



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

Alabama · Georgia · North Carolina · South Carolina · Tennessee

June 24, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

May the Lord be with you, and you with the Lord!

Since becoming your Regional Minister last fall, I have experienced an abundance of joy. I have had the opportunity to meet and share with many of you at professions, visitations, and gatherings. It has been a privilege and a source of strength and hope to witness all of you living our Franciscan charism and spirituality. I thank you for all you do and give.

Yet something has happened that is a source of great sadness and concern, something that I feel I must share with the Region and that we, as brothers and sisters, must address. A few weeks ago, I received an anonymous phone message from someone in our Region who used the language of a racist. I will not go into the details of this crude message, except to say that it was, unequivocally, hateful and racist, and directed at a member of our Region.

As Minister and previously as a member of the REC, I am aware that there have been other racist incidents in our Region, though none this direct or shocking. I also suspect that our brothers and sisters who are people of color know of more, but have simply kept silent. This is true in the broader world and in our Church, so I must assume it is true in our Region as well.

Racism is a grave sin, and it has no place in our Region or in our hearts. I remind you of our Rule, which states:

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.

--Rule of the OFS, Article 13.

I simply do not understand how someone who is “called to follow Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis” (Art. 1) can speak such words or harbor them in their heart. We must, as Secular Franciscans, “with a gentle and courageous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.”

In the Spirit of the Gospels (see Mt. 18:15) I would speak privately to whoever sent this message, but it was sent anonymously. I hope and pray that this person will reflect on their actions and call me to apologize privately. If this does not happen, then I very much question your commitment to our way of life, and believe that it would be better for you to resign from our Order.

Moreover, this issue transcends one person: it is a problem we, as Catholics and Franciscans must face directly. As our Bishops have said,

[R]acism still profoundly affects our culture, and it has no place in the Christian heart. This evil causes great harm to its victims, and it corrupts the souls of those who harbor racist or prejudicial thoughts. The persistence of the evil of racism is why we are writing this letter now. People are still being harmed, so action is still needed. What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society.

--USCCB Letter, Open Wide Our Hearts,

I would ask all Secular Franciscans to search your hearts, and begin the long process of conversion, which our Rule says must occur “*daily*” (Article 7). If you cannot love all your sisters and brothers, you cannot love God who has created all in His image and likeness. Please do not forget, this is not our Order it is God's.

To begin this process, I am sharing this letter widely, and I ask that every local minister begin their next fraternity meeting by reading this letter and asking for a few minutes of silent prayer and reflection. Should any local fraternity wish to explore questions of race and racism more deeply, the REC is prepared to provide resources and suggestions.

Brothers and sisters, I know that there is much good in our Region, and much love in your hearts. I hope and pray that we can learn and grow from this incident, and so continue “*to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ.*”

May the Lord grant you his peace!

Peace and joy,

Ellen Ferrone

Minister, Brothers and Sisters of the St Francis Region