

THE RULE OF LIFE OF THE
ORDER OF LESSER SISTERS AND BROTHERS
a Dispersed Ecumenical Franciscan Community

INTRODUCTORY

The purpose of the Order of Lesser Sisters and Brothers is to provide a canonical structure for those who wish to follow a Franciscan lifestyle. It is an ecumenical order open to any Christian who is at least 18 years of age. It is authorized under Charter from the Contemporary Catholic Church and is under the Protection of the Presiding Bishop of that church. There is a common rule with scope for members to apply the Rule in a way that is harmonious and fitting with their Christian tradition and life situation. The common rule of life of the OSFM is to be viewed as a guide to which each member conforms him or herself by way of applying the principles of the common rule to his or her particular life.

The Rule is intended to make one's spiritual progress more secure, and to suggest that it is binding under pain of sin would tend to make that progress more difficult. The Rule of Life, therefore, and the various customs and regulations of our Order, since they do not bind under pain of sin (except in so far as they are a part of the divine law or the precepts of Holy Church) may for sufficient reason be dispensed. Therefore, should there be any serious and good cause to prevent anyone from observing any of our regulations, such persons may be dispensed from that regulation, or the regulation may be prudently changed or "commuted" into something equivalent. The Minister shall determine which officers of the Order have the right to grant such dispensations and commutations. No members may ever "dispense themselves." Each dispensation shall state clearly for how long it holds good.

This document is heavily based upon The 1929 Little Book of the Rule of the Third Order Secular of the American Congregation of Franciscans, to whom we acknowledge an enormous debt of gratitude. Sections of the Rule is also heavily based upon the rule of the Secular Franciscan Order to whom we owe an equal debt of thanks.

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- I. The Rule of Life of the Order of Lesser Sisters and Brothers is to live in the spirit of poverty chastity and obedience and to strive for and seek to foster and uphold Peace, Justice, Ecology, absence of discrimination, care for those less privileged, loyalty to one's own church or denomination or expression of Christianity, simplicity of living,

personal conversion, prayerfulness, devotion and discipleship to the Incarnate Christ, Minority, Franciscan Community, love peace and joy. Such is the promise of the Order.

II. Personal Vows

In addition to the common rule of life of the OSFM, members are expected , as part of their initial formation process, to formulate, write, and submit to the Minister a personal vow which outlines how they as individuals of the Order will strive to concretely and specifically live out and apply the guiding principles of the Rule of the OSFM.

III. Amendment

A formal amendment to the Rule may be suggested by any member of the Order to the Minister or Spiritual Director

- b. The Minister or Spiritual Director may call for a vote upon a proposed amendment to the Rule and the Rule shall be amended if the amendment receives a two-thirds vote by the members.
- c. Such a vote shall be conducted by the Spiritual Director in the manner as he/she sees fit.

IV. Simplicity—Members should live their lives in the spirit of simplicity by:

- a. Seeking a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs.
- b. Striving to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power
- c. Placing themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly
- d. Being mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.
- e. Dressing modestly.
 - i. The Little Habit of the Order, the Tau Cross, should always be worn unless for good reasons a dispensation is obtained.
 - ii. The Greater Habit¹ may be worn at home, at gatherings of the Order, at church functions subject to the permission of the presiding minister, or on other occasions subject to the permission of the Minister of the Order.
- f. Eating and drinking modestly, always being mindful of those who go without. They should give thanks before and after meals, and faithfully observe fasts if such is the tradition of their denomination or Christian tradition.²
- g. Addressing each other by the name given upon investiture and as brother or sister, adding the name given on admission. No other title is to be used, regardless of clerical or worldly status.
- h. Members are encouraged to make a will within 3 months of entering the Order.

V. Prayerfulness—Members should live their lives in the spirit of prayerfulness by:

1 Refer to Appendix A
2 Refer to Appendix B

- a. Conforming their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.
- b. Serenely tending toward the ultimate encounter with eternity.
- c. Saying daily their morning and evening prayers.
 - i. Members whose denomination or Christian traditions employ a common Divine Office are encouraged to refer to the order of Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer according to their particular tradition or denomination.³
- d. Daily spending time for contemplation, meditation, examination of conscience and spiritual reading⁴
- e. Meeting with a spiritual director. Members must, on a regular basis, meet with a spiritual director who is not also a member of the OSFM.
- f. Practicing the Christian duty of intercession. To this end they should pray daily for all Franciscans and for the needs of the world and for those who ask for prayer. They should additionally prayer for members of the Order who have been embraced by Sister Death.⁵
- g. Faithfully observing and participating in the common liturgical life of their Christian community or tradition.⁶

VI. Service—Members should live their lives in the spirit of service by:

- a. Individually and collectively being in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives.
- b. They should daily engage in charitable enterprises, and particularly minister with, commune with, and care for those who are oppressed, marginalized, and disenfranchised
- c. Building a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the realm of God may be brought about more effectively
- d. Esteeming work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption, and service of the human community.
- e. Seeking out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, and striving to bring joy and hope to others.

VII. Community—Members should live their lives in the spirit of community by:

- a. Faithfully fulfilling the duties proper to their various circumstances of life.
- b. With a gentle and courteous spirit accepting all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.
- c. Especially in the field of public life, making definite choices in harmony with their faith, and by avoiding scandalous living.
- d. In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life.

3 Refer to Appendix C: I-II

4 Refer to Appendix C: III

5 Refer to Appendix C: IV

6 If appropriate to their denomination or tradition, to receive the Sacraments of Absolution and Holy Eucharist regularly.

- i. In particular, those members who are married, partnered, or in a committed relationship are expected to nourish, foster, and maintain a committed, respectful, and chaste relationship.
 - e. Respecting all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and by striving to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.
 - f. Avoiding quarrels among themselves and with others and by making peace and remaining at peace amongst themselves and with all.
 - g. When possible, visit sick members who request it, and attend the local funeral of deceased members.
- IV. The rule does not bind under pain of sin. Those who are guilty of a breach of the Rule and Constitutions of our Order do not thereby incur any guilt of sin, except in so far as they also by such breach offend against the divine law or the precepts of the Church. But every member is bound to make restitution for any such breaches by performing the penance assigned by the Minister or his or her representative.
- V. The professed should renew their commitment on April 16.

APPENDICES TO THE RULE

Matters appearing in the Appendices to the Rule of OSFM are by no means binding upon its members. The Appendices below provide supplementary information and resources that may prove helpful in understanding sections of the Rule or provide information about Franciscan history and traditions as it relates to sections of the Rule.

APPENDIX A

The Greater Habit is a brown, grey or black tunic or cassock with or without a hood and/or capuche, held in at the waist by the white cord. Women may add a veil if they do not have

a hood or capuche. White may be worn in hot climates. The Franciscan Crown rosary may be worn. Members may at any time wear a shirt habit or cobblers apron or similar casual “habit”

APPENDIX B

- I. Traditionally, fasts from food occur in the Christian calendar on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday; and abstinence from flesh-meat on each Friday of the year (except Christmas Day), and during Lent on the Wednesdays in addition to the Fridays.
- II. In Franciscan tradition, it has been the case that Franciscans abstain from meat on the following seven vigils:
 - i. The Vigils of Our Lord, which are— Christmas Eve, Dec. 24.
 - ii. The Vigil of Easter, being Easter Even or Holy Saturday.
 - iii. The Vigil of Pentecost, which is also an Ember Day.
 - iv. The Vigils of Our Lady, which are— The Vigil of the Assumption, Aug. 14. The Vigil of the Immaculate Conception, Dec. 7.
 - v. The Vigil of our seraphic Father, St. Francis, Oct. 3.
 - vi. The Vigil of All Saints, Oct. 31.
- III. Fasting means a reduction in the quantity of food. Abstinence means diminishing the quality of food, i.e., going without meat.

APPENDIX C

- I. In Franciscan tradition, the Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary (<http://liturgies.net/Liturgies/Catholic/LittleOffice.htm>) or the Little Office of the Passion (<http://www.ibreviary.com/m/preghiere.php?tipo=Preghiera&id=451>) have also been used as daily office prayers for morning and evening.
- II. According to St. Francis’ own precept, it is permissible to substitute certain other prayers for the daily Office; wherefore, anyone may say twelve times the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Glory be, in place of the Office, but let this not be done save by such as be sick or cannot read, or by such as be hindered through some great emergency from reading the Office.
- III. The Franciscan Crown Rosary has also been a traditional devotional practice within Franciscan tradition. Information about how to pray this devotion may be found here: <http://www.thefranciscanfriars.org/node/624>
- IV. Traditionally, priests say three masses (“Eucharists”, or some other form of liturgy as appropriate to one’s denomination or tradition) a year for all members, living and deceased, at or around Pentecost, December 8 and between October 3 and 11 inclusively.

THE CONSTITUTION
OF THE ORDER OF LESSER SISTERS AND BROTHERS
a Dispersed Ecumenical Franciscan Community

I. INTRODUCTION

The Order of Lesser Sisters and Brothers seeks to live out a canonical structure that allows for a dispersed order of Franciscans in which its members are bound by a common Rule and Constitution while still accommodating the realities and needs of its members who may be far from fellow members or have a geographically close community of members. Therefore this Constitution aims to provide a structure in which members are connected to a unified order while allowing for the life and work of the Order to exist and take place amongst the local communities, custodies, members de familia.

II. ORGANISATION

- a. Communities: Members join the Order as a whole and are members at large unless two or more members live in the same city or place, in which event the Minister shall establish said members as constituting a “community” and they will elect a guardian and hold monthly meetings. Those entitled to vote are novices and professed, including professed who are probationers on transfer from another institute. The purpose of communities within the Order is to bind together members who find themselves in geographic proximity with one another so as to strengthen our communal bonds.
 - i. For every community the Minister will, if practicable, appoint a Chaplain, who need not necessarily be a member.
 - ii. In St. Francistide, each community shall elect a Guardian and any other necessary officers to serve for one year.
 - iii. The Guardian shall be the presiding officer of the community.
 - iv. The community should undertake some common prayer or devotion each month, or more often. The community should also hold a monthly conference about our ideals, life, and Rule, and conduct any necessary business meetings.
 - v. There is no maximum limit to the number of members within a community, but a new community can be formed from an existing, large community on the basis of the practical convenience of geographic proximity or on the organic movement of the members to do so. The Minister and his/her representatives should, in careful pastoral conversation with all the community members, decide if and how a new community might be formed out of an existing community.

- b. Members *De Familia*: Members not within a reasonable geographic proximity with an existing community or another member shall be deemed members *de familia* to a community within the Order.
 - i. Members who are, for reasons of geographic distance, isolated from members of the Order, shall be placed as *de familia* members of an existing community. The Minister will, in pastoral conversation with the member, place him/her within a particular community as member *de familia* that will best benefit the member and the Order.
 - ii. Though not bound by a requirement of physical presence at community gatherings, members *de familia* have an obligation to make use of modern technology to stay connected with their community.
 - iii. The members of a community who are not *de familia* also have an obligation to make use of modern technology in building strong relationships with their members *de familia*. At community gatherings and meetings, the members *de familia* should be remembered and included in an expressed and intentional way.
 - iv. The members *de familia* will have equal voice and vote in matters concerning their community, and they should be informed and involved in all aspects of the life of the community.

- c. The Spiritual Director of the Order: The Spiritual Director of the Order shall be any Christian person with a prudent, wise, and trustworthy disposition who has

the skill, understanding, and relationship with the Order that can act as outside advisor and arbiter of the brothers and sisters of the Order.

- i. The Spiritual Director must not be, nor ever have been, a member of the OSFM.
- ii. Each year on April 16th, the Spiritual Director will be chosen by the Minister and the Guardians. If the same individual is desired to serve as Spiritual Director for another year, the Minister and Guardians may continue to request that she/he serve in this role.
- iii. The Spiritual Protector shall be the guardian of the Constitution of the Order, and shall serve as an arbiter in matters which the Order or its members cannot resolve through its normal processes.

d. The Minister and The Vicar of the Order:

- i. The chief officer of the Order, the Minister, is elected every three years by a majority vote of the Order. The person who receives the second highest number of votes is appointed as the Vicar. The Vicar assists the Minister in carrying out his or her duties, and the Minister may delegate any of his or her duties to the Vicar. If the position of Minister becomes vacant for any reason mid term, then the Vicar automatically becomes Minister for the remainder of the original term of office and may appoint an Interim Vicar. If the Minister is unable to fulfill his or her duties temporarily, by virtue of ill health, suspension or otherwise, then the Vicar acts as Interim Minister until the Minister returns to duties. All references to Minister in this document are to be construed as including the Vicar when he or she is acting as delegate of or in place of the Minister. Those entitled to vote are novices and professed, including professed who are probationers on transfer from another institute. The Spiritual Director may suspend or terminate the appointment of any officer if he or she thinks there is sufficient reason.
 1. A vote for Minister should be taken in St. Francistide
- ii. The Minister may appoint officers to assist him or her according to the need, such as Visitors, Formators, Secretaries, Almoners, Procurators, and any other officers which he or she deems necessary.
- iii. No member shall refuse any office to which he or she is appointed or elected except for a good and sufficient reason, of which the Minister or his representative shall be the judge.
- iv. The Minister shall take responsibility for the government of the communities according to the best interests of the Order, and shall call upon the officers of the Order to assist him or her. To them he or she shall delegate his or her authority as he or she deems necessary.
- v. The Minister or her/his appointed officers should be the caretakers of all documentation of the Order, including application documents and personal vows.
- vi. The Minister may have a council, called the Discretorium, with whom s/he may consult in regard to all problems and difficulties arising in the Order.

1. The Discretorium, should, at minimum, be composed of all the guardians of the Order. In addition to the guardians, appointed officers of the Order may be asked to serve on the Discretorium.

II. MEMBERSHIP

a. Postulancy:

- i. Each aspirant shall serve a postulancy of at least three months unless the Minister or his/her representative shall dispense the postulancy in whole or in part. No one shall be admitted to the postulancy unless they:
 - o Are at least 18 years of age;
 - o A Christian of good character and peaceable disposition
 - o Provide a clear background check at their own expense
 - o Provide at least one reference from their pastor (or spiritual director or figure) and one other personal or professional reference.
- ii. Aspirants must also confirm in writing that so long as they are members of the order they agree to *accept and follow the terms of this document and any amendments hereto and to live in the spirit of spirit of poverty chastity and obedience and to strive for and seek to foster and uphold Peace, Justice, Ecology, absence of discrimination, care for those less privileged, loyalty to their own church or denomination or expression of Christianity, Simplicity of living, personal conversion, prayerfulness, devotion and discipleship to the Incarnate Christ, Minority (expressed as humility and detachment from worldly financial or other ambition), Franciscan Community, love peace and joy. Such is the promise of the Order.*
- iii. After a person applies for admission to the Order, if s/he is found eligible, notification will be sent that s/he has been accepted as a postulant, and s/he must then begin living under the Rule and make monthly reports as to how s/he has kept it. This obligation continues until profession, after which the member must make such reports quarterly, by the fourth days of October, January, April and July, to another member appointed by the minister or his or her delegate. The postulancy is designed to show the postulant whether s/he has a vocation (i.e., desire and fitness) for the life of the Order and to form the posultant in knowledge of the Franciscan tradition.
- iv. The postulancy shall be as long as the Minister appoints, ordinarily not less than three months. No postulant shall be clothed and no novice professed except with the consent of the Minister or his or her representative.

- v. The postulants as well as the novices, shall be under the direction of a professed member (a formator) who shall undertake their instruction in all things that pertain to our life.
 - vi. Before proceeding on to Novitiate, a postulant must have completed and submitted her/his written statement of personal vows that express his/her individual and specific promises of living out the spirit of poverty, chastity, obedience. The postulant must submit this personal statement of vows to the Minister. This process of writing the personal vow should be an important task in the initial formation process overseen by his/her appointed formator.
- b. Novitiate: After being fully advised concerning the duties of the Order they are to be clothed. After a year they are to be received subject to being by then reconciled to their neighbours and having made restitution of their property.
- i. The general rule is that no novice shall be professed who has not served a novitiate of a year and a day, except in case of fatal sickness, in which case any professed members or Minister is hereby empowered to receive the profession. However, if the member recovers from the illness this profession should be afterwards ratified by the Minister; and before the ratification, the member must complete the full time of the novitiate.
 - ii. When postulants are admitted to the novitiate, they take their first definite step in the Franciscan life. They are “clothed” (i.e., invested with the Habit) and may ask to be given new names by which they are to be known in the Order (selected in honour of the Saints or some mystery of the Faith.).
 - iii. The novitiate lasts for at least a year and a day. In practice, it is often extended beyond this time. However, it may be reduced in appropriate circumstances, such as in the case of a novice who transfers from another Order, especially a Franciscan Order
 - iv. At clothing, the novice will be invested in the Lesser habit, which is the Tau cross, and may, if so desired, be invested in a preferred variation of the Greater Habit and/or take a new name at clothing.
- c. Profession is an agreement between the member and the Order.
- i. Clothing and profession may be effected in writing, though if possible clothing and profession should be effected at the hand of the candidate’s pastor and/or other professed Franciscan who should, if possible, be a member of the Order.
 - ii. The promises made are to live in membership of the Order in accordance with the Promise of the Order. Promises made at clothing last until profession or termination of membership, and those made at profession

last for one year and thereafter from year to year until termination of membership.

- d. Novices and Professed Membership: Membership, whether as novice, 3professed member or probationer on transfer is at will and may be suspended or terminated at any time by the will of the member or by the the pastoral consensus of the Spiritual Director and the Presiding Bishop on behalf of the Order.

VI. Oblates - Professed members who wish and are able to undertake the literal vow of chastity or either one or both of the other two vows of Holy Religion in a literal manner and are moved thereto by divine inspiration, may do so if they have the consent and approval of a prudent spiritual director and the Minister who knows their souls and their deeds.

- i. Prudence demands that the vow of chastity should be taken at first for a year at a time; and no member shall take a life vow of chastity without the consent of the Minister nor until at least three successive year-periods have been spent under the vow of chastity, nor until the subject has attained 24 years of age.
- ii. These vows of chastity shall be simple even when perpetual, and thus dispensable for a grave cause by the Minister or by the Spiritual Director.
- iii. Members who have taken the vow of chastity or either one or both of the other two vows of Holy Religion are to be known as Oblates of the Lesser Sisters and Brothers. If such oblates live in community they are known as conventual oblates.

b. Formation: Formation is to be a formal training in Franciscan history, traditions and way of life.

- i. Formators will be appointed to care for the proper formation of novice and pre-novice members of the Order.
- ii. The Minister will work closely with the formator(s) to ensure that postulants, novices, and formators are supported and progressing in the formation process.
 - 1. Formators should meet once a month with postulants and novices concerning their progress in keeping with the Franciscan rule of life and to discuss regularly-assigned Franciscan texts for the benefit of the member's formation in the knowledge of the Franciscan tradition
 - 2. The Minister, in conjunction with the formators of the Order, will make up the Formation Council which will be responsible for discussing how to carry out the formation process within the Order and for ensuring that high-quality formation is proceeding within the Order.
- iii. The Minister and/or her/his appointed representative(s) will care for the ongoing formation of the professed members of the Order.

IV. THE COMMON FUND

- a. The Order may have a Common Fund overseen by the Almoner.
- b. Each member will be given an opportunity to contribute to this fund in the monthly meeting, and the members *de familia* will be expected to contribute their offerings from time to time.
- c. No dues are demanded and any such offering is understood to be a free-will offering in love and charity.
- d. And those members who have no material thing to contribute shall contribute holy humility by suffering their poverty cheerfully.
- e. From this fund, at the direction of the Minister or his or her representative, the expenses of the Order are to be paid and the needs of any of the poor among our brethren and sisters shall be ministered unto.
- f. The Minister shall submit every year to the Spiritual Director a report of these disbursements, signed by the Almoner.

V. AMENDMENT

- a. If it should arise that a desired amendment be made to the Constitution of the Order, the Minister and Spiritual Director should be made aware of the desired changes and call for a discussion and vote on the proposal.
- b. The Constitution shall be amended if the amendment receives a two-thirds vote by the members.
- c. The vote shall be conducted by the Spiritual Director in the manner that she/he sees fit.

VI. No relationship of employment and no right to remuneration arise by virtue of this document

VII. The Order and its members, whether clergy or lay, do not accept, and hereby disclaim liability for the acts of any other person or persons and such other person or persons should keep the OSFM and its members fully indemnified in respect thereof.

VIII. To preserve anonymity and guard against bias, any election or vote within the Order shall be conducted by the Spiritual Director, and he/she shall determine the best method for collecting and recording votes that will ensure an honest account of the members' wishes.