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**SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL ASSISTANCE TO THE OFS AND THE YOUFRA**

**AND COLLEGIALITY AMONG THE SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS**

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**INTRODUCTION**

I would like to introduce the theme of the “Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS and the YouFra and Collegiality among the spiritual assistants”, according to the *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the OFS.*

“The spiritual and pastoral care” (Art. 2) to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth (YouFra)[[1]](#footnote-1)“is exercised according to these present Statutes, common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap, TOR) and must be performed collegially at all levels above the local level (Art. 3.2).”

Let us reflect for a moment upon this text.

**1.1. “Spiritual and pastoral care”**

The first element concerns *spiritual and pastoral care*. This means a twofold attention: “spiritual and pastoral”.

It is “spiritual” in so far as it deals with the *Holy Spirit*, who raised up the Franciscan Family in the Church[[2]](#footnote-2).

Our first duty with regard to the Secular Franciscans is: “to foster a deeper insight into Franciscan spirituality”[[3]](#footnote-3), “to animate spiritually”[[4]](#footnote-4) and offer suitable spiritual reflections[[5]](#footnote-5).

Our care is also “pastoral”, particularly during the Liturgy and the celebration of the sacraments.

For this reason we need to be well prepared. We have to know the Gospel of our Lord and the *magisterium* of the Church. We must put these into practice with love for every person.

**1.2. Care according to the “Statutes, common to the four religious Orders”**

The second element is this: The spiritual and pastoral care to the OFS “is exercised according to these present Statutes, common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap, TOR)”.

This is our second commitment: to know the Statutes, which were approved by the *Conference of General Ministers of the First Order and the TOR,* in October 4th, 2009.

Our Statutes are an easy tool for our tasks, and I say “our” because they are “common to the four religious Orders (OFM, OFMConv, OFMCap, TOR)”. Hopefully, each and every one of you has a copy of it.

**1.3. A collegial care**

The third element rightly refers to collegiality, insofar as the spiritual and pastoral care *must be performed collegially at all levels above the local level,* that is to say the regional, national and international level.

Those principally responsible for this spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS are, in the first place, Major Superiors, and in the second place Spiritual Assistants. If there is more than one of them in the same territory, they form a Conference and give their service collegially to the OFS and to the Franciscan Youth.

The members of a Conference are called to work together and learn how to work as a team.

**2. MAJOR SUPERIORS**

“The spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS, entrusted by the Church to the Franciscan First Order and the TOR, is the duty above all of their general and provincial ministers”. They have “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”[[6]](#footnote-6).

**2.1. A duty to perform**

Dealing with this subject we have to keep in mind that “the spiritual and pastoral care of the OFS is the duty above all of the Major Superiors of the First Order and the TOR” [[7]](#footnote-7).

It’s a matter of “duty”[[8]](#footnote-8), not an option: “The Franciscan major superiors remain responsible for the quality of spiritual assistance and pastoral care”[[9]](#footnote-9). “Therefore, as a concrete sign of communion and co-responsibility, religious superiors must assure spiritual assistance to all the fraternities of the OFS”[[10]](#footnote-10). “They should also foster the formation and the interest of their own religious in the OFS and in the Franciscan Youth and ensure a specific preparation for the Assistants so that they will be suitable and well-prepared”[[11]](#footnote-11). “They may exercise this office personally or through a delegate”[[12]](#footnote-12).

**2.2. The way in which Major Superiors exercise their office**

How Major Superiors exercise their office?

According to the Statutes, Major superiors (General Ministers and Provincial Ministers and)“exercise their office through:

* the establishment of OFS local fraternities;
* pastoral visits;
* spiritual assistance”[[13]](#footnote-13). This includes the appointment of spiritual assistants by Major Superiors.

I would like to remind you that each OFS fraternity should have its own spiritual assistant. I hope you all know about Art. 89.4 b of the GGCC of the OFS. In her letter of Sept. 29, 2009 (11/08-14 - Prot. N. 2081), Encarnación del Pozo, Minister General of the OFS, affirmed the following:

“I want the national councils to see the need to identify and prepare Secular Franciscans, whether lay or cleric, to assume the delicate and highly important task of providing spiritual assistance to local Fraternities when necessary. We must absolutely avoid having Fraternities lacking this essential guide, and at the same time, we must prevent the closing of some Secular Franciscan fraternities as a result of the unavailability of members of the First Order and TOR, or religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes.”

Regarding the Franciscan Youth we have to take in consideration the Document entitled “YouFra: the establishment of a new fraternity”.

For the official establishment of a local fraternity, the following is required:

* a minimum of five members who have made the Promise;
* a request by the brothers and sisters involved to the YouFra Council of the higher level or, in the case where there is no Council at that level, to the corresponding OFS Council;
* assurance of fraternal animation by the appropriate council of the OFS;
* assurance of spiritual assistance by the appropriate Major Superior;
* the issuance of the document of establishment by the YouFra Council of the higher level or, in the case where there is no YouFra Council at that level, by the corresponding OFS Council.

The new Franciscan Youth fraternity will need special accompaniment from the OFS through a **Fraternal Animator** (*GG.CC. 96.1 and 96.6*). Why?

Because, the OFS, by virtue of its own vocation, must be ready to share its experience of living the Gospel with young people who feel attracted to Saint Francis of Assisi.

As a sign of communion and shared responsibility, the appropriate Major Superior will appoint a **Spiritual Assistant** to assist this new fraternity (*GG.CC. 96.6*), to ensure its faithfulness to the Franciscan charism, communion with the Church and its union with the Franciscan Family (*GG.CC. 85.2*).

The Fraternal Animator and the Spiritual Assistant will collaborate in the formation of the young people and will accompany them.

**3. SPIRITUAL ASSISTANTS**

This topic deals with the spiritual assistance to Fraternities and their Councils, at different levels.

**3.1. Purpose of spiritual assistance**

In Article 2.3 of the Statutes we read:

“The purpose of spiritual assistance is to foster communion with the Church and with the Franciscan Family through witness and sharing of Franciscan spirituality, to cooperate in initial and on-going formation of secular Franciscans and to express the fraternal affection of the religious towards the OFS”[[14]](#footnote-14).

**3.2. Collegial service for the spiritual assistance**

In Article 16.2 of the Statutes we read:

“At the international, national, and regional level, the Assistants, if there are more than one, form a Conference and give their service collegially to the OFS”[[15]](#footnote-15).

We can talk about collegiality of the Assistants when they are more than one, that is to say when there is the possibility of forming a Conference.

In Article 16.3 of the Statutes we read:

“Each Conference of Assistants functions according to its own by-laws, approved by their respective major Superiors”.

These *by-laws* do not have to be very long and complex. To the contrary, being *internal* by-laws, they can easily be contained in one page.

In Article 16.1 of the Statutes we also read:

“The number of Assistants who are members of the Councils at the various levels shall correspond to the number of Orders which in fact provide assistance to the local fraternities in the sphere of the international, national, or regional fraternity”.

The Assistants are also collegially responsible “for the animation of liturgical celebrations and spiritual reflections during the meetings of the Council or of the Chapter” (Art. 13.3).

**Clarifications**

And now we have a few minutes to further clarify some of the topics I have just presented to you. Please write down what you want to be explained.

**Questions for the breakout groups**

1. What are the main problems you find in your Fraternity regarding the spiritual and pastoral care to the OFS and YouFra? Please, brainstorm first in your group, and then choose only the three most common problems.

What are your expectations of a spiritual assistant?

1. Wherever in this paper I refer to the Secular Franciscans, this is to be understood as including the Franciscan Youth. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See *OFS Rule* 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Statutes* 13.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Statutes* 11.2; 17.3; 19.3; 21.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Statutes* 13.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *OFS Const.* 85.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Statutes* 5.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Cf. F. CANGELOSI – B. LINO, *L’Assistenza spirituale,* 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Statutes* 5.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. *Statutes* 1.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. *Statutes* 5.4. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *Statutes* 5.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Statutes* 5.2. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. See *OFS Const.* 89.3; 90.1. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See *OFS Const*. 90.3. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)