

The Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

Adapted by Bob Fitzsimmons, SFO

And based on a presentation at a regional Chapter

This segment on the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order is based on the work of our brother Beneditto Lino, OFS, coordinator of the Formation Commission of our International Presidency.

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Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order.

To begin to understand who we are as Franciscans, let us again take a brief moment to recall the foundational building blocks of the Franciscan Family as we understand them: from Francis and Clare and then on to the major mentors and developers of Our Spiritual Traditions, Bonaventure and Scotus.

Francis and Clare gave us the understanding of the goodness, worthiness, i.e. the loveable-ness of God and how we encounter God by immersing ourselves into the messiness and plight of all created things. In day-to-day life, we begin to understand the “Dance of Life,” the presence of the Trinity, and our invitation to enter into relationship with God and each other.

Bonaventure leads us into the life of the Trinity with his “Soul’s Journey into God” [*Itinerarium Mentis ad Deum*], and Duns Scotus soon follows giving us the understanding of the Absolute Primacy of Christ. Breaking with the primary thought of his day and possibly also ours, Scotus taught that Jesus is not God’s reaction or response to the sin of mankind. Jesus’ Incarnation was not plan B, put into effect by God because plan A failed. Jesus is and always was God’s whole action and whole plan from the very beginning. For Scotus, Jesus truly is the Alpha and the Omega; the very reason for God’s loving act of creation and His continuing acts of creation. Jesus is not just the reason for the season, as we cheerfully remark around Christmas, Jesus is the reason PERIOD!

Beginning with Our current Rule of Life, as approved by Pope Paul VI in 1978, the Secular Franciscan Order, as part of the renewal of all religious orders in the Church, received new direction for revitalization of our way of life in the modern world. No longer just a “piety” society, we, along with the other members of our greater Franciscan Family, were charged with returning to and re-enlivening the original charism of our founder, Francis of Assisi. The hope is that Francis’ example and spirituality might again become a source of holiness drawing more and more people to imitate Jesus, and become a source of enlightenment and inspiration for the modern world.

Our task is simple: make the wisdom of the gospels and its values come alive, and become a source of transformation for ourselves and for all we touch.

Our renewed Rule is our call to do what Jesus taught, to follow Him into the lives of the poor, the rejected, the people discarded by society, because that is where He is and where He serves. Here is where we will find Him; if we only, but look.

Based upon these very brief comments on our spiritual roots, we can look at the composition of the Franciscan Family, especially at the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order and how the SFO is view by several Modern Pontiffs (the Holy See).

An Order?

First from Benedict XV:

“..., (Francis) founded a **true Order, that of the Tertiaries**, not restricted by religious vows, as the two preceding (Orders), but similarly conformed to simplicity of customs and to a spirit of penitence. So, he was the first to conceive and happily carry out, with the help of God, what no founder of regulars (religious Orders) had previously contrived, to have the religious life practiced by all.” (**Benedict XV, Encyclical “Sacra Propediem” June 6, 1921**)

Secondly from Pius the XII:

“**You are an Order: a lay Order, but a real Order.** Ordo veri nominis, as our predecessor of holy memory, Benedict XV (Sacra propediem, June 6, 1921) called it. You will not, as is obvious, be an assembly of the perfect; but you must be a school of Christian perfection. Without this resolute will one cannot suitably be a part of such a chosen and glorious militia.” (**Pius XII, July 1, 1956, Speech to the Tertiaries in Rome**)

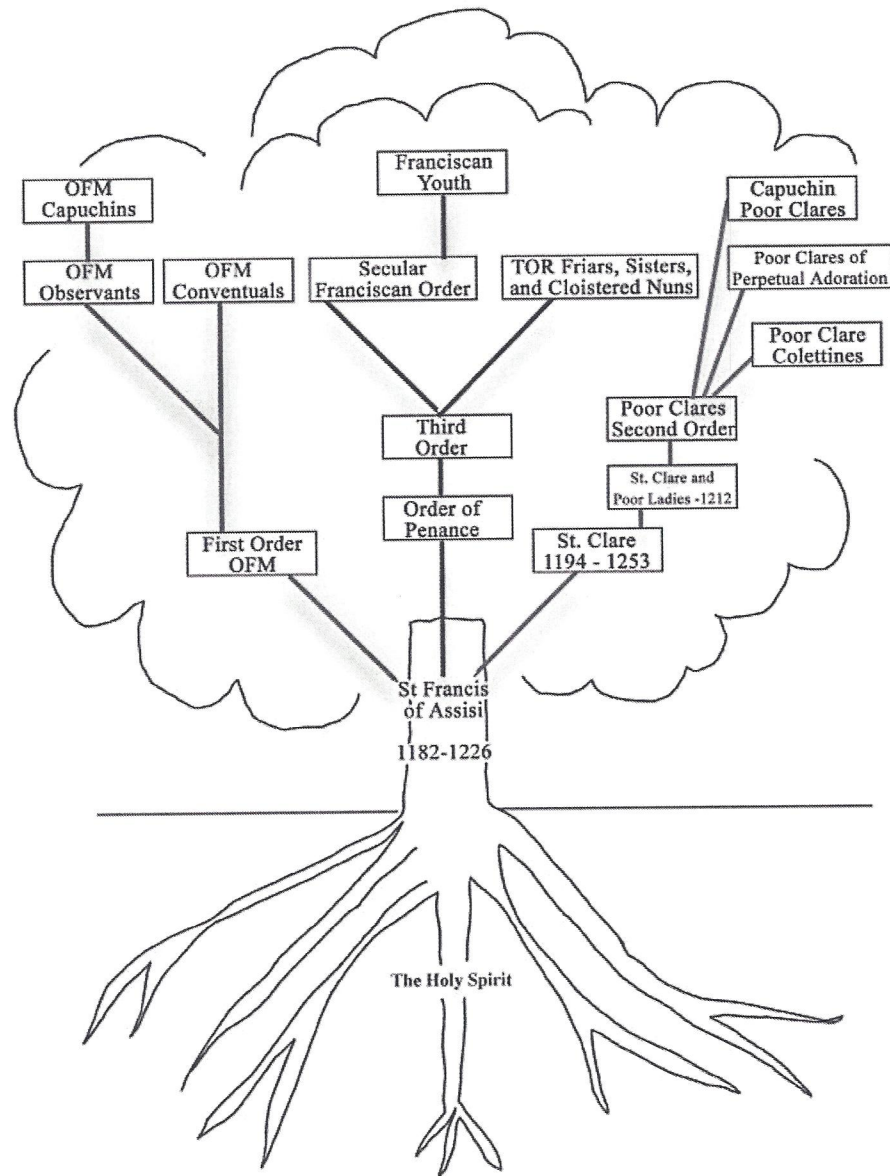
And lastly from John Paul II to our General Chapter of 1988:

“...you are also an „Order,“ as the Pope said (Pius XII): **A Lay Order, but a Real Order;**” and after all, Benedict XV had already spoken of “Ordo veri nominis”. This ancient term – we can say medieval – “Order” means nothing more than your intimate belonging to the large Franciscan family. The word “Order” means the participation in the discipline and actual austerity of that spirituality, while remaining in the **autonomy typical of your lay and secular condition**, which, moreover, often entails sacrifices which are not lesser than those experienced in the religious and priestly life.” (**John Paul II, June 14, 1988, General Chapter, SFO**)

Note. Popes Gregory IX, Blessed Gregory X, Innocent XII, Pius IX, Pius X, Pope Martin V, Clement XII, and all Popes from Pius IX up to and including John XXIII were SFO.

The Franciscan Family

The diagram below is a representation of the formation of the Franciscan Family, noting in particular that the Third Order, (formerly the Order of Penance, originally known as the Order of the Brothers and Sisters of Penitence of St Francis and now known as the Secular Franciscan Order) which shares, from the very beginning a common founder, Francis of Assisi with our brother and sister “religious,”



Franciscan Family Tree

The following is our adaptation of the original materials received from CIOFS as part of the "Forming the Formators" Project and Manual, by Beneditto Lino OFS, Presidency Councilor for Formation of the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS), in Rome.

Francis and the Franciscan Trilogy (Founding of Three Orders within the Franciscan Movement)

The Franciscan Trilogy [the Three Orders] is the first (and only) religious experience, preordained to apostolic life, born simultaneously, and designed to include all states of life.

Francis received from Christ very precise directions: "go, repair my house..." The Pope clearly confirmed this directive for Francis and his followers: to accomplish in themselves conversion and preach it to others (*facere et predicare poenitentiam*).

Francis began work immediately and put all his confidence in the Spirit. He did not deliberately intend to *found* three Orders. However, in the institution of his three Orders, Francis let himself be guided solely by the Spirit of the Lord. He welcomed this reality as it flourished in his hands, without any predetermined plan.

So, his three Orders were born and soon Francis realized that all of them (each according to its own condition) related to his own apostolic mission of restoring the house of the Lord. His three Orders were entrusted with: fidelity to their vocations and joint co-responsibility of mutual fraternal help in their journey towards the Lord¹.

Essentially, Saint Francis gave his three orders only one rule: **a more perfect observance of the Gospel, according to their state of life.**

The commitment of a permanent conversion to the Gospel (*facere poenitentiam*) must permeate the life of all three Orders.

In view of their preordained apostolic mission, the three Franciscan Orders are not related among themselves hierarchically, but from their very beginning, are equal and need to recognize both their spiritual interdependence and their need for mutual assistance.

Within the context of the Fourth Lateran Council, St Francis **is the first person to found a religious trilogy that provided for living a religious life regardless a person's of the state of life.**

¹ A. Boni, OFM, *Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus* (TOHO), Ed. Porziuncola, Assisi, 1999, page 27.

Since St. Francis was unable, due to the prevailing Church laws at the time, to welcome into his “apostolic religion”² (Order) either communities of consecrated women or seculars (men and women living in their own homes), Saint Francis was obliged to institute the Second Order (for consecrated women) and also a Third Order (for seculars). These orders were, by their very nature, autonomous.

Due to their common origin, shared mission and charism of the First, Second and Third Orders, the Secular Franciscan Order is not a *mere* Public Association of the Christian Faithful; anyone who enters the First or the Second or the Third Order belongs to a single entity (the Franciscan Family), willed by God for the restoration of the Church, where each part is in intimate communion with the others.

The rule of Nicholas IV, provided a common legislative structure to all the fraternities of Franciscan penitents, (Bull “Supra Montem”, issued by Nicholas IV on 18th August 1289)³. This rule, then became the first Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance of Saint Francis that received formal written Papal approval. This was the official “Regula Bullata” of the SFO, and was the fruit of the work and initiative of the Franciscan Penitents themselves (especially notable in its development were two **Secular Franciscans**: a judge **Ugolino de’Medici di Ferrara** and his brother **Elias**.)

Although the three Franciscan Orders are autonomous and independent, and their autonomous existence is not conditional on the other parts of the Franciscan Family, our common spirituality depends on the mutual support we share with one another across the various branches of the Franciscan Family (vital reciprocity).

² “Religion” corresponded to “Institution of religious life”. Here, we refer to the Order of Friars Minor, approved by Innocent III and the 4th Lateran Council.

³ “The foundation of the Third Franciscan Order was achieved by St Francis in accordance with the provisions of the penitential law of the era, without the need of the specific constitutional approval of the Holy See. The official documents were subsequently obtained. So **it is wrong to think** that “the constitutional approval” of the Third Franciscan Order came only with the Bull “Supra Montem”, issued by Nicholas IV on 18th August 1289, as if determined by the official announcement of *The New Rule* of the Third Order Secular of St Francis. The approval, according to the legal principles in place at the time, is attested by the testimony of the *Legend of the Three Companions* which, with reference to the approval of the three Franciscan Orders, reports: ... *Each one of these three Orders was in its time approved by the Supreme Pontiff.* (L3C, chapter XIV, 60)

It was a **papal approval** that was **direct** and **indirect** at the same time: it was **indirect** in so far as the three Orders were born in full accordance with and according to what was established by the common law of the Church, and was **direct** in that for these three Orders the Apostolic See renewed and granted measures and privileges partly new and partly renewed, because they had already been formerly granted to professed converts and to *secular penitents*. (A Boni)

We can summarize our foundational elements with three Latin phrases, used by Fr. Andrea Boni in his book “Tres Ordines Hic Ordinatus”

1. *Tres ordines hic ordinatus* (Three were the Orders he arrayed).⁴ Common founder – Francis of Assisi
2. *Eiusdem corporis membra existentes* (Existing as members of the same body)⁵
 - Same charism
 - Same mission in different states of life, interdependent and complementary: all three to accomplish the *marvelous work*.
3. *Funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur* (A three-ply cord is not easily broken)⁶.
 - Independence and unity.
 - Vital interconnection [reciprocity].

Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO)

1. The nature of the SFO is determined by 3 characteristics:
 - **First**, its birth and the intention of its founder, Francis of Assisi based on inspiration he received from God,
 - **Second**, through its historical evolution as an order/movement consistently [and continuously] approved by the Holy See, and
 - **Third**, through legislation, (Rule and General Constitution) approved by the Holy See, and accepted throughout history, as expressed by the Supreme Pontiffs & Magisterium of the Church.

We are, therefore, united by a common founder, with common charisms/spirituality and apostolic mission to our brothers and sisters of the first and second orders. Despite this foundational unity we remain fully independent of the other Franciscan Orders, but by privilege, we are intimately connected in a relationship of mutual and vital reciprocity.

2. We (SFO) are a group of Christian faithful, evangelically called, (vocation) to respond in fullness to follow Jesus, through the witness of Francis, while living in our secular condition. We are as deeply called and committed, as any other

⁴ Julian of Speyer *The Divine Office*, Antiphon for Lauds

⁵ Urban IV, Bull *Spiritus Domini*, 1. C, 671

⁶ Ecclesiastes 4, 12

Franciscan, friar or sister, to God's call to continually rebuild the Church, inviting her and ourselves to live in greater fidelity to the Gospels.

3. Although the SFO is not "religious" in the strict sense of the word (making evangelical vows), we do commit ourselves through a true and proper "religious" profession to give witness to the Gospel along with and beside our other Franciscan Family Members.
 - Franciscan Family
 - the Friars, (priests and brother) of the First Order
 - The Sisters of the Second Order (Poor Clares)
 - Our Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular
 - Priests & Brothers [also called Friars] of the Third Order Regular (TOR)
 - 400+ communities of Religious Women (Sisters) bound under the Rule of St. Francis
 - Secular Franciscan Order

The Secular Franciscan Order (in the Church and Canon Law)

The Secular Franciscan Order is a **public Association** in the Church. OFS Gen. Const., art. 1.5 – (Code of Canon Law [CCL] 301 §3; 312; 313)

The SFO, as an **international public Association**, is connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff from whom it has received the approval of its Rule and the confirmation of its mission in the Church and in the world. OFS Gen. Const., Art. 99.2

The General Constitutions of the SFO open and close with these two fundamental statements which characterize the ecclesial nature of the SFO as:

We are a Public Association of Christian Faithful.

- **International in scope**
- **Linked by a special bond with the Roman Pontiff,**
 - who gives the SFO its **Rule** and
 - confirms our **Mission** in the Church and in the world

So we can define the nature of our Order and outline it as follows:

- a group of Christian lay faithful evangelically committed in our own secular state of life for a full response to the call to follow Christ; humble, poor and crucified like St. Francis.

- Secular Franciscans, along with the brothers and sisters of the First and the Second Orders, are committed to achieving the mission that God entrusted to Francis to repair his house, which is the Church, the Body of Christ, in all its manifestations. We are called to help the Church fulfill its mission of salvation, announcing conversion and the message of the Gospel to all creatures. (*Convert and believe the Gospel*).

- Secular Franciscans, while not 'religious' in the strict sense, are committed by means of a real and personal "religious" Profession for witnessing to the saving power of the Gospel, by uniting ourselves to the apostolate of the Brothers of the First Order and to the contemplation of the Poor Clares⁷.

While most public associations within the Church are erected by the Church Hierarchy (Bishops), who endow them with a juridic [legal under Canon Law] personality and assigns them a canonical mission within a specific jurisdiction (generally a diocese), the Secular Franciscan Order exists as a deliberate act of will of the whole Church, erected by the Holy See and is connected to the evangelical mission of the Church in the world. Thus our juridic personality is derived directly from the Holy Father.

The Hierarchy (Bishops) of the Church generally does not intervene into the life of the Secular Franciscan Order, its governance, in its electoral process or in its civil identity,

⁷ So that Francis could accomplish the mission entrusted to him, Christ worked in him "a marvelous work" by **conforming him to Himself in life and death** (LMj, Chapter XIV, 4)); and to continue this, He inspired him to give life to a threefold militia (the knights of the dream of Spoleto, LMj, Chapter I, 3).

The 1st Order to make the apostolic life flourish;

The 2nd Order to give new energy to the contemplative life achieved through prayer and sacrifice;

The 3rd Order to restore family and social life from within and with people committed to live the Gospel values in the world.

All three Orders are heirs of Francis' original mission and his charism to accomplish this mission. As stated by Pope Paul VI: "*The vision of Innocent III of Francis sustaining the Lateran basilica, that is the Church, the mystical Body of Christ, in its historical and central, hierarchical and Roman expression, discerned the vocation and mission of the great Franciscan family*" (The General Chapter OFM, 23/6/1967). - C. Piacitelli, OFM

although the local ordinary does exercise oversight of the SFO to help insure our fidelity to the Church.

Likewise, by privilege granted by the Holy See, the SFO has freely bound itself to the brothers of the First Order and TOR in a relationship of equal and vital reciprocity (Life-giving union) for the support and life of both orders. Our Friar brothers help us to keep vibrantly alive the Charism of Francis, our commitment is to “Observe the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ,” to remain faithful to our Profession and our Rule of Life, and further the apostolic activity of the Church.

The Nature of the SFO, then, is not that of a simple third order or public association. We are both one and autonomous (having our own laws); united by a common founder, charism and mission and by chosen privilege (to the Franciscan Family) while living out our vocation in the secular state. Though we have subdivided into the SFO and TOR, **we, the SFO, remain the original Third Order directly founded by Francis.**

From our Holy Rule, our goal in life is to flow between the Gospel and Life, not just as an academic exercise of studying the Gospels, but in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, and to discover the Living God present in all creation, as beauty and ultimate goodness (love).

As we reach the end of this section on the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order it is important to reflect on **profession** and **sense of belonging** both to the Order and to the greater Franciscan Family. It is paramount to our survival as a unified and autonomous order.

Choosing profession into the SFO is a deliberate choice for Jesus and a promise to embrace the Gospel and His way of Life after the manner of Francis of Assisi.

So like Jesus and Francis, we are invited to consecrate ourselves to live the Gospel and respond with love for all so we can be instruments of peace.

Below is a Comparison between a “Third Order” and the Secular Franciscan Order

A Third Order	The Secular Franciscan Order
Affiliated, associated to a religious house (e.g. Benedictine, Dominican, Carmelite)	Not affiliated or associated to the Franciscan First Order or to the Third Order Regular (TOR). The SFO is born autonomous and is equal and complementary to the other Orders of the Franciscan Family.
Participates in the spirit of the religious house to which it is associated	The SFO is part of the religious family founded by Francis of Assisi, in its 3-fold articulation, and participates in the spirit of the entire Family, and not simply a single part of it, as the SFO is a direct depository of the common charism of our common Seraphic Father. It is equally and directly Franciscan from its beginning as are the other orders within the Franciscan Family.
It exists under the authority of a religious house	The SFO is born autonomous and remains such, under the authority of the Holy See, who has entrusted assistance to the SFO and vigilance to the First Order & TOR
A member of a religious institute (house) may belong to the third order of another religious house, without any incompatibility	SFO General Constitutions contemplates the exact opposite i.e. exclusive via perpetual profession (Gen Const Art. 2.1) -- <i>The vocation to the SFO is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members. Therefore, those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life cannot belong to the SFO.</i>
The same individual may belong to the third orders of several different religious houses without any special authorization	Contradicts Gen Const Art 2.1 cited above
Any religious institute/house may have its own third order without requesting any privilege of the Holy See	<p>The SFO is erected and granted its juridic person by the Supreme Pontiff and not by any religious house.</p> <p>None of the Franciscan First Orders nor the TOR hold the SFO as its own third order.</p> <p>The single SFO is its own entity and has the privilege of being assisted collegially by its own brother religious rather than by local bishops</p>

Comparison 3rd Order vs. SFO

Structure and Governance

Today the SFO has a **centralized structure of government** [see structure of SFO – appendix 2]. It has acquired the self-awareness of being a single Fraternity [comprising all levels of fraternity] with respect to its structure and has decided to overcome the divisions that occurred within the First Order.

Governance is accomplished through the fraternity councils at the various levels in a relationship of collegiality and consensus, with most activities being conducted at the lowest possible level, (called subsidiarity), in order to afford the local fraternity the highest degree of flexibility within the Order.

Higher levels of fraternity exist to animate and guide the lower level (local) fraternities and intervene only when an issue cannot be resolved at a lower level or when it involves more than one fraternity.

We must become fully aware of this centralized structure of government in order to acquire the necessary sense of belonging to both our local fraternity and to all the fraternities at higher levels. We live out our profession within our own local fraternity where we are called to serve, but we are also part of the whole Order and may be asked to share our talents and gifts at higher levels of fraternity. We become part of the whole and need to embrace this reality and accept a true sense of belonging at all levels of the order.

Again, let us not forget that **Profession incorporates the person into the Order**, (Gen. Const. 42.2 and Preliminary Notes of the Ritual, 14.c) that is into the Order **as a whole**, so it is not possible to live in this reality without being aware of all the members that make it up. For it is in our awareness of the whole Order, that we can grow harmoniously and fully develop our vocation to live as fraternity, to live the charism, and to accomplish our mission.

The nature of governance and authority in the Order should be understood in the Spirit of the two verbs, repeated in our Rule and Constitution: *to animate and to guide*. This authority is *not* to command *or* to prescribe.

The rule of **subsidiarity**, then, is crucial.

Local Fraternities are the fundamental units of the Order and in them, live our brothers and sisters.

The Fraternities have (and should have) a broad capacity for self-determination and what they are properly able to do. They must do this without undue intrusions of higher levels.

The regional and national governing bodies are liaison and coordination structures designed to offer service, guidance and to guarantee legality. Their primary objective is to serve, link up, coordinate and, always, animate and guide.

These governing bodies (local, regional and national), have authority and this authority expresses itself in:

- admitting and receiving to Profession the candidates in the name of the Church
- presiding over elective Chapters of Fraternities of lower levels
- the possibility of suspending or removing from office or from the Order
- the approval of Statutes (local, regional, national and even international)
- performing fraternal visits, where the visitor has the authority and the duty, to suggest and sometimes impose measures, when the fraternity has violated our governing documents, or where the Rule is manifestly ignored or, in general, when there are objectively serious problems.

It is worth repeating, once again, that the Minister is not the “absolute master” of the Fraternity. This is something that is still not well understood and which needs to be stressed forcefully. **The elected council determines the will of the fraternity; the Minister is the agent who implements the will of the council.** The Minister has only the power to serve the brothers and the sisters, to watch over them and to love them (to animate and guide). (Gen. Const. 31.2).

Let us remind ourselves that St Francis placed himself below and in service to all his brothers. Similarly if we place mutual service, guiding and animating our sisters and brothers at the center of all we do in fraternity life, we shall never err.

Appendix 1 – Public Associations in the Church vs SFO

PUBLIC ASSOCIATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FAITHFUL according to the Code of Canon Law (CCL):

- Associations erected by the hierarchy as corporations endowed with juridical rights.
 - *canonical erection* by the hierarchy causes the Association to have a public character from its very inception, conferring it a public juridical personality in the Church.
- The Hierarchy assigns them a canonical mission because these Associations are established to share in the pastoral mission of the Hierarchy.
- They act in the name of the Hierarchy
- Their property is ecclesiastical.
- They are totally subject to the authority of the sacred pastors:
 - Intervention in appointments and dismissals;
 - Nomination of chaplains or ecclesial assistants;
 - Possibility of appointing commissioners;
 - Statutes of the Association approved by the competent ecclesial authority
 - Control over property.

As a Public Association of the Christian Faithful, **the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER:**

- exists through a deliberate act of the will of the whole Church⁸ (it is the Church, itself, that wants the SFO's existence in as much as the Church considers that it needs the SFO),
- is erected by the Holy See
- is intimately connected to the life of the Church, from which it receives a specific mission to be carried out in its name, (*in nomine Ecclesiae = in the name of the Church*).

However, looking at our own laws, (General Constitutions, Statutes etc) we can underline the following specific differences with respect to the Code definitions of Public Associations of Faithful:

1. Hierarchy does not intervene in the nomination and removal of officers: SFO laws allow the election of its own ministers and councilors without the

⁸ Stated and confirmed by the Church for 8 centuries.

intervention of the Hierarchy. Removal by the hierarchy is obviously possible in extreme case.

2. Spiritual assistants do not exactly identify with the ecclesiastical assistants as described in the Code. Moreover, by a special *privilege* granted to the SFO by the Holy See, our spiritual assistants are appointed by the Major Superiors or by the General Ministers of the First Order and Third Order Regular, on the request of the Fraternities and not by imposition of the First Order or Third Order Regular.
3. The Rule and the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order are approved by the Holy See. Statutes are approved by Secular Franciscans functioning at appropriate levels (e.g. International, National, Regional Councils).
4. The functions and control of property belongs to the SFO. Only in case of disputes or of extinction of the Association, as a whole, would the Hierarchy dispose of the properties.

In the context of the Code of Canon Law the general definition of Association (Can 298 § 1⁹) indicates that the purpose of Associations is to enable the Christian faithful *to be more or to do more*¹⁰.

A Third Order (can 303) is defined as an association whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection¹¹, living according to the spirituality of the religious institution which guides them. (A Boni, Quaderno Compi N. 6, FEDELI LAICI FRANCESCANI, 1990, page 54).

Being defined by the Church itself as a Public Association of Faithful (PAF) tells us that we are vital to the Church, by helping Her to fulfill Her *canonical mission*; a mission which for us coincides with the mission of the Franciscan family and finds its specific expression in the Rule (sections 6, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19) and in the General Constitution of the Secular Franciscan Order (CC.GG). The entire Title II of the

⁹ Can 298 - §1. In the Church there are associations distinct from institutes of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life; in these associations the Christian faithful, whether clerics, lay persons, or clerics and lay persons together, strive in a common endeavour to foster a more perfect life, to promote public worship or Christian doctrine, or to exercise other works of the apostolate such as initiatives of evangelization, works of piety or charity, and those which animate the temporal order with a Christian spirit.

¹⁰ By this, it is meant to strive just for spiritual perfection or for more concrete apostolic work.

¹¹ A necessary aim for all the baptised regardless of whether they are a member of any group, secular or religious.

CC.GG. (Articles 17-27) most clearly explains our *mission* and the articles from 99 to 103 complete the description!

So as a Public Association of the Faithful/Third Order, the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO General Constitutions Art 1.5 & 99.2) has the following characteristics:

- The SFO is, in canon law, an Association of the Christian Faithful, which is universal, constituted by the faithful and erected under the personal authority of the Supreme Pontiff.
- As a Public Association, the SFO enjoys *the privilege* to be assisted pastorally and spiritually by its brothers of the First Order and the TOR rather than the Bishops, though remaining under their jurisdiction for apostolic activities in their respective dioceses (article CC.GG 101.2)
- The SFO is *autonomous* (has its own law) and *united*, living in fullness its *secularity*, to completely fulfill its role in the common mission of the Franciscan Family.
- These three features, **autonomy, unity, and secularity** are the essential characteristics which make up the constitutive elements of the nature of the SFO.

The SFO is and will always be “the” Third Franciscan Order; the same as always, in an uninterrupted continuity with the one founded by St Francis. It is and functions as a “privileged Public Association”.

The SFO, within the Church, is placed under the jurisdiction of the Congregation for the Institutes of Consecrated Life and the Society of Apostolic Life (for the internal life of the SFO itself) and under the Pontifical Council for the Laity (for the apostolic life on a world level).

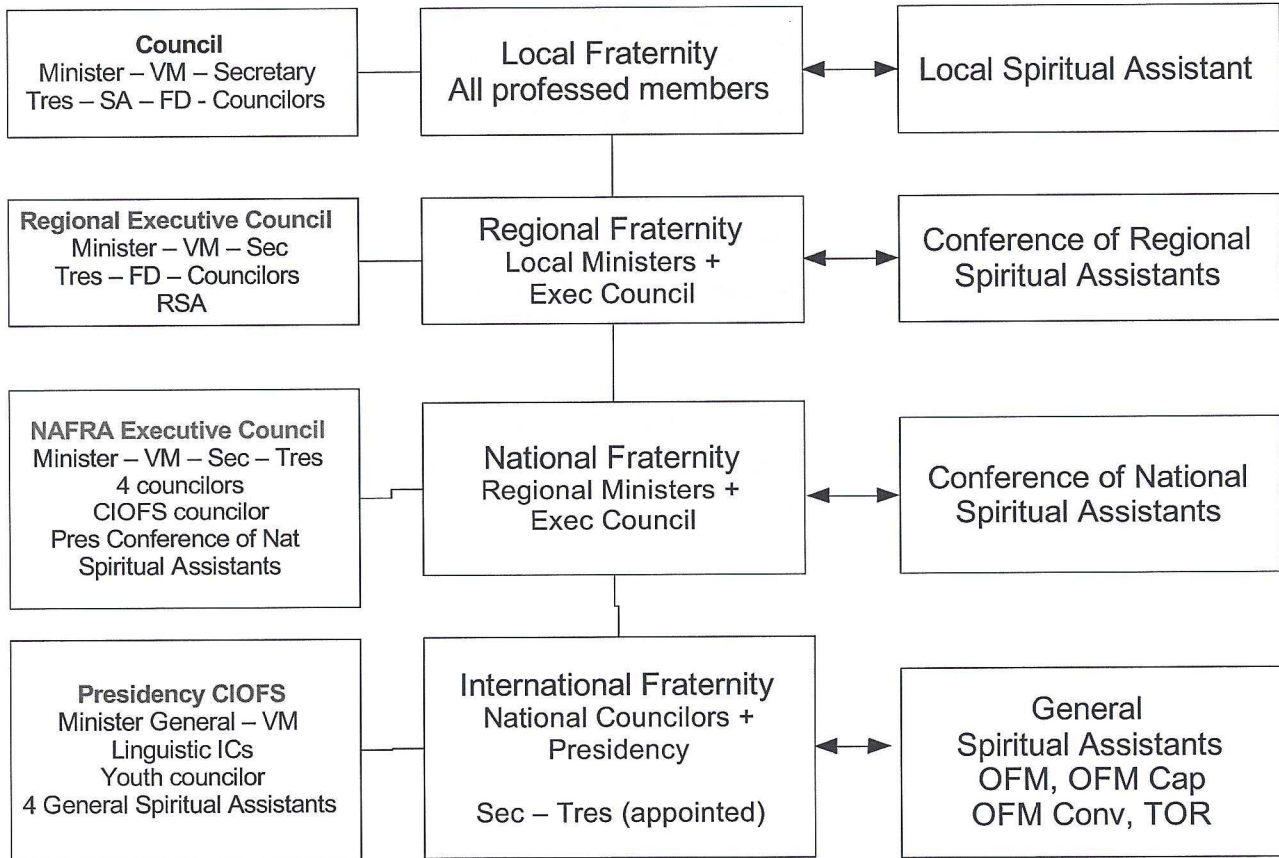
Embracing our identity as Secular Franciscans involves understanding who we are, as an association, as an Order, as an autonomous branch within the Franciscan Family, and what our role/mission is in service to the universal mission of the Church.

The Papal Bull, “Supra Montem” in 1289 is our officially recognized ratification by the Holy See, for the SFO, our “Regula Bullata” [Rule with Papal Seal].

Our new Rule, [Pope Paul VI, 1978] reaffirmed and reestablished our ancient reality, grounded us firmly on the dignity of our baptismal state, insofar as it can lead to perfect love of God and man and help the Secular Franciscan Order transition into the modern world.

Appendix 2 – Structure and Governance of the Secular Franciscan Order

Structure of the Secular Franciscan Order



Center column in yellow denotes the physical structure of the Order, beginning with the local fraternity; the basic unit of the Order, and the different levels of fraternity from Local to the International level. The Council and the Spiritual Assistant's columns show the governance structure of the Order also from local to international levels. The Spiritual Assistance of our Order is provided to us at the request of the Holy See and with our concurrence.