



St. Thomas More Region SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER



General guidelines for achieving a good visitation.

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The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive (intensity / stimulate / encourage / animate) 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 Order, and to promote its most effective insertion to the Franciscan family and the Church.
OFS Constitutions - Article 92.1

A visitation requires:

- **Up-to-date information from the fraternity council and the Spiritual Assistant;**
- **Information on the Franciscan life of the fraternity;**
- A description of council collaboration in their leadership roles – and information about the relationships within the council and with fraternity members;
- Checking the effectiveness of *initial and ongoing* formation and how the fraternity formators follow the National Formation Commission’s leadership;

Initial and ongoing formation programs nurture the Franciscan spirit and are vital to fraternity life. OFS fraternities should implement the direction of the National Formation Commission in their initial and ongoing formation.

- Sharing the spirit of prayerfulness in fraternity life and gatherings;
- Examining fraternity books and records;
- Checking how the council and fraternity members deal with ecclesial and social issues.

NB: Usually a stipend is offered to visitors in addition to paying transportation costs.

The *round table* dialogue is *guided by the visitors*. The dialogue shares ideas, insights, questions or conclusions of the Visitors, the Regional Fraternity and the Executive Council, Local Ministers, the Spiritual Assistants, and the Observers. This dialogue can help to *encourage, intensify, stimulate, and animate* a renewed dedication to the OFS way of life, the goal of a Visitation.

The pastoral and fraternal visitors need time and information to learn and evaluate:

1. the functioning of the fraternity council in all areas of fraternity life;
2. the faithfulness to the OFS Rule by the members and how it is achieved;
3. how the regular gatherings are conducted and the effectiveness of the gatherings in *guiding, animating, and intensifying* the Franciscan spirit among the members;
4. the manner of conducting initial formation and its effectiveness as well as the development of ongoing formation for fraternity members, the council, and the newly professed.

Councils respond to material sent by the visitors.
They also send a copy of the last visitation report and their latest annual report to both the visitors.

The visitors need time:

1. to meet with the council, formation personnel and people who wish to see the visitors.
The pastoral visitor needs time to meet with the spiritual assistant(s).
The fraternal visitor needs time to examine books and records, the register, and financial accounts;
2. to offer ongoing formation to the council and the entire fraternity;
3. to discern the relationship between the local fraternity, the spiritual assistant(s) and other local fraternities (as well as friaries, convents and residences of Franciscan men and women religious).



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Visitations and elections should not occur on the same date. The fraternity is best served if the visitation follows the election by a period of time. The councils and the visitors adjust schedules in dialogue with each other.

**The local or regional council asks the Seculars to pray to the Holy Spirit to guide the visitation.
A prayerful spirit is important for all of us.**

Local Visitations

- A) Local visitations are shorter than regional visitations. They require quality time for interaction between the local council, the members, and the visitors.
- B) Before the visitation, the council fills out and returns questionnaires sent by the visitors. They are returned several weeks before the visitation. The council sends a copy of the last visitation report and the most recent annual report to each visitor.
- C) The visitors need time to dialogue with the council and for interaction with the entire fraternity. The local council schedules adequate time for ongoing formation conducted by the visitor(s).
- D) The visitors ordinarily lead the prayer during the visitation. They may use the OFS Ritual or special prayers. The local minister checks beforehand and, if necessary, invites members to bring their OFS Ritual. The visitors provide any special prayer texts.
- E) It is customary to offer a stipend to the visitors in addition to paying transportation costs. Check Regional Guidelines for details.

General Reflections

1. A separate visitation by the fraternal or pastoral visitor is permissible. Where it has been done it has been well-received both by the visitors and the visited fraternity.
2. A visitation is required once every three years. If separate visitations are chosen, a fraternity is visited two times in a three-year period. Elections would generally precede the visitation with time for a new council to get experience in guiding the fraternity.

Requests for a visitation should be made at least six or more months before the visitation.

3. The visitors, fraternities, and councils are expected to dialogue about visitation option. It is legitimate to have a common fraternal and pastoral visitation or to have separate visitations. Agreement, through dialogue, will determine the form of the visitation.

* After the visitation, the visitors send a post-visitiation letter to the council (and others as required). It has insights, ideas and if needed, corrections for the fraternity. It is sent within a month after the visitation.

It may be a common letter from both visitors or separate letters written by each visitor.

* About 9 to 12 months after the visitation, the visited council reports to the visitors on their implementation of the suggestions in the post-visitiation letter(s).

*As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: **to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring.** In fact, many who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet be disciple of Christ*

*Legend of the Three Companions
Francis of Assisi – The Founder – Vol. II – Page 102*