

ST. THOMAS MORE REGIONAL FORMATION GUIDELINES

FORMATION IS VITAL FOR THE ORDER

Formation is “one of the most vital functions within our Order, that of helping our sisters and brothers of the Secular Franciscan Order come to a deeper understanding of our vocation as we seek to observe the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ after the manner of St. Francis.” (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p. 8)

INITIAL FORMATION CYCLE

For the purpose of order and stability, it is recommended that each fraternity in the St. Thomas More Region establish an initial formation cycle.

Fixed Calendar Formation Program (New aspirants are accepted once a year).

Example:

Orientation 3 months minimum (September – November)

Inquiry 6 months minimum (December – May)

Candidacy 18 months minimum, but not to exceed 36 months (begin in June)

Rotating Formation Program (New aspirants are accepted any time during the year).

A rotating formation program may be established in lieu of a fixed calendar program. The rotating formation program goes in rotation, where the bulk of information during initial formation (Candidacy phase) has no beginning or end point – it is ongoing. Separate sessions are held for those in Orientation and Inquiry. After completing the Orientation and Inquiry stages, the aspirant then “plugs in” to where everyone else is in the Candidacy phase and remains for the entire time of his/her Candidacy.

(Richard Trezza, O.F.M. National Formation Commission (1999, 2005) TAU-USA Issue #17, Fall 1997)

STRUCTURE OF THE FORMATION PROCESS

The “Pathway to Profession” (FUN Manual, for the Formator, p13) is a diagram and outline of the structure of the formation process that is to be followed in the initial formation program of the local fraternities.

This diagram should be given to prospective members in the Orientation phase.

INITIAL FORMATION NOTEBOOK

The use of a formation notebook is highly recommended for all those in Initial Formation, in which they complete all written assignments and write down any questions or insights they might have, anything they might not fully understand, and experiences of living the Gospel Life that they would like to share with the group. This notebook can be used during group discussion and sharing at the formation sessions.

A separate journal, which is to be kept private, may also be used.

ATTENDANCE

Those in Initial Formation must faithfully attend all the formation sessions and must participate in the gatherings of the fraternity as well.

Formation attendance receives priority over all other social and church commitments.

This must be well understood by the aspirant in the beginning stage of Orientation.

Priorities for a Secular Franciscan are:

1. Marriage
2. Family
3. Work
4. Secular Franciscan Order
5. Any other activities.

If for some reason a formation session or fraternity gathering is missed, a call must be made to the Formation Director explaining the reason for the absence.

An accurate attendance record must be kept by the Formation Director.

Make up Sessions

If a formation session is missed, the Formation Director or someone from the local fraternity Formation Commission (team) is to meet with the aspirant to catch up on the material that was presented.

This make-up session should take place sometime before the next regularly scheduled formation session. Making up the missed session by telephone or mail goes against the spirit of formation, which is all about RELATIONSHIP.

INTERVIEWS

All Candidates are to be individually interviewed by the Local Fraternity Council prior to entering Candidacy and prior to Profession with a minimum of one additional interview during Candidacy.

At the end of the Inquiry phase, two interviews are scheduled with the Inquirer – one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant (if available) and one by the Council. These interviews could be combined in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant, (if available) and the Council. (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p 19-20)

Towards the end of Candidacy, two interviews are scheduled with the Candidate- one conducted by the Spiritual Assistant (if available) and another by the Council. These interviews could be combined in the form of a roundtable discussion with the Spiritual Assistant (if available) and Council. (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p. 23)

In addition, there is to be a minimum of one additional interview during Candidacy with the Fraternity Council.

Example:

1st Interview: before entering Candidacy

2nd Interview: at 9 months of Candidacy

3rd Interview: prior to Permanent Profession

These interviews enable the Council to come to a mature discernment of the Candidate's suitability for a permanent commitment to the Secular Franciscan way of life.

Each fraternity council is to formulate interview questions.

FORMATION RESOURCES

In all of our regional formation; Initial and Ongoing; we use those resources recommended by the National Fraternity (NAFRA).

Formation Directors should be thoroughly familiar with and utilize the two following publications. "Initial formation will suffer without both of these resources." (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p5)

- 1) *Guide for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States*, prepared by the National Formation Commission of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – U.S.A., 1985.
- 2) *For Up to Now - Foundational Topics for Initial Formation* (FUN Manual), prepared by the National Formation Commission of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order U.S. A, 2011.

The FUN Manual is to be used as a resource.

All foundational topics in the FUN manual must be covered during initial formation.

Franciscan Journey, Lester Bach OFM Cap is the recommended basic text for initial formation.

“The Counciliar and Post-Counciliar Documents of Vatican II, Papal and Episcopal Documents, Franciscan sources and history, and the major official documents of the Secular Franciscan Order (the Rule of 1978, the General Constitutions, the National Statutes and the Ritual) are each to be given pride of place in all our formation programs.” (National Formation Commission, 1999).

In the event of an occasional guest speaker, there are two requirements that must be met:

1. The content of their presentation must clearly be in unity with the Holy Father and the teachings of the Church.
2. Their presentation must advance in some way our understanding and living out of our Secular Franciscan vocation.

These two points apply also to any videos that might be shown.

SEMI-ANNUAL FORMATION REPORTS

All Formation Directors shall submit a Semi-Annual Formation Report to the Region. The midyear report is due June 15.

The year-end report is due December 15.

Formation Directors are to use the approved Semi-Annual Formation Report form and forward the completed form to the Regional Formation Director.

Sponsoring fraternities are to submit a separate report for a newly forming group or an emerging fraternity.

SPONSORS

“The Ceremony of Welcoming is a natural time to formalize a relationship between the newcomer and a sponsor.” (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p 17)

By the time Candidacy begins, an Inquirer must have a sponsor, either chosen by the Inquirer or appointed by the Council. The sponsor accompanies the Candidate on his/her journey of discernment and preparation for permanent commitment by developing a relationship of “deep communion and friendship” with him/her. (*Elements of Formation, 1992*).

The sponsor must be an active, professed member of the Local Fraternity in which the aspirant is a member.

It is recommended that the sponsor attend all formation sessions with the Candidate.

RECORDS

Aspirant Records: “It is recommended that all information forms, sacrament records, interview observations, correspondence, letters of recommendations and other notes be kept in a confidential file folder for each prospective member. This will help the Fraternity Council in their discernment process.” (FUN Manual, For the Formator, P 15)

The file folder should be kept until the time of Permanent Profession.

Admission Inventory

“The following documents must be on file prior to the Rite of Admission and should be obtained early in the Inquiry Phase:

- Baptism Certificate, annotated with other sacrament dates.
- If married provide verification of validity (a sacramental marriage).
 - Decree of Nullity, if applicable.
- If ordained, provide copy of letter verifying faculties.
- Two letters of recommendation, one being from the Inquirer’s pastor.”
(Fun Manual, For the Formator, p 18-19)

Rite of Admission

“Immediately after the Rite of Admission the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.” (FUN Manual, For the Formator, p 22)

Rite of Profession

“Immediately after the Rite of Profession the act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.” (FUN Manual, For the Formator, P 25)

ELECTIONS/OUTGOING FORMATION DIRECTOR

It cannot be overstated how important it is to keep all formation records in good order out of love for the new Formation Director. The outgoing Formation Director is responsible for acquainting the new Formation Director with the Regional Formation Norms and with any other particular ways in which the fraternity conducts formation. A smooth and orderly transition is essential for the good of those in formation and for the benefit of the whole fraternity as well.

FREQUENCY OF INITIAL FORMATION SESSIONS

Orientation, Inquiry, and Candidacy sessions are to be held one time per month.

Orientation session is to be for a minimum of one hour.

Inquiry session is to be for a minimum of 90 minutes.

Candidacy session is to be for a minimum of two hours.

FORMATION COMMISSION

The Local Fraternity Council is to establish a Formation Commission (formerly referred to as the “formation team”) under the direction of the Formation Director and working in unity with the Council. This Formation Commission acts as a valuable support and concrete help in the work of formation, and is to meet as needed to discuss and evaluate the formation program with the Formation Director acting as its chairperson.

ONGOING FORMATION OF THOSE TEMPORARILY WITHDRAWN

Those members of the fraternity who have temporarily withdrawn due to certain difficulties with health, family, work or distance are to be visited, or at least contacted, once every month. They are to receive the fraternity newsletter and any ongoing formation materials for the sake of nourishment and support.

TEMPORARY PROFESSION

Temporary Profession is only permitted in accordance with the *For Up to Now* manual, prepared by the National Formation Commission of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – U.S.A. 2011, Section 3 What is Formation 3-23-2011 Page 10 of 22 and Page 11 of 22:

2.3. PERIOD OF TEMPORARY COMMITMENT

Rule 23 Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years. (Article 42.2 General Constitutions)

2.3. a. Primary Objectives

- *To allow the candidate time to attain the age requirement necessary for profession to the Rule*
- *To reconcile any indecision on the part of the candidate with regard to permanent commitment*
- *To reconcile any lack of certainty on the part of the fraternity as to the suitability of the candidate for permanent commitment*

2.3. b. Material Content During Temporary Commitment

- *Continue to reinforce all subject material covered during the time of formation*
- *Continued study and reflection on Sacred Scripture*
- *Continued study and reflection on ecclesiology*
- *Continued study and reflection on Franciscan history and spirituality*
- *Continued study and reflection on the role of the laity*

PROVISIONS FOR REMOTE INITIAL FORMATION

“In those rare instances in which a person is legitimately impeded from participating in the normal formation process of a Local Fraternity, recourse may be had to the *Guidelines for Remote Initial Formation in the United States* as adopted by the National Executive Council in June 2000.” (NAFRA Statutes, Formation article 19.6)

The Local Fraternity Council must contact the Regional Executive Council prior to beginning Remote Initial Formation in a Local Fraternity.

AGE REQUIREMENTS

An aspirant younger than 21 years of age (minimum age for Permanent Profession) may participate in the initial formation program at the discretion of the Local Fraternity Council after prayerful discernment and conducting the Initial Interview and the Faith Inventory.

CANDIDATE WITHDRAWAL OR SUSPENSION

“Candidates that withdraw or are suspended from formation and wish to return at a later time must start the formation process at the Orientation phase.” (Regional Governance Norms)

RETREATS/EVENTS

The Local Fraternity Council/Formation Director should provide a discernment and commitment retreat for the Candidates prior to Permanent Profession.

To enhance the formation experience, inter- fraternity retreats and events among aspirants in initial formation are highly recommended.

ADMISSION TO PROFESSION

The Local Fraternity Council decides by secret ballot on the admission to Profession. (General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order 2000, article 41.1)

REVISED & APPROVED BY ST. THOMAS MORE REGIONAL COUNCIL OCTOBER 24, 2015