

Provisional RULE & CONSTITUTION, 1931/2

of the

THE BROTHERHOOD OF ST FRANCIS OF ASSISI

On February 13, 1931 the Bishop of Salisbury officially recognised the *Brotherhood of Saint Francis of Assisi (BSFA)* as a full Religious community in the Church of England. *The Rule* had been modified since that of 1927, yet despite these changes the community still appeared precarious with three professed brothers and one novice. By 1933 there were four professed and moves were in process to unite the diverse and scattered Franciscan groups within the Church of England. This led eventually to the formation of the *Society of St Francis* in 1936. The present *Principles and Constitution of the First Order SSF* reflect the influence of this *Provisional Rule & Constitution* from the SSF Archives at Hilfield Friary.

Aim: We desire the complete dedication of ourselves to God in a common life of poverty, chastity and obedience and to win souls in every possible way to the allegiance of Christ.

Method: Because we wish to share the poverty of Christ, we desire to divest ourselves of all but the simplest of requirements of life, to move amongst people living by compulsion a life of poverty, and to illustrate to them by deed as well as by word, the love and compassion of Jesus Christ.

THE CONSTITUTION

1 Visitor

The visitor shall be the Bishop of the diocese or some other Bishop appointed by him. The brothers will make their profession in his presence and only with his sanction. Each brother has the right (with the Warden's knowledge) to consult the Visitor on any matter affecting the well-being of the Community or his own religious life. The Visitor's consent is necessary before making any alteration in the Rule or Constitution. He reserves the right in case of grave need to release a member from his obligations to the Brotherhood and dispense him from his vows.

2 Chapter

The Chapter consists of all the professed Brethren. It should decide all important matters delegated to it by the Warden. Any Brother proposed

for Profession shall be elected by the voting of the Chapter. To be duly elected he must have at least a majority of three-quarters of those qualified to vote. Any change of Rule or Constitution must have a two-thirds majority. The Chapter shall meet normally every Tuesday at 9.15am and when specially summoned by the Warden.

3 Warden

The Warden shall be elected by the Chapter. He must have the votes of a clear majority of those who have the right to vote and also receive the approval of the Visitor.

His function is to administer the Rule of Life and generally to supervise the work of the Community.

His period of Office shall usually be three years. He may be re-elected at the discretion of the Chapter and with the sanction of the Visitor.

4 Members

Members are those who, having served their novitiate, have taken their vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience according to the use of the Community.

The vows while renewed year by year at the annual Visitation of the Bishop, are at the outset made with a life-long intention.

Members wear the three-knotted cord and hood over their khaki cassocks.

5 Novices

Before profession a novitiate of at least two years is necessary. Novices will not be admitted under 18 years of age, and their vows will be received by the Warden.

They will wear a khaki cassock and cord with one knot.

The decision as to who are to be received as novices and postulants rests with the Chapter.

6 Postulants

Postulants are those seeking admission into the novitiate. Normally they will remain as such for six months, but this period may be left to the discretion of the Chapter.

Postulants wear a khaki cassock and a leathern belt. Laymen and those in Holy Orders are equally eligible to test their vocation to the Brotherhood of St Francis of Assisi.

THE RULE

- 1 **Praise and Prayer**
Praise and prayer is the atmosphere in which our life must be lived. We would maintain a constant recollection of the presence of God and of the unseen world. To aid us in this aim we would make our Communion frequently, observe the hours of prayer and set apart at least two hours each week for private meditation.
- 2 **Poverty**
As a Community we desire to possess no endowments, no land or buildings, only the furniture of such buildings as we rent, our tools and money enough to pay six months' bills.
We would be dependent upon God for our daily bread and be prepared if need be to end our lives in the Workhouse.
As individuals we desire to live the simplest life that is consonant with health and fitness, to have nothing in the Home that is not shared by the wayfaring brothers. On Road Missions in Casual Wards we would go without purse or scrip.
When staying in Common Lodging Houses we would take with us only the minimum required for our maintenance (or transport) and seek to live on food as simple as that of those to whom we go.
- 3 **Chastity**
Christ is our spouse, and every affection or desire unsanctified by his perfect Love, we would regard as infidelity to him. For his sake we will remain unmarried that our affections may rest wholly on him to whom we seek entirely to devote our lives.
- 4 **Obedience**
To God we would render our obedience as bond slaves to fulfil his will for us in all times and places. Accepting the family Rule as his discipline, we would cheerfully obey its commands as administered by our lawfully elected Warden, believing that our obedience to our Rule is the only way for us to enjoy the freedom of the service of God.
- 5 **Work**
All Brothers must be capable of engaging in some form of manual work and, if necessary, of giving instruction to others in such work. The Community's many external activities will be on behalf of or alongside homeless wayfarers, able and willing to work but faced by the hard lot of unemployment.

We desire to offer all our work to the glory of God, to put our best into it, and, by word, example, sympathy and in every way possible to infuse fresh life, hope and energy into the hearts of those who, often through no fault of their own, are in danger of losing the habit of regular work.