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Subject: Prison Ministry

Guidelines for the OFS Concerning Prison Ministry

1. "I was . . . in prison and you visited me" (Matthew 25:35-6). Ministry to people in prison is a good gospel-based ministry for OFS members. We encourage such a ministry for those who are called to it. "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" (Secular Franciscan Rule 13).
2. Individuals who are in prison can be encouraged to learn about the Franciscan charism. People in prison can read and learn about St. Francis and begin to live his spirit in prison. Prayer groups, Christian education and Bible study can be established to offer prisoners hope and a sense of belonging to a faith community.
3. It benefits neither prisoners nor Secular Franciscans to invite prisoners to enter formation to become permanently professed members of the OFS while still in prison. Prisoners lack control of their own lives. They may be moved at any time and therefore lack a sense of permanence in a set place. They cannot congregate consistently to participate in a common formation program with approved spiritual assistance. Nor can they work together in fraternity performing apostolic ministries. In addition, by very definition, it is impossible for prisoners to participate directly in the life of a local fraternity outside the prison (cf. National Statutes Article 18.5a). Similarly, the local fraternity cannot witness formation and profession of a prisoner.
4. Therefore, for any prisoners who feel called to the Secular Franciscan Order, the time for formation and formal admission into the OFS must come after release from prison. These individuals would then be able to begin formation in a fraternity of their choice. They and the members of that local fraternity would both be free and able to discern a Secular Franciscan vocation in the same way as any applicant.

*These guidelines were approved and adopted by the OFS National Fraternity Council gathered in Chapter on October 19, 2013.
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