

2001 SFO General Constitutions

Title II

Entrance into the Order and Formation

Article 37

1. *Rule 23* Membership in the Order is attained through a time of initiation, a time of formation, and the profession of the Rule.
2. The journey of formation, which should develop throughout life, begins with entrance into the fraternity. Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation and always attentive to collaboration with Him, those responsible for formation are: the candidate, the entire fraternity, the council, the formation director, and the spiritual assistant.
3. The brothers and sisters are responsible for their own formation, developing in an ever more perfect way the vocation received from the Lord. The fraternity is called to help the brothers and sisters in this journey by means of a warm welcome, prayer, and example.
4. The elaboration and adoption of means of formation, adapted to the local situations and offered as a help to those responsible for formation in the individual fraternities, belong to the national and regional councils in common agreement.

The Time of Initiation

Article 38

1. *Rule 23* The time of initiation is a phase preparatory to the true and proper time of formation and is intended for the discernment of the vocation and for the reciprocal acquaintance between the fraternity and the aspiring member. It should guarantee the freedom and the seriousness of entrance into the SFO.
2. ***The duration of the time of initiation and the forms employed in its development are established by the national statutes.***
3. It belongs to the fraternity council to decide possible exemptions to this time of initiation, keeping in mind the guidelines of the national council.

Admission to the Order

Article 39

1. *Rule 23* the request for admission to the Order is presented by the aspirant to the minister of a local or personal fraternity by a formal act, in writing if possible.
2. Conditions for admission are: to profess the Catholic faith, to live in communion with the Church, to be of good moral standing, and to show clear signs of a vocation ^[26].
3. The council of the fraternity decides collegially on the request, gives a formal answer to the aspirant, and communicates this to the fraternity.
4. The rite of admission is performed according to the Ritual ^[27]. The act is to be registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

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The Time of Formation

Article 40

1. Rule 23 *The time of formation lasts at least one year. The national statutes can establish a longer period.* The purpose of this period is the maturation of the vocation, the experience of the evangelical life in fraternity, and a better knowledge of the Order. This formation should be carried out with frequent meetings for study and prayer and with concrete experiences of service and of apostolate. These meetings should be held, as far as possible and opportune, in common with the candidates of other fraternities.

2. The candidates are guided to read and meditate on Sacred Scripture, to come to know the person and writings of Francis and of Franciscan spirituality, and to study the Rule and Constitutions. They are trained in a love for the Church and acceptance of her teaching. The laity practice living their secular commitment in the world in an evangelical way.

3. Participation in the meetings of the local fraternity is indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life.

4. A style of teaching which is Franciscan in character and which fits the mentality of the persons concerned should be adopted.

The Profession or Promise of Evangelical Life

Article 41

1. Rule 23 having completed the time of initial formation, the candidate submits to the minister of the local fraternity a request to make his or her profession. Having heard the formation director and the spiritual assistant, the fraternity council decides by secret ballot on the admission to profession, gives its reply to the candidate, and informs the fraternity.

2. The conditions for the profession or promise of evangelical life are: attainment of the age established by the national statutes; active participation in the time of formation as established by the national statutes; the consent of the council of the local fraternity.

3. Where it is held to be opportune to lengthen the time of formation, it must not be extended to more than a year beyond the time established by the national statutes.

Article 42

1. Profession is the solemn ecclesial act by which the candidate, remembering the call received from Christ, renews the baptismal promises and publicly affirms his or her personal commitment to live the Gospel in the world according to the example of Francis and following the Rule of the SFO.

2. Rule 23 Profession incorporates the candidate into the Order and is by its nature a perpetual commitment. Perpetual profession, because of objective and specific pedagogical reasons, may be preceded by a temporary profession, renewable annually. The total time of temporary profession may not be longer than three years ^[28].

3. Profession is accepted by the minister of the local fraternity or by his or her delegate in the name of the Church and of the SFO. The rite is carried out according to the norms of the Ritual ^[29].

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4. Profession does not only commit those professed to the fraternity, but also in the same way it commits the fraternity to be concerned with their human and religious well-being.
5. The act of profession is registered and preserved in the records of the fraternity.

Article 43

The national statutes establish: — *Rule 23* the minimum age for profession which, however, may not be less than eighteen years completed; — the distinctive sign of membership in the Order (the “Tau” or other Franciscan symbol).

Ongoing Formation

Article 44

1. Begun by the preceding stages, the formation of the brothers and sisters takes place in a permanent and continuous way. It should be understood as an aid in the conversion of each and everyone and in the fulfillment of their proper mission in the Church and in society.
2. The Fraternity has the duty to give special attention to the formation of the newly professed and of the temporarily professed, to help them become fully mature in their vocation and develop a true sense of belonging.
3. Ongoing formation – accomplished by means of courses, gatherings, and the sharing of experience – aims to assist the brothers and sisters:— *Rule 4* in listening to and meditating on the Word of God, “going from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel”;— in reflecting on events in the Church and in society in the light of faith and with the help of the documents of the teaching Church, consequently taking consistent positions;— in discerning and deepening the Franciscan vocation by studying the writings of Saint Francis, Saint Clare and Franciscan authors.

Promotion of Vocations

Article 45

1. The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves. The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members.
2. Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the Secular Franciscan vocation.

Notes:

26. See Can. 316.
27. See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 10 ff.; Chapt. I.
28. See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 18.
29. See *Ritual SFO*, Preface n. 13 ff.; Part I, Chapter II.
30. See *Constitutions 8; 1 Celano* 103.

From the *2002 Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, USA*

(Officially approved and in effect as of July 4, 2003)

Article 19 Formation

1. Orientation

- a. **Orientation** is a time for determining a person's interest, eligibility and disposition to enter into the initial formation process [cf. *Guidelines for Initial Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States* (hereafter *Guidelines for Initial Formation*), page 25].
- b. **The period of orientation shall consist of not less than three (3) months.**

2. Initial Formation

- a. **Inquiry** – the period of Inquiry, which begins with the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming [cf. Ritual, page 9], **shall consist of not less than six (6) months.**
- b. **Candidacy** – the period of Candidacy, which begins with the Rite of Admission [cf. Ritual, page 11], **shall consist of not less than eighteen (18) months and not more than thirty-six (36) months.**
- c. All persons in initial formation, in addition to attending their formation sessions, must participate in the meetings of the local fraternity as this is an indispensable presupposition for initiation into community prayer and into fraternity life [cf. *General Constitutions*, article #40.3].
- d. To be admitted to the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States, a person must be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church (i.e., having received the Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation/Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) in addition to being an actively practicing Catholic.

3. Profession

- a. The minimum age for perpetual profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is twenty-one (21) years.
- b. The minimum age for temporary profession as a Secular Franciscan in the United States is eighteen (18) years.

4. Ongoing Formation

Ongoing formation is the responsibility of all professed members consonant with article #44 of the *General Constitutions*.

5. Form and Methodology

- a. The form (i.e., content and process; cf. *General Constitutions*, #38.2) to be employed in both initial and ongoing formation is that found in the *Guidelines for Initial Formation*.

From the 2002 Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, USA (Continued)

- b. The methodology employed in formation should be both interactive and experiential in nature [cf. *General Constitutions*, #40.4].
- c. Opportunities for fraternities to meet together for the purposes of common on-going and initial formation shall occur whenever possible at all levels of fraternity [cf. *General Constitutions*, #40.1].

6. Provisions for Remote Initial Formation

In those rare instances in which a person is legitimately impeded from participating in the normal formation process of a local fraternity, recourse may be had to the *Guidelines for Remote Initial Formation in the United States* as adopted by the National Executive Council in June 2000.