



## Brothers and Sisters of Saint Francis Region Secular Franciscan Order

Alabama · Georgia · North Carolina · South Carolina · Tennessee

### CHAPTER OF ELECTIONS

#### THE ECCLESIASTICAL WITNESS AT ELECTIONS

“The Spiritual Assistant of the immediately higher level or his delegate is to be present as a witness of the communion with the First Order and the TOR.” (SFO GC, 76.2)

It is expected that for elections on all levels of the Secular Franciscan Order - local, regional, national, and international - an ecclesiastical witness be present to complement the SFO representative of the higher level of fraternity who presides at the elections. (SFO GC, 76.2)

This ecclesiastical witness is necessary for the full celebration of the election process in order to gain its entire meaning and effect within the Church and the Franciscan Family. (SFO GC, 85.2)

That witness serves as the visible sign of the vital reciprocity and life-giving union between the Franciscan seculars and the Franciscan religious to make present the charism of Francis to “go, rebuild the Church.” (SFO Rule, 1) The witness likewise indicates the partnership between the laity and the clergy to fulfill the mission of Christ to the world within the context of the Church. (Canon 311; PCL Norms) The witness, furthermore, demonstrates the indispensable bonds of fraternity existing on different levels at the same time in order to preserve the authenticity and accountability of the Secular Franciscan Order. (SFO GC, 28.2)

The image and the impact of the ecclesiastical witness at elections need to be preserved at all costs. When announcing the elective chapter and requesting a representative of the higher level to preside over the elections, the fraternity minister of the local or regional level also has the obligation to request a witness from the conference of spiritual assistants of the higher level. The respective conference (regional or national) of spiritual assistants likewise has the responsibility to assign a witness to the elections. If a national or regional assistant is not available, the appropriate conference can assign another friar to represent that conference. If friars are unavailable, another Franciscan religious or SFO priest or deacon could be delegated. Under special circumstances a SFO spiritual assistant could be assigned. An ecclesiastical witness should always be present; no matter whom it is, this witness stands in the place of and acts in the name of the conference of spiritual assistants of the next higher level.

If a person were to have active voice in the election at hand, he or she forgoes that voting right when acting as an ecclesiastical witness.

If for some unusual circumstance an ecclesiastical witness is not present for the actual elective chapter, the validity of the elections is not jeopardized.

Source: Policy statement from the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants September 21, 2000