

Serving as a Spiritual Assistant

Relationships and Responsibilities



Major Topics

- Role of the Spiritual Assistant
- Franciscan Theology and Spirituality
- The Trinity
- Formation
- Franciscan Writers
- Vatican II
- OFS Structure
- Activity in the World
- The Ritual and Devotions
- Church and Eucharist
- Franciscan Spirit
- Conversion
- Theology of Profession
- Basic Theology
- Prayer
- Franciscan Family
- Pastoral Visitations

Role of the Spiritual Assistant

Connecting the OFS with the Church and the Franciscan First Order/TOR

Altius Moderamen

The Catholic Franciscan Family

- First Order
 - Order of Friars Minor
 - Order of Friars Minor, Capuchin
 - Order of Friars Minor, Conventual
- Second Order
 - Poor Clares
- Third Order
 - Secular Franciscan
 - Third Order Regular

Local Spiritual Assistants

- Communicate Franciscan Spirituality
- Cooperate in Formation
- Witness of Franciscan Spirituality
- Animator of Liturgical Celebrations
- Lead by Assisting

Regional Spiritual Assistants

- Serve the Regional Council
- Serve the Regional Fraternity
- Formation of Spiritual Assistants
- Foster Interest of Friars and Youth

Franciscan Spirituality and Theology

Providing Perspective on the Incarnation, Salvation and Trinitarian Theology

Christ-Gospel-Centered Life

- A God Who Always Loves Us
- Love Manifested Through Incarnation
- Call to Conversion
- The Holy Spirit
- Messengers of Perfect Joy

The Trinity

A model for the relationships we establish in life

Father, Son and Holy Spirit

- A Relationship of Love
- Transformative Power
- Individual Skills and Gifts from God

“As the Father see in every person the features of his Son... so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ...”

SFO Rule # 13

Called to Build Relationships

- Trinitarian model of collaboration
- Seek peaceful resolution
- Mutual Respect
- Love is the foundation

Formation

A Spiritual Assistant is a key part of the process of initial and ongoing formation

Initial Formation

- Discerns the reality of the call
- Experience the Rule in daily life
- Stages of formation
 - Orientation
 - Inquiry
 - Candidacy

Ongoing Formation

- Required to keep a Franciscan perspective
- Vital to be Faithful to the Rule
- Celebrate with People
- Positively deal with the World

“ ...called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world...”
SFO Rule # 14

Franciscan Writers

Theological and mystical writers, men and women keep us in touch with our
Franciscan heritage

Alexander of Hales

- Born 1185 in Gloucestershire, England
- Teacher of St. Bonaventure
- Developed Trinitarian theology
- Love, not sin, is the reason for the Incarnation
- God choose freely to create the natural world
- God choose to be incarnate

St. Bonaventure

- Born 1217-1221, Bagnoregio, Italy
- Influenced by Scripture
- Spirit of love that impelled Christ to suffer and die
- Union with Christ enables us to act with compassion
- Writer- Insights into nature of God
 - Itinerarium Mentis in Deum (The Soul's Journey into God)
 - Tree of Life
 - Life of St. Francis (Legenda Major)

John Duns Scotus

- Born 1226, Scotland
- Saw love as key to our union with God
- God desires to be with the people he created
- Incarnation gives flesh to the love
- Highest glory of creation
- Christ is the center of the Universe

Angela of Foligno

- Born 1248, Italy
- Experienced a sense of Trinity
- Great Medieval Mystic
- “Teacher of Theologians”
- Dictated the Book of Visions and Instructions
 - The Memoriale: Book of Visions
 - The Visions

Study and Ongoing Formation

- Franciscan Institute
St. Bonaventure University, Olean, NY
- OFS International Council Presidency- CIOFS
General Constitutions

Vatican II

La Novitas Franciscana- Franciscan Newness

Vatican II- The Four Constitutions

- **Sacrosanctum Concilium** (this Sacred Council):
Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- **Lumen Gentium** (Light of the Nations):
Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- **Dei Verbum** (Word of God):
Divine Revelation
- **Gaudeum et Spes** (Joy and Hope):
Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World

Lumen Gentium- Light of the Nations

- Love of God active in the Church
- Create harmony with diversity of gifts and responsibilities
- Love of God and love of neighbor
- Sense of dignity and worth
- All are welcome

La Novitas Franciscanas- Franciscan Newness

- Devotion to the Trinity
- Return to the Gospel
- Called by God- community of love
- Unencumbered by power or possessions
- Experiences of the heart

La Novitas Franciscanas- Franciscan Newness

- Power of the Holy Spirit
- Servant Leadership
- Embrace the poor and marginalized- “Little Ones”
- Power of Prayer
- Compassion, Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Working Together for the Common Good

- Dialogue, don't control
- Encourage conversations
- Create atmosphere of acceptance

“Called like St. Francis to rebuild the Church and inspired by his example... fostering an open and trusting dialogue of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.”

Rule # 6

OFS Structure

Spiritual Assistants, as servant leaders, work with the councils and the membership of the OFS to give life to our common Franciscan Vision

Structure & Principle of Subsidiarity

- International Fraternity- CIOFS
 - Serves all Franciscans in the world
 - Presidency: General Minister, Vice-Minister, Presidency Councilors
- National Fraternity- NAFRA
 - Serves all regions and fraternities
 - National Executive Council Elected at National Chapter
- Regional Fraternity
 - Serves local fraternities in region
 - Regional Executive Council elected at Regional Chapter
- Local Fraternity
 - Local Council

Spirituals Assistant Service & Collaboration

The Spiritual Assistant helps maintain connection between:

- The SFO
- Franciscan First Order/TOR
- The Poor Clares

Franciscan Vision

- Structure supports the vision
- Balance between Support and Vision
- Promote Franciscan Way
- Vital Reciprocity

“We are spouses, when by the Holy Spirit, the faithful soul is united with our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to him when we fulfill “the will of the Father who is in heaven.” Mt 12:50

Activity in the World

A way of life that touches everything we do

Living in the World

- Work unceasingly for peace
- Respect culture and traditions
- Acknowledge human dignity
- Promote Justice

“Secular Franciscans....are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world...”

SFO Rule #14

Servant Leadership

- Ability to choose wise ways to serve the fraternity
- Decisions from good discernment and dialogue
- Lead and celebrate
- Love in action
 - Speak truth with compassion
 - Err on the side of compassion

“We are not leading until we are empowering someone else to serve our common enterprise.” Leadership: The Art of Empowering

The Ritual and Devotions

An effective means for our worldwide Franciscan Family

Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order

- Enrich local celebrations with
 - signs
 - symbols
 - Gestures
 - music
- Enhance the spirit of prayer

“to have the spirit of God at work within them, while they pray to him unceasingly with a heart free from self-interest.”

Rule of 1223. 10

Devotional Life

- Vocation is primary commitment
- Fraternity gathering takes preference
- Support charism and concern for the poor
- Bring us closer to Jesus

“...should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.”

Rule # 9

Church and Eucharist

Bringing the Franciscan spirit to the Church with a tender love of the Eucharist

Rebuild My Church

- Bring the Franciscan spirit to the Church
- Community of love
- Share our gifts with humble & grateful hearts
- Let the Gospel speak in our lives

“ As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is your hearts.”

Legend of the Three Companions

Living Our Franciscan Life

- Stewards of the goods received
- Gentle and courteous spirit
- Accept all people as a gift of the Lord
- Trust in the Holy Spirit
- Heal the wounded, bind up the broken, recall the erring

Franciscans and the Eucharist

- Tender Love and devotion
- Center of the life of Fraternity
- Periodic celebrations strengthen fraternal bond
- Ongoing formation on the Eucharist

General Reflections

Benet Fonk OFM on issues concerning the SFO

A Spiritual Assistant

- Helps connect
- Does not impose will or dominate
- Assistants to the SFO
- Share their gifts for the good of the fraternity

A Spiritual Assistant is Expected to

- Be suitable and well prepared
- Attend gatherings & chapter
- Assist with formation
- Keep records
- Participate in councils they serve
- Term of at least 5 years
- Engage in personal ongoing formation

Respects & Moderates Differences

- Listens to others without interruptions
- Asks questions to ensure understanding
- State opinions clearly and calmly
- Looks for common ground

“ Our human dignity can never be separated from community with our sisters and brothers.”

At Home in the Web of Life, Appalachian Bishops, 1995

Insights of the Franciscan Spirit

Working for peace and seeking justice for all people

Franciscan Focus

- Needs of the poor
- Unceasing work for peace
- Justice for all people
- Concern for family life
- Mary is the model for Franciscan Family
- Work is a gift from God

Franciscan Focus

- Eucharist is source and center
- Dedication to giving
- Community of Love
- Forgiveness and Reconciliation lead to freedom
- The Rule gives direction

Conversion

The Call of the Spirit

Framework for Conversion

- God initiates
- God leads
- The Penitent responds
- The Penitent accepts
- This leads to happiness

*“... what had seemed bitter to me was turned into sweetness
of soul and body.”* SA Handbook

Franciscan Example of Christian Life

- Obedient to the Holy Spirit
- Prayerful trust
- Grateful & Simple use of creation
- Delight in gifts of God
- Joy at being Christian
- Gratitude for the World
- Readiness to help others

SA Handbook

Understanding

- Animation & Guidance NOT Domination & Dictating
- Creating Fraternal relationships
- Collaborate with all people of good-will

“... bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue...”

SFO Rule #19

Pastoral Visitation

A privileged moment of communion

Role & Responsibilities

- Pastoral & Fraternal visitation every 3 years
- Maintain a balance
- Each visitor is important
- A single report can be drawn

“ The Pastoral visit is a privileged moment of communion of the First Order and the TOR with the SFO... carried out in the name of the Church...”

Statues for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to SFO 14.1

Before, During & After Visitation

Before

- Prayerful preparation
- RSA and local SA connect
- Previous visitation report is reviewed

During

- Seek ways to help & share ideas
- Time with Council
- Time with open forum

After

- Post-visitation letter
- Visitation Report

Theology of Profession

A vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion

Profession & Vocation

- Examine the path to profession
- Formative process is vital
- Give flesh to vision
- Personal relationship with Jesus

“ The vocation to the SFO is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion.”

GC - Article 3.3

Co-Responsibility for Life of the Fraternity

- Personal presence
- Witness
- Prayer
- Active collaboration
- Sharing of gifts

“Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.”

1 John 4:8

Demands of Profession

Understand and Live the Rule

- Go forth as witnesses- Rule #6
- Build a more fraternal & evangelical world- Rule #14
- Prayer & contemplation soul of all said & done- Rule #8
- Promote justice with courageous initiatives- Rule # 15
- Cultivate peace, fidelity & respect for life- Rule # 17

Basic Catholic Theology

A Franciscan approach to how we see God creates a foundational perspective

The Catechism of the Catholic Church

- The Human Family
- Jesus Christ
- Magisterium & Tradition
- Bible & Scripture
- Church & Eucharist
- Caring for the Little Ones
- Reconciliation & Mercy
- Resurrection

Forms of Prayer

Leads us to a greater intimacy with Jesus and the Trinity

Prayer & Contemplation

- Soul of all you do
- Variety of forms is good
- Silence and recollection
- Focused on Christ

“Franciscan prayer is dynamic because it is about participation in the mystical body of Christ.”

Franciscan Prayer- Ilia Delio OSF

Prayer Forms

- Liturgy of the Hours
- Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament
- Lectio Divina
- Centering Prayer
- Contemplative Prayer
- Crown Rosary
- Stations of the Cross
- Liturgical Prayer

Franciscan Family

As one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God... who recognize they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi

Vital Reciprocity

The entire Family is involved in bringing a Franciscan spirit and charism to the Church and to the world.

“ In various ways and forms, but in life-giving union with each other, they intend to make present the charism of their common Seraphic Father in the life and mission of the Church.”

SFO Rule #1

The Franciscan Family

- Three branches of the First Order
- Poor Clares in all their expressions
- Third Order Regular in all their expressions, both male & female religious, who embrace the Franciscan spirit
- Secular Franciscan Order throughout the world

Other Groups that Follow Francis & Clare

- The Anglican Franciscans
- Order of Ecumenical Franciscans
- Atonement Franciscan Friars & Sisters

We share a common vision and embrace a Gospel response that bears the mark of Francis' spirit.

Collaborative Efforts

- Franciscans International
- Franciscan Action Network (FAN)
- Franciscan Federation
- Poor Clares Federations / Associations
- SFO Ministries
 - Franciscan Family Apostolate
 - Water Project
 - Amazon Project

Final Thoughts

- In word or deed do everything in the name of Jesus giving thanks to God the Father
- Called to integrate the Rule and the Gospel into our personal and fraternity life as a *community of love*
- Rule and Gospel are tools to impact the Church and the world
- Success requires faithfulness to the Franciscan way of life

“Blessed is that servant who no more exalts himself over the good the Lord says or does through him than over what He says or does through another. A person sins who wishes to receive more from his neighbor than he is willing to give of himself to the Lord God.”

Admonition XVII - Francis of Assisi- The Saint- Vol I - Page 134