



PASTORAL VISITATION OF FRATERNITIES ON ALL LEVELS

COMMENT: The purpose of visitations is clear. Do your best to *stimulate, encourage and animate the Franciscan evangelical spirit*. The following texts offer guidelines for a pastoral visitation

1. The **Pastoral visit** is a privileged moment of communion with the 1st Order and the TOR. It is carried out **in the name of the Church** and serves to guarantee and promote the observance of the Rule and Constitutions and fidelity to the Franciscan charism. The visit is carried out with respect to the organization and the law proper to the OFS itself.
2. Having verified the canonical establishment of the fraternity, the visitor will give attention to the relations between the fraternity and its spiritual assistant and the local Church. The visitor will meet with the pastors (Bishop or parish priest) when this is opportune for fostering communion and service for building up the Church.
3. The visitor will promote collaboration and a sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the religious assistants. The visitor is to examine the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity, encourage the spiritual assistants in their service and promote the continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
4. The visitor will give special attention to programs, methods and experiences of formation, to the liturgical and prayer life, and to the apostolic activities of the fraternity.

OFS General Constitutions - Article 95.1, .2, .3, .4

1. The **pastoral visit** is a privileged moment of communion of the 1st Order and the TOR with the OFS. It is carried out **in the name of the Church** and serves to revive the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of unity of the OFS and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church.
2. The visitor strengthens the fraternity in its presence and mission in the Church and in society; verifies the relation between the secular and religious fraternities; gives special attention to programs, methods, and experiences of formation; gives attention to the collaboration and sense of co-responsibility among the secular leaders and the spiritual assistants; examines the quality of the spiritual assistance given to the visited fraternity; encourages the spiritual assistants in their service and promotes their continuing spiritual and pastoral formation.
3. At the request of the respective council, a delegate of the Conference of Assistants carries out the **pastoral visit**, fully respectful of the OFS's own organization and law. For urgent and serious reasons or in case of failure on the part of the minister or the council to request it, the pastoral visit may be carried out upon the initiative of the conference of spiritual assistants, having consulted the Council of the OFS of the same level.
4. It is recommended that the pastoral and fraternal visits be carried out together, with agreement beforehand on the program. The visitor or visitors will in good time communicate the object and the program of the visit to the council concerned. (Most of the following is done by the fraternal visitor). They will examine the registers and the records, including those relating to previous visits, to the election of the council and to the administration of goods. They will draw up a report of the visit they have conducted, appending it to the records in the appropriate register of the fraternity visited, and will inform the council of the level which has conducted the visit.
5. In the visit to the local fraternity, the visitor or visitors will meet with the entire fraternity and with the groups and sections into which it is divided. They will give special attention to the brothers and sisters in formation and to those brothers and sisters who may request a personal meeting. Where required, they will proceed to the fraternal correction of the shortcomings possibly encountered.

Statutes for Spiritual & Pastoral Assistance to the OFS - Article 14.1, .2, .3, .4, .5

COMMENT: *Pastoral visitations* help to promote the Franciscan charism and maintain the connections within the Franciscan family. The *pastoral and fraternal visitors* are responsible for the many elements of a visitation, including a post-visitiation report sent *within a month* after the visitation. *The RSA or CNSA can delegate someone to make a visitation, but that person must be qualified and knowledgeable.*

1. Local and regional visitations are held once every three years. A visitation should guarantee and promote the observance of the OFS Rule and Constitutions as well as fidelity to the Franciscan charism and the Church. The visitor(s) verify the canonical establishment of the fraternity and its relationship to the Church, society, and the spiritual assistant(s) of the fraternity. Individual seculars may wish to meet with the a visitor. The *pastoral visitor* gives attention to formation programs as well as the fraternity's prayer life, liturgical practices and apostolic activities.

2. The *pastoral visitor* promotes collaboration and co-responsibility between the secular council and the spiritual assistant(s). The *pastoral visitor* promotes the continuing pastoral and spiritual formation of SAs in order to "assist" them; to get their insights about the condition of the fraternity(s); and to discover ways to help one another. The *pastoral visitor* dialogues with the entire gathering of the whole fraternity and spiritual assistant(s) at a pastoral visitation. The visited fraternity provides adequate time for everything that needs to be done at a *pastoral* visitation. Councils schedule sufficient time to accomplish the goals of a visitation, especially time for *ongoing formation*.

3. It is permissible to do the *fraternal or pastoral visitations* at different times. This alternative gives more time for both the fraternal and pastoral visitor to accomplish their goals. If the visitation is done together, the visitors can do one post-visitiation letter done collaboratively or two post-visitiation letters done separately. Each visitation team makes these decisions when setting the schedule for visitations. The post-visitiation letters should be sent to the visited fraternity *within one month* after the visitation. *Nine to twelve months after the visitation, the visited fraternity council reports to the visitors on the council's implementation of suggestions, recommendations or corrections in the post-visitiation letter(s).*

4. **We urge that elections and visitations NOT be done on the same dates.** Elections should generally precede the visitation by at least six months. This gives the new council time to get acquainted with their fraternity and their council duties. The old and new councils may dialogue and come to a mutual decision on the timing of the pastoral and/or fraternal visitation.

A *Regional pastoral visitation* requires careful use of time. *Regional visitations* begin on Friday evening by meeting with the Regional executive council. While the REC meets with the visitor(s), the REC can have a prepared program for Regional fraternity members on Friday evening. (This is good use of time at the chapter.) Saturday morning is time for chapter business (kept to a minimum of necessary issues); Saturday afternoon is time given to the visitors, with Eucharist some time at or after 4:00 PM. On Saturday evening the visitors can facilitate an *open forum* with the attendees (including observers). Dialogue requires people to both LISTEN and share! On Sunday morning there may be some need for chapter business (Short). On Sunday morning the entire community gathers to share ideas and questions that may have surfaced during the visitation. A form of *round table discussion* can be an effective use of time. *Dialogue with the visitors beforehand allows the schedule to be adjusted for special regional needs.*

5. While *Local fraternity visitations* are usually much shorter, the efficient use of time is even more important. The meeting with the council requires at least an hour or more. There should be plenty of time for the visitor(s) to share *ongoing formation* with the whole fraternity. Getting good information on the formation programs of the fraternity is very important.

Please dialogue with the visitors to settle the schedule for a visitation. Work out difficulties or prepare for various needs of the fraternity and the visitors. ***The National executive council has developed a brochure for Visitations.*** Get a copy to find other helps in preparing for *pastoral and fraternal visitations*.

In ALL VISITATIONS the concerned council sends each visitor a copy of the **previous post-visitiation letter** and a copy of the **most recent annual report**.