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THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FAMILY FOR THE OFS AND FOR THE YOUFRA

THE FAMILY IN THE RULE AND GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS OF THE OFS

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Introduction

The fact that a rule so small as that of the Secular Franciscans devotes an entire article (17) to the family, tells us of the importance of family in the life of a Secular Franciscan.¹

The family is an essential part in the "form of life" of every Secular Franciscan. The OFS Constitutions reaffirm this idea when they say: "Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation." (*Const. OFS 24.1*)

This article has two parts. In the first we present the text of the *Rule* which speaks of the family and we offer our comment about it.

Considering, then, that the *General Constitutions* of the OFS are the application of what is contained in the *Rule* in its details, we think that only reading the texts constitutes the best commentary on what the family is as contained briefly in the *Rule*. And so we decided to quote the texts of the *Constitutions* dealing with the topic without giving an explanation.

1. OFS Rule 17

The text

In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ (Rule of Leo XIII, II,8). By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church. They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child (Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30).

¹ The *Rule of the SFO* is composed of 26 articles

The comment

The Rule takes into account the protagonists of the family: *the couple* (husband and wife) and *their children*.

The Rule tells us, moreover, what constitutes the "Franciscan spirit" that can be lived within the family environment:

- Peace;
- Fidelity and
- Respect for life.

Peace

Pope Francis said to the religious leaders of the world that it is possible to live it if you can learn it first in the family. In fact, the expression: *artisan of peace* refers to something that we learn at home and then spread to other areas of life:

Each one of us is called to be an artisan of peace, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths to dialogue and not by constructing new walls! Let us dialogue and meet each other in order to establish a culture of dialogue in the world, the culture of encounter.²

What peace there would be in every family if it were established in the culture of dialogue and encounter, where one learns to love and not to hate, to build and unite rather than to divide and destroy.

Fidelity

This is a value that you learn first within the family. The fidelity of spouses is the fundamental basis of any other fidelity: father, mother, filial and fraternal.

“The way spouses love each other and affirm the value of fidelity is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.” (*Const. OFS 24.1*)

We can ask ourselves: where can spouses find help? What is the foundation of such fidelity?

“Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church”. (*Ibid.*).

This love is called to go beyond the sacred boundaries of the family as a witness. In fact, Rule 17 says:

“By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church.”

Respect for life

It is within a family, that we learn to be born, to live and to die. The family is the privileged space where we practice respect for all people in all circumstances and moments of life: when we

² *Address of Pope Francis to participants in the international meeting for peace sponsored by the Community of "Sant' Egidio"* (Clementine Hall Monday, 30 September 2013), in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130930_incontro-pace-s-egidio.html

are small, adolescents, youth, adults and seniors. A respect that is learned in the everyday life of a Christian:

“Secular Franciscans should make space within the family for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death.”(*Const. OFS 24.1*)

Since there is no ideal and perfect couple or family, Pope Francis, responding to a question during *the meeting with the engaged couples*, said: “This daily journey has some rules that I have repeated often to families ... which can be summarized in three words: please, thank you and sorry. 'Please' is a respectful request to enter into the life of someone else ... 'Thank you': gratitude is a flower that grows in noble hearts, as an old lady used to say. A noble soul is necessary to make this flower grow. The third word is 'Sorry.' In our lives we make many errors, many mistakes. We all do. ... Let us learn to recognize our errors and to ask for forgiveness. Always remember: never end a day without making peace. ... If we learn to apologize and to forgive each other, the marriage will last and will move on.”³

Regularly participate in the sacrament of the Eucharist, carefully cultivate the sacrament of reconciliation and practice charity in its various forms. These are an inexhaustible source of graces.

Such a lifestyle will also be assimilated by the children, and all will become “*sign of a world already renewed in Christ*,” says *OFS Rule 17*, with a reference to *Rule of Leo XIII*, which, in Chapter II, 8, affirms:

“In family life let them (the members of the Third Order of St. Francis) strive to be examples to others: promoting acts of piety and good works. Do not let books or daily publications enter the home which could harm virtue, and do not permit (these) to be read by those who are under their authority.”

Obviously today we must add all other available means of the digital age.

Two quotes from *Vatican Council II (Lumen Gentium, 41.5, and Apostolicam Actuositatem, 30,2.3)* found in the text of *OFS Rule 17* have an extraordinary synthesis which should be further explored.

A human and spiritual itinerary

When speaking of the education of children, Art. 17 uses the image of the "path", the "route" and puts it this way:

“*They should joyfully accompany their children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.*” (*Vatican II, Const. on the Church, 41; Decree on Lay Apostolate, 30*)

A real and proper education takes into account the processes, the rhythms and the maturing time of each family member, demanding no more than the possibility of each.

It is not, however, any itinerary, but a joyful journey to accompany *their children*, a *human and spiritual journey* to take together.

This is very beautiful! Although there may be moments of uncertainty and suffering, there are as many moments of happiness that only those who experience them can really enjoy them all the way and talk about it with authority.

To take this route with courage involves having a clear awareness of one's own vocation and mission.

³ *Pope Francis meets with engaged couples* in St. Peter's Square (14 February 2014), in <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-meets-with-engaged-couples-in-st-pete>

In this regard, Pope Francis said: “A good family upbringing is the backbone of humanity. Its radiance in society is the source that allows us to fill in the gaps, wounds and vacuums in parenthood that touch less fortunate children. This radiance can work real miracles. And in the Church these miracles happen every day!”.⁴

2. The family in the *Constitutions of the OFS*

There are eight articles of the OFS *Constitution* that refer to the family.

Articles 12 and 15 are found under the title “The form of Life.”

Articles 17.4; 23.1; 23.3; 24 and 25 can be found under the title: “Active presence in the Church and in the world,” and therefore they consider the care of the family as the main form of “apostolic activity.”

Finally, in Art.53.3 we find it in the context of fraternal life.

These are all the items listed on the family in the OFS *Constitution*:

Article 12.1

Gaining inspiration from the example and the writings of Francis and, above all, filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit, each day the brothers and sisters faithfully live the great gift which Christ has given: the revelation of the Father. They should bear witness to this faith before all:

- in family life;
- in work;
- in joy and suffering;
- in encounters with all men and women, brothers and sisters of the same Father;
- in their presence and participation in the life of society;
- in fraternal relationships with all creatures.

Article 15.2

Secular Franciscans, who must provide for their own families and serve society by means of their work and material goods, have a particular manner of living evangelical poverty. To understand and achieve it requires a strong personal commitment and the stimulation of the fraternity through prayer and dialogue, communal review of life, and attentiveness to the instructions of the Church, and the demands of society.

Article 17.4

Participation in the service of sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and finally through their active presence in the local Church and in society.

Article 23.1

Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and of fraternal love (See *Gaudium et Spes* 78). Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society:

- they should see to the proposal and spreading of peaceful ideas and attitudes;
- they should develop their own initiatives and should collaborate, individually and as a fraternity, with initiatives of the Pope, the local Churches, and the Franciscan Family;
- they should collaborate with those movements and institutions which promote peace while respecting its authentic foundations.

⁴ Pope Francis, *General Audience*, Saint Peter's Square, Wednesday, 20 May 2015, in http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/audiences/2015/documents/papa-francesco_20150520_udienza-generale.html

Article 23.3

To preserve peace in the family, the brothers and sisters should, in due time, make a last will and testament for the disposition of their goods.

Article 24

1. Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect to all life in every situation from conception until death.

Married couples find in the OFS Rule an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that, in the sacrament of matrimony, their love participates in the love that Christ has for his Church. The way spouses love each other and the affirmation of the value of fidelity are a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

2. In fraternity:

- the spirituality of the family and of marriage and the Christian attitude towards family problems should be a theme for dialogue and for the sharing of experiences;
- they should share the important moments of the family life of their Franciscan brothers and sisters and they should give fraternal attention to those — single, widows, single parents, separated, divorced — who are living difficult situations;
- they should create conditions suitable for dialogue between generations;
- the formation of groups of married couples and of family groups should be fostered.

3. The brothers and sisters should collaborate with the efforts undertaken in the Church and in society to affirm both the value of fidelity and respect for life and to provide answers to the social problems of the family.

Article 25

Out of the conviction of the need to educate “children to take an interest in community, bringing them the awareness of being living, active members of the People of God” (*Apostolicam actuositatem* 30) and because of the fascination which Francis can exercise on them, the formation of groups of children should be encouraged. With the help of a pedagogy and an organization suitable to their age, these children should be initiated into a knowledge and love of Franciscan life. National statutes will give appropriate orientation for the organization of these groups and their relationship to the fraternity and to Franciscan youth groups.

Article 53.3

Insertion into a local fraternity and participation in fraternity life is essential for belonging to the OFS. Appropriate initiatives should be adopted according to the directives of the national statutes, to keep those brothers and sisters united to the fraternity who — for valid reasons of health, family, work, or distance — cannot actively participate in community life.

Conclusion

There can be no doubt that the family has special importance in the life of the Secular Franciscan. Art. 17 of the Rule and the articles of the Constitutions confirm this.

NEWS – CHAPTERS – VISITS – MEETINGS

Rome - Meeting of the Presidency CIOFS

The new Presidency of the International Council, gathered in Rome (Seraphicum College, March 14 to 21), constituted the different working commissions. Here are the names of General Assistants that will be part of the same: 1. Formation: Fr. José Antônio Cruz Duarte, OFM; 2. YouFra: Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR; 3. Communication: Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM Cap; 4. Legal and financial: Fr. Martin Bitzer, OFM Conv; 5. Family: Fr. Francis Dor.

Cuba - National Elective Chapter

From April 16 to 19, the National Fraternity of Cuba celebrated its national elective Chapter at the House Laical, in the city of Havana. At the Chapter there were 30 brothers (and sisters) of the 35 chapter members invited and two observers. The Chapter was presided over by Ricardo Herrera Sandi, OFS National Minister of Costa Rica, delegate of the OFS General Minister, accompanied by Fr. José Antonio Cruz Duarte, OFM, General Spiritual Assistant. On April 17, after the presentation of the reports of the national minister, the formator and the treasurer, Fr. Frank Dumois, OFM, presented the theme "The spiritual roles of St. Francis" and Ricardo Herrera presented the topic "How to operate a worldwide Order like the OFS?" Our brother Airan Negrin was elected National Minister and International Councilor. The closing Mass was celebrated in the Church of St. Francis.

Canada - National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter of Canada was held May 14 to 17 in Loretteville, Quebec. There were 45 participants present, including 33 voters. The Chapter was presided over by Ana Fruk, member of the CIOFS Presidency, delegated by the OFS General Minister, assisted by Fr. Francis Bongajum Dor, OFM, YouFra OFS General Spiritual Assistant. The National Spiritual Assistants Fr. André Chicoine, OFM, Fr. Gerry Clyne, OFM and Fr. Peter Knappen OFMConv, Assistant in the United States and Canada, and four Regional Assistants were present. The opening Eucharist was presided over by Fr André Chicoine. On the 15th, Fr. Francis held a conference on the theme "Rediscovering the simplicity of St. Francis of Assisi." On the 16th, the chapter members made a pilgrimage to the first church of the Recollect Friars in Canada where they celebrated the Eucharist with the small community of Poor Clares who now live there. Some results of the elective session that particularly interest us are these: National Minister Gilles Métivier; National Vice-Minister (French-speaking): Françoise Malboef; National Vice-Minister (English-speaking): Marzio Apolloni; International Councilor Marion Clorey; International Councilor substitute: Debbie Tessier.

Germany - fraternal and pastoral visits

The fraternal and pastoral visits to the OFS National Council of Germany were conducted on May 14-15 by Tibor Kauser, the OFS Minister General, and Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant, at the House of Spiritual Exercises "Haus Klara" in Würzburg. The program included various liturgical celebrations, a meeting with the entire the OFS National Council and then individual meetings with each member, review the registers and the acts, moments of fraternal recreation, etc. The total number of Secular Franciscans in Germany is 1,938, of which 1,840 are active. Those who are sick still help with their prayers and are kept informed through visits, letters, bulletins, etc. There are six regional fraternities, but YouFra is absent.

Germany - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of the OFS National Fraternity of Germany was held from May 15 to 17, at the House of Spiritual Exercises "Haus Klara" in Würzburg, with the participation of 29 chapter members plus observers, four spiritual assistants (one national and three regional), two secular Franciscans guests from the Netherlands and one from Austria. The Chapter was presided over by Tibor Kauser, the OFS General Minister, who was accompanied by Fr. Amando Trujillo Cano, TOR, General Assistant. Mechthild Händler was confirmed National Minister, as well as Gerti Theobald as International Councilor. *The Manual for the Assistance to the OFS and YouFra* has been translated into German by Fr. Georg Scholles, OFM, National Spiritual Assistant, then published and presented by him during the Chapter. Fr. Amando Trujillo presided over the closing Mass, during which Tibor Kauser installed the new Minister and National Council. Some chapter members remained, after the Chapter, for an open conversation with Tibor Kauser and Fr. Amando.

Taiwan - National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Fraternity of Taiwan celebrated its elective chapter on May 23, in Taishan, New Taipei City, near the House of the OFM. The Chapter was presided over by Augustine Yoon, Presidency Councilor (English Area Asia/Oceania) and delegated by Tibor Kauser, the General Minister OFS, who was accompanied by Fr. Thaddeus Kao, OFM, delegate of CAS. 34 of 37 ministers came to the chapter. Theresa Chuang Ping Peng Piao was re-elected OFS National Minister of Taiwan, Joseph Hsu Kuo Chiang was elected International Councilor. To be noted was the excellent preparation of the candidates made by the outgoing National Council with the support of the Assembly, which was attended by all the local councilors. As criteria for being candidates it was established that they must be brothers with perpetual profession for more than five years, that they are consistent with their obligations in fraternity, and that they participate regularly in the meetings of the fraternity.

Costa Rica - National Elective Chapter

The National Elective Chapter of Costa Rica was celebrated from May 22 to 24. It was presided over by Angela Ramos, OFS of Nicaragua, as a delegate of the OFS General Minister, accompanied by Fr. José Orestes Tellez, OFM, delegate of CAS. Frank Quirós Zúñiga was elected National Minister.

Czech Republic – National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter of the Czech Republic was held from June 5 to 7 at Velehrad. It was presided over by Lucia Spodniakova delegated by Tibor Kauser, the OFS General Minister and in the presence of Brother Karol Barran, OFM Cap, of Slovakia, delegate of CAS. Hana Reichsfeldová was elected National Minister and Mária Janáčková, International Councilor.

El Salvador - National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Fraternity of El Salvador celebrated its National Elective Chapter June 12 to 14, in Santa Ana. The Chapter was presided over by Ana Maria Raffo Laos, delegated by Tibor Kauser, the OFS Minister General, accompanied by Fr. Juan Alonzo Pagoada Acosta, OFM, delegate of CAS. The new National Minister and International Councilor is Morena Guadalupe Pérez de Ayala Deleon.

Austria - National Elective Chapter

From June 19 to 21, the OFS National Fraternity in Austria celebrated the National Elective Chapter, in "Santa Chiara" House, managed by the Franciscan Sisters in Vöcklabruck. Attilio Galimberti, member of the Presidency, presided over the Chapter, accompanied by Fr. Georg Scholles, OFM, OFS National Assistant of Germany. It was attended by 32 delegates. Thanks to the efficient organization and the great help given by the National Spiritual Assistants Fr. Leszek Nocuń, OFM Cap, and Fr. Guido Demetz, OFM, and the regional Assistants Fr. Fritz Wenigwieser,

OFM, and Fr. Wolfgang Frühwirth, OFM, everything was conducted very fraternally and without problems. The OFS in Austria consists of 1,356 professed members, present in 65 local fraternities and 5 regional fraternities. After the outgoing Council presented the required reports and reports on the activities of the regional fraternities, the first day ended with a presentation on the General Chapter held in Assisi in November 2014. On the morning of June 20, the Chapter heard a summary of the main presentations given at the General Chapter: "How would you handle a worldwide Order, like the OFS, at all levels?" And the discussion was started with questions which each fraternity must answer. In the afternoon, there was the election of the new National Council. Alfred Obermair was re-elected National Minister and International Councilor, Kaserer Gottfried was elected Vice-Minister and Ewald Kreuzer substitute International Councilor. The day ended with the Eucharistic celebration during which the new National Council was installed. As for the problems of the decreasing number and increasing age of the professed members, Fr. Georg in his homily encouraged the new Board to find new ways to manage the Order and quoted what Pope Francis says in his new encyclical letter "Praised be You", "we walk singing! That our struggles and our concern ... never take away the joy of our hope "(LS 244). The last day, the delegates discussed and gave some guidelines for the new Council, including the name of the National Fraternity that should be "OFS Austria." The Chapter ended with Mass celebrated by Fr. Leszek Nocun.

Ivory Coast - National Elective Chapter

The OFS National Elective Chapter of the Ivory Coast was held on June 20-21 at the Monastery of the Poor Clares of Aboboté - Abidjan. The Chapter was presided over by Adolph Assagba, OFS Togo delegate of the OFS General Minister, Tibor Kauser, in the presence of Brother Simon Pierre Koné, OFM, delegate of CAS. Kizito Avi was elected National Minister, and Yves Jean Marc Odi, International Councilor.

Condolences to the OFS Minister General

On April 25, in Budapest, Ilona Mösszmer of Kauser, mother of Tibor Kauser, the OFS General Minister, returned to the Father's House. Our Conference of General Assistants of the OFS-YouFra, shares in the pain of Tibor and his family. We join in affection and prayer, in the hope of the resurrection of our loved ones, that we all hope to achieve one day.