

Terms of Reference (2): Fraternal Life Proposal

BACKGROUND / CONTEXT

The local fraternity is “the basic unit of the whole Order” and “the privileged place for developing a sense of Church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members (Rule, Art. 22). All of the other structures of the Order, whether regional, national or international, should aim to support the life of the local fraternity and the fraternal life of the brothers and sisters. National fraternities have repeatedly underlined that the focus of managing the Order must be on the animation and guidance of local fraternities but, regrettably, the life of the local fraternity is often lost in the governance of the Order. The regional, national and international levels of the Order are meant to support the animation and guidance of the life of the local fraternity but, often, become a burden that achieves little. Each level carries with it a significant commitment of time and resources (people and finances) which often translates into few benefits for the members of the local fraternity.

On a global scale, the physical size of some countries, the distances involved in travelling within and between countries, the cultural differences within and between countries, the variety of languages and dialects used, and the political environment in which life is lived by Secular Franciscans are all significant challenges in managing an Order like the OFS. Although all Secular Franciscans belong to the same Order, the way in which their lives are lived varies greatly. A more decentralized structure is necessary that accommodates for these differences and the challenges that they present.

PROPOSAL – SUMMARY

Creating a Decentralized Structure for the OFS

It is proposed that a review be undertaken of the structures of the Secular Franciscan Order as outlined in the General Constitutions, with an openness to modifying the General Constitutions, where necessary, to create a more decentralized structure that reflects the secular nature of the Secular Franciscan Order and its members. Along with creating a more decentralized structure, a more flexible governance structure should be adopted for the Order that focuses specifically on animating and guiding the local fraternity.

SCOPE

The basis of this proposal is to review the structures that are in place within the Secular Franciscan Order and to determine if these structures are the most effective for an Order that is composed of secular men and women living their vocation in local fraternities. Decentralized options will be assessed that allow for more brothers and sisters to be engaged in the animation and management of the Order.

APPROACH

As an initial step, a review team of 3 Secular Franciscans would be established to review the structures that are currently in place within the OFS with a view towards developing a Discussion Paper on possible alternative structures. This is a significant piece of work that overlaps with many of the other proposals contained in the 2017 Instrumentum Laboris. A number of phases to this project can be envisioned, with the first phase being to conduct the initial review. A period of one year would be given to establish this initial team and to have it complete the first phase of this project. The first phase of this work would be conducted virtually using teleconferencing technology.

At the same time as the work of the Review Team is proceeding, it is proposed that the Presidency proceed with the following practical steps in engaging a broader base in the management of the Order:

1. Engaging International Councillors with the appropriate competencies to collaborate with the Presidency in the animation of National Fraternities other than their own, focusing on national fraternities

that require support and ensuring that there is continuity in providing this support. This would include the delegation of International Councillors to preside at the national elective chapters of neighbouring national fraternities, as currently occurs, and to have these Councillors follow up on a regular basis with these national fraternities, reporting periodically to the Presidency Councillor of the respective area. This more frequent contact could help provide practical support to brothers and sisters, not only spiritually, but also materially for those experiencing difficult circumstances.

2. Grouping national fraternities within the same geographic area, and encouraging the organization of international gatherings that bring these national fraternities together periodically. This proposal expands on what is already in effect in many areas (European Congress, Latin America Congress) by proposing worldwide frequent encounters or gatherings among neighbouring nations.

3. Encouraging the twinning of fraternities at all levels – national, regional and local. This proposal refers to countries where a Franciscan presence exists or where National Fraternities are emerging. Guidelines for accompanying these fraternities have been approved and published by the CIOFS Presidency (Circ 31/14-20 dated 15March2017).

**RESOURCES REQUIRED
(for Review Team)**

- Resource with an extensive knowledge and understanding of national fraternities around the world and their composition
- Resource with extensive knowledge of Rule, General Constitutions and Statutes
- Resource with experience in organizational development and design
- No financial resources are required for the first phase of this project

SOURCE OF FUNDING

- CIOFS
- National Fraternities
- National Fraternities

RESPONSIBILITIES

A team of three people is proposed for the first phase of this project in reviewing the structures that are currently in place within the OFS with a view towards developing a Discussion Paper on possible alternative structures.

It would also be the responsibility of this team to propose the work that would need to be done in subsequent phases of this project.

TIMEFRAME FOR IMPLEMENTATION

A timeframe of one (1) year is proposed to complete the first phase of this project.