

**First Order  
of the  
Society of Saint Francis**

**Policies  
Norms  
and  
Precedents**

## ***Table of Contents***

<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 90%;">First Order Brothers &amp; Sisters</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Rule and Officers</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Principles.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Acting General Secretary.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Nomination of Ministers Provincial.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Confidentiality.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Basic Guidelines for Bishops Protector.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Finances</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Central Fund.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Provincial Financial Reports.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Funding and Care of those on an Inter-Provincial Move.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Relations with the Central Fund Trustees.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">16</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Communication and Correspondence</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">21</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Address Lists.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">21</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Communication Format.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">21</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Communication Officers.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">21</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Distribution of Material.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">22</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Photographic Intercession Booklet.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">23</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Miscellaneous</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">25</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Aspirants who are not Anglican.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">25</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Release from Vows.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">25</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Assisi Visas.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">29</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Assisting Other Religious Communities.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">29</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Incipient Communities Covenants.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">30</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Pastoral Care of those on Detached Service.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">31</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">First Order Brothers</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">33</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Policy Statements</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">33</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 60px;">Chastity.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">33</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 60px;">Statement of Intent - Our Charism as a Community.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">33</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 60px;">Unity and Diversity.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">34</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Procedures</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">37</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 60px;">Archives.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">37</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 60px;">Election of a Minister General.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">37</td> </tr> </table>	First Order Brothers & Sisters	5	Rule and Officers	5	Principles.....	5	Acting General Secretary.....	5	Nomination of Ministers Provincial.....	5	Confidentiality.....	5	Basic Guidelines for Bishops Protector.....	6	Finances	15	Central Fund.....	15	Provincial Financial Reports.....	15	Funding and Care of those on an Inter-Provincial Move.....	15	Relations with the Central Fund Trustees.....	16	Communication and Correspondence	21	Address Lists.....	21	Communication Format.....	21	Communication Officers.....	21	Distribution of Material.....	22	Photographic Intercession Booklet.....	23	Miscellaneous	25	Aspirants who are not Anglican.....	25	Release from Vows.....	25	Assisi Visas.....	29	Assisting Other Religious Communities.....	29	Incipient Communities Covenants.....	30	Pastoral Care of those on Detached Service.....	31	First Order Brothers	33	Policy Statements	33	Chastity.....	33	Statement of Intent - Our Charism as a Community.....	33	Unity and Diversity.....	34	Procedures	37	Archives.....	37	Election of a Minister General.....	37	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">“Blurring Boundaries”</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">39</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Communication.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">39</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Interprovincial Moves and Transfers.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">39</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">New Works.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">39</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Finance and Fund Raising</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">40</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Franciscan Aid.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">41</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Incipient Communities</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">42</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">Prayers</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">42</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 20px;">First Order Sisters</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Anniversaries.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Archives.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Aspirants who are in Therapy.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Habits.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">Sisters with Children.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">43</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding-left: 40px;">FOSC Minutes.....</td> <td style="text-align: right; vertical-align: bottom;">44</td> </tr> </table>	“Blurring Boundaries”	39	Communication.....	39	Interprovincial Moves and Transfers.....	39	New Works.....	39	Finance and Fund Raising	40	Franciscan Aid.....	41	Incipient Communities	42	Prayers	42	First Order Sisters	43	Anniversaries.....	43	Archives.....	43	Aspirants who are in Therapy.....	43	Habits.....	43	Sisters with Children.....	43	FOSC Minutes.....	44
First Order Brothers & Sisters	5																																																																																																
Rule and Officers	5																																																																																																
Principles.....	5																																																																																																
Acting General Secretary.....	5																																																																																																
Nomination of Ministers Provincial.....	5																																																																																																
Confidentiality.....	5																																																																																																
Basic Guidelines for Bishops Protector.....	6																																																																																																
Finances	15																																																																																																
Central Fund.....	15																																																																																																
Provincial Financial Reports.....	15																																																																																																
Funding and Care of those on an Inter-Provincial Move.....	15																																																																																																
Relations with the Central Fund Trustees.....	16																																																																																																
Communication and Correspondence	21																																																																																																
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Communication Format.....	21																																																																																																
Communication Officers.....	21																																																																																																
Distribution of Material.....	22																																																																																																
Photographic Intercession Booklet.....	23																																																																																																
Miscellaneous	25																																																																																																
Aspirants who are not Anglican.....	25																																																																																																
Release from Vows.....	25																																																																																																
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Assisting Other Religious Communities.....	29																																																																																																
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Pastoral Care of those on Detached Service.....	31																																																																																																
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Chastity.....	33																																																																																																
Statement of Intent - Our Charism as a Community.....	33																																																																																																
Unity and Diversity.....	34																																																																																																
Procedures	37																																																																																																
Archives.....	37																																																																																																
Election of a Minister General.....	37																																																																																																
“Blurring Boundaries”	39																																																																																																
Communication.....	39																																																																																																
Interprovincial Moves and Transfers.....	39																																																																																																
New Works.....	39																																																																																																
Finance and Fund Raising	40																																																																																																
Franciscan Aid.....	41																																																																																																
Incipient Communities	42																																																																																																
Prayers	42																																																																																																
First Order Sisters	43																																																																																																
Anniversaries.....	43																																																																																																
Archives.....	43																																																																																																
Aspirants who are in Therapy.....	43																																																																																																
Habits.....	43																																																																																																
Sisters with Children.....	43																																																																																																
FOSC Minutes.....	44																																																																																																

# ***FIRST ORDER BROTHERS & SISTERS***

## **Rule and Officers**

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### **Principles**

The official version, and therefore that which forms part of *The Rule* of the First Order, remains that authorised by the Joint Meeting of the Chapters of the First Order in 1996. This uses NRSV biblical texts and the third person plural (“brothers and sisters”). This is the version in *The Manual*.

It is recognised that the 1984 version (as printed in the *Daily Office – SSF*) although superseded in 1996 may, for reasons of convenience, still be used.

In 1993 an alternative text based on the 1984 version (using the first person plural - “we”) was also authorised for use.

(MM 2003)

The paraphrase drawn up by Brian some years ago is used where English is not the first language.

(FOC 1993)

### **Acting General Secretary**

When the General Secretary is unable to be present, the chair shall appoint an Acting General Secretary, as the General Secretary’s presence at meetings is required constitutionally.

(MM 1995)

### **Nomination of Ministers Provincial**

Courtesy demands that all those nominated to stand be informed immediately, and also the Minister of the Province where they live. It was also agreed that nominated candidates be permitted to state that they do not wish to be elected and that this information be circulated with the ballot paper.

(FOC 1993)

### **Confidentiality**

As one of the roles of the Ministers’ Meeting is to provide an opportunity for the Ministers to share concerns and to seek counsel regarding personal situations, many of the discussions within the meeting are confidential. Times of unminuted sharing are confidential by definition and at times a Minister may request that a

particular conversation be kept among the Ministers. All other discussions and conversations may be shared outside the meeting at the discretion of the individual Minister.

(MM 2001)

## **Basic Guidelines for Bishops Protector**

(To be adapted as necessary by each Province)

### **2. The Office**

The role of Protector to the Society of Saint Francis is similar to the position of Episcopal Visitor in other Anglican religious orders. It will, however, not come as a complete surprise to some that, in certain respects, it differs in ways which are unique to SSF.

Generally speaking, the Protector (who is invariably a bishop, and preferably a diocesan bishop) exercises authority and ministry in three ways.

The Protector:

- a) protects SSF from the Church;
- b) protects the Church from SSF;
- c) protects the brothers and sisters from themselves.

### **Protecting SSF from the Church**

The religious life is by no means fully recognised, or even known, within the Anglican Communion, and even those - of whatever position within the Church - who think they know about it are frequently misinformed or dependent on concepts gleaned from past history or romantic fiction. There are two respects in particular where this can bring the Society into conflict with, for instance, a diocesan bishop or a parish priest. In questions of authority, diocesan bishops or incumbents naturally feel they have rights of jurisdiction and authority over anyone living and working ‘under’ them. This can well clash with the Community authority, identified by a vow of obedience which the brother or sister has with a Minister or Guardian. For example, bishops can be eager to invite religious to work in their dioceses and make promises which then cannot be fulfilled. Religious orders can also be eager to engage in a particular work or place and raise hopes and expectations. But who is the authority when it comes to failure on one side or the other? Arbitration and explanation may finally rest with the person best able to know both sides of the story, the Bishop Protector.

Another point at which a Protector mediates with the Church concerns the stance the Society or its members might feel obliged to take over moral, political, social and ecclesiastical issues: matters which involve the confidential knowledge the Protector has of the Society and its members.

### **Protecting the Church from SSF**

It will be recognised that, while the Society is an independent body with its own rules and constitutions, it still has to function within the structures of the Anglican Communion both as a whole and where, in particular, it finds itself located. It cannot establish work in a diocese without the prior invitation (or at least approval) of the diocesan, or similarly work in a parish without the assent of the parish priest.

This accountability of the Protector to the Church is expressed through the advisory body on religious communities appointed by the church authorities in each ecclesiastical Province or group of Provinces.

### **Protecting the Brothers & Sisters from Themselves**

The Protector has also to act as a sensitive conscience of the Society. There is a history of religious orders who self-destruct, for a wide range of reasons. Protectors who make themselves deeply aware of the Society, its documented rules and its dynamic, who grow in understanding of its personnel and who know something of its strengths and weaknesses, can arbitrate, encourage, caution and, if necessary, rebuke, while retaining sufficient 'distance'. In all this, the relationship of trust between Protector, Minister and Chapter is crucial.

## **3. The Appointment**

The method of election – and all the documented responsibilities of Bishops Protector, General and Provincial – can be found in:

*The Society of Saint Francis – The Constitution*

*The Society of Saint Francis – The Constitution of the First Order*

*The Society of Saint Francis – The Provincial Statutes*

which can all be found in *The Manual SSF* and which obviously should be studied carefully and discussed with the officers of the Society.

It is, however, important to add that though the appointment is made by the Chapter, this can only be done after wide consultation, which itself should not be hurried. While the first approach is made by the Minister on behalf of the Community, it is the Minister who will be most frequently in touch with the Protector, and ample time should be given for the bishop concerned to understand what is involved, both in terms of the spirit and *mores* of the Society and the amount of time that will have to be given by the bishop. In these respects, it may be that SSF has established a rather more personal relationship with its Protectors than is always the case with Visitors of other orders.

While it is by no means mandatory for the Protector of the various Communities of brothers and sisters of the three Orders to be the same person, there are clearly advantages when this is the case. Consultation between the Communities, therefore, prior to election, should be seen as essential.

A Provincial Chapter may ask the Protector to appoint another bishop to act as Deputy Protector in a prescribed area: this would usually occur when the geographical area of the Province is such that travelling long distances is prohibitive. Similarly, a bishop may be asked to act as Deputy on a one-off occasion, such as a life profession.

## **4. The Duties**

The duties of a Protector are listed in the Constitutions and Provincial Statutes and in the appropriate publication of the local advisory body on the Religious Life (referred to here as *The Directory*). They include:

- a) presiding at the election of the Minister and, together with the Minister General, being concerned with the resignation, removal or suspension from office of the Minister;
- b) being concerned with the admission of aspirants not in communion with the See of Canterbury;
- c) admitting to life profession those elected by the Provincial Chapter;
- d) being concerned with those granted exlastration or who seek transfer to another religious community;
- e) together with the Minister General, ratifying the decision of a Provincial Chapter to grant release to a member in life profession.

also, from time to time, the Provincial Protector, of right, may address the Provincial Chapter or a Provincial General Chapter.

## 5. The Society

### Getting to Know You

Before accepting nomination as a Protector, it is advisable that a bishop should have visited one community house or more for sufficient time to understand how the Society appears to function. It can, for instance, be surprising how frequently the members do not wear habits (sisters and brothers in jeans can still shock a traditional prelate) and how 'relaxed' SSF can seem to be over the Daily Office, or liberal in its theological opinions and attitudes.

### Lay Communities

Another fact about the Society – which, though acknowledged in theory, still can cause surprises to bishops – is that it remains primarily a community of lay communities, of men and women not ordained. Though about a third of the brothers of the First Order are ordained and a much smaller proportion of the sisters of the First Order, 'Father' and 'Mother' are no longer designations used in the First Order; all are brothers and sisters and titled as such, after the tradition of Francis and Douglas. The ministry of those ordained is valued, honoured and respected, but their sacramental role plays no part in the order and structure of the Society and all offices are open to all brothers and sisters, lay or ordained.

### Ordination

In some Provinces, Protectors may be approached to consider sponsoring a particular brother or sister for the ordained ministry though, after an initial interview, the usual process now is through the local diocese where the candidate is living. The Franciscan norm, however, is to remain a lay person and ordination the exception, and it is made clear that, although ordination is the fulfilment of a vocation within the church, and within the community as a microcosm of the church, it is in no way a stepping stone. Nor does the Society see itself as committed, other than in principle, to parochial ministries and structures. This fine balance is often another cause for which it is sometimes necessary to 'protect'!

## The Documents

Some time ought to be given over to read, mark and, if not learn, at least inwardly digest the documents listed at the beginning of Section Two, which try to give a practicable structure to the Society, to inform those who need to know and to protect members from any casual abuse of 'the system'.

- a) The *Primitive Rule of Saint Francis* is a possible version of the 1210 Rule, no longer extant, reconstructed by Bishop John Moorman. It served the English-based SSF as *The Rule of Saint Francis* from the late 1930's to the late 1960's.
- b) *The Rule of 1223* was the revision by Saint Francis to his original rule as the Order grew so fast, and is still regarded by Roman Catholic Franciscans as *The Rule of Saint Francis*. It became a document of the Society of Saint Francis after the Order of Saint Francis in the USA united with the SSF in the UK and the Pacific Islands in 1967.
- c) *The Principles* are the 'original' rule of the First Order brothers in the UK and are now adopted by the whole First Order. It is the nearest thing the First Order has to a 'primitive rule' but not in any way to be confused with it.
- d) *The Constitution* of the Society of Saint Francis is the document that demonstrates how all the three Orders throughout the world are held together in a unity of purpose and a diversity of function.
- e) *The Constitution of the First Order* governs the life and work of the whole First Order: though the brothers and sisters are separate and autonomous communities, they meet together to decide on this common text and some Provinces also have a similar procedure for their Statutes.
- f) Protectors will need to become acquainted with the *Provincial Statutes* of the particular Province where each ministers. The Statutes aim to legislate for the particular situation as each Province experiences it.
- g) The *Forms of Admission*, particular to each Province but with common texts for the formulæ of Profession and Life Profession, are an important indicator of the way SSF believes the brothers and sisters commit themselves to God, to the Franciscan Way

and to each other. It is a first declaration of intention for all members of the Society. In some respects, it sums up the previous documents.

### **Further Reading**

Who we are and where we come from is quite important and there is now considerable reading matter concerning the religious life in general and the Franciscans in particular.

Where an ecclesiastical Province has an advisory body on the Religious Life, its publications should be regarded as essential reading, particularly its directory of practice.

Concerning the revival of the religious life up to 1960, Peter Anson's *Call of the Cloister* and A.M. (Donald) Allchin's *The Silent Rebellion* are both excellent resource books, though much has happened since they were written and the current picture of the life considerably transformed.

Concerning Anglican Franciscans in general, Barrie Williams' book *The Franciscan Revival* draws together the many strands in the hundred years since the first Franciscan communities began to re-appear in the Anglican Communion.

Concerning SSF in particular, the two biographies *Brother Douglas* by Brother Francis and *Father Algy* by Brother Denis give a personal view of the two major founding characters of the First Order brothers in the UK. This has been recently added to a short but helpful autobiography by Brother Kenneth called *A Brother's Way. Corn of Wheat*, by Sister Elizabeth, describes the life and history of the sisters of the Community of Saint Francis.

The bibliography on pages 208 and 209 of *The Franciscan Revival* provides a list of invaluable reading on all the various contributing Franciscan movements, notably the Society of the Divine Compassion, the Christa Prema Seva Sangha and the Brotherhood of the Holy Cross. It also lists some of the invaluable biographies of Saint Francis himself.

## **6. The Advisory Bodies on the Religious Life**

The Church, in different parts of the Anglican Communion, has set up various advisory councils and bodies to give advice and guidance, on the subject of the Religious Life, to diocesan bishops, to religious communities.

## **Functions**

Their functions often include:

- a) Advising bishops on
  - questions arising about the rules of existing communities,
  - the establishment of new communities, and
  - matters referred to it by a diocesan bishop;
- b) Advising communities and their Visitors/Protectors on referred items;
- c) Giving guidance to those who wish to form communities.

## **The Directory**

In England, The Advisory Council on the Relation of Bishops and Religious Communities publishes *A Directory of the Religious Life*, popularly known as 'the Directory', and is really required reading for Bishops Protector in England. It is also a useful guide for those in other ecclesiastical Provinces of the Anglican Communion. The role of Protector is covered in Chapter Nine and the relation of Protectors with dioceses is touched upon in Chapter Ten.

In the *Directory* of each advisory body should be a set of instructions on Visitations. Because of the widespread nature of the Society, some modifications in these suggestions have proved to be necessary. Such visits are arranged between the appropriate Minister and head of house. There are circumstances, it should be said, when a visitation has proved to be quite invaluable, both for the sake of the Society and the Protector.

*The Church of England Directory* can be obtained from:

Church House Bookshop, Great Smith Street, London SW1P 3NZ, UK; price £2.25 (or £2.75 by post).

## **7. Finance**

Each Minister is answerable for presenting an annual statement of account to the Protector, who holds in trust the funds used by the Society. In this respect, SSF anticipates a requirement of the visitation and endeavours to honour the particular Franciscan emphasis on poverty.

## 8. The Franciscan Family

Finally, a factor for which there is no legislation. It has seemed inevitable, according to our custom and ethos, that Protectors become 'one of the family' (though they may not be members of any of the Orders) and this is much to be welcomed. SSF would not want Protectors to feel they must remain distant or remote in order to be fair and impartial. On the other hand, too great an intimacy could impair the impartial love which can 'reprove, rebuke and exhort' when necessary, as well as encourage, comfort and care. Protectors are inevitably going to find themselves challenged by the pains and difficulties of men and women who are discovering – all their lives – the contradictions, failures, pains and fulfilment of a life which most people still regard as unnatural and in which all that is best and most real and true is 'hid with Christ in God'. Protectors need patience and hope. The Society prays that it might also share with them its joy.

(MM 1992, FOC 1999)

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## Finances

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### Central Fund

The Trustees of the Central Fund 'have the widest possible discretion about how they apply the income of the whole trust fund and whether or not and how they apply capital. This means that, notwithstanding the specific mention of the Society's charitable work, the Trustees can, if they think fit, apply the whole of the income to further the objects of any other body which qualifies as a charity under English law. A decision by the Trustees which resulted in funds going elsewhere than to the Society could be challenged in court, but would only be upset if it was shown to be taken in bad faith or worse.' (MM 1996)

### Provincial Financial Reports

Ministers bring with them for the information of Ministers' Meetings and First Order Chapters a copy of the Provincial accounts most recently received by their Provincial chapter. (MM 2003)

### Funding and Care of those on an Inter-Provincial Move

That the sending and receiving provinces negotiate travel expenses to and from the host province (seeking assistance from the Development Fund through the Ministers' Meeting when necessary;

That provision be made for members with particular needs (i.e. warm clothing, on-going medication, special diet, intra-provincial travel, tuition and books) as part of the negotiating process;

That the expectations of the host province (including living arrangements and ministry) and the needs of the visiting member (including spiritual nurture, educational stimulus and physical limitations) be spelled out in the early stages of negotiation;

When the member arrives in a province s/he is looked after by the province and subject to the financial disciplines of that province;

That the province to which the member belongs keeps him/her informed of matters in the home province and of national news;

That the host province will facilitate the visitor's interaction with other members of her/his culture as circumstances warrant and allow;

That there not only be de-briefing and welcome home when a member returns, but that there also be an appropriate welcome and briefing when the visiting member arrives – so that both the visitor and the members of the household/province know the expectations of the visit. (MM 2001)

### Relations with the Central Fund Trustees

#### Background

Back in the time at Hilfield when the work of SSF was becoming known, yet we were very small, the Society was financially supported beyond its financial needs. It was decided that these reserves, mostly legacies, be handed to the Fidelity Trust and held there for the use of the Society in future days. The Fidelity Trust also held those properties that were gifted to the Brothers, and most of their financial matters and insurance, in the UK, up until the 1960's, were controlled by the Fidelity Trust or nominees or others who signed our cheques. Until the late 60's finance was not even part of the Brothers' Chapter agenda. The Minister received the annual income and was free to dispense the income from the fund as he saw necessary as the Community grew in outreach and ministry, particularly in regard to the establishing of our work abroad. With our being split into autonomous Provinces, and the creation of the role of Minister General, the Central Fund became the source of his funding, together with the costs of staging First Order Chapters and running the office of the General Secretary. Geoffrey as Minister General sought the help and advice of the then USPG Financial Secretary who drafted a Trust Deed, setting up the SSF Central Fund, with three foundation Trustees, the Bishop Protector General, the European Protector and a Companion of the Society.

#### Central Fund Trust Document.

This Trust Deed, dated 31 March 1980, gives discretionary powers to the Trustees to administer the capital and income of those monies that were recovered from the Fidelity Trust to form the basis of this new Trust. The Trust is registered as a Charity (280238) and is administered by the present USPG Financial Secretary, Michael Hart, acting as Secretary to the Trust Fund, with the regular assistance of Mrs Jackie Fletcher Brown, another USPG employee in the Finance Department. However, they require the authorising (in writing) of all payments by one of the First Order participants in their regular meetings. The Year-end for the Trust is 31 March.

## First Order Sisters

It has been established that the Fund includes the Community of St Francis who from 1973 were recognised as part of the First Order of the Society of St Francis. The office and expenses of the CSF Minister General and CSF General Secretary are included in the budget of the SSF Central Fund and these officers take part in meetings of the Trustees when possible, in the same way as their Brother counterparts.

## First Order Development Fund

By arrangement with the Ministers, the Trustees have more recently accepted responsibility for the management and administration of a First Order Development Fund, the income of which is made up of:

- a) Contributions from the First Order Provincial Funds, as voted by the Provincial Chapters;
- b) Appropriations from any surplus from the SSF Central Fund, as agreed by their Trustees;
- c) Other items donated to the Fund.

The expenditure, recommended by the First Order Joint Ministers' Meeting, for development works and the promotion of various projects or extra-provincial expenses is considered for approval by the Trustees.

## Other Funds held by the Trustees

Very recently we have asked the Trustees to take two other items:

- a) **The Br Peter Memorial Fund**  
which is available for travel and expenses of ecumenical ventures of First Order sisters and brothers from any Province. This has certain restrictions and is monitored by the SSF General Secretary. Currently the SSF Brothers European Provincial Bursar is used as Banker, receiving authorisation from the General Secretary SSF and reclaiming the grant from the Secretary to the Trustees.
- b) **The Pacific Islands Provincial Account**  
which is held as a creditor rather than a fund. Total access to the balance held is placed with the officers of the Pacific Islands Province, and negotiation would then take place between the Secretary of the Trustees and the Minister General SSF. Interest

earned on this Account is to be apportioned equally to the Papua New Guinea Region and the Solomon Islands Region.

## The Trustees

The Trustees aim to meet twice a year, often in May and November, and they invite to their meetings the Ministers General and the General Secretaries. When some of these Officers live outside the U.K. and to assist the continuity and the co-ordination between the Society and the Trustees, a nominee of the Minister General SSF, normally the Minister Provincial of the European Province SSF, attends these meetings also.

## Assisting the Trustees and the Secretary to the Trustees

The Trustees do appreciate (and need) a certain amount of input and background information to assist them with their regular agenda. There are slots for the Ministers General to give short reports on recent events (it is particularly good for them to have information which may help the Trustees see the purpose of expenditures we have recommended). The Trustees recognise that Franciscans should not have large funds at their disposal and so are quite clear that it is they, not the sisters and brothers, who hold these funds. As has often been quoted, they remind us, 'It is not **your** money'. Nonetheless they are responsible to see that the First Order is adequately provided for. We are there to offer the detailed assurances and explanations, particularly about expenditure, we are recommending from around the world.

More particularly, the Pacific Islands Provincial Bursars and Ministers presently require some assistance (which begins at the Ministers' Meetings) with presenting their budget in a summary form which can be set out clearly so that remittances can be sent out at appropriate times from London to the Pacific Islands Regional Accounts. This requires someone in London (or skilled with computers) to co-ordinate the process. Certainly the live contact, being accessible and there to answer queries, does help the administration undertaken by the USPG staff.

Every payment made by Michael Hart must be authorised by a C/SSF officer in writing before it is paid – usually on the USPG account and then refunded, after several payments have been made, from the SSF Central Fund bank account. (FOC 2002)

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## **Communication and Correspondence**

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### **Address Lists**

The General Secretary SSF is responsible for the compilation and distribution of the Address List. (MM 1997)

### **Communication Format**

Because of the different paper sizes in America, additions to *The Manual*, the European Intercession Paper, address lists etc. are to be sent by e-mail or on disk using RTF (Rich Text Format) (MM 1998)

### **Communication Officers**

It is recognized the expense of international mailing may make it difficult to maintain inter-Provincial communication.

Each country in which CSF/SSF has a house shall have a Communication Officer who is to be appointed by the relevant Minister(s) Provincial. The Statutes of each Province need to provide for the appointment of Communication Officers and clarify the duties of the Communication Officer in relation to those of the Provincial Secretary.

It is suggested that the duties of the Communication Officer be those relating to the copying and distribution of material originating outside the country in which the Communication Officer serves: the Communication Officer forwarding copies of communications to appropriate recipients of all three Orders throughout that country. It is advisable when sending material to a Communication Officer for distribution to indicate to whom copies should be sent. When communications are being sent to the Third Order in other provinces, care should be taken to include the African Region of TSSF in the original distribution.

The Communication Officer is the appropriate local source of *The Manual* and should have a supply of a full set of proofs available. (MM 1997)

## **Distribution of Material**

### **Provincial and Regional Chapter and Area Meeting Minutes**

Provincial/Regional Secretary distributes to

- all Brothers/Sisters C/SSF, Protector & constituent parts of SSF in province of origin (by e-mail or conventional mail)
- C/SSF Ministers, General Secretaries, Provincial Secretaries and Protector General (by e-mail)

### **Provincial Communications, Prayer Lists**

Compiler distributes to

- all Brothers/Sisters C/SSF, Protector & constituent parts of SSF in province of origin (by e-mail or conventional mail)
- Communication Officers (by e-mail or conventional mail) for further distribution to:
  - ◆ C/SSF Ministers, General Secretaries, Provincial Secretaries and Protector General
  - ◆ all houses (including members living alone), Community of St Clare, Third Order

### **Periodicals** (*Franciscan, Canticle, Franciscan Angles, Little Chronicle, etc.*)

Publisher distributes to

- all houses C/SSF,
- Bishop Protector and Third Order Minister Provincial in province of origin
- C/SSF Ministers General, Third Order Minister General and Protector General
- Community of St Clare and First Order Communities in covenant relationship

### **Publications** (pamphlets, brochures and liturgical materials developed for more than one use)

Publisher distributes to

- all houses C/SSF, Protector & constituent parts of SSF in province of origin
- Communication Officers for further distribution to
  - ◆ C/SSF Ministers; General Secretaries
  - ◆ First Order Communities in covenant relationship

### **Statutes, Ordos, Provincial Norms, etc.**

Provincial Secretary, Liturgist, or Guardian distributes to

- all Brothers/Sisters C/SSF, Protector & constituent parts of SSF in province of origin

- C/SSF Ministers and General Secretaries (by e-mail if possible)

**Books, Published Music etc.**

Publisher, Provincial Secretary or Minister Provincial distributes by e-mail the particulars (title, cost, where available) to

- Protector and constituent parts of SSF in province of origin
- C/SSF Ministers, Provincial and General Secretaries
- First Order Communities in covenant relationship

(One copy is customarily sent to each Province)

(MM 2003)

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**Photographic Intercession Booklet**

The first section of the booklet consists of photographs of professed First Order members, along with their date of profession and country of residence. The second section is a list in month and day order of anniversaries of profession and birthdays (of the living) and anniversaries of death. The names and dates of the departed are indented and italicised.

The initial responsibility for collecting the photograph is that of the Minister concerned. However anyone may contribute a different photograph at any time if they wish.

Members of communities in covenant relationships with the First Order are invited to be included in the booklet.

The booklet is revised each year in time for distribution in January. Distribution is normally to the Communication Officer in each country. The cost of printing and distribution is met by the Central Fund. (MM 2003)

## Miscellaneous

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### Aspirants who are not Anglican

Concerning Christians who approach the First Order with a view to membership but who are either members of other denominations or of no particular ecclesiastical allegiance the general practice in SSF is as follows:

- a) to consult the Protector from the beginning;
  - b) to ensure that baptism has occurred before admission as a postulant;
  - c) that the ecclesiastical allegiance is clarified before profession.
- (MM 1992)

### Release from Vows

#### 1. Considerations

- a) The decision of members in vows to withdraw from Community is clearly a serious one. It affects not only them, but also the brothers and sisters to whom, in God, they have committed themselves. On both sides love and affection will, almost certainly, have developed: the Community has accepted, nurtured, trained and worked with them; they have given themselves in work, prayer and the ways of service. The Community struggled with them over a number of years to discern vocation: in the belief that it was God's will, they made a free choice when making their profession in vows.
- b) We should all believe that the cost of life under vows in this Community is part of the cost of following Christ, and that the renunciation and sacrifice with which *The Principles* begin will 'yield a rich harvest': the struggle of faith to be always holding on to this, however, is common to most of us at some stage in our Franciscan lives. Sometimes the struggle requires us to discuss with the head of house or the Minister Provincial a change of house or work. Still further, we may need to discuss with a spiritual director or others whether our decision to come into vows was of God and whether it is still God's calling despite all the difficulties. During the period of first vows, both the Community and the individual are required by the Constitution to give special attention to such discerning (*Constitution*, ¶ 23).

Acceptance of life vows implies a further degree of confidence on both sides.

- c) The public nature of vows may involve, too, the local church, neighbourhood, families and friends and the wider Franciscan family. Life vows before a bishop recognise these wider Church implications. Withdrawal from vows, despite most people's sympathy with personal needs, lessens the credibility of life under vows and the value of vows in general. These are considerations more easily appreciated when a person is not in personal crisis about their vows.
- d) Nevertheless, members do, from time to time, feel an inner compulsion to withdraw. The reasons are probably as complex as those that led them to explore vocation and commit themselves in the first place; they may be more or less obvious to themselves and others. It may be about doubt and faith; or about ecclesial allegiance; or it may be to do with following an inner conviction about a one-to-one relationship. It may be about following a new form of service which seems impossible to follow within the community. All these possible reasons need careful exploration in depth. If a withdrawal seems the only way, and the person can say 'I can do no other', in that personal integrity requires it, then the Community may be helped to believe that the 'hidden purpose of God', mentioned in the preamble to the vows, has been revealed.
- e) Charity, if nothing else, requires that the Community be given the fullest possible opportunity to help in the discernment and, if possible, the resolution of the difficulties. The Minister Provincial will need to seek further assistance, within the bounds of confidentiality, and will need the help of the Provincial Chapter, as well, and possibly of those with whom the member is living, before making a recommendation.
- f) The time of first vows is the main time for experiment and exploration, so that initial difficulties can be explored in a variety of circumstances well before the limit of time allowed before life vows. All these considerations result in a counsel of caution and waiting rather than rushing forward. In the end, however, since the contract with the Community depends entirely on good will, there is little that the Community can do to prevent it if the person decides to withdraw. But pain on both sides will be minimised if the correct steps are taken. The

following guidelines (to be seen as the human face of the provisions of the Constitution and the guidance of the appropriate *Advisory Council for Religious Communities*) are intended to help in this process.

## 2. Guidelines

- a) Openness with the Minister Provincial, the head of house and the member's spiritual director is the ideal at every stage of development, and especially if a member begins to think seriously of withdrawing. Secularisation is a matter affecting both the individual member and the Community as a whole, particularly the house where the member resides. Therefore the member's release should be openly and fully discussed with the Minister Provincial, the head of house and, where possible, the members of the household.
- b) Secularisation is a radical step. Alternatives such as Leave of Absence, Exclaustration, a sabbatical, transfer to another house or Province, for example, should be thoroughly investigated during this exploratory stage.
- c) The Minister Provincial may grant Leave of Absence from an agreed date and for an agreed period. Before the period of Leave commences, a Rule of Life is drawn up and requires the approval of the Minister Provincial. The Provincial Chapter is given reason, indicating why the Leave had been thought necessary; it is asked to ratify the decision, or to consider Exclaustration. The Provincial Chapter should examine each instance to decide which is the most appropriate in the particular situation. The agreed period can be varied or extended by a similar process (*Constitution* ¶ 25 & 26).
- d) A member desiring release has to give notice in writing to the Minister Provincial. The Minister must then ensure that the matter is dealt with and with due speed: the Provincial Chapter has to be informed immediately and a vote taken within three months of receipt of the written request (*Constitution* ¶ 28).
- e) If a member decides that they must ask for release, the Minister Provincial should consult with the household whether it would be useful and right for the member to stay living in or leave the house where currently resident.
- f) If a member is in first profession, the Provincial Chapter decision secures the release from vows and obligations on both sides cease: the person is immediately released from membership once the decision is made (*Constitution* ¶ 23:9).
- g) If the member is a head of house, who holds office under the Minister Provincial (*Constitution* ¶ 17:1), the Minister Provincial may suspend that member from duties until the Provincial Chapter can meet (or be consulted by telephone or letter) to decide on future pastoral care. Other office holders may similarly be suspended from duties by the appointing authority.
- h) In the event of a Minister Provincial seriously doubting his or her vocation, the matter should be immediately referred to the Minister General and to the Provincial Chapter by the Assistant Minister Provincial (*Constitution* ¶ 11:11).
- i) All financial arrangements for the member's departure from the household are ultimately a matter for the Minister Provincial, not the local house. The Minister Provincial and the member should determine together the necessities in the situation (*Constitution* ¶ 33:7).
- j) **Release.** The Provincial Chapter's decision to recommend release from life profession is effected when ratified by the Provincial Bishop Protector and the Minister General (*Constitution* ¶ 28), who represent the wider SSF and the wider Church. They will need to be satisfied that the decision is a responsible one.
- k) **Secularisation.** If the decision is ratified, the Protector will then normally send the result of the decision to the appropriate authority for the vows to be dispensed, though this is not always a necessary follow-on (*Constitution* ¶ 28). This process can be remarkably speedy, though the possibility of any of those involved being out of the country, for instance, can be a reason for delay. Only on issue of the dispensation (the *Instrument of Secularisation*) are the person and the Community released from their obligations (*Constitution* ¶ 29:2). It is much to be desired that no formal or public obligation be made, such as to an ecclesial body or another person before that.

- l) Charity, goodwill, honesty and openness should characterise the process of discernment throughout the proceedings. Ideally, release from vows does not necessitate a severing of friendship with the Community and particular members, especially when there has been time for the new basis of the relationship to be accepted on both sides.
- m) A Service of blessing for the person withdrawing is commendable and will often be one means of healing for all involved.

(FOC 1993, references updated 2002)

### **Assisi Visas**

Visa requirements for entry into Italy must be applied for in the member's country of residence before departure, not to the Italian Embassy in London, which only deals with British applications.

(MM 1995)

### **Assisting Other Religious Communities**

At various times SSF brothers and sisters have been asked to be involved with developing a Franciscan expression of the religious life in a country where SSF does not already have a presence. In seeking to discern if it might be appropriate to respond affirmatively to such a call, and if so how, there are several concerns and matters that our past and present experience indicate should be a part of the discernment process:

- Should SSF form a covenant relationship with a group of [potential] religious in that area or consider expanding into that country either as part of an existing province or region or in some other way [a new province/ region] ?
- Is SSF being asked to support an existing leader already in place or to help the incipient community to develop suitable leadership?
- How is the membership of the core group to be determined? Is SSF to help in the discernment of [future] vocations or to support the community in its discernment?
- What role is SSF to play in the formation of any existing and new members?

- What cultural influences (age/ seniority/ role of women/ role of clergy) need to be taken into account as the community life develops?
- What is the relationship of the nascent community with the local church/ diocese? How widespread is the support for the religious life in general and a Franciscan expression in particular?
- What experience/ concept of the religious life does the Bishop have? Is the Bishop willing to allow the nascent community to develop its own expression of the Franciscan life?
- Are there other religious orders that have influenced the local understanding of the religious life? If so, are there aspects of that community that can be built on or need to be counteracted?
- What financial support is in place for the incipient community? What systems of fiscal, pastoral, and administrative accountability?
- What contingencies are there for SSF to withdraw with honour if things do not work out as planned?
- Does SSF have a member who is proficient in the language(s) of the country and familiar with its culture(s) and who is able to meet the needs of the nascent community? If not, is there someone who can gain proficiency within the time span needed by the incipient community?
- What financial arrangements need to be made with SSF [province, FODF, Central Fund] and what other kinds of [non-financial] support are available for any SSF brother(s)/ sister(s) asked to live with the incipient community?
- What interest/ support does SSF as a whole have in the undertaking?
- Are there any other questions and/ or concerns that need to be addressed in this particular situation? (MM 1998)

### **Incipient Communities Covenants**

The following possible items for inclusion in any covenant were noted:

- what the common aims are
- duration (how long)
- how to initiate it and how to conclude it
- how to negotiate a new or renewed covenant
- how covenants might be progressive
- to whom a covenant should look for affirmation and blessing
- any financial arrangements

- any personnel or human resources involved
- the commitment to praying for each other of the covenanters
- areas of mutual concern

It was recognized that a covenant might include some of these or others that had not been thought of. (MM 1998)

### **Pastoral Care of those on Detached Service**

Throughout SSF world-wide the norm is for members to live in the context of a community house of some kind. To strengthen the bonds of our common life it is important to come to an understanding of the ways in which mutual trust and support, communication and accountability can be established so that the community life of both groups and individuals on detached service may be deepened and all may be encouraged in our common vocation. Some ways in which this can happen are:

1. **Community support in prayer and interest.** It is desirable that those living away from houses are in a mutually supportive relationship with a named house of the Province, so that all may uphold each other in regular prayer. Both the community and the individual should be encouraged to take a particular interest in each other's activities in life and ministry. Significant decisions should be shared at least by informing each other. When practical, visits to each other can strengthen the links of love and concern. It may also be possible for those on detached service to keep in touch with each other through letters and electronic means. In some Provinces it is expected that each member on detached service will share by their presence or by report in an annual meeting of the Provincial Chapter and spend some time in one or more houses in connection with this.
2. **Pastoral Care.** It is important for both the individual and those with pastoral oversight, Minister, Guardian or Chapter, to agree upon the amount of pastoral care needed. It would be good to decide together on the frequency of visits to each other, the use of telephone, fax or e-mail to encourage a good, relaxed and open relationship. Sometimes it would be a help to choose another member, other than a designated authority, to assist in this pastoral role. A modified *Rule of Life* may be worked out and agreed with the Minister.
3. **Finance.** When a period of detached service begins, an agreement, possibly involving Chapter or Minister or Bursar (provincial or local) should be made. The member should be adequately supported and

(as in the case of all members) there should be mutual accountability, for example, through the sharing of an annual budget and accounts.

4. **Length of Detached Service.** The Community recognises that mutual encouragement and sincere interest count considerably in strengthening the sense of belonging and in the living out of our common life. It may be important to identify from the beginning the length of time that the period of detached service is expected to last, and certainly at what intervals these arrangements should be reviewed.

As all seek to discern the call of God in the life of each sister or brother, so we will rediscover the call to live in community that calls us beyond isolation, separation and indifference into that sharing of the divine grace which transcends distance and builds up the common life of the Body of Christ. (FOC 1999)

# ***FIRST ORDER BROTHERS***

## **Policy Statements**

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### **Chastity**

It is recognized that intimacy is a necessary part of realistic human relationships. For members of religious communities, the physical limitations of such intimacy ought to be quite clear. Even particular use of language can be intrusive, e.g. verbal harassment, suggestive language.

Ministers have to be fully aware of the legal aspects of sexual misconduct and have to comply with the law. If they do not, they themselves can become liable to prosecution and litigation. Therefore, such misconduct should be clearly defined and understood in each Province.

However, Chastity is not limited to activities simply with legal implications.

Counselling, confession, spiritual direction, relationship to guests, relationship to juniors in the community, professionally known as fiduciary relationships, all have to be seen as situations requiring guidelines for appropriate conduct.

Some Provinces of the First Order, religious orders and Churches have already developed policy statements for particular situations and Ministers agreed to exchange resource material for reference in and by other Provinces. (SSF 1994)

### **Statement of Intent - Our Charism as a Community**

“Our aim and function must be to live the holy gospel wherever we are in this day and age. That means we must continually discover what the gospel of Christ is - for us as a community and for each of us as individual friars. We must take to heart the gospel in order that we may live it. Only then can we be Christ to each other and Christ to the world. Only then through our life and witness will others be attracted to Christ and find their salvation (their wholeness, their perfection). Only then will we find our salvation too. Saint Francis of Assisi is our model for living the gospel. He points us to Christ. With enthusiasm we must seek to embrace his ideals of humility, poverty, prayer,

penance and preaching. With Francis, we must yearn for the holiness of God and desire to be the instruments of Christ in our day.

We recognize that this vocation, which is common to us all, has to be lived in a variety of cultures and among people of different races and nations. We rejoice that we are friars of various nations and races.

We believe that this variety is likely to expand in the years ahead because the larger part of the Christian population in the world is no longer in Europe and the northern hemisphere but in Africa, Asia Latin America and Oceania.

We believe therefore that we must be willing to recognize joyfully that SSF will be enriched by this variety insofar as we see ourselves as partners in the gospel, true brothers of the universal Christ, and true brothers of each other in Christ and with Saint Francis. We hope that all brothers of whatever Province or Region will expect to serve a period of their religious life in another country.

On the other hand, we are also aware that we must live the gospel and be Christ in parts of the world where the community of faith is small and people have ‘chosen to serve other gods’. any of them are the poor of this generation because their lives are empty and miserable. To them we are called to meet their need, which is the love of God in Christ, which is also our need.

Wherever we are, we are Lesser Brothers living the creative union of the active and contemplative dimensions of the Christian life. ‘Being’ is as important as ‘doing’. That is our contribution to the mission of the church. By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are the servants of humankind by being the servants of our loving God.” (FOBC 93)

### **Unity and Diversity**

As Brothers of the First Order of the Society of Saint Francis, we rejoice that together we form a religious community of men which, by the grace of God, transcends a number of nations, races, cultures and ecclesiastical Provinces of the Anglican (Episcopal) Communion.

We know that our unity in Christ depends primarily upon the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit working in and through frail humanity. Together and individually, we are obliged to seek and discern the will of God and discover the mind of Christ, for his Church and for us as a religious community of the Church.

We recognize and accept that our supreme authority is God, the creator and redeemer of all, revealed in our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and conveyed to us in each era of history by the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. Our religious community life, if it is authentic, must reflect the unity of truth, holiness and love between the three Persons of the holy and undivided Trinity.

Tragically, the Church on earth does not reflect her unity in Christ completely. She never has. Yet we are bound to align ourselves with the prayer of Christ that his disciples will be one, just as he and the Father are one, that the world may believe (John 17). As baptized members of the Body of Christ - the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church - living out our baptism under religious vows, we Brothers are committed to this discovery of the will of God for the unity of the Church on earth and of all humanity.

In that search, we meet a variety of matters of faith and order. This variety of strong convictions often produces tension and confusion in the minds and hearts of members of a community who long to live in the truth, holiness and love of God.

The Ministers believe that our best contribution to the common discovery of the fullness of unity in Christ is not to change the Constitution of the First Order of the Society of Saint Francis at this time in our history but to continue as an Order whose members belong to Churches in communion with the See of Canterbury (and acknowledge the four marks of the Lambeth Quadrilateral containing the living tradition of the unchanging Gospel). With this identity, we believe that we can confirm and increase in fraternal charity our collaboration with the members and communities of other ecclesial communions, especially with our fellow Franciscans.

A family, searching for the fullness of truth in Christ, is one whose members respect and love each other, who listen to each other, acknowledge each other's pain, and recognize the diverse convictions which they hold. They will not expect any to act against conscience. And they will accept that, in the loving search for truth, people can change their opinion, which they should be allowed to do without rancour. They should uphold each other through sustained prayer for each other.

Such a family we believe the Society of Saint Francis should always aim to be, in all its houses. This is the most powerful witness we can make to the world of the love of God in Christ, particularly when this

for many is a time of ecclesiological turmoil across denominational boundaries. By it, we can all grow in the three notes of the Order: humility, love and joy. For security, ultimately, can only be found in the all-powerful and loving God.

(SSF 1994)

## Procedures

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### Archives

A copy of all documents signed at Clothing of Novices, Professions, Life Professions and Releases are sent to the General Secretary SSF and stored in the Central Archives. It is important to keep safe all documents relating to SSF's history and membership.

Provinces need a policy about what documents should be retained and ensure safe and secure means of keeping them. (SSF 1998)

### Election of a Minister General

*(whose term commences July 1st)*

- November 1st All eligible candidates are brothers in life profession on this date, not on leave of absence or in exclaustation; a list will be circulated to all houses;
- Nov – Dec Discussion and debate is initiated in the houses and Provinces;
- The election may be begun any time from November 1st, but,
- December 6th is the latest date for Provinces to begin nomination round, all in profession having a vote (including those on Leave of Absence but not those on Exclaustation);
- January 6th Nomination round completed and General Secretary informed of results by fax;
- January 10th Voting papers dispatched to life professed brothers (including those on Leave of Absence but not those on Exclaustation) for second round;
- March 1st Votes counted, successful candidate declared; otherwise, third round of voting initiated;
- May 1st (Possible third round of votes counted)
- July 1st Minister General assumes office.

Brothers in friaries must ensure that voting papers are quickly distributed to voting brothers and quickly returned to the General

Secretary. This applies especially to brothers living alone or in places with less frequent communications. The General Secretary is to keep in touch by e-mail to see that this is happening.

If there is some delay in a significant number of ballot papers being returned to the General Secretary, then he is to consult with the Protector General with a view to adjusting the timetable slightly in order to delay the date of counting.

The General Secretary includes the following on the biographical details sheet he sends out with the second round voting paper:

Name of nominee; dates of birth, novicing, profession and life profession; offices held in the Society; votes received from the individual Provinces; and a final note to the effect that, if the nominee so desires, "He has made it known that he would prefer not to be elected to this office." (FOBC 2002, SSF 2003)

## **“Blurring Boundaries”**

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### **Communication**

All Provincial Secretaries send copies of the Provincial Statutes and any Books of Norms, Guidelines, etc. to each Minister Provincial in all the other Provinces and to the Minister General and General Secretary, so that all could be kept acquainted with practices in other Provinces. Each Minister and the General Secretary should be in possession of all such documents and, where lacking, make it known. (FOBC 93)

### **Interprovincial Moves and Transfers**

Novice formation programs fully lay out the international dimension of our Society, each Province building in an expectation within its membership that, where possible, they would experience life in another Province before life profession. (FOBC 93)

The Development Fund meets the medical insurance premiums for the first year of any brother going to or from the USA if this could not be covered by any other source. (SSF 1995)

There needs to be a debriefing process and welcome home for brothers returning to their home province. (SSF 1996)

### **New Works**

The starting of new community work occurs only when the Provincial Chapter has received the approval of the Ministers' Meeting. This differs from Clause 16:3 of the Constitution of the First Order, but Provinces are being asked not to implement Clause 16:3 without first referring back to the next Ministers' Meeting.

The Minister General, in consultation with the Ministers Provincial, can require, if at all possible, that a Province or Provinces find suitable brothers to meet the specific staffing requests.

When houses are closed and brothers re-located to new houses, this does not breach the agreement for the Ministers' Meeting to be required to approve new foundations: this agreement was in direct relation to such new foundations requiring staff and financial support from outside the Province. (FOBC 1993)

## **Finance and Fund Raising**

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All Provinces are encouraged to raise adequate income to meet more than their own estimated expenditure, where possible. Contributions to FODF are required to meet ever increasing requests. This drawing together of funds makes for a practical way of blurring the Provincial boundaries.

The management and maintenance of local appeals are the responsibility of each Province through its executive body. Methods of making these appeals, whether for assisting with living costs or for a specific project, is clearly placed in the context of the total structure of the Province's finance.

Where a Province is in need of capital funds which may be beyond the resources of the FODF, the Minister and Chapter may request the Minister General to make specifically targeted appeals to assist in the raising of these additional funds. Where this is done, it is expected that the money will be channelled through the FODF.

In the Pacific Islands Province, much of the ministry of the brothers is inadequately financially rewarded. Their financial needs are for three kinds of expenditure:

- a) Development and Expansion
- b) Administration of the Province and the Regions
- c) Normal household costs.

It is recognized that any expanding Province will almost certainly require capital funding; also that the Provincial overheads cannot be raised in the foreseeable future. But it is expected that the houses in both regions work toward reducing their dependence and to become self-supporting as soon as possible.

With the change in emphasis in recent years from unearned income (donations) to earned income (salaries), brothers in various places have been considering tithing as an appropriate sign of their stewardship and responsibility. Others, at Provincial level, consider giving away part of their surplus funds.

All requests for moneys from the Development Fund are required by the Constitution to have come through the appropriate Provincial Chapter. In the event of emergencies occurring which required moneys from the Development Fund, the appropriate Ministers

Provincial (and Deputy Ministers Provincial) shall need to consult with the Minister General SSF and obtain his approval. The General Secretary SSF will need to be kept informed.

(FOBC 1993)

### **Franciscan Aid**

Franciscan Aid is not available for the benefit of members of the First Order

(SSF 1998)

### **Incipient Communities**

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The Minister General, in consultation with the Ministers' Meeting, responds appropriately to requests from incipient Franciscan groups in countries where there is no First Order presence. Brothers undertaking such work remain under the pastoral care of their Minister Provincial.

(FOBC 1993)

See also *Assisting Other Religious Communities and Incipient Community Covenants* (page 29 -31)

### **Prayers**

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First Order brothers pray daily for the Minister General and their own Minister Provincial.

(SSF 1995)

## ***FIRST ORDER SISTERS***

### **Anniversaries**

It is more realistic to acknowledge our solidarity with each other on the actual day of novicing or profession with no particular expectation on anniversaries. (CSF 1989)

### **Archives**

CSF Archives continue to be kept Provincially. It was stressed that notes should be made for photographs to identify names, date and occasion. It was agreed that if Dr Petà Dunstan needed material from America or New Zealand this should be regarded as a loan, and that such material should be returned to its place of origin, not kept in the UK. (FOSC 1996)

### **Aspirants who are in Therapy**

If a serious breakdown in mental health had occurred, an enquirer should have evidence of at least two years of good health before being considered to test her vocation to join CSF. (CSF 1992)

### **Habits**

While there is not to be a uniform habit common to all Provinces, we aim for a similarity of colour and style as stated in the Constitution of the First Order, ¶32:1. The number of variations should be limited and that each Province determined styles. (FOSC 1990)

### **Sisters with Children**

The expectation of sisters-who-are-mothers' commitment to community is the same as everyone else's, yet there was a different dynamic operating. It might take more time for these sisters to work out the implications of detachment from family ties; more time to let go; more time to learn different ways of handling family crises; etc. There has to be a givenness and a willingness on the part of community and the sister to work this out together. (CSF 1992)

## **FOSC Minutes**

The minutes of the FOSC are to be signed at the Ministers' Meeting in the year following the Chapter. (CSF 1996)