

**REVIEWING THE SFO RULE**, article by article, with associated questions for sharing. Besides sitting down and making up your own questions for sharing, here are some further possibilities you may wish to choose from:

(Sources you may wish to consult for other questions –

a) To Live as Francis Lived; (St. Anthony Messenger Press, Cincinnati, OH)

b) Called to Follow Christ (Franciscan Press, Quincy, IL)

c) Gospel Living – Teresa Baker, sfo, 1994 (Barbo-Carlson Enterprises, Lindsborg, KS)

Sections marked with d) are notes from Kathleen White, sfo, Our Lady of Indiana Region Unity Day, 1999

- compiler, Fr. John Sullivan, ofm - 2004

***Prologue, part a:***

What is the meaning of “to love” in this context? Is this love primarily a feeling?

How does Francis view us as “mothers” to Jesus?

How does Francis weave the Trinity into this prologue?

When you examine your life, who are the people who gave you your idea of love?

Knowing that Francis does not hesitate to call God his Father; what can God’s parental love mean in your life?

Have you ever thought of Christ as your brother? ...& as your blood brother?

Why does Francis call us “Brothers and Sisters...” and “...in Penance”?

Are we really expected to “hate” our bodies?

***Prologue, part b:***

Why does all personal sin have social consequences?

Do I think of the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a positive celebration of the mercy of God? Is it an act of faith on my part?

What procedure do I use to work on my characteristic fault?

How does spiritual blindness hurt us and deprive us of so much good?

Do we need to offer satisfaction for our own sins and those of others?

***SFO Rule article:***

***art.1*** – What do you consider the primary purpose of the Secular Franciscan Order?

What other purposes might the SFO fulfill?

Does membership in an Order established by the Church call us to changes in our lives?

How do we explain that we are called to develop a spirituality and lifestyle “in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi”?

Who are included in the term: “the Franciscan family”? Do we interact as a family?

Who specifically can become a member of the SFO?

(d) How did you recognize that you were called to follow Francis?

Did a person or event awake you to the call?

What one charism (there are many!!) of Francis speaks the loudest to your spirit?

***art.2*** – Are SFO fraternities to be considered “isolated” and “autonomous”?

Why are SFO members called “secular”?

What does it mean to “make profession”?

What do SFOs profess?

Have I recently reviewed the SFO Ritual for Profession to reflect on those prayers used at the ceremony of my public Profession? Would this be beneficial now?

What is understood by the words “the gospel”, the “Good News”?

How does an Order differ from a parish society?

What efforts should we be making to carry out this SFO promise?

What is meant by the common adage: “From Gospel to Life and Life to the Gospel”?

Is there a starting age limit to becoming an SFO member?

Do I regularly wear the external sign of my membership in this Order – the Tau Cross? Why, or why not?

Do I have the impression that I am only to wear the Tau Cross at our fraternity gatherings?

(d) Does your local fraternity feel connected to any other local fraternities?

Do you feel connected to your regional fraternity? Why, or why not?

How often does your fraternity read and/or study the SFO Rule?

Do you, individually, read/study/meditate upon the Rule? When was the last time you did so?

**art.3-** Do we realize that our SFO historical roots reach back to the time of St. Francis?

In the course of the past 800 years, the SFO Rule has undergone several approved revisions; do you know the year of Church approval for the present text of our Rule?

How would you describe the organization of the SFO in the world, and in your region?

Who are called to serve the fraternities of SFOs organizationally?

How do these people get elected?

What are the offices held in each fraternity council?

Clearly the SFO is under the guidance of the Catholic Church; how is this manifested?

Who established this Catholic Church? Do you ever reflect on Sacred Scripture passages that deal with this authority given by Christ?

In what ways can you say the Church is “human/divine”?

As members of the Body of Christ today, what demands are put upon us by our Baptisms?

How important is my input today into the Body of Christ?

(d) We have many documents to refer to when the need arises: The Rule; the General Constitutions; National Statutes; Regional Guidelines.

Has your council (local or regional) needed to refer to these documents to solve a problem, clarify a procedure, or emphasize a point? Does each member of your council have a copy of these documents to guide them in their duties?

Do you own a copy of these documents? Does your Fraternity library have copies of these documents?

If they do not, do you know where you can get a copy?

**art.4** – In the practice of any religion (such as the Catholic Church) , what is the function of various spiritualities?

This first sentence is a digest of the SFO vocation, which is?

How serious of a commitment is this for the SFO member?

Do we daily direct our lives using the teaching of Christ that He is the way, the truth, and the life?

Do we depend on all three Persons of the Trinity, as indicated here?

(d) What is your definition of “observe the Gospel.” How do you observe “careful reading of the gospel”?

In what ways can we go “from gospel to life, and life to gospel”?

**art.5** – Can you list the four basic means for the SFO member to encounter Christ?

Each is a gift; do I use all of these? How?

If Christ is the center and meaning of everything, can you apply this to everyday life? – the

videos I watch? the TV programs I enjoy? the books I read? the conversations I have?

Has Francis’ great love and reverence for the Eucharist inspired me to a deeper Eucharistic life?

How might I let this improve my life?

What did Francis mean by calling himself the “herald of the Great King”?

(d) Who are your brothers and sisters? What scripture are you familiar with on a daily basis?

What do you consider your role as a member of the Church?

What liturgical activity(ies) do you participate in? Enjoy the most? the Least?

How do you feel when you accept the Host into your hands/mouth?

**art.6** – Do I treasure the powerful gifts given to me by God when I received the Sacrament of my Baptism? What happened then? Can I recall some elements of that ceremony?

When I was anointed with the Oil of Chrism at my Baptism, what was the purpose of that anointing? Do I live it out?

What three necessary and privileged roles with Christ are given to us at our baptisms?

What commitment does my Baptism call me to?

As Secular Franciscans, how do we commit ourselves to “rebuild the Church”?

In what ways are we called today to be “witnesses”?

What reverence for the Church did Francis have?

How can the Secular Franciscan Order cooperate with the stated aims of the Church’s teaching on social justice? How do I do my part?

How can the local fraternity work toward these aims?

(d) Francis had great love and respect, and showed obedience to the pope, bishops, and priests. As Franciscans, we are called to the same. We may not always agree with them; can you give examples of how these disagreements can be handled in a way that rebuilds the Church, rather than tears it down?

**art.7** – What is the meaning of “conversion” and “penance” in the Franciscan tradition?

How frequently is this needed?

For the Franciscan, can we say “embracing the Gospel” is our “penance”?

Do we recognize and appreciate the Sacrament of Reconciliation as a great celebration of the

Father's mercy?

In the process of conversion, what are the purposes for penances?

Do penances serve a positive or a negative purpose?

How can we say that there will always be room for conversion in our lives?

Can I single out one area of my life which needs more discipline on my part?

Do I also have to make atonement and reparation for any past wrongs?

An act of true contrition requires two basic ingredients; which are...?

(d) Do you remember significant conversion experiences in your life? (besides the daily ones?) If you are comfortable, can you share the experience with the group?

Listed are several "tools" for renewal.

What has been your experience with any/all of these tools? Christ Renews His Parish, RCIA; Charismatic Renewal; Cursillo; Koinonia; Bible Study; Small group faith sharing; Marriage Encounter; Retreat week/weekend; other.

**art.8** – What does "worship" mean?

Why do we say that "prayer and contemplation" are at the heart of our faith?

Can I describe how my prayer has changed through the years since my youth?

In my daily prayers, do I follow the expectation of the Catholic Church (CCCh#2699) that I use three expressions of prayer: vocal, meditative, and contemplative? Why, or why not?

Have I been neglectful in such styles of prayer?

When I pray, is God just to be the "listener" to me?

When and how often do I become "the listener" in my prayers?

Do I have a clear procedure for praying each day? Should I?

What should I be doing to improve my prayer-time?

How do I pray with the Scriptures (e.g. Lectio Divina; the Liturgy of Hours)? – Should I?

What is meditation?

What is contemplation?

How does contemplation differ from meditation?

What is the purpose and advantage of praying the structured "Liturgy of the Hours"?

(d) Ideally, SFOs should attend daily Mass. How often are you able to attend daily Mass?

How often do you stop by church for a visit with our Eucharistic Lord? Do you pray the Liturgy of the Hours at your fraternity meetings? And how often between meetings?

**art.9** – How have we developed the understanding that Mary is our mother?

Why is Mary titled the Mother of the Franciscan Order?

What special virtue(s) do you find that Mary teaches us?

Can you recall anything associated with Francis that would indicate his "indescribable love" for Mary?

Knowing that in Mary's life joys co-existed with suffering, how might we find joy even in the sufferings and problems of daily life?

How does this article of our Rule ask us to express our ardent love for Mary?

What is the “Franciscan Crown”?

(d) In imitation of Mary, are we open to His “every word and call”? What are some ways we hear His call? How did you hear the call to the Secular Franciscan Order?

**art.10** – Why do we call Christ’s obedience “redemptive”?

Does Christ’s obedience set the pattern for my own obedience to the Father?

Is it true to say that each of our vocational ways of life calls for obedience to God?

How might we witness to the poor and crucified Christ in our own lives?

Does witnessing for Christ even include difficulties and persecutions?

What has been my experience in wearing the Tau-Cross in public places?

How do I handle: ingratitude; treachery; betrayal of friendship; apparent failures; ridicule; mockery; physical agony; spiritual desolation?

Do these sometimes take us to the cross with Christ?

(d) We each have different circumstances: spouse, parent, grandparent, single, doctor, file clerk, bus driver, FBI agent, retired, student, unemployed (the possibilities go on and on...) Are you aware of times you faithfully fulfill these duties... Of times you do not? And in each of these circumstances, can we honestly say: “I witnessed to Christ today by...”?

**art.11** – Is our model in gospel living, following Francis, the poor and humble life of Mary & Jesus? Should it be? How can this be done in a practical way?

How do some determine “a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods”?

How do some choose to “simplify their material needs”?

Do I distinguish between my “needs” and my “wants” in practical daily events?

When we use our resources, do we do it in the spirit of being “stewards .... of the goods received for the benefit of God’s children”?

Do we use our time wisely?

Do we exercise power unfairly on others?

The word “humble” is also used here; what is humility?

(d) Stuff!!! I have too much stuff!!!! But my problem is that I feel great guilt in throwing things away, because I think ‘someday’ someone is going to need it and I will be able to supply it!

What do you have too much of? What are you doing about it? What are you having trouble detaching yourself from? Are you using your stuff wisely for God’s service and glory, or for your own?

**art.12** – What is the scriptural meaning of “purity of heart”?

How can this “purity of heart” be said to give us freedom?

What activities do you like to think you can do without God’s help?

Which saying of St. Francis on humility strikes you most forcibly?

Do I credit God with the talents I have and the good I do?

How does “to love” differ from “to admire”?

How do you celebrate your “finiteness”?

(d) It’s not easy to set oneself free to love everyone. The beautiful are loveable, as are the kind and the clean. Can we... do we.... love the unattractive, the mean, and the dirty, too?

In this context, could I have loved Hitler? .... Do I love Saddam Hussein? ...

**art.13** – How flexible are we in accepting differing personalities and people of diverse cultural backgrounds?

Do we like only those who like us?

Do I recognize the cultural conflicts that come from differing races? Give examples....

What efforts might be made to alleviate the tensions among cultural groups to keep our focus on Christian values?

Does it take courage to help develop peace among neighbors and others? Any examples?

What efforts might be made for those who are truly under-privileged in today’s American society?

Do any of your tax dollars help alleviate struggles of the poor?

Do we accept the value of each person as being that of Christ?

(d) Ask yourself – what features of Jesus does God the Father see in me? What features of Jesus do I look for – see – love – in others?

Do you feel a sense of community with your fraternity? your Parish? Have you seen – worked to improve – lowly conditions for others? How? If we have not experienced the lowly, is it our obligation to seek them out?

**art.14** – As a Secular Franciscan, where is “the Christian spirit of service” calling me this year? ...calling us as a fraternity?

Since Christ is our model for service, how did He go about it?

What did Christ teach us about the way we serve?

Does this also include the operation of our local and regional fraternities?

Do I neglect fulfilling the needs that I should be responding to in our fraternities?

(d) Can I be more sacrificing for the sake of others than I presently am?

How fraternal is your world? Your family? Your workplace? What do you do to make it more fraternal?

Can you see a difference since you started as an SFO? Do you feel called to a spirit of service? In what ways?

**art.15** – What is the relationship between justice and peace?

What did Pope Paul VI mean when he said: “If you want peace, work for justice.”

How important is this principle?

Where does an SFO start being “an apostle for peace and justice”?

Can we determine any forms of injustice right in our own backyard?

Do I ever consider issues of justice when I make my choice in voting?

Has my faith actually influenced how I vote?

Do I sometimes find my language as prejudicial toward some cultural groups without sufficient reason?

How does terrorism seriously violate the rights of individuals?

How does abortion, which our laws allow, parallel terrorism?

(d) Does your fraternity actively educate your members on the Commissions?

Do you have individual “commissioners” appointed for these areas?

What are the 6 SFO commissions? Can I name them?

They are an area of focus within our Franciscan vocation based on the SFO Rule, specifically: peace and justice, work, ecology, family, youth, and formation.

These areas of focus are easy to recognize in our everyday living of our Rule.

Peace and Justice ... How does the testimony of your life put you in the forefront of promoting justice? What do you do? What more can you do?

Have you ever made a definite choice that favored justice over the “easy” way?

**art.16** – Do I just tolerate having to work, or do I really see it as “a gift”?

What useful values do I see in the various types of work I am involved in?

Do these motives enliven my spirit? If not, why not?

Can I identify how my various types of work and efforts are really designed to be of service to others, and not just to and for myself in a selfish manner?

Do I see my efforts expended on work as something constructive?

Do I work even when I know it will not be appreciated?

Why is it essential for the Christian to view work as “being of service”?

(d) Do you consider your work (job) as a gift? Do you take the opportunity to let your work BE a gift? What work would you consider your ideal? What work would you refuse to do, no matter what? Does the fact that you are Franciscan affect your work? Do those you work with know you are Franciscan? (Without blatantly saying “I am a Franciscan.”) Has your Christianity, Catholicism, and Franciscanism ever been the cause of you changing jobs? Changing circumstance at your present job?

**art.17**- Is it their responsibility that parents be models and guides for their children?

How can healthy sharing between spouses help create a Christian atmosphere in their home?

How do parents determine what policies of discipline they should be following?

How do the graces from the Sacrament of Marriage help parents?

How do we help be “attentive to the vocation of each child”?

Do we support, encourage and help in the marriage preparation program in our parish?

Do we perhaps as a family pray for those whose planned marriages have been announced in the parish bulletin – for example, at our meal time?

Is it appropriate to have Christian pictures and symbols on the walls of our homes?

(d) What are some of the ways we can cultivate peace within our family?

In what ways are we unfaithful to our family? How do you, as an individual or as a family member – cultivate respect for life? For those who are married: How do we, as couples, witness to our community that we share love?

It is not always a “joy-filled” journey – raising children. How can we nurture that joy when things go in a different direction than we had hoped?

**art.18** – What is the difference between showing respect for animals and treating them as if they are humans?

How do we take steps to see that we do not promote exploitation of nature? By the way, what is “exploitation”?

Do humans and animals have equal rights?

Do you know any movements and TV programs that promote such equality?

Are humans just biologically improved animals, as some proclaim?

How do you understand “universal kin-ship” as important to your life? What is the basis for such terminology?

Can clothing purchased from (as well as donated to) groups like GoodWill make us more friendly with the earth’s resources?

(d) Universal kinship... Brother shark? Sister Slug? Brother man-eating tiger? Sister deadly virus? Brother Hurricane? Sister Earthquake? It is easy to think of Sister Bunny and Brother Puppy. It is harder to think of the more ferocious as our kinship. What are we doing, individually and collectively, to experience that kinship with all of creation?

Do we care for the earth (our little corner)? Do we own pets and treat them lovingly?

Have we saved any animals from cruelty?

Do we recycle, use less, and refuse extra packaging?

Do we bring our canvas or plastic bags with us to the store?

(There are so many ways we can LIVE this article of the Rule.)

**art.19** – Following Christ’s teaching in the Beatitudes, we are called to be “peace-makers”.

How do we accomplish this?

Have I examined the several recommendations listed in the “Peace Prayer” for how I am to behave as a peace-maker? How often do I review those situations I this Prayer, one by one, and consider how each applies to my present living? Should I use this list as a daily guide?

Can I always be at peace in my union with God?

How seriously do I take the demands of the “Peace Prayer of St. Francis”?

Do we appreciate the implications of being members of the Communion of Saints?

(d) Why do you think that the same article that calls us to peace and joy, also speaks of Sister Death? Do you feel peace and joy when you encounter Sister Death in others? ...When you think of your own encounter with Sister Death?

**art.20-21-22-23-24-25** - Some people question why a program committed to living the Gospel needs to have all this structure; why is this reasonable and needed?

What is your definition of a fraternity? Does this definition coincide with your Rule?

What is the purpose of the fraternity council? ...of the spiritual assistant?

Why must we be willing to serve the fraternity by accepting positions on the council (through nominations/elections)?

Why does being open to election nominations in the fraternity take humility?

What are the many purposes for the common fund?

Do I make serious contributions to it?

What options exist for selecting a local spiritual assistant?

(d) We probably have known someone who has gone through initial formation, been professed, and never returned to fraternity meetings. What can we do, as formation team members, to emphasize and fully express to candidates that profession is permanent? What have we been offering to our members? Have our regular fraternity meetings been spiritually nourishing, and giving sufficient time (at least one hour) to Franciscan spirituality reflection topics – the Rule, St. Francis, and his spirituality?

What kind of ongoing formation does our fraternity use?

Does our fraternity develop a budget, and do the members show sufficient monthly support for the activities and needs of the local fraternity?

Have our members shown a positive attitude toward being potential candidates in the triennial elections for officers? Why, or why not? Can this be changed?

How have we developed our recruiting program, and our initial formation programs?

Do I volunteer to help in these matters?

**art.26** – What are the various levels of Secular Franciscan Order structure?

What is the purpose for these various levels of fraternities?

What is the purpose of the fraternal visitation and the pastoral visitation?

Do I personally take part in regional activities – Franciscan meetings, retreats, social gatherings?

Why should I? What benefits are there – to me, and to others?

Has our fraternity reviewed the written results of the pastoral visitation and fraternal visitations?

What recommendations did they make? Did we do anything about these recommendations?

(d) Asking for spiritual assistance and receiving spiritual assistance are two different things. Many fraternities are operating without spiritual assistance because of the transfer of or lack of friars. Some fraternities thrive and grow because of the magnetism of the friar/spiritual assistant; when he is transferred, the fraternity dies.

What has been your experience with spiritual assistance for your fraternity?

What do you see as the answer to the lack of First Order spiritual assistance?

How did your fraternity prepare for its last (pastoral and fraternal) visitation?

How did your fraternity grow as a result of the visitation?