

# Chapter 7: Charism of the Three Franciscan Orders and the Rule For Lay People

## THE THREE FRANCISCAN ORDERS

### Background

Early on, the Holy Spirit drew lay people to Francis. By his life, Francis preached a God of love, a God of limitless forgiveness, a God unconditionally in love with the world. This was good news for many in his time who lived under fear and trembling in their attempt to please a very judgmental God. The joy and peace that emanated from Francis and his followers was like a breath of fresh air, a breath of the Spirit, in the world of chaos and violence that permeated the 13<sup>th</sup> century. In addition to numerous wars among cities and countries, Francis lived in a time of brutal trial, punishment and execution of heretics. The Church was in sore need of reform.

### The Founding and Rules of the Three Franciscan Orders

As more and more people flocked to him for guidance, Francis wanted to be sure that his followers did not digress from the teachings of the Church and that the Church would understand and approve the way of life that he was living and preaching. That Francis wrote a Rule at all is a testament to grace. Initially he resisted because he simply wanted to live the Gospel. That was Rule enough for him. When the Pope insisted that he write a Rule, he acquiesced because of his great love for and trust in the authority of Peter's successor. Since the Gospel was his way of life, his written Rule is grounded in Scripture passages.



*Artwork by Associate Karen Kiezman*

We have to remember that up until this time great monastic orders were established and exerted powerful influence on the culture and the Church. Their wealth and lands employed many classes of people, often in a kind of servitude and dependence. Monasteries often had strong political influence on the towns and villages around them as well as with the Church in Rome. Francis was proposing something new and radical for the times. His Friars Minor were not living in monasteries or owning property. They were walking the roads in imitation of Jesus, serving the poor, totally dependent on God. They lived as “minors” in the midst of formidable power and wealth.

## **The First Order – Friars Minor**

The Friars Minor, both priests and brothers, belong to what is called The First Order. The Rule approved for them during the life of St. Francis, like all Rules, has gone through many changes and papal approvals over the centuries in response to the signs of the times. Yet its foundation is always the example of Francis and the Scriptures that guided him. In the same way, we read and pray Scripture to discern how we can live the Gospel *today*.

## **The Second Order — Cloistered Nuns**

St. Clare and the women who followed her were later designated as belonging to The Second Order. Clare spent her entire life getting papal approval for her Rule for the Poor Ladies, as they were first called. Compared to Francis, her perseverance was even more heroic. At first, she only wanted to live the Gospel as Francis did, in the world, on the road. But this was an impossible goal for women at the time. The culture and the Church would not accept it. With loyalty and obedience to the Pope, she agreed to bring the women who followed her to the cloister at San Damiano, but only in strict poverty, in total dependence on God, owning nothing. In the decades after Francis died, Clare clung tenaciously to his original ideals, despite the Friars’ conflicts and adaptations of their Rule. It was only on her deathbed that the Pope relented and finally approved her Rule for the Second Order, the first rule ever written for women by a woman.

## **The Third Order – Lay People and Vowed Religious**

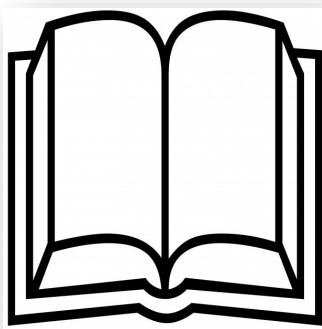
Now we come to the Rule for lay people who wanted to follow Francis in the footsteps of Jesus but had commitments to families, and other responsibilities. Francis called them “The Brothers and Sisters in Penance” and they made up what later became the Third Order. For them Francis wrote the first Rule in 1221. This Rule was formally approved in 1289 by Pope Nicholas IV.

Over the centuries this Third Order came to include congregations of vowed men and women religious founded for the apostolic works of mercy. These non-cloistered religious belong to the Third Order Regular (TOR). Our Joliet Franciscan Sisters follow this Rule. The original Third Order lay people called to live the Franciscan charism in the world, belong to the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO). Each of these groups (TOR and SFO) has a distinct Rule of life that has evolved in accord with changing times and needs.

## **Understanding More About the Third Order Secular and the Relationship to the Associate Movement**

Over the centuries many religious orders have had lay people associated with them in various forms of prayer and ministry. The “Associate Movement” as we know it today evolved after Vatican II. The Associate, in multiple ways, bonds with the chosen congregation in order to deepen his or her Franciscan way of living the Gospel. In our Congregation Associates renew their commitment yearly.

Some of our Joliet Franciscan Associates are SFO members. Some were members before they became Associates and some joined after they made their Associate commitment. In the first case, becoming an Associate and bonding with the Joliet Franciscans added another dimension to their lifelong promise to live as Francis did. Those who started as Associates and later went through the formation for Secular Franciscans, in the same way added another dimension to their quest of deepening their Franciscan spirituality. The Secular Franciscan joins a local fraternity of lay members. After a period of orientation and formation, they make a permanent commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to the example of Francis, following the SFO Rule. Members meet regularly for prayer and mutual support with spiritual guidance from a Franciscan Friar or designated Franciscan lay leader. Fraternities are organized into regional, national and international groups. The Secular Franciscans is the largest of the three Franciscan Orders.



## ***Reflecting on the Three Franciscan Orders***

*How has what you've read here about the three Orders helped you better understand the beginnings of the Franciscans? What surprised you or was new information?*

*What might you have in common with the lay people who asked Francis how they could follow him and still fulfill their obligations as parents, teachers, workers, civil authorities?*

*How does the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) differ from The Associate Movement? What is common and what is different?*

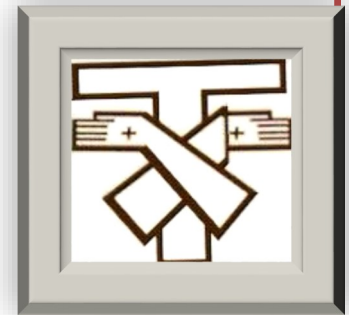
## **THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SFO RULE FOR ASSOCIATES**

On the next pages you will find the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order. May your reading and praying of this Rule be ongoing and life giving. Be creative in your approach. Focus on an article that speaks to you and challenges you; let it permeate your day or a particular relationship. Be open to the work of discerning and carrying out the work you are constantly given to do in your time as Francis did in his time.



# RULE FOR SECULAR FRANCISCANS

## Chapter One: The Secular Franciscan Order



- Article 1: The 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—laity, religious, and priests—who recognized that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saint Francis of Assisi. 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.
- Article 2: The Secular Franciscan Order holds a special place in this family circle. It is an organic union of all Catholic fraternities scattered throughout the world and open to every group of the faithful. In these fraternities the brothers and sisters, led by the Spirit, strive for perfect charity in their own secular state. By their profession they pledge themselves to live the gospel in the manner of Saint Francis by means of this rule approved by the Church.
- Article 3: The present rule, succeeding "*Memoriale Propositi*" (1221) and the rules approved by the Supreme Pontiffs Nicholas IV and Leo XIII, adapts the Secular Franciscan Order to the needs and expectations of the Holy Church in the conditions of changing times. Its interpretation belongs to the Holy See and its application will be made by the General Constitutions and particular statutes.

## Chapter Two: The Way Of Life

- Article 4: The rule and life of the Secular Franciscans is this: *to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly.* Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to gospel.
- Article 5: Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ in their brothers and sisters, in Sacred Scripture, in the Church, and in liturgical activity. The faith of St. Francis, who often said, "I see nothing bodily of the Most High Son of God in this world except His most holy body and blood," should be the inspi-

- Article 6: They have been made living members of the Church by being buried and raised with Christ in baptism; they have been united more intimately with the Church by profession. Therefore, they should go forth as witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words. Called like Saint Francis to *rebuild the Church* and inspired by his example, let them devote themselves energetically to living in full communion with the pope, bishops, and priests, fostering an open and trusting dialog of apostolic effectiveness and creativity.
- Article 7: United by their vocation as "brothers and sisters of penance" and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel calls "conversion." Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father's mercy and the source of grace.
- Article 8: As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do. Let them participate in the sacramental life of the Church, above all the Eucharist. Let them join in liturgical prayer in one of the forms proposed by the Church, reliving the mysteries of the life of Christ.
- Article 9: The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to His every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently.
- Article 10: United themselves to the redemptive obedience of Jesus, who placed His will into the Father's hands, let them faithfully fulfill the duties proper to their various circumstances of life. Let them also follow the poor and crucified Christ and witness to Him even in difficulties and persecutions.
- Article 11: Trusting the Father, Christ chose for Himself and His mother a poor and humble life, even though He valued created things attentively and lovingly. Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children.
- Thus, in the spirit of the Beatitudes,



Artwork: Sister Kay Frances Berger, OSF

and as pilgrims and strangers on their way to the home of the Father, they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power.

- Article 12: Witnessing to the good yet to come and obligated to acquire purity of heart because of the vocation they have embraced, they should set themselves free to love God and their brothers and sisters.
- Article 13: 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. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.
- Article 14: Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect person, becomes more of a person in his or her very self," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.
- Article 15: Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith.
- Article 16: Let them esteem work both as a gift and as a sharing in the creation, redemption and service of the human community.
- Article 17: In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ. By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for His Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.
- Article 18: Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most High," and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.

Article 19: Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

*May whoever observes all this be filled in heaven  
with the blessing of the most high Father,  
and on earth with that of his beloved Son,  
together with the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.”  
—Blessing of St. Francis from the Testament*

### Reflecting on Four Articles of the Secular Franciscan Order

Although Associates do not commit to living by the SFO Rule, their principles guide anyone committed to Franciscan values. Re-read in full each of the articles listed below in order to support your reflection. These brief reflections are just “teasers” to invite you to plumb the depths of each of the nineteen Articles. A year of prayer, meditation and action could be spent on any of them. They give us, as Franciscans, solid stepping stones for our journey.

#### Article 4. “Going from gospel to life and life to gospel”.

This is really the core of what Francis is trying to say to us lay Franciscans in the world. It sounds so simple and yet we are daily challenged by it. Francis urges us to *know* Christ and follow in his footsteps. Not to do everything that Christ did, but to live *his* truth, love and compassion in *our* lives, *our* circumstances, *our* joys and sorrows.

Perhaps you have a favorite verse of Scripture. Often it changes as your circumstances change. Or a verse you heard proclaimed at Mass or read in your daily practice has struck you with a challenge or has given you encouragement. These are signs that you are “...going from gospel to life and from life to gospel.”

*What scripture passages do you find yourself returning to over and over?*

*Why are these so important to you?*

*How do different passages inspire you during different times in your life?*

**Article 11. "...in the spirit of the Beatitudes...they should strive to purify their hearts from every tendency and yearning for possession and power."**

In this longer Article, the core and meaning of Franciscan poverty is laid out. Francis chose poverty because Christ chose it for himself and his mother. In the signs of his own times, Francis could see that unbridled greed led to unbridled power over others. In our own fast-paced world we are pulled in many directions and enticed to acquire more and more.

*How can we cultivate a spirit of detachment and simplify our material needs?*

*What does being a good steward of God's gifts mean to you?*

*As a citizen of the richest country in the world, how do you see the connection between Franciscan poverty and power?*

*What effect might Franciscan poverty have on world peace?*

**Article 13. "...with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ..."**

We could contemplate each phrase here: "gentle and courteous...accept all people...people as gift...people as image of Christ." We are challenged here to place ourselves on an equal basis with all, especially the lowly, with whom we strive to create conditions of life worthy of God's children.

*How often in our daily comings and goings do we fall short in the way we relate to those around us?*

*When and how do you move beyond your comfort zone to be a co-creator with God to build a better world?*

*What kinds of communities support you in this work?*

*How do you build a community that is joyful and ready to act for justice?*

**Article 18 "...respect all creatures, animate and inanimate..."**

Much can be written about Francis' love for all creation. In contrast to the word "nature," the very word "creation" acknowledges a Creator. It is this Creator God that Francis falls in love with. This love flows out of Francis onto all of creation just as God's love flows into Francis through creation. Franciscans call this experience one of universal *kinship*. We are all "kin," brothers and sisters to each other.

For example, spend some time imagining how water is our “Sister”. *Why do we need it? How do we obtain it? How do we treat it? How do we waste it? How is it exploited and polluted throughout the world? What about its needs and use by our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world? If Francis would pickup a worm from the path and place it safely in the grass, what would he be doing about the gold mining process in many parts of the world which is killing the sources of water for millions?*

*What are some environmental issues that challenge you to study and act? How can you share your growing awareness with family, friends, colleagues and your church group?*

