

# CNSA News and Views

Franciscan Life in the 21st Century

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## Some Fundamentals



In the course of human events, things change. The mindset of people in Congress holds a variety of views and each one considers him/herself to be right. In the Church, people have all sorts of ideas about the Catholic Church, and each one considers their ideas to be right. In families people with experience push personal ideas and ignore ideas of people just getting a good start in life, and vice-versa. Each person considers him/herself to be right.

The common thread here, perhaps, is in our inability (unwillingness?) to listen to one another, to take time to hear and understand the ideas of others as a source of information - even if we disagree. Refusal to offer *attentive listening* means we may not really care to understand the ideas of that "other" person or group. Franciscans, however, show courtesy, concern, and respect. Each quality requires us to understand experiences and ideas which may differ from our own.

Here are ideas about spiritual assistance to the OFS. Secular Franciscans and others have a variety of ideas about spiritual assistance. These ideas often conflict with one another. Below are ideas from documents and practices in the Church and the Franciscan family that may prove helpful.

**I. Spiritual assistants represent the 1st Order/TOR in 'assisting' the OFS.** Where does their authority come from? Let's look at a bit of history:

Nicolas IV became the first Franciscan Pope on February 15, 1288. He was bombarded by Franciscan Penitents and others to give approval to "their" rule. On August 18, 1289, he issued a Rule for Franciscan penitents. As is frequently the case, neither the Penitents nor the Friars were totally happy with this Rule. Nicolas had designated the Friars as the "visitors" of the fraternities. Lack of acceptance is obvious. Within a year, on August 8, 1290, Nicolas issued a stronger text, *Unigenitus Dei Filius*. He re-asserted that the visitors of the penitents *would* come from the Friars. Gradually both sides accepted the papal direction. Since then the 1st Order/TOR have authority from the Church to do (among other things) the pastoral visitations of the fraternities. This authority is now mandated by the Church and Canon law #303 and is called - *Altius Moderamen*.

cf. "*De Illis Qui Faciunt Penitentiam*" - *The Rule of the SFO: Origins, Development, Interpretation*" - Robert Stewart OFM - Page 202

**The authority of the spiritual assistants, at every level, comes from the Church through the major superiors of the 1st Order/TOR.** It does *NOT* come from the OFS. The OFS constitutions do require the major superiors or their delegate to *consult* with

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## Reflections on leadership

*Truth cannot be compromised. The truth of what we say is shown by what we do. As someone has put it: "If you don't live it, you don't believe it!"*

*The Leaders of the Future* - Hesselbein, Goldsmith, Beckhard - Page 247

*Community is a phenomenon that occurs most easily when free people with some sense of equal worth join together voluntarily for a common enterprise. Great leaders create a sense of freedom, voluntariness, and common worth. They do this most easily in smaller organizations that allow a lot of face-to-face contact. As organizations become larger, more complex, and more widely distributed geographically, it becomes harder to create enough common vision and enough community spirit to guide actions without increasing reliance on a chain of command. When people are separated by distance, vast differences in power and wealth, and conflict over resources and promotions, political struggle often replaces community.*

Ibid - Page 28



We face difficult issues of community life: because we are spread out; there are differences in skills; and there are differences in implementing the *Rule and Constitutions* among us. Councils need clarity in understanding their responsibilities. A community does not function like a large company. Neither are leaders expected to create hierarchies to hand down decrees. We take a more difficult road.

OFS leaders involve members in determining the goals and tools that enable a fraternity to be a community and not just a group of people who happen to meet regularly. *Developing relationships based on love for one another* is different than working at a business for

the appropriate fraternity council before appointing a spiritual assistant (General & Provincial Spiritual Assistants are delegates of the major superiors).

## 2. How is this authority carried out in practice?

This mandate, given by the Catholic Church to the 1st Order/TOR, to assist the OFS, is indicated in the OFS Constitutions, Articles 85.1 & .2; 86.1; 95.1. The mandate (authority) of the Church (*Altius moderamen*) is given to the major superiors and the friars they delegate (General and Provincial SAs) in order:

- A) to promote fidelity to the Franciscan charism in its secular expression;
- B) to assure the observance of the OFS Rule and Constitutions;
- C) to provide support & accountability for OFS life in fraternity (OFS Rule #26).



These responsibilities, *mandated by the Church*, are fulfilled by the major superiors (& delegates) through:

- 1) establishing Franciscan fraternities of the OFS;
- 2) appointing spiritual assistants on the various levels;
- 3) conducting pastoral visitations of the fraternities at the various levels. (Generally these visitations are conducted by a *regional SA*. But Provincials and PSAs are free to make separate visits to fraternities bonded to their province.)

## 3. Fraternities are "bonded" to a particular Province of the 1st Order/TOR.

A fraternity is *bonded* to the 1st Order/TOR province whose major superior or delegate officially establishes the fraternity. The *Document of Establishment* will contain the appropriate information. It is important to have the document of establishment in the archives!

If, for good reasons, the fraternity or the *bonded* province wish to **transfer a fraternity to another Province**, they apply to the major superior or delegate of the involved provinces and dialogue with the affected fraternity about the transfer. An official request includes the reason(s) for the transfer. When agreement is achieved the official transfer can take place. A copy of the official transfer is done in writing and kept in the archives.

## 4. The major superiors or their delegates, mandated by the *altius moderamen* from the Church, have the authority to establish fraternities, appoint SAs and conduct pastoral visitations. The goal of the mandate is achieved by relating to the OFS as brothers and sisters (of the Franciscan Family) and not simply by fulfilling duties required by canon law.

The ministry performed by the 1st Order/TOR with the OFS is to assure that the Franciscan charism is strengthened and supported by the ministry of SAs and councils at all levels.

SAs serve as *brothers and sisters*, related in a special way to the OFS. SAs *reinforce the bond of unity* between the 1st Order/TOR and the OFS (cf. Constitutions - Article 92.1). E.g. A visitation is a *privileged moment of communion* with the 1st Order/TOR (Constitutions - Article 95.1). Other terms of unity include - *life-giving union / vital reciprocity*.

## 5. The OFS Constitutions (Article 85.2) gives a definition of the spiritual care that is the responsibility of the 1st Order/TOR major superiors (and their delegates):

*The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan 1st Order/TOR, is the responsibility, above all, of their general and provincial ministers. The *altius moderamen*, of which Canon 303 speaks, belongs to them. The purpose of *altius moderamen* is to guarantee the fidelity of the OFS to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and union with the Franciscan family, values which represent a vital commitment for the secular Franciscans.*

wages.

Formation requires OFS members to develop relationships with the Trinity; with all our neighbors, including enemies; and with a gentle love of self. Thus the entire Franciscan community follows these gospel words:

*You have heard that they were told, "Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you this: Love your enemies and pray for your persecutors; only so can you be children of your heavenly Father, who causes the sun to rise on the good and the bad alike, and sends his rain on the innocent and the wicked. If you love only those who love you, what reward can you expect? Even the tax-collectors do as much as that. ... there must be no limit to your goodness, as your heavenly Father's goodness knows no bounds."*

Matthew 5: 43-46, 48

Franciscans perceive reality as the place where we fill life with actions of love. We view people in the way that G.K. Chesterton describes in his book: *St. Francis of Assisi* - Image books - Page 96-97:

*Whatever his (Francis') taste in monsters, he never saw before him a many-headed beast. He only saw the image of God multiplied but never monotonous. To him a man was always a man and did not disappear in a dense crowd any more than in a desert. He honored all men; that is, he not only loved but respected them all. What gave him his extraordinary power was this; that from the Pope to the beggar, from the sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernadone was really interested in him, in his own individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously, and not merely added to the spoils of some social policy or the names in some clerical document.*

This way of love is practiced in community life and extended beyond it to include all people both in the Church and in society. As the OFS Rule expresses it:



*... a sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on a equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly ...*

OFS Rule #13