



Congratulations! Your brothers and sisters just elected you to animate and guide your fraternity for the next three years! NOW WHAT?

Whether this is the first time you serve on your council, or the tenth time with different responsibilities, if you're feeling somewhat "in over your head," you're probably in the right place.

Remember: A change in leadership is an opportunity for renewed enthusiasm and new ideas!

Please know that your Regional Executive Council (REC) will gladly offer valuable assistance for any matter, or any question you may have in serving your fraternity.

These are our recommendations to maintain the health of your fraternity for which you've accepted responsibility:

- Be familiar with our Regional Website: <https://www.stmregionofs.com/> and our National Website: <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/> Visit them often and take advantage of all the resources they contain.
- Keep a copy of the Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order and carry out the duties of each office as determined by the provisions in the National Statutes and General Constitutions (See GC Articles 49-52 regarding the Fraternity Council).
- Read and follow our Regional Guidelines. <https://www.stmregionofs.com/regional-guidelines>
- Read and follow your Local Fraternity Guidelines. Revise them if needed. If your fraternity doesn't have Guidelines yet, your council members together should consider creating this useful document. Remember to share it with your REC for ratification.
- Bring your new council together:
 - a. Soon after your elections, schedule a meeting with previous council to exchange files and documents, dialogue about the best means of "passing the baton".
 - b. Establish what responsibilities each council member will take on.
 - c. Determine the best way of communication outside council meetings.
 - d. Agree on time and place for council meetings that is convenient for all.
 - e. Make sure to follow the Robert's Rule during council meetings.
 - f. Determine goals, timeline of things to get done, formation plan for the next 3 years.

FORMATION:

Formation should be the # 1 priority for the wellbeing of the members, of the fraternity, and ultimately the good of our Order.

Our sister Esther Stewart, who, at the time was our Regional Formation Director urged us to:

“Ask not what your fraternity can do for you, but what you can do for your fraternity!”

Remember the council is not an exclusive group and ALL members may participate in the animation of the fraternity. Inviting candidates as they near profession to observe how your council conducts a meeting will offer greater understanding of our Order’s management. ALL are welcome to attend council meetings.

Initial Formation is the foundation of our Franciscan journey and needs to be implemented with great care. Keep in mind that the council members vote for Admission into the Order and Profession. This responsibility requires getting to know the new member. All council members need to actively support and participate in the initial formation process.

Ongoing formation is a key component. Active participation in the process is a requirement of profession. Formation begins with the council, which should have a brief formation period at every council meeting, learning to be fraternity helps in building up the larger fraternity. Each member of the council may take turn sharing a reflection.

The fraternity should not be overly dependent on the Spiritual Assistant or Formation Director for spoon-feeding its members. Encourage ALL members to participate in various parts of fraternity life and to come prepared to participate in formation activities. Invite them to actively contribute in the animation of the Fraternity gatherings. Are gifted members emerging and being encouraged to share their research and interests (potential future council members)?

Be thinking of diverse ways to “feed” your brothers and sisters. Vary the diet of your monthly programs. If you've embarked on an in-depth study of one particular topic, don't belabor it for a whole year. Instead, consider presenting a series of three or four sessions and saving further material for another year.

Some staples in your fraternity's diet ("ongoing formation") should include:

- Periodic examination of different sections of the Rule;
- Attention to Franciscan feasts, stories, and customs as they occur on the calendar;
- Discussion of papal encyclicals regarding social justice teachings;
- Studies on personal spirituality topics such as prayer and the simplification of our lifestyle;
- Current issues related to work, family, environment, peace and justice.
- The fraternity as a whole will benefit from at least one annual injection of a program related to the group apostolate, if you have one, or to exploring a possible apostolate, if you do not.

Vary not only the topics, but also the method of presentation. Remember to use the lecture format sparingly but arrange for small group discussion or one-on-one sharing. Most importantly, fraternal dialogue is fundamental for our Order and should permeate every aspect of fraternity life. For the health of the fraternity, a periodic presentation related to group dynamics such as building communication skills, or conflict resolution, is prudent - BEFORE problems arise.

TREASURY:

Treasurer needs to be familiar with:

- “Statement of Purposes” and “Fraternity internal controls and Treasurer guidelines” located in our Essential Documents immediately following the National Statutes;
- The Rule, article 25;
- General Constitutions, articles 52.4 & 52.5;
- National Statutes, articles 6.4 & 24.2; as well as International Statutes, article 22 and the Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS, pages 44-47.

For additional information, visit the National website under “forms and resources”.

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/guidelines-forms-other-resources/>

Council makes sure the treasurer maintains accurate records. Treasurer’s report is presented monthly during council meeting. Council doesn’t vote to accept the report. However, the council approves, after review that the report was received and can be filed.

Treasurer’s report is available to all fraternity members upon request.

Treasurer prepares and presents a yearly budget. Council votes to approve budget.

It is prudent to have in the fraternity’s bank account at least enough to cover close to a full year of projected expenditures and a small amount to cover unknown expenses.

Council should provide for an audit of the treasurer’s records prior to the end of term of office by a professional accountant who is not a member of the fraternity Council, or by a “board of examiners” established by the particular fraternity (consisting of two or more experts selected at large by the membership who are not also members of that fraternity’s Council). A written report of such audit must be given to the Council of the higher fraternity.” Council needs to approve and vote to accept audit report.

Council will determine and vote on amount for stipends to offer Visitors on the occasion of Visitations and Elections as well as their assigned Spiritual Assistant. The stipend should take into consideration the actual expense incurred by your Spiritual Assistant (e.g. travel, etc.). In addition, it should include a reasonable, just amount in recognition of their service to the fraternity. This should be discussed among the council and with the Spiritual Assistant to achieve a mutual understanding.

The National Fraternity purchases an annual liability insurance policy. All fraternities are covered by this insurance. A copy and letter of indemnity can be obtained whenever holding a special event or gathering in a place that requires such letter. Contact the National Treasurer who will provide you with a form to complete and request the certificate of insurance. The certificate will then be sent directly from our insurance company to the parish. National Treasurer will provide you with a copy of the certificate of insurance if you want one.

GATHERINGS AND MEMBERSHIP:

Monthly gatherings should always include a properly balanced agenda with the basic components: Prayer, Formation, and Fraternal Social.

Council members should actively communicate and encourage attendance. Keep record of members monthly gathering attendance. A member of the council needs to be assigned the responsibility to arrange for telephone contacts to bring absent members up-to-date about what happened at the last gathering to share handouts or notes, to communicate to those absent that the fraternity missed them.

Devise a good communication plan to keep all members connected. Encourage communication and relationship of all the members outside the gathering. Remember once-a-month Council meetings and once-a-month fraternity meetings are a minimum. Encourage fraternal interactions and for members to actively and deliberately pray for each other. Promote Regional and National events (workshop, day of Recollection or Regional meeting and retreat, Quinquennial, etc.). Motivate members to attend Mass together and share a meal together afterwards.

It is important to maintain contact with Active/Excused and Lapsed members. The temporary reason that kept excused members away for a while (health, work, family obligations, etc) may, over time cease to be an issue. Coordinate ways and create opportunities to keep in touch with members who are no longer able to attend gatherings. At least once a year, a member of the council needs to "touch base" with the members who are not attending the gatherings and invite them back to be active again in the fraternity life.

At least once a year and preferably twice a year, council should make a systematic review of its membership, classifying their members according to the three categories identified by the National Statutes in article 18, 7 a & b (Active, Active/Excused and Lapsed) and inform Regional Database Manager of any change.

- Preserve in a safe place all fraternity documents (certificate of Canonical Establishment, Letter of affiliation for Altius Moderamen, Visitation Reports, Council Meeting Minutes, etc...). All fraternity records stored in each council member's home, should be properly identified as 'Property of the Secular Franciscan Order' with a slip of paper containing at least two members and their telephone numbers for contact in case of emergency.
- Update and preserve records (rosters, registers) of important dates for Welcoming, Admission, Profession, Transfer, Death.
- Update records of any changes affecting members status (active, excused or lapsed) or members contact information (phone number, home address, email address)
- Notify the Regional Database Manager of any changes.

Celebrate special personal occasions such as birthdays and observe "Jubilees" of long-professed members. Always remember our deceased brothers and sisters in prayers and include yearly celebration of life ceremonies.

Consider publishing a newsletter with useful and newsworthy articles. Remember to save all issues for your archives. Promote the National newsletter, "TAU-USA" and the Regional Newsletter "Our Franciscan Scoop". Contribute to the Regional Newsletter by sharing with the members of St. Thomas More region what your fraternity is doing.

Last but not least, invest great efforts in promoting vocations to our Order. This responsibility belongs to ALL our members. Our Fraternities are not viable if a healthy number of members cannot be sustained. Encourage your members to wear the TAU, use the postnominal letters, OFS behind their names after Admission into the Order, serve actively in their parish and frequently invite new people to explore a Secular Franciscan Vocation. Let us be "Fishers of Franciscans"!

These are just some of the ideas to consider in helping you to inspire the life of both your council and fraternity. Considering all this, would you say there's any easy "formula" to follow in guiding your fraternity "from Gospel to life and life to Gospel"? The answer is a resounding "No!"

Francis did what was uniquely HIS to do. And as he lay dying, he blessed all of us with the challenge: "May Christ teach you what is yours." (*Omnibus*, 739)

May God give you the courage to actively animate and guide the members of your fraternity.

Again, congratulations on your election and please consider yourself a blessing to the sisters and brother who called you forth. Love and support them and expect the same back from them for your gift of yourself!

The Final Test of Servant Leadership in the Secular Franciscan Order is Love

*Heavenly Father, Servant Leadership in the Secular Franciscan Order is not about us. It is never about us. **Servant Leadership, is about love.** Love and service. If we are seeking anything else, fame, attention, escape from boredom, revenge on someone in the fraternity, we are wasting our time; and worse, the fraternity's time; and the worst, Your graces and gifts. You test us in many different ways with different people and circumstances as we journey on this Franciscan Way to salvation. When we fail, lift us up. Help us to learn from our mistakes to trust Your love and mercy more and more by showing that love and mercy to all our sisters and brothers. We pray in Jesus' name.*

Prayer by the late Deacon Tom Bello, OFS, former Minister of the National Secular Franciscan Order

Adapted from "Care and feeding of Fraternity councils"
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