



**The Principles
of the
First Order
of the
Society of St Francis
in
Controlled English**

**Simplified by
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**Society of Saint Francis
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Editor's note

I hope any adult who has finished Primary School can easily understand this version of the principles. They were written in the 1920s in a style that even mother tongue English speakers can find difficult today.

Now they are less than Grade 7 in the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level in the readability statistics in the Microsoft Word Spellchecker. I have made the following changes to simplify to this level.

Sentences are now in a normal modern word order. I am aiming for simplicity, not beauty.

Wherever possible I have changed the passive (e.g. she was chased by a dog) to the active (a dog chased her).

I have shortened long sentences or made two short sentences.

You can find most vocabulary in a primary school dictionary, except for well known Religious and Bible words. Where there are harder words, I have also explained their meaning.

Bible passages are now from the Good News Bible. There have been some recent changes to the GNB so the version I have used may not be identical with others.

Thank you to Brother Samson Amoni for helping me.

What the Order is for

1 Jesus our master says ‘I am telling you the truth: a grain of wheat remains no more than a single grain unless it is dropped into the ground and dies. If it does die, then it produces many grains. Whoever loves his own life will lose it; whoever hates his own life in this world will keep it for life eternal. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, so that my servant will be with me where I am. And my father will honour anyone who serves me.’ (John 12:24-26).

These words give a summary of the example of our Lord’s life in the flesh. He shows that a life of sacrifice brings plenty of fruit for the kingdom of God. He gives new life to lots of people because he obeys the Father and even lets himself be killed. When Jesus is lifted up from the earth in sacrifice on the cross, he attracts all nations to him. He shows that we die if we protect our lives selfishly. If we give our lives to serving others, we have eternal life.

2 This law of giving ourselves up is the law of Jesus the Master’s own life and fruit bearing. We give ourselves up so that we can serve others. Jesus also gives this same law to his servants. He calls us to follow him along the same road. If we answer this call, he promises to give us the wonderful reward of being with him forever. He also promises that God the Father will welcome us.

So the Society of St Francis works to build up a group of people who accept Christ as their Lord and Master. When we follow him along the road of loving service and sacrifice, we show him to everyone we meet.

The Three Conditions of Life

3 The community sees that God calls some Christians to choose the single life in community. We are free to serve God without worrying about a husband or wife. The community tries to build up a group of people who give themselves to God - in both body and spirit. After some time of testing and training, we answer God’s call by giving ourselves to him under the conditions of poverty (being poor), chastity (not getting married) and obedience. We do this by our own choice.

4 People who want to give themselves to our Lord alone accept these conditions of poverty, chastity and obedience. They do not have the responsibilities of marriage, which need so much attention. When they live in poverty, chastity and obedience, they can say no to the world, the flesh and the devil. These are the three great enemies of the spiritual life.

Poverty

5 Jesus the Master chose to be poor in this world. Though he was rich, he made himself poor for our sake. (2 Corinthians 8:9).

He chose to be born in an animal house, and to grow up in the house of a village carpenter. He left home when he was young, and became a traveller, with no place of his own to sleep in.

He also calls his servants to poverty. Whoever wants to serve me must follow me, (John 12:26). None of you can be my disciple if you do not give up everything you have. (Luke 14:33).

So we want to be poor in spirit. We want to run away from the love of the world and the things that are in the world. We think it's better to have love for poverty, like our father, Saint Francis. We only want to have the wonderful riches of Christ. We see that God calls some of our brothers and sisters to have very few things and to live in a very simple way. They follow Saint Francis. The Italians called him the Poverello - which means the poor man. But this great simplicity will be too hard for most of us.

6 All the same, we want to share our few things with those around us. And we want to have only things that we really need for our life and work. We live as a family and we share all things together. We get the simple needs of life for our personal use. But we see that the things we have do not really belong to us personally but to the community. We can use these things for a time.

We try to shut out the temptations of this world from our individual lives. But we must not let these same temptations destroy our community life. This would bring greater damage. It would be no good for us to give up our personal things and then to live in luxury in a rich community. Therefore, the community must try to live a simple life. We must not have too much money and too many things. We must build only simple buildings. We must lead a simple life-style which will give us good health and help us work hard and well. If there is money left over, we can spend it on works of mercy and

30 People should be able to see humility, love and joy in our lives. These three graces come only from God. We can never get them through our hard work or our own efforts. They are miraculous gifts of the Holy Spirit. But Christ our Master wants to work miracles through us his servants. So if we empty ourselves and totally surrender to him, we will become chosen channels of Christ's spirit. We will also become powerful tools of Christ's great work, because he can do far more than we ask or think.

31 *You can read your own Province's Rule of Life on this day.*

thought, the quick unloving word, and the angry deed. We must always ask forgiveness of anyone we have sinned against. We must try to love equally with others people who we don't like very much.

For this love of one another is not simply the expression of natural affection, but the love which God gives us through our common union in Christ. This love towards all can only come from God. Our Lord wanted the unity of those who believe in him to be a special witness to the world. We must show that we are a true Christian family and that God's love joins our members into a loving fellowship. We are a family even though we belong to different races, have different customs and languages and have had different types of education. 9.1

Lastly, we will try to show the same Christ-like love to everyone we meet in our work and everyday lives. We will do this whether people are Christians or not. We must remember that love is measured by sacrifice. And so we will happily try to use whatever gifts of body, mind and spirit we have, to serve the people that God calls us to minister to.

Joy

28 Finally, we must always rejoice in the Lord and show the grace and beauty of the joy of the Lord in our lives. We must remember that we follow the Son of Man, who came eating and drinking, who loved the birds and the flowers, who blessed little children, who was a friend of tax collectors and sinners, who ate with both the rich and the poor. So we will try not to be sad and moody. We will be concerned about the problems of other people. We will be happy in laughter and good fellowship. We will rejoice in God's world and all its beauty and its living creatures, calling nothing common or unclean. We will mix freely with all kinds of people. We will try to get rid of sorrow and to bring happiness to others. We will carry with us an inner secret of happiness and peace which others will feel, even if they do not know where it comes from.

29 This joy is also a gift of God. It comes only from union with God in Christ. Because of this it we can also be joyful in days of darkness and difficulty. Joy can make us brave and strong in times of disappointment. It can give us an inner calmness and trust in times of sickness and suffering. People who have joy can be happy with weakness, insults, hardships, persecutions and difficulties for Christ's sake. For whenever we are weak, then we are strong. (2 Corinthians 12:10)

service. Or we can spend it on the chapel, for it's right to make it beautiful in a simple way. Or else, we can spend it on books and study materials.

7 We must show the simplicity of true religious brothers and sisters in all we do. We must not love the world too much because we are only strangers and pilgrims in it. (Pilgrims are people who visit holy places.) We must set our hearts on that spiritual house where our treasure lies (Luke 6:45).

Chastity

8 Like all Christians, we must say no to sexual temptations. We must live lives of purity and self-control. But we cannot do this in our own strength. We can only do it by God's grace. We must always try to be pure in both mind and body through faithful self-discipline and prayer. Also, we choose the vocation not to marry so we can give our full attention to the Lord and his work. We choose to be "married" only to Jesus Christ.

This does not mean that we believe that being single (not married) is better than being married. No. We stay single only because we believe God has called us to serve him in that way. Therefore, we look to God and we trust him to give us the grace to live the single life for him alone. For if we try to stay single when God really wants us to marry, we will be in much more danger than if we were married.

9 When we choose to stay single for the kingdom of heaven's sake, we live in what we call the state of celibacy. In this state, we must always be on our guard against the temptation to think of just ourselves. We must also try not to be hard and cold towards others by having no pity for them with their worries and interests. Belonging to Christ alone, in body, mind and spirit, does not mean that we must not love our friends and relatives. No! Our union with Christ must help us to love everyone we meet more richly with Christ's love.

Obedience

10 Jesus our Master came into the world not to do his own will but the will of God who sent him. He walked the path of obedience all the way to death – his death on the cross. (Philippians 2.8) He says to people who follow him, Take my yoke and put it on you, and learn from me; because I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest. (Matthew 11:29).

We want to surrender our wills to the will of God in the spirit of perfect obedience. If we do this, God will set us free from doing what we want and

from pride. We will find true freedom and peace. We will also be instruments ready for God to use.

11 Also, when we voluntarily accept the Rule as being law for us we promise to live by this Rule. We also promise to accept the decisions of the Chapter, because they put the common mind of the community into words.

The Minister's work is to administer the Rule and to make sure that the Chapter's decisions are put into action. We must be happy and quick to do what the minister asks us to do. However, if he or she orders something against the Rule or something that is sinful, we must not do it. When the Minister is away, we must obey the Assistant Minister. We must obey a brother or sister who is in charge of a department of work when we are working in that department. But if the minister, or anyone else in authority, tells us to do something, none of us may act against our own consciences. (Our conscience is our own sense of knowing what is right and wrong.)

Like the other members of the community, the Minister must obey the Rule and Chapter. The Minister must not favour some brothers or sisters over others. He or she must treat each person the same. He or she must not be proud or selfish. The Minister must care for and love everyone equally, and pray humbly for God's wisdom.

12 We must be happy to accept obedience within the community. This obedience is part of the obedience which we must give back to God. It's not something different. We firmly believe that if God has called us to a life under Rule we are truly obeying God when we carry out the duties of that life. If we happily and willingly do all that the life under Rule asks us to do, we will not be proud or bigheaded. We will be able to give ourselves to God more deeply.

When we are working away from the community, we must obey the parish or group where we are staying.

The Three Ways of Service

13 The brothers and sisters try to serve their master by the life of prayer, by study and by work. All these three ways must have a full and equal place in the life of the community.

said, 'No spiritual house can stand for a moment unless it is built on humility.' A family needs humility to have a happy life.

We must remember that those of us who always think that we are right, will be unhappy ourselves. This is because we will find it's too hard to listen to orders and correction. When we do our work happily, we create an atmosphere of peace and order. We make family life unhappy by disturbing this atmosphere. If we gladly accept the rule of obedience, and carry out orders that we don't like or that are difficult, we will grow in the grace of humility.

26 We must also try not to have angry and unloving thoughts about one another. We must not seek to make ourselves more important than others. When we see faults in others, it's better that we pray for them rather than criticise them. We must try to take out the piece of wood from our own eye than the speck from another's. We must be ready, not only gladly to accept the lowest place when someone gives it to us, but rather take it of our own choice. On the other hand, if we are trusted with a work for which we feel incapable or unworthy, we must not say no to that work because we think that that is the humble thing to do. Instead, we must try to do it, trusting in God who will give the power to do it.

We will try to show our Master's humility to people outside the community. We must be happy to welcome all opportunities of humble service that come to us. We must never want positions of importance or praise. We must not think that if we live the religious life are better than others. We must remember that people who have ordinary jobs have made bigger sacrifices and have bigger difficulties.

Love

27 Jesus the Master says: Everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (John 13:35). We can see that all true disciples of Christ have love. Love is very important in the lives of people who want to be servants of Christ. God is love. For those whose lives are hidden with Christ in God (Colossians 3:3) love will be like air which is around everything they do. 6.1

We must also show this love to our relatives and friends. We will love them not less but more as our love for Christ grows deeper. We will specially love also the members who are united with us in the family of the community. We will pray for each individually, and want to grow in love for each other. We must guard against anything that spoils this love. We must say no to the bad

22 The number one form of service which we can offer others is to try to show them Christ. He is the inspiration and joy of our own lives in his beauty and power. We will not do this to force ourselves on others or to look down on what they believe. But we will do it to share with them the very big treasure of our own lives, Christ himself, who can save from sin and can make lives new again. Because of our love for Christ, we want to give our beloved Master to others.

We must remember that when we work to show Christ to others, the witness of our lives speaks louder than words. It's better for us to try to live lives through which Christ can show himself than to preach to lots of people. All the same, there will be some among us called more particularly to the ministry of the word. But all of us must always be ready to give an answer for the faith that is in us. We must be ready to help all who are honestly looking for truth. We must also be ready to make stronger the faith of Christians by instruction and prayer and spiritual direction, and lead them forward in the spiritual life.

23 We must always be happy to help people who come to us for help or counsel. We must not tell them we have no time to help them. But we must be ready to stop doing all other work, including even our prayers, if someone asks us to help them urgently. We do this because we believe that if we give attention to this urgent ministry, Jesus, the Servant of all, will be really pleased, even though we have to do without our prayers for a time.

The Three Notes of the Order

Humility

24 Our lives must be filled with humility, love and joy. (Humility means not being a big head.) If these are strong in our lives, the community's work will bear much fruit. If there is a shortage of these three, the life and work of the community will be weak.

25 We will always try to think about the example of Jesus who emptied himself, and became a servant. On the last night of his life, he washed his disciples' feet as if he was a slave. We will always try to be humble like he was and to serve one another.

Humility shows us the truth about God and ourselves. It shows us that we are weak without God, and that everything we have comes from God. Humility is the most important of all Christian virtues. A famous monk called St Bernard

This does not mean that all of us will spend equal amounts of time on each of these three jobs. Our different jobs will depend on the gifts which God has given each of us. If the Minister says yes, one brother or sister may spend more time in prayer and contemplation. Another may spend more time on study and making educational materials. A third may spend more time on the ministry of active service. Yet all of us must give some of our time to all three jobs of prayer, study and works.

Prayer

14 We must try to live in a spirit of praise and prayer. We must try to remember the presence of God and the unseen world throughout each day. Our devotion to Christ must get deeper and deeper because all our strength and joy comes from it. For us Christ is the One who loves everyone and everything. Christ is the One who we can love very much. He is God-with-us, crucified and risen. Christ's love makes us want to serve others. Christ's love is the reward for our sacrifice.

15 Every day, we come together to offer the Mass (or Holy Communion) to God. It's the memorial of Christ's death and passion. We do this so that our union with this Lord and Master may always be renewed and made stronger, and together we often feed on Christ's sacrificial life. It's the heart of our prayer life.

At Morning Prayer, we prepare our minds and spirits to enter the holy place. After that, the time of personal prayer (sometimes called meditation) is the chance to be quiet with Christ. He is present in us through the sacrament. It's a time to feed on Christ in the heart by faith with thanksgiving.

Jesus promised If you stay in me, and my words stay in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (John 15:7). The services of intercession and thanksgiving are times when we may pray to God by claiming this promise in faith and hope. They are also times when we can thank God for making this promise come true (when he answers our prayers).

At Evening Prayer, we offer praise and prayer at the end of the day's work. In the silence afterwards, we can be quiet again with the Lord in personal prayer. God refreshes all our hearts in the peace of his presence which never changes. Compline or Night Prayer is the Jesus the Master's blessing of protection and peace.

16 We must always try to remember that the work of prayer is the root of everything we do. If God's grace does not renew us all the time, our spirit becomes weak and our conscience gets lazy. Our mind loses its freshness, and even the powers of the body are spoilt.

So we must always be faithful in keeping the times of prayer. We must not let other work interfere. We must remember that if we try to work more and pray less, our work will not be very good. We must be regular and not late for our prayer together. We must also remember that it's no good to be present at the prayers when we are not ready to pray. We must not go to prayers in a careless way.

Morning Prayer, Midday Prayer, Evening Prayer and Night Prayer (or Compline) are called Offices. Each office should be an offering of true devotion from the heart. The reverent, ordered and serious offering of our worship together is the heart of the community's life.

17 We must also be careful not to let other things replace our times of private prayer. For example, we can be tempted to leave the chapel early to help in the kitchen. We must remember that worship together does not replace our own quiet communion with God. We must try to develop our prayer so that we remember that God is with us all the time. We must try to pray at all times (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

18 There are rules of silence to help us in 'recollection.' (This means remembering that God is with us.) We can welcome and use this silence. For it helps us to become more and more aware of God's presence. We must not think that silence is just a rule of no talking. Silence is for helping our recollection. In the same way, we can welcome the retreats and days of quiet which the Rule gives us. We must see that these are times when the life of the spirit may be renewed and made deeper, because we have left things which distract us.

In these ways, we will try to keep our love for Christ our Lord strong. When we do wrong we will go back to Christ again because we will be truly sorry and really want to do better. We will want the sacrament of penance and absolution. They clean us from sin and renew us in the life of grace.

Study

19 True knowledge is the knowledge of God. The highest wisdom is that holy wisdom which makes us one with God. So it's important that we

study about our personal communion with God and that we learn to put it into practice. We will see that the devotional study of the Bible greatly helps us in this personal communion. We will also study the things the saints teach about the spiritual life. The community hopes that some of its houses may be homes of study as well as of prayer. Because study is important and valuable, our Rule asks us to set some time apart each day for study. Some of our friaries keep the rule of the lesser silence. It asks us to be quiet for a time in the middle of the day so that we can study in peace.

Work

20 Jesus the Master became like a servant. He came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). Jesus went about doing good, healing the sick, preaching good news to the poor, ministering to people with broken hearts. So if we want to be his servants and follow him we must be faithful in ministry to others.

We start to try to serve our Master by working in the house and in the garden. The community gives us domestic work (which means housework, cleaning and cooking) and other sorts of manual work (which means work with our hands). We must see these types of work as our part in earning our own living. All of us must be able to take part in some kind of manual work. All of us must think about what is best for the community in its work for God. We must also not be wasteful or spend a lot of money. We will do our own work as much as possible, for example washing our own clothes. St Francis said there is no place in the community for lazy brothers and sisters.

21 As well as the special works of service to the community itself, there are many chances of ministry, particularly to the sick, the suffering and the poor who have no one to care for them. The community specially tries to do these works of mercy to the humblest of the Master's brothers and sisters. This is because he has said that he will welcome these acts as if we did them to him. We give Jesus food and drink when we help poor people. We give him a place to live when we welcome strangers. We give him clothes when we help those who are homeless and naked. We relieve him when we care for the sick. We encourage him when we visit prisoners. We do not expect to have much money to give to others in need, but we will be happy to lend the members of our community to work with others who are trying to help them. In all such work, we will try to serve people of all races, languages, religions or beliefs. We will not offer our services to make a person become a Christian but to show Christ's own love.