

RITUAL OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

English translation approved August 5, 1985 by the
Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship
Prot. 956/85
+ Vergilius Noè
Tit. Archb. of Voncaria
Secretary

SACRA CONGREGATIO
PRO SACRAMENTIS
ET CULTU DIVINO

Prot. n. CD 1615/85

THE FRANCISCAN FAMILIES OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

At the request of Very Reverend Father José Angulo, Minister General of the Third Order Regular of St Francis, in the name of the Ministers General of the Franciscan Families and of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order, by letters issued on the 5th day of *October 1983*, by Virtue of the faculties given to this sacred Congregation by the Supreme Pontiff JOHN PAUL II, we gladly approve or confirm the text of the Ritual of the *Secular* Franciscan Order written in the Latin language and attached to this Decree.

The confirmation granted by the Apostolic See is to be mentioned in the printed text. Moreover, two samples of the same printed text are to be forwarded to this Sacred Congregation.

Anything to the contrary notwithstanding.

From the offices of the Sacred Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, on the 9th day of March, 1984, in the Jubilee Year of the Redemption.

(Joseph Card. Casoria)
Prefect

+ Vergilius Noè
Tit. Archb. of Voncaria
Secretary

Part I:

Rites for Entering the Secular Franciscan Order

Preface

I. The Nature of Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order

1. Many men and women, married and single, and many members of the diocesan clergy are called by God to follow the way of perfection of the gospel life after the example and manner of Francis of Assisi, to share his charism, and to make it present in the world. They promise to follow Jesus Christ and to live the gospel in fraternity by entering the Secular Franciscan Order. In this way they manifest the priceless gift of baptism and realise it in a fuller and more fruitful way.
2. The Church has always esteemed highly this form of life prompted by the Holy Spirit “for the good of the Church and the human community”¹. By means of the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV, Leo XIII and Paul VI, the Church has made sure that this form of life is suitably adapted to her needs and expectations in the conditions of changing times.
3. The Secular Franciscans, gathered together in fraternity and in oneness of spirit with all the People of God, celebrate the mystery of salvation, revealed and communicated to us in Christ, with prayers and thanksgiving, and by renewing their commitment to a new life.

II. The Normative Nature of the SFO Ritual and its Adaptation

4. The Constitution “Sacrosanctum Concilium” states: “Provided that the substantial unity of the Roman Rite is maintained, the revision of liturgical books should allow for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands”². In accord with this criterion, the Secular Franciscan fraternities scattered throughout the whole world, conscious that experience itself has a specific value, want to continue to bring to completion in any people and in any given culture the mystery of the Incarnate Word, the Saviour of all people.
5. The rites and prayers presented in these celebrations are inspired by the traditions of the Secular Franciscan fraternity and by the rituals being used experimentally in the various nations. They need to be adapted to the mentality and to the different circumstances of the fraternities scattered in so many parts of the world.
6. It is the task of the SFO National Councils particularly to carry out this work of adaptation.
The rites which refer to admission and profession are to be taken as normative with regard to the essential elements which will be indicated as such in each rite.

¹ PAUL VI, Apostolic Letter “Seraphicus Patriarcha” (24 June 1978), in AAS 70(1978)454.

² VATICAN COUNCIL II, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy “Sacrosanctum Concilium”, n. 38.

7. The SFO Ritual should manifest the gift of the Spirit proper to the Secular Franciscan Order and also its commitment to the gospel life, in a way that is suitable for any nation and in any cultural context.

On the one hand, this implies the assimilation of the valid cultural elements of each region, and, on the other hand, it presumes fidelity to the Secular Franciscan vocation and to its universality, that is, to unity among all the fraternities with the Church.

III. The Rites that Accompany the Steps of SFO Life

8. The steps by which the new members and the candidates are incorporated into the Secular Franciscan Order after a time of inquiry and preparation are the time of formation of at least one year; and profession of the rule or commitment to the gospel life. The renewal of profession is added to these.

The whole fraternity is involved in this gradual journey.

9. Through the priest and the president (minister), who represents the fraternity, the Church accepts the commitment and the profession of those who profess the life and rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. By her public prayer the Church entreats the help and grace of God for them. She imparts her blessing over them, and accompanies their commitment or profession with the eucharistic sacrifice.

1. Rite of Admission

10. The rite of admission, which precedes the time of formation, should be simple and plain. It is appropriate that this entrance take place within the celebration of the Word of God with the fraternity present.

11. The elements that should be clearly and evidently highlighted for the candidate are the following:

- a. the request and the will to experience to the gospel life, like Francis of Assisi;
- b. having in mind that the request is related to a possible future commitment to live this way of life, with the help of a fraternity, in communion and harmony with the whole Franciscan Family.

12. Present at this rite are:

- a. the candidates;
- b. a priest who is SFO spiritual assistant or the superior of a Franciscan religious community to which the secular fraternity is especially connected and who presides over the liturgical rite. In case of necessity another priest can be delegated.
- c. the president (minister) of the fraternity who receives the new members in the name of the fraternity council³. The president (minister) should occupy a significant place in the celebration to bring out the meaning of the office.
- d. the formation director or the delegate for formation, where there is one;
- e. the local fraternity.

If, for good reasons, the rite of admission is celebrated without the presence of a priest, the president (minister) presides at the celebration as well as receiving the candidates for the time of formation.

A fraternal social gesture of welcome to the newcomers can precede or follow the rite of entry, as an expression of joy and a pledge of fraternal support.

³ SFO RULE, art. 23

2. The Rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life or Profession

13. Since by its very nature profession is a public and ecclesial act, it should be celebrated in the presence of the fraternity. It is fitting that the profession be made during the celebration of the Eucharist or at least within an appropriate celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

14. The nature of commitment to the gospel life is:

- a. the renewal of one's consecration and promises made at baptism and confirmation. This means dedicating oneself to God through his People with all the consequences flowing from it, up to the present moment, in order to live in union with God and to hold firm to his plan of salvation, by means of a consecration that is to be lived in the world;
- b. the desire to live the gospel by following St. Francis of Assisi;
- c. incorporation into the Secular Franciscan Order, which is the harmonious union of all the members who promise to live the gospel after the example of St. Francis of Assisi, while remaining in their secular vocation;
- d. the desire to live in the world and for the world. In this regard, profession aims to be a gospel leaven and also a commitment to collaborate in building a more fraternal world. Members of the diocesan clergy by their profession confirm the appropriate pledges and promises of their specific episcopal, presbyteral or diaconal vocation.
- e. the desire to live the gospel for the whole of one's life. This dimension is the expression of a person's generosity in sharing the fullness of one's innermost being, and also the acceptance of the risks that are inseparable from any human choice that is so permanent and important;
- f. the candidate's confidence, supported by the help of the SFO Rule and the fraternity. For the candidate will feel led and helped by the Rule approved by the Church and will experience the joy of sharing the journey of gospel life with many brothers and sisters, from whom one can receive something and to whom a person can also give something. Being incorporated into the local fraternity, which is an integral part of the Church, he/she will contribute toward rebuilding the whole Church.

15. The elements considered above should be united in a single formula of profession, or even be expressed in the form of a dialogue. Some of these fundamental concepts, such as service of God and of his Church, simply cannot be expressed explicitly in a formula, since they are repeated constantly throughout the whole celebration, or they may always be presupposed in the very act of commitment to the gospel life.

16. The commitment to the gospel life is received by the president (minister) in the name of the Church and of the fraternity. The priest presides over this rite as the witness of the Church and of the Franciscan Family.

17. In exceptional circumstances, when a lack of priests calls for it or makes it necessary, the candidates pronounce their profession before the fraternity. The president (minister) of the fraternity presides at the celebration of the Word (or has another preside), if the circumstances require it, and also receives the profession, while the professed members of the fraternity act as witnesses.

3. The Rite of Annual Renewal of Commitment to the Gospel Life or Profession

18. Profession or permanent commitment can be preceded and prepared for by a temporary promise or commitment, renewed annually, but not extended beyond three years, since it is a preparation for permanent commitment.

19. This option is offered for pedagogical reasons, namely, to facilitate a suitable and gradual formation and entry of members into the Secular Franciscan Order. For that reason, the renewal is made with the same frame of mind in order to respond to the goal of this pedagogical preparation.

20. The rite of annual renewal can be performed in a celebration of the Word of God with a very simple formula. The readings and the whole rite may be arranged to suit the circumstances. If it is performed in some kind of liturgical celebration, the celebrant may give a short homily.

Chapter One

Rite of Admission into the Secular Franciscan Order

1. The rite of admission, which precedes the time of formation, begins with a suitable hymn.
2. The rite is to be simple and performed within the fraternity.

Description of the Rite

3. It is fitting that the rite of admission take place within an appropriate celebration of the Word of God.

Opening Rites

4. The rite begins with the sign of the cross and with a few words of greeting from the presiding priest.
5. Then an admonition is given by one of the members or by the priest himself, in these or similar words:

The Lord has called us
to live the gospel way of life in fraternity,
as he showed it to St. Francis of Assisi.
He brings us together today
to receive those who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
have asked to be admitted into the Secular Franciscan Order
and want to begin their time of formation
which will culminate in their profession
or commitment to the gospel life.
We will now renew our faith in the Holy Spirit
and call on him:
May he give us the grace
to encourage and sustain their proper formation
and to walk with them to attain their goal.

6. After the admonition, the priest says:

Let us pray.
Lord our God,
you have sent your Son Jesus Christ
to be for us the way, the truth, and the life.
Grant that these your people
who are asking to be admitted
into the Secular Franciscan Order,
and all of us,
may hear the words of the gospel fully
and may observe them attentively.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen.

Liturgy of the Word

7. Before the first reading these words of exhortation of St. Francis may be read from the *Letter to All the Faithful* (14:2-3):

Let us hear the Word of God
in the spirit of our blessed father Francis
who encourages us:
“In that love which is God,
I beg and implore you to hear these fragrant words
of our Lord Jesus Christ with humility and love,
putting them into practice with all gentleness
and observing them perfectly.”

8. First Reading: Rom 6:3-11 “*Let us live a new life*”

9. Responsorial Psalm: Ps 23:1-2,3-4,5-6

R. Lord, this is the people that longs to see your face.

The Lord’s is the earth and its fullness,
the world and all its peoples.
It is he who set it on the seas;
on the waters he made it firm. *R.*

Who shall climb the mountain of the Lord?
Who shall stand in his holy place?
The man with clean hands and pure heart,
who desires not worthless things,
who has not sworn so as to deceive his neighbour. *R.*

He shall receive a blessing from the Lord
and reward from the God who saves him.
Such are the men who seek him,
seek the face of the God of Jacob. *R.*

10. Second Reading: Mk 1:12-15 “*Repent, and believe the Good News*”

11. The celebrant gives a brief homily. According to circumstances he can invite the participants to share their reflections on the Word of God.

Rite of Admission

12. One of the candidates in the name of all (or all together) expresses their desire to enter the Secular Franciscan Order. The president (minister) receives their request in the name of the fraternity. This can be done in the form of a dialogue, in these or similar words:

President (Minister):

Would those who are asking to be admitted into the fraternity please come forward, namely, N.N.

Candidates:

We here present ask to enter this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, so that we may live more intensely and faithfully the grace and dedication of our baptism by following Jesus Christ according to the teachings and example of St. Francis of Assisi. In this way we intend to be of service to all through our secular state of life for the glory of God and to fulfil his plan of love in behalf of all people.

President (Minister):

This fraternity is pleased to accept your request. I, therefore, receive you into the Secular Franciscan Order so that you may begin your time of formation and experience our Franciscan life.

Priest Celebrant:

The Church and the Franciscan Family accept and confirm your sincere intention. May the Lord allow you to persevere in this desire and to be a leaven of gospel life within the world.

All: Amen. Thanks be to God.

This acclamation can be replaced by a hymn or a suitable gesture, according to local custom.

Presentation of the Gospel and the Rule

13. The president (minister) or the celebrant, according to local custom, presents the Gospel and the Rule to each one, saying:

The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the centre of his life with God and with people. May this too be your way of life.

14. According to local custom, the president (minister) may give the distinctive sign of the Order (the Tau emblem or another one) to each member.

15. The General Intercessions and the Lord's Prayer follow.

16. Then the minister (president) addresses the new members of the fraternity in these or similar words:

N.N., the Secular Franciscan Fraternity of N.N. very gladly promises to help you in your journey with friendship, prayer, and the witness of its life.

You, on the other hand, strengthen our fraternity in numbers,
by virtue of your presence and participation,
and through the sharing of your special gifts.
You are most welcome!

17. The members exchange a sign of peace. Meanwhile a suitable hymn is sung.

Blessing

18. The rite concludes with the Blessing of St. Francis:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.

All: Amen.

May his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you.

All: Amen.

May he look upon you with kindness, and give you his peace.

All: Amen.

May the Lord bless you, ± the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Chapter Two
Rite of Commitment to the Gospel Life
or Profession in the Secular Franciscan Order
Within the Mass

19. The rite that is described in this chapter is celebrated during the Mass.
20. The Mass formula to be used may correspond to the liturgy of the day; or, if the rubric permit, the votive Mass of St. Francis or of St. Louis King or St. Elizabeth of Hungary may also be chosen. With regard to the hymns and exhortations during the celebration, the text of Chapter Two of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order should be kept in mind, as well as the biblical texts that support the SFO way of life.
21. The president(minister) of the fraternity receives the profession at a suitable place in the sanctuary. Places for those to be professed are to be arranged in the sanctuary so that the whole liturgical action can be clearly seen by the whole congregation.
22. All that is necessary for celebrating the Eucharist and for the rite of profession is to be adequately prepared beforehand.

Entrance Rite

23. After the people and the fraternity members have assembled, and everything is properly prepared, the entrance hymn of the Mass is sung while the priest proceeds to the altar. Those to be professed arrange themselves in the places designated for Them.
24. After the celebrant's greeting, a fraternity member or the priest himself gives an admonition in these or similar words:

We are assembled as a community
to take part in the eucharistic sacrifice.
In this celebration of the Eucharist
N.N. are going to make their profession
of the gospel life in the Secular Franciscan Order.

While giving thanks to the Father through Christ
for all the gifts we have received from him,
we have a special reason for gratitude today:
the gift of his grace which he has given
to those about to be professed to live in the world
according to the spirit of the Beatitudes
and also the gift of his grace
which he has given to the whole community
by adding new members to the fraternity.

Especially today, after the example of Christ
and in union with his own act of thanksgiving,
we are invited to present ourselves before the Father

as living sacrifices of praise for the life of the world.

25. Mass continues in the usual way. It might be appropriate to amplify the penitential rite in order to highlight the pervading spirit of penance.

Liturgy of the Word

26. Everything is done as usual in the Liturgy of the Word, with the exception that:
- a. the readings can be taken either from the Mass of the day or from the texts offered in Appendix I, part 1;
 - b. the Creed may be omitted.

Profession or Commitment to the Gospel Life

Request:

27. After the reading of the Gospel the celebrant and the people sit. Those who are to be professed stand. The president (minister) of the fraternity invites those who are to be professed to present themselves and to express their intention publicly. The candidates can do this either singly, each in one's own words, or else by means of one candidate speaking in the name of all. In this case, the request may be made in these or similar words:

We ask to be admitted to profession
of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.
The experience during our time of formation
has strengthened us in our conviction
that the Lord is calling us
to observe the holy gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ
by following the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

President (Minister):

The fraternity accepts your petition
and is united with you in your prayer.
May the Holy Spirit confirm in you the work he has begun.

Homily or Talk:

28. Those to be professed are seated, and a homily is given. The biblical readings as well as the commitment to the gospel life and its theological implications are fittingly explained.

Questioning:

29. After the homily those to be professed stand. The celebrant questions them in these or similar words:

Celebrant:

Before this fraternity and the other members of the People of God
gathered here, I ask you to express your will:

Do you wish to embrace the gospel way of life
by following the example and words of St. Francis of Assisi,
which is at the heart of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order?

Candidates, replying all together:

Yes, this is what I want.

Celebrant:

You have been called to give witness to the Kingdom of God
and to build a more fraternal world based on the gospel
together with all people of goodwill.
Do you wish to be faithful to this vocation
and to practice the spirit of service proper to Secular Franciscans?

Candidates:

Yes, this is what I want.

Celebrant:

You have been made members of the People of God by your baptism,
and strengthened in confirmation by the new gift of the Spirit,
in order to proclaim Christ by your life and your words.
Do you wish to bind yourself more closely to the Church
and to work intently to rebuild the ecclesial community
and fulfil its mission among all people?

Candidates:

Yes, this is what I want.

President (Minister)

The local fraternity is a visible sign of the Church,
a community of faith and love.
Together with all the members you now pledge yourselves
to spend your efforts to make the fraternity
a genuine ecclesial assembly and a living Franciscan community.

Prayer for Divine Grace:

30. Then the celebrant prays for divine help, saying:

Let us pray.

And in a manner customary to the community all pray in silence for a while. Then:

Lord, watch over these your servants.
May the Spirit of your love penetrate their hearts,
so that your grace will strengthen them
to keep their commitment to the gospel life.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Profession or Commitment to the Gospel Life:

31. After the prayer, two professed members stand beside the president (minister) of the fraternity, acting as special witnesses. Those to be professed approach the president (minister) one at a time and read the formula of profession before him/her:

I, N.N.,
by the grace of God, renew my baptismal promises
and consecrate myself to the service of his kingdom.
Therefore, in my secular state (*or:* as a member of the diocesan clergy)
I promise to live all the days of my life (*or:* for one year)
the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order
by observing its rule of life.

May the grace of the Holy Spirit,
the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary
and our holy father Saint Francis,
and the fraternal bonds of community always be my help,
so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.

32. After the formula, the president (minister) adds:

Thanks be to God!
As the president (*or:* minister) I receive you
into this fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order.
Your membership in the fraternity is a cause of great joy
and hope for the members of this community.

33. When all the candidates have made their profession and the president (minister) has accepted it, the celebrant speaks to them in these or similar words:

I confirm your commitment in the name of the Church.
Our Seraphic Father himself encourages you
in the words of his Testament:
“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,
and all the powers of heaven and all the saints.

34. If tradition to the local culture calls for it, suitable emblems of the Secular Franciscan Order can be presented here.

35. When all this is finished, the members present may come forward to congratulate each newly professed with an appropriate sign of peace and goodwill. Meanwhile, a suitable hymn may be sung.

Conclusion of the Rite of Profession:

36. The rite is concluded with the General Intercessions.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

37. While a hymn is sung at the Presentation of the Gifts, some of the newly professed members may appropriately present the bread, wine, and water for the eucharistic sacrifice.

38. At communion it is fitting that the Eucharist be received under both species.

39. At the end of the Mass, the solemn blessing “throughout the year” may be given. It is placed first in the restored Roman Missal, and it is the Blessing of St. Francis, as found at the end of Chapter One (n. 18).

Chapter Three

Annual Renewal of Profession

40. The president (minister) of the fraternity and two witnesses must be present for the renewal of profession or the commitment to gospel life. It is very appropriate, however, that the whole fraternity take part in this rite as much as possible.

41. The rite is to be performed within some kind of liturgical celebration and in a very simple way (cf. Preface, n. 20)

42. If the rite is performed within a celebration of the Word of God, the readings may be taken from Appendix I, part 1.

Admonition Before the Rite of Renewal

43. Before the celebrant proceeds to the renewal of profession, he addresses those present in these or similar words:

Moved by the power of the gospel,
we all experience the call always to begin again
and to bring about a continuing inner conversion,
so that we may be conformed to Christ
and with him be given over to the service of the Father
and of our brothers and sisters as well.
In this journey toward an ongoing change of heart,
perseverance is a gift of God.
Let us pray, therefore, that,
as we make progress in loving one another,
we will remain faithful to the end.

All reply to the celebrant's words:

O Lord,
look kindly upon those whom you have called
to the holiness of gospel life in the Secular Franciscan Order.
Grant them the grace to fulfil their commitment to the gospel life
which they have embraced with spirit and generosity.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Renewal of Commitment

44. Those renewing their commitment to the gospel life may use formula n. 31 above or this one following:

I, N.N.,
renew for one year my commitment
to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ,
after the example of St. Francis of Assisi,

according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Then the celebrant adds in these or similar words:

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,
and all the powers of heaven and all the saints.

All: Amen.

Acceptance of the Renewal of Commitment

45. After the formula, the president (minister) of the fraternity says:

As the president (minister) of the fraternity,
I accept the renewal of your profession.
All our brothers and sisters unite with you
in thanking God for this gift.

Conclusion of the Rite

46. The rite concludes with the General Intercessions, the Lord's Prayer, and the following prayer:

Hear our prayers, o Lord,
and grant that these our brothers and sisters,
who spend their daily lives in the service of others,
may imbue their earthly affairs with a genuine gospel spirit.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Chapter Four

On the Anniversary of Profession

47. It is a praiseworthy custom to celebrate the twenty-fifth and the fiftieth anniversary of profession in the Secular Franciscan Order. If this jubilee is celebrated within the context of the Eucharist, the Mass corresponding to the liturgy of the day may be said, with the prayers “In Thanksgiving”, according to the rubrics. The Masses mentioned in n. 20 above may also be used.

Admonition after the Homily

48. After the homily, the president (minister) of the fraternity or one of the other members present gives an admonition in these or similar words:

Today with great joy we are celebrating
the twenty-fifth (*and/or*: fiftieth) anniversary
of N.N in the Secular Franciscan Order.
During these years, they have made a sincere effort
“to make present the charism of their seraphic Father
in the life and mission of the Church”
and to build a more fraternal and evangelical world
so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively.”
Let us, therefore, join in their thanksgiving
and in their commitment to an ongoing change of heart.

Renewal of Commitment

49. The members who are celebrating their jubilee renew their commitment in these or similar words:

We thank you, Lord,
for calling us to the Secular Franciscan Order.
We ask your pardon
for all our shortcomings, weaknesses and transgressions
against our commitment to the gospel life and against the Rule.
We pray that you will allow us to experience once again
the fervour and readiness of that first day when we entered the fraternity.
We renew once again our commitment to the gospel life,
according to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order,
until the end of our days.
Grant also that we may live in harmony
with our brothers and sisters,
and may give witness to younger people
of the great gift we received from you:
our Franciscan calling
to “go forth as witnesses and instruments
of the Church’s mission among all people,
proclaiming Christ by our life and words.”

Amen.

50. After the renewal of commitment, the celebrant offers this prayer:

Lord our Lord, Father of all,
we thank you for the love and goodwill
that you have shown toward your people.
And so we ask you
to help our brothers and sisters, who today celebrate
their anniversaries in the Secular Franciscan Order,
to fulfil their commitment to the gospel life
which they once took upon themselves.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
All: Amen.

Conclusion of the Rite

51. The rite is concluded with a sign of congratulations shared by all. Meanwhile, the “Canticle of the Creatures” or another suitable hymn is sung.

Part II:

Prayers for Fraternity Meetings

Preface

1. Local fraternity gatherings as well as meetings of regional, national, and international councils are held in the Secular Franciscan Order.
2. The goals of these gatherings and meetings are indicated in the Rule, namely, to promote charity among the members and to foster their Franciscan and ecclesial life⁴.
3. There are different kinds of gatherings within a fraternity: sometimes for prayer, other times for planning work or accomplishing projects, and still other occasions for fraternising and socialising.
4. The following gatherings of the fraternity are required by statutes:
 - a. a time for getting to know one another as brothers and sisters;
 - b. a time for hearing the Word of God and sharing it⁵;
 - c. a time for study and work (when opportunities arise);
 - d. a time for the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist and The Liturgy of the Hours.
5. In all of these, there is ample room for the creative initiative of the council and members of the fraternities.
6. The prayers given here are taken mainly from the writings of St. Francis.

⁴ SFO RULE, art. 22, 24.

⁵ SFO RULE, art. 5.

Chapter One

Opening and Closing Prayers for Fraternity Meetings

1. The prayers suggested in the following number are given only as a sample.

Opening prayers

2. When the members have gathered together in a suitable place, before any business is taken up, the one chairing the meeting may begin the community prayer in a manner similar to this:

Chairperson:

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen.

Chairperson:

Most high, all powerful, good God,
praise, glory and honour and all blessing are yours.

All:

Praise and bless my Lord, and give him thanks,
and serve him with great humility.

Chairperson:

Let us pray.
All-powerful, most holy, most high and supreme God,
all good, supreme good, total good, you who alone are good:
we give you all praise, all glory, all thanks,
all honour, all blessing and every good.
So be it. So be it.

All: Amen.

or:

Let us pray.
Most high, glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of our hearts
and give us right faith, firm hope and perfect charity,
with wisdom and insight, o Lord,
that we may accomplish your holy and true will.

All: Amen.

3. A short reading may follow, from Sacred Scripture (Appendix I, part 1). or from the writings of St. Francis (Appendix I, part 2).

Closing Prayers

4. If it is opportune, there may be a time for spontaneous prayer or for intercessions for the general needs of the Church and the particular needs of the fraternity. Then the chairperson may use the prayer of St. Francis, as follows, or another of his/her own choice.

Chairperson:

Let us pray.

Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God:
grant us in our misery that we do for your sake alone
what we know you want us to do,
and always want what pleases you;
so that, cleansed and enlightened interiorly
and fired with the flame of the Holy Spirit,
we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son,
our Lord Jesus Christ,
and so make our way to you, Most high,
by your grace alone,
you who live and rule in perfect Trinity and simple Unity,
and are glorified, God all-powerful, forever and ever.

All: Amen.

or:

Let us pray.

Most generous God,
you are the giver of peace and the lover of charity.
Grant to us your people true harmony with your will
and help us to overcome all temptations that could disturb our peace.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

5. If a priest is present, he may give St. Francis' Blessing to Brother Leo (cf. Part One, n. 18).

Chapter Two

Celebration of the Fraternity's Chapter of Elections

6. After the invocation of the Holy Spirit and a short reading from the Sacred Scriptures (Appendix I, part 1) or from the writings of St. Francis (Appendix I, part 2), the one presiding at the elections offers this prayer:

Almighty, most high and supreme God, Father,
holy and just, Lord, King of heaven and earth:
we give you thanks for yourself.
Of your own will you created all things spiritual and physical,
and made us in your own image and likeness,
and gave us a place in paradise,
through your only Son, in the Holy Spirit.
We trust in you and we ask for your light
so that we may choose those
who will properly serve our fraternity through their leadership.
Help us to select those who are able
to animate and guide us by their example,
their virtues and prudent decisions
so that the gospel of Jesus in the spirit of St. Francis
may come alive in our community.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

7. The elections follow in accordance with the Constitutions. When the election process is finished, those elected give witness to their Franciscan vocation and to their readiness to be of service.

8. After all this is completed, the one presiding at the elections says to those newly elected:

May the God of hope
bring you such joy and peace in your faith
that the power of the Holy Spirit
will remove all bounds to hope (Rom 15:13)

All: Blessed be God forever!

The one presiding continues:

Let us pray for those who have been elected.
Through their service of animating and guiding the fraternity,
may we all live our faith more deeply,
witness to Christ more bravely,
and work to prepare the kingdom of God.

All join in this prayer:

Most generous Father,
grant, through the dedicated efforts of our new leaders

who have been called to serve our fraternity,
that all of us may know you better, and make you known to all.
May we live more vigorously the gospel way of life
that you inspired through Francis of Assisi.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Chapter Three

The Establishment of a New Fraternity

9. The rite described in this chapter is performed in a suitable place.
10. The one who has the faculty to establish a fraternity canonically presides at the ceremony.

Introduction

11. After a word of welcome and a brief introduction from the president (minister) of the fraternity, article 22 of the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order is read:

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.

12. The one presiding at the establishment of the new fraternity offers the following prayer:

Let us pray.
O Lord our God, as we gather here in your name,
may our lives together in fraternity
help us to experience the presence of your Son our Lord Jesus Christ,
so that our joy in St. Francis may come to fulfillment.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Scripture Reading

13. Then there is a reading from the Bible; Rom 12:4-13 is suggested.

Reading and Signing of the Document of Establishment

14. After the scripture reading, the document of the establishment of the new fraternity is now formally read and signed. Also, the names of the members of the fraternity are recorded, as well as the leaders who constitute the council of the new fraternity.
15. When this is finished, it is appropriate to read a short text from St. Francis' "Letter to All the Faithful".
16. On this occasion some appropriate words can be offered either by the one presiding at the establishment or by a regional or national leader present.

Prayer in Common and Conclusion

17. A prayer can be offered in common after the style of general intercessions, which is concluded with the following prayer:

Our Father, almighty God, source of love and unity:
grant that this new fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order,
united and animated by the Holy Spirit,
may be ready to hear your Word and keep it.
May all its members pray together with one mind and heart.
May they find in the community
the strength and inspiration to bring about a more fraternal world
and to carry the message of joy and peace to everyone.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

18. It is appropriate to conclude with a hymn to Our Lady.

Appendix

Part One

Optional Texts for the Celebration of the Commitment to the Gospel Life

A. First Reading

1. Gal 6:14-18
"The only thing I can boast about is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ."
Brothers and sisters: The only thing I can boast about...
2. Eph 1:3-10
"He determined that we should become his adopted sons through Jesus Christ."
Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ...
3. Col 3:9-17
"Put on love over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them."
4. 1 Pt 2:9-17
"Always behave honourably among pagans."
Brothers and sisters: you are a chosen race ... (as far as) fear God.
5. Jac 2:12-18
"If good works do not go with faith, it is quite dead."
Brothers and sisters: talk and behave...
6. 1 Cor 12:4-11
"The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose."
Brothers and sisters: there is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit ...

B. Responsorial Psalm

7. Ps 15:1-2a,5,7-8,11
R. (5a): O Lord, you are my inheritance.
8. Ps 97:1-4
R. Sing psalms to the Lord with the harp, for he has made known his salvation.
9. Ps 132
R. Let us love one another, for love is from God.
10. Ps 36:3-4,5-6,30-31
R. The law of the Lord is in the heart of the just.
11. Ps 24:2-5,8-10
R. Make me walk in your truth, o Lord.
12. Ps 91:2-3,6-7,13-14
R. (6a): How great are your works, o Lord!

C. Alleluia and Verse Before the Gospel

13. Phil 1:21
Life to me is Christ, but then death would bring me something more.
14. Mt 11:25
You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever and revealed them to mere children.
15. Col 3:14-15

Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts.

16. Lk 10:1,9
Start off now; tell the towns, "The kingdom of God is very near to you".
17. Jn 15:8
It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit, and then you will be my disciples.
18. Ps 132:1
How good and how pleasant it is, when brothers live in unity!

D. Gospels

19. Mt. 5:1-12
"How happy are the poor in spirit, the gentle, the merciful."
20. Mt 11:20-30
"You have hidden these things from the learned and the clever and have revealed them to mere children."
At that time: Jesus began to reproach the towns...
21. Mt 12:46-50
"Anyone who does the will of my Father in heaven, he is my brother and sister and mother."
At that time: Jesus was still speaking to the crowds.
22. Lk 10:1-9
"Start off now; I am sending you."
At that time: The Lord appointed ...
23. Jn 15:1-8
"It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit."
At that time: Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine ..."
24. Jn 17:20-26
"May they be one in us, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you."
At that time: Jesus was praying, and he said, "I pray not only for these..."

Part Two

Franciscan Readings

25. At fraternity gatherings, especially at the ordinary meetings of the fraternity and at the celebration of the chapter of elections, it is a good idea to have on hand the writings of St. Francis or other writings taken from the early Franciscan sources, in order to provide topics and ideas for the members to reflect upon.

Here only a few of the writings of St. Francis of Assisi are indicated:

- a. “The Exhortation to the Brothers and Sisters in Penance”;
- b. “Letter to All the Faithful”;
- c. the “Unconfirmed Rule of 1221”, chapters 22 and 23;
- d. prayers and hymns from the “Office of the Passion”

Part Three

Liturgical Prayer

For the Members of the Secular Franciscan Order

26. According to the SFO Rule (art. 8), the members of the Secular Franciscan Order are to join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of Christ.

27. These prayers may be:

- a. Morning and evening prayer from The Liturgy of the Hours, either in common or in private. These celebrations are to be preferred at the fraternity meeting.
- b. A shortened form of The Liturgy of the Hours according to forms adapted to the local Churches.
- c. The Little Office of the Blessed Virgin Mary.
- d. The office of the Passion written by St. Francis of Assisi
- e. The office of the twelve Our Fathers in one of its many versions that have been enriched with short biblical readings and also adapted to the structure of The Liturgy of the Hours, especially since this form of prayer still thrives in many parts of the world and is a useful way of praying in everyday circumstances.