



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS

Consilium Internationale

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**PRACTICAL INTERPRETATION  
of Article 89.4, letter b, of the General Constitutions, and  
Article 15.4, item 2°, of the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO,  
and relevant application.**

*“When it is not possible to give such a Spiritual Assistant to the fraternity, the competent major superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the SFO” (Gen. Const., art. 89.4,b).*

*“When it is not possible to give the fraternity a spiritual assistant who is a member of the First Order or the TOR, the competent major Superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to secular Franciscans, cleric or lay, especially prepared for such service” (Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO, art. 15.4, 2°).*

**Introduction**

**Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order**

1. In the Church, there are many spiritual families, with different charisms. One of these is the Franciscan Family, with its various branches, which recognizes Saint Francis of Assisi as father, inspirer and model (cf. Rule 2).
2. The Secular Franciscan Order has held, from the beginning, a special place in the Franciscan Family. It is an organic union of all the Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful (cf. Rule 2).
3. Since they belong to the same spiritual family, the Holy See has entrusted pastoral care and spiritual assistance of the SFO to the Franciscan First Order and to the Third Order Regular (TOR) (cf. Gen. Const. 1.4).
4. From the Franciscan history and the Constitutions of the Franciscan First Order and TOR, it is clear that these Orders, by virtue of their common origin and charism and by will of the Church, dedicate themselves to the spiritual and pastoral assistance of the SFO (cf. Const. OFM 60; Id. OFM Conv. 116; Id. OFM Cap. 95; Id TOR 157; Rule of the Third Order of Pope Leone XIII 3,3 and SFO Rule approved by Paul VI 26).
5. In their own jurisdiction, the Provincial Ministers and the other Major Superiors assure spiritual assistance to the local Fraternities entrusted to their jurisdiction and are responsible for the spiritual assistance of the local Fraternities that they have established (cf. Gen. Const. Art. 88, 1 and 3).

6. To be a witness of Franciscan spirituality and of the fraternal affection of the religious towards the secular Franciscans, and to be a bond of communion between his Order and the SFO, the spiritual assistant should be a Franciscan religious, member of the First Order or the TOR (cf. Gen. Const. 89.3).
7. When it is not possible to provide the Fraternity with a Spiritual Assistant who is a member of the First Order or TOR, the competent Major Superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:
  - a. religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
  - b. diocesan clerics or other persons, specially prepared for such service, who are members of the SFO;
  - c. other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious (cf. Gen. Const. 89.4 and cf. Statutes for the Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO, art. 15.4).

### **Application**

In due consideration of and in conformity with article 5.3 of the General Constitutions, the Presidency of the International Council of the SFO:

- a) realizing the need to clarify and unify the application of art. 89.4, letter b, of the General Constitutions, and art. 15.4, item 2° of the Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO and prepare guidelines for the national statutes;
- b) considering that in defining the Assistant, being a priest is not a requirement, as his/her specific duty is not “sacramental” assistance, but **spiritual assistance**, the First Order and TOR can designate a brother or sister, who may not be a priest, to assist the SFO Fraternity on condition that he/she is “**suitable and prepared**”.
- c) considering that it is the duty of the Major Superiors to provide for the spiritual assistance to an SFO fraternity, in the absence of a friar.

### **clarifies**

- a) The secular Spiritual Assistant (lay person or cleric) is appointed for the various levels - local, regional and national - by the competent authority (Major Superior or Conference of the First Order or TOR) to which he/she normally refers.
- b) To take on the task of Spiritual Assistant in a Fraternity, the secular Franciscan must have been professed for a minimum of 5 years.
- c) The secular Franciscan Spiritual Assistant must not belong to the same Fraternity to which he/she is providing assistance because:
  - ✓ the bonds of friendship, fraternity and living together may prejudice his/her duty, especially for what concerns fraternal correction, preventing him/her to act with impartiality in his/her directions;
  - ✓ when applying the directions given by the superior level, the involvement in the same fraternity makes his/her work more difficult;

- ✓ an Assistant belonging to another fraternity is able to have a clearer picture of the difficulties, problems and progress in the Fraternity.
- d) For the ministry of spiritual assistance, the secular Spiritual Assistant must be suitable and well-prepared, that is:
- ✓ have the psychological capacity and conditions to carry out the responsibility that spiritual assistance entails;
  - ✓ have moral rectitude;
  - ✓ give testimony of authentic Christian life;
  - ✓ be faithful to the Catholic faith and Franciscan charism;
  - ✓ give testimony of life in conformity with the SFO Rule and Constitutions.
- e) The lay secular Spiritual Assistant must have a solid Franciscan formation in view of his/her important role and influence in the fraternity, with a good knowledge of:
- ✓ the Sacred Scriptures;
  - ✓ the Franciscan Sources;
  - ✓ the SFO Rule and General Constitutions;
  - ✓ the SFO and Church documents to ensure that the fraternity does not lose its Franciscan identity.
- f) The Secular Franciscan Spiritual Assistant does not have the right to vote in financial matters relating to the Fraternity he/she assists nor will he/she have active or passive voice in these matters (cf. Gen. Const. art. 77.1 and 2; 90.2).

Approved by the SFO General Chapter in Hungary, November 2008