

## Pat's Formation Conference November, 2023

### Introduction: *Asking the tough questions*

#### *How to deal with difficult fraternity situations*

From time-to-time a; fraternities face difficult situations and/or have uncomfortable questions to ask—and to address. This is not something particular to OFS fraternities but some of the issues are. Facing these issues with openness, honesty, and charity, ie: love, heads off deeper and more complicated problems in the future. Sometimes fraternity difficulties are reasons people leave fraternity--- and the order. How we address these issues is crucial to maintaining authentic fraternal life.

#### ***The Issues:***

Let's look at three areas of difficulties:

Fraternity gatherings

Initial Formation

Leadership—not just the Council

#### **1. Fraternity gatherings:** to name a few...

Divisiveness

Interrupting and Cross talk

Easily and frequently getting off topic

Some one has all the answers

Lack of participation ei: set up/cleanup, not prepared for ongoing formation, not helping with fraternity events

Spotty attendance

**What else?**

## **2. Initial Formation:**

Does not come prepared for the class

Does not have clear signs of a vocation to the OFS

Frequent absences

Lack of Sacraments or irregularities

**What else?**

## **3. Leadership:**

Council member not fulfilling duties

Frequent absences from Council meetings

Monopolizing the floor

Lack of knowledge of the OFS documents

Can't get members to accept nominations

Difficulty getting a slate for an election

**What else?**

## How to address:

### 1. Council must identify the issue

\*Be specific...this can be a challenge as everyone may see the issue from a different angle The whole Council needs to give input.

\*Need consensus

\*Write out the issue... do let it be vague. A vague issue cannot be effectively addressed!!

\*Write side or contributing factors

*\* It is important that the entire fraternity is involved in the process*

NOTE: is this truly a fraternity issue or is it YOUR issue??

### 2. Prayer... the most critical element

The whole Council ---the whole fraternity—needs to pray about the issue.

This not a quick Hail Mary!! Rather, time spent listening to the Holy Spirit.

\*Everyone needs to commit to prayer

F/U with asking what is the outcome of discernment..... what did the members hear in prayer....not what did you think about

### 3. Take time for Holy Reflection

Give some time to the issue, time between the steps.

It is rare that an issue will need an immediate response.

### 4. Step back

Look up OFS and Church Resources: Ritual, Rule GC, Nat'l Statutes, CCC, Scripture, etc

Try to see the issue from other points of view.

This is where the council members and the fraternity is of great help

### 5. Draw up the plan with a timeline for evaluating the effectiveness and changing the plan if necessary. This is done by the Council or the entire fraternity.

### **Beyond steps 1-5:**

#### ***Fraternity meeting issue:***

After steps 1-5 The fraternity must be involved in evaluating the plans effectiveness and contribute the rewrite of the plan.

For issues that involve an individual, the minister and a council member,

or minister and fraternity member should approach the person privately to discuss the issue with charity, and honesty. Calmness and humility are necessary.

***Formation issue:***

\*The Formation Director and team member or council member approach the individual in private. Depending on the issue, a meeting before the Council may be indicated. Be open minded, put aside ALL preconceived ideas, plans, and lectures...be calm, nice, and humble.

\*Begin with a positive statement about the person.

\*Ask open ended questions...ie: "tell me about..."; "how do you understand..."

\*Again, a timeline for remediation is necessary.

\*Write up the interaction. Present it to the council, and a copy must remain in the person's permanent formation file, **and** the Council notes. A letter should also be written to the person with all the pertinent information.

\*Sacraments...help the person find out how to complete Sacraments, or correct any irregularities. Parish RCIA or resources from the Diocese is a good starting place.

**Leadership:**

1. Address the Council member's difficulty, again 1 on 1, or 2 on 1.

Use open ended questions.

## 2. Elections

Begin at least a year prior with prayer, open discussion with the fraternity.

How will this fraternity continue as a Fraternity in the future and how will we get there? ***This discussion and the resultant answers cannot be vague.***

Leadership is a 3 year term and then ends. A second term is not required. Is the Holy Spirit asking for 3 years from you??

Review GC: articles 30,31, 32, 49-53

The greatest assets to leadership are consistent prayer and to keep yourself organized. \*\*write out a year of what is happening and needs to happen in the fraternity. This may help others to see that stewardship of the fraternity is not so daunting.

What is Stewardship of a fraternity?

It is how we care for one another. Are we open to the needs of the other?

Do we celebrate together, recognize each other?

Do we as a fraternity pray for vocations and for each other?

Do we come ready to participate, fully prepared?

Do we pay attention to what is coming up for events (the calendar slide information)

Do we review our fraternal life each year?

Is our fraternity a living shared experience of the Gospel?

Does our Fraternity embody the person of Christ?

Do the members go beyond "duty"? Article 30 of the GC we are all co responsible for the life of the fraternity: everyone helps, from setting up the room to contributing to the common fund, bringing meal items, or taking a turn in service??

Those who have served in elected or appointed leadership also need a break, to rest. (hermitage)

A leader does not do everything.

Understands the value of prayer and does it.

Has a deep spiritual life

Tries to balance personal/family/ and fraternal life.

### 3. What if you cannot get a slate?

Prayer should start way in advance. What is the Will of God for this fraternity; and prayer for all to be open to the Will of God.

Make sure all members know they have the support of the current leadership.

**Associate and intentional members...** every organization has them.

Associate—just want to be around people like you, or the friars or the facility. They are committed to being seen and some help, some prayer life but not a deep conversion.

Intentional--- are convinced of the validity of the vocation and that God is calling them. They work hard and seek deep conversion and an authentic prayer life.

Both are good people and love God and St Francis...they have different reasons for joining/being Franciscan...and maybe not a vocation to the OFS.

This makes fraternal life difficult at times. Great care must be taken to properly discern with the person if they have a true calling to the OFS life.

**We must remember our fire of the First Fervor.**



We were excited to become Secular Franciscans. We studied with enthusiasm; we discussed Franciscan ideals with excitement. So, what happened?

All first fervor fire dies down over time. But not all this fire goes out. The key is prayer life, becoming fully engaged in the fraternity (this may mean at other levels too). They never stop studying ...scripture, Franciscan writings, Church writings, lives of the saints Franciscan and others. They surrender to the Will of God repeatedly. They ask the help of God, Blessed Virgin Mary, the angels, and saints. And they accept the help and put it into practice. They frequent the Sacraments. When life becomes drudgery, they surrender to God.

Fraternity "ages, " does not have vocations or those in Formation/newly professed are not eligible for election.

The Regional Council should set up help from the District Councilor or other member to take over the responsibility of leadership. The fraternity exists without a council of its own per se until such time as new members are eligible for the council. When it is clear this will not happen, deactivation must be addressed. This discussion should take place years

prior to the event and perhaps in small doses. The members should be introduced to and incorporated into nearby fraternities. When this is not possible, the members must be assured they will remain OFS in good standing with all the rights and especially spiritual privileges. Members must not be forgotten.

Having this discussion requires calmness, patience, understanding, open-ended questions and statements, and allow for a time of grieving. Putting off this discussion is uncharitable and provokes great anxiety. Deactivation is not a sign of failure on the part of the members. Remember that a deactivated fraternity exists for 100 years and may be reactivated when membership conditions are met.

#### Conclusion:

The most important part of addressing difficult issues is prayer and having the courage, charity, and humility to be open to the Holy Spirit and follow His lead.

