follow for elections to the Council?
(SPP) How long a term do the members serve?
Why does being open to election nominations in the fraternity take humility?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY TWO

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.

(SPP) Do I see the following of my vocation to the SFO as a call from God?

(SPP) Do I recognize that my attendance at meetings is a gift from God and a necessary part of my responsibility to Him?

(SPP) How is a local fraternity established? (SPP) What are the steps necessary to form a new fraternity?

(SPP) Where can I go to find this information?

(SPP) What does it mean to be established canonically? (SPP) What does that entail?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY THREE

Requests for admission to the Secular Franciscan Order must be presented to the local fraternity, whose council decides upon the acceptance of new brothers and sisters.

Admission into the Order is gradually attained through a time of initiation, a period of formation of at least one year, and profession of the rule. The entire community is engaged in this process of growth by its own manner of living. The age for profession and the distinctive Franciscan sign are regulated by the statutes.

Profession by its nature is a permanent commitment.

Members who find themselves in particular difficulties should discuss their problems with the Council in fraternal dialogue.

Withdrawal or permanent dismissal from the Order, if necessary, is an act of the fraternity council according to the norm of the constitutions.

(SPP) How are requests for admission and profession carried out by your fraternity?

(SPP) What does acceptance mean? (SPP) What are the council and community actually discerning? (SPP) Is it the acceptability of a person or the recognition of positive signs?

(SPP) Why is a certain amount of detachment and objectivity necessary in discerning a call in another who is interested in the Order? (SPP) Who is it that calls the potential Candidate?

(SPP) What is the time of initiation? (SPP) How many parts does it contain and how long does it last?

(SPP) How old must an individual be before they can enter the SFO? (SPP) Where can I look to find this information?

(SPP) What steps does the fraternity take for withdrawal or dismissal from the Order?

(SPP) Where can I look to find this information? (SPP) What do the documents say?

(SPP) What particular difficulties would a member find themselves in?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY FOUR

To foster communion among members, the council should organize regular and frequent meetings of the community as well as meeting with other Franciscan groups, especially with youth groups. It should adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan

and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity. This communion continues with deceased brothers and sisters through prayer for them.

(SPP) Do I consider these regular gatherings of the members as important to my life?

(SPP) Do I make every attempt to fulfill my obligation to attend?

(SPP) Do I recognize the fact that the Franciscan charism is lived in community?

(SPP) What does that mean? (SPP) How does that happen?

(SPP) How can “communion between members” be fostered?

(SPP) How does the fraternity adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan life?

(SPP) How does the fraternity adopt appropriate means for growth in ecclesial life?

(SPP) Do I pray for my deceased Franciscan brothers and sisters?

(SPP) Do I ask them to pray for me?

(SPP) Do you make excuses not to attend the monthly meetings?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY FIVE

Regarding expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means. Local fraternities should contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils.

What are the purposes of the common fund?

Do I make serious contributions to it? Do I examine myself honestly as to what I should be contributing?

Does our fraternity develop a budget, and do the members show sufficient monthly support for the activities and the needs of the local fraternity?

(SPP) Do I understand the need to support the higher fraternity councils, or am I unwilling to encourage any financial support?

(SPP) Do I realize what the “fair share” amount is and what members make up the fair share offering?

(SPP) Do I begrudge that amount going to the higher councils? Why or why not? What keeps me from embracing a greater generosity?

(SPP) Do I have the faith of a little child in regard to the fraternity finances? (SPP) What obstacles do I put in the way of a greater childlike faith and trust?

CHAPTER THREE-ARTICLE TWENTY SIX

As a concrete sign of communion and co responsibility, the councils on various levels, in keeping with the constitutions, shall ask for suitable and well prepared religious for spiritual assistance. They should make this request to the superiors of the four religious Franciscan families, to whom the Secular Fraternity has been united for centuries.

To promote fidelity to the charism as well as observance of the rule and to receive greater support in the life of the fraternity, the minister or president, with the consent of the council, should take care to ask for a regular pastoral visit by the competent religious superiors as well as for a fraternal visit from those of the higher fraternities, according to the norm of the constitutions.

What are the various levels of Secular Franciscan Order structure?
What is the purpose for these various levels of fraternities?
What is the purpose of the fraternal visitation and the pastoral visitations?
Do I personally take part in regional activities-Franciscan meetings, retreats, and social gatherings?
Why should I? What benefits are there-to me, and to others?
Has our fraternity reviewed the written results of the pastoral and fraternal visitations?
What recommendations did they make? Did we do anything about these recommendations?
Asking for spiritual assistance and receiving spiritual assistance are two different things. Many fraternities are operating without spiritual assistance because of the transfer or lack of friars. Some fraternities thrive and grow because of the magnetism of the friar/spiritual assistant; when he is transferred, the fraternity dies.
What has been your experience with spiritual assistance for your fraternity?
What do you see as the answer to the lack of First Order spiritual assistance?
How did your fraternity prepare for its last (pastoral and fraternal) visitation?
How did your fraternity grow as a result of the visitation?

Adopted by