



Guideline: 2024-04
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Subject: Guidelines for Councils in Conflict

General Comments: Applies to all fraternities – local, regional, national.

Background: When elected to the council of a fraternity, the primary responsibilities are to work cooperatively to lead the fraternity in deepening the commitment to the Secular Franciscan Rule. through building fraternity, forming new vocations and communicating with the broader family.

“... 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...” OFS Rule Article 21

The council should work collaboratively in a fraternal spirit to make decisions for animating and guiding the fraternity. Councils are invited to study the [Handbook for Secular Franciscan Servant Leadership](#)¹. This handbook offers solid suggestions for how to manage meetings, improve communications and listening skills and resolve conflict.

As in all administrative groups, occasionally members of the council may not agree on all decisions. This is normal. However, when a Council allows disagreements to prevent them from working together or completing necessary work, this is a concern.

In addition, the Minister should schedule a meeting to discuss the issues with the entire council. The following process may be helpful:

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you personally and the entire council.
2. Resolve individually and as a group to put hurts aside and listen to each other. Miscommunication may be at the heart of the difficulty.
3. Each person should prepare to share honestly what they think the problem may be.
4. While sharing is taking place, agree to **listen carefully** and not interrupt one another.
5. Make a list of all the issues that come out in the sharing.
6. Pinpoint those issues that come up repeatedly. These issues will be the first to focus on.
7. Resolve to ask the Holy Spirit for humility in case it turns out that you might be the source of the problem.
8. Work together to resolve the issue. Keep in mind that the solution may be a combination of everyone's ideas. (Even if you are sure that your idea is best.)
9. Confirm agreement by all council members and set out a timeline for actions to be taken.
10. Follow-up on each action. If revisions may be needed, meet as a council to determine an agreed upon path.

¹ Available on the OFS-USA website or through Smoky Valley Printing.

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If these steps do not get the council working together again, it may be time to call in a mediator. The mediator may follow the same steps or guide the council in a different way. Resolve to trust the process even if you do not agree! The Holy Spirit is in charge. (See presentation on Mediation on the OFSUSA website: [Miscellaneous Items-Mediation as a Means of Conflict Resolution Within the OFS.pdf \(secularfranciscansusa.org\)](https://secularfranciscansusa.org/Miscellaneous%20Items-Mediation%20as%20a%20Means%20of%20Conflict%20Resolution%20Within%20the%20OFS.pdf))

When a stalemate occurs, tempers begin to rise, the council is encountering uncooperative attitudes or work of the council is being left uncompleted, the Minister (or when necessary, another member of the council) should notify the council of the next higher level.

The next higher council will schedule a visitation of the council to determine appropriate next steps.

The National Executive Council may “intervene to resolve serious and urgent problems in a spirit of reconciliation when requested by a Regional Fraternity Council or on the National Executive Council’s own initiative”. (Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States of America Article 5.5(e).) A Regional Executive Council may also apply this provision for a local fraternity council in need.

In some cases, General Constitutions Article 84 regarding removal of a council member may be necessary. (See suspension or removal provisions of the Guidelines for Suspension or Dismissal of a Member or Removal from Office.)