

**CHAPTER 1**  
**FRANCISCAN LIFE IN OUR INSTITUTE - NATURE AND PURPOSE**

1. Our Institute of Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception, founded by Mother Mary Ignatius Hayes, is an apostolic Institute of pontifical right. As members of this Institute, we
- follow the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis according to our Constitutions
  - live our public profession of chastity, poverty and obedience in community
  - honor Mary Immaculate as our special patroness *EN 49,69*
  - are sent to serve the Church especially in its poor and needy members *AG 42*

so that in all things we may give glory to God and thus fulfill our purpose as an Institute within the Church.

2. As Sisters of Penance following the spirit of Francis, we
- seek the positive and joyous meaning of daily dying to self and rising to new life in Christ *RTOR 1:2*
  - commit ourselves to call one another to change of heart through our active living of the Gospel in community
  - proclaim the peace and reconciliation of the Lord both by our words and by the harmony and simplicity of our lives.

Thus through our life of continuous conversion our baptismal consecration finds a new and deeper expression as we respond in praise and gratitude to God who has first called us. *PC 5*

**OUR CONSECRATED LIFE**

- Chastity**
3. Our life of consecrated chastity is
- a special gift of divine grace coming to us from the Father's love *LG 42*
  - the particular way that we as religious are called to live the Holy Gospel.

It enables us to imitate more closely in our own lives the Son of God incarnate and his Virgin Mother.

4. Called to this special consecration of our lives, we
- devote ourselves to the Lord with our whole heart *1Cor 7:34*  
*PC12*
  - commit ourselves to the Church for the service of all people
  - signify the union of love between Christ and his Church and bear witness to the reality of the life to come. *ET 13*  
*LG 44*

5. Ever seeking to realize in our lives the words of Christ "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God", we
- grow daily in personal love of Christ through prayer and frequent reception of the sacraments

- invoke the aid and intercession of Mary taking her as our model in virtue for she is the most faithful image of the holiness called for by Jesus
  - strengthen ourselves through sacrifice and self-discipline, inseparable from our life of conversion.
6. By vowing consecrated chastity, we bind ourselves to observe celibacy and to live chastely in a complete dedication to Christ and to his kingdom.
7. We take advantage of the means that are available to promote health of mind and body. Aware that the psychological and emotional needs of each sister vary with age, health and the pressure of particular circumstances, we support one another in community in a spirit of love and sisterly concern.
8. We establish relationships of understanding and trust within the community and encourage bonds of personal friendship as indispensable for each sister in the life of consecrated celibacy.

### **Poverty**

9. Living the Gospel life in the spirit of St. Francis, we
- follow the lowliness and poverty of our Lord Jesus Christ who became poor that we might become rich by his poverty
  - see every created thing as a gift of God's love, a reflection of the Creator's infinite bounty
  - free ourselves from attachment to both material possessions and our gifts of mind and body, depending solely on the goodness and mercy of God.

Thus we are more available for the service of God and the kingdom of God which we must seek above all else.

10. Franciscan poverty is deeply rooted in our life of conversion. Poor in spirit, we
- accept from the Father in humble confidence the circumstances in which we find ourselves
  - give joyful thanks to the Lord for the good that his power accomplishes through us and through others
  - place our trust in God our Creator and the source of all good.
11. Our profession of poverty in community is an essential part of our life of penance and
- places us in a relationship of interdependence with our sisters
  - requires of us the generous sharing of our time, our strength, our talents for the welfare of all
  - obliges us to a right use of the goods of the earth which we share with all people present and future.
12. Brought into solidarity with all poor by our commitment to poverty we
- accept work as a necessary part of our life

*Test.  
ER 5*

*LR 5  
LR 3*

- live in an unassuming manner, without seeking preference or privilege

aware that our lives of voluntary poverty are enriched by communion with those who are poor by necessity.

13. By the vow of poverty, we renounce the right of using and disposing legitimately of temporal goods without the permission of the lawful minister, while retaining the right of ownership and inheritance of patrimony. Patrimony is understood to be any property owned by a person on entering the convent, or any property which she inherits from family or those who replace family.
14. Before making first profession the sister cedes the administration of personal property and decides regarding its use and usufruct according to the norms of Church law. Such acts of cession and disposition may be changed or modified with the permission of the General Minister. In urgent cases the permission of the Governance Circle Leader or even that of the local minister is sufficient. Before perpetual profession the sister makes a will which is civilly valid. If after making this cession and disposition, the sister becomes, under any title, the possessor of any other property, she must make provision for the newly acquired property in the manner explained above
15. Fifteen years after perpetual profession a sister may renounce acquired patrimony. This is done only after careful consideration and with the permission of the General Minister.
16. Any money a sister receives as salary, pension, insurance benefit of any kind, or gift, becomes the property of the community which supplies the needs of each sister according to the procedures laid down in the particular governance circle. It is the responsibility of each sister to judge her own needs and to avoid the accumulation of unnecessary goods.
17. Each Governance Circle Leader in accordance with the norms of the relevant Governance Plan makes provision for the individual use of money by the sisters, in conformity with the penitential lifestyle we profess.
18. Mindful that all have a right to a just share of the riches of the earth and that it is our duty to do our utmost to alleviate the hardships of the modern age, we live sparingly so that our communities may contribute to the needs of the Church and the support of those poorer than ourselves.
19. In accordance with Gospel justice we fulfill our work commitments conscientiously, adhere to the terms of lawful contracts and pay just wages. In so doing we bear witness to the human meaning of work carried out in liberty of spirit and restored to its true nature as a source of sustenance and service.

### **Obedience**

20. By professing religious obedience we
  - make a total offering of our will to God in imitation of Christ who was fully committed to the accomplishment of the Father's saving plan
  - recognize in faith that our lives are directed by God's loving providence
  - acknowledge the authority with which Christ has endowed his Church
  - are attentive to the promptings of the Holy Spirit who leads us to the knowledge of the will of God.

Thus, our constant fidelity in seeking God's will contributes to the holiness of the Church and to the spread of the kingdom of Christ.

21. Authority and obedience are complementary aspects of our participation in Christ's offering; therefore
- those in positions of authority imitate the Lord who came to serve and all who respond in obedience unite themselves with his submission to the Father's will
  - as a community we seek to discern the will of God through prayer and dialogue.

Through the bond of obedience, the community is securely bound to the fulfilment of God's will and accomplishes more effectively its mission in the Church.

22. As Franciscans, living obedience as the highest expression of our poverty, we
- surrender ourselves completely to the divine plan of love
  - open our hearts to God and to our sisters in availability and service
  - defer to one another rather than seek esteem for ourselves.
23. Freely embracing a life of religious obedience, we commit ourselves in faith and love to fulfill the directives of our lawful ministers insofar as they are in accord with the Gospel, the law of the Church, our Rule and Constitutions. We likewise oblige ourselves to observe Chapter enactments and community decisions.
24. A sister is gravely obliged to obey in force of the vow when the minister gives her an express command in virtue of holy obedience. Any such formal command must always be given in writing, or in the presence of two witnesses. In virtue of the vow, the sister owes obedience also to the Holy Father as the Supreme Superior of all religious.
25. Each sister has the responsibility of participating actively in community discernment of the will of God, and of consulting and collaborating in trustful dialogue with those in authority in regard to personal decisions. The sister accepts in faith the decisions made or confirmed by the minister, and supports her in prayer as she strives to lead the community.

## CHAPTER II

### OUR LIFE WITH GOD - CALL AND RESPONSE

26. God calls us into the Franciscan family to take possession of us and consecrate us to continue Christ's saving mission. God continually forms and directs us through the action of the Spirit in our life which
- unfolds gradually from the moment of first awareness of this call to final encounter in death

*Phil 1:5,6*

- is revealed in prayer and through the circumstances and events of life
  - is mediated by persons who help us to perceive and clarify this divine call while supporting and accompanying us in our response.
27. As Sisters of Penance called to a life of constant conversion we deepen our response to God by
- prayerful reflection on our life experience in the light of God's revealing word
  - openness and receptivity to those whom God uses to guide and challenge us as we grow in conformity to Christ.
28. A vocation to consecrated life is an invitation of God's love, a mystery of divine choice and a work of grace. In a spirit of gratitude and reverence for this gift we seek to
- nurture vocations by the total living out of our own commitment
  - encourage a faith-filled environment in the local Church so that God's call may be readily heard
  - bring others to an experience of God's love which makes them receptive to the divine word
  - help bring to fulfilment the response of those God is calling to our own Franciscan family.

### **PREPARATION FOR CONSECRATION**

29. A young woman who responds to the Lord's call to conversion within the Franciscan family enters a period of special guidance and growth during which she
- freely chooses to orient her life towards Jesus Christ
  - prepares to make a radical response to the call to a life of penance
  - grows in the dispositions of heart essential for making a total offering of herself through the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience.
30. Since it is God who ultimately directs the one called, the Formation Personnel should be aware of
- the uniqueness of each person's relationship to God
  - the fact that the person called is primarily responsible for her own growth
  - the mediating nature of their particular role.
31. The stages of basic formation are postulancy, novitiate and temporary profession. At each stage there is a directress responsible for the guidance of the candidate.
- 32 a. The General Minister, with the consent of her Council, appoints the Formation Personnel for the International Formation Program. She ensures that they have at least five years of perpetual profession, a lived experience of our Franciscan way of life and adequate preparation. The sisters appointed must keep themselves informed on Church law and current Church documents and be open to the spirit of renewal in the Church. Appointments are made for three years and may be renewed.

- 32 b. Those Governance Circle Leaders whose Governance Plan provides for a Formation Program specific to that Governance Circle are bound by similar norms.
- 33 a. The program for the basic international formation period is drawn up by the Formation Personnel under the direction of the General Minister and her Council. This program is flexible so that at each stage the candidate may grow towards the degree of human and spiritual maturity which allows her to respond to the promptings of divine grace with sufficient and proper responsibility and freedom.
- 33 c. The Formation Program within a specific Governance Circle is drawn up by the appropriate Formation Personnel with due accountability to governance circle leadership according to norms outlined in the Governance Plan.
34. Formation Personnel ascertain if a candidate has the necessary qualifications and motivation for following our way of life, and before recommending her admission to the postulancy ensure that she
- a) is leading the life of an active Catholic with a deepening appreciation of liturgy and the sacraments and that, if a convert, a sufficient period of time has elapsed since her full communion with the Church
  - b) has heard the call to follow Jesus Christ in religious life and motivated by faith is endeavoring to answer that call
  - c) has good health, is psychologically sound, and has the maturity appropriate to her age
  - d) has completed or is capable of completing her education as far as the level normally required in her country
  - e) is capable both of relating well to others and of integrating herself into our community life
  - f) has the capacity to take personal responsibility and is able to make a free choice
  - g) is normally neither less than 18 years nor more than 35
  - h) is not hindered by any impediment which would make the novitiate invalid or illegal
  - i) provides certificates of birth, baptism, confirmation, proof of free status and any other documents deemed necessary.

Once the suitability of the candidate has been verified and she has shown positive signs of an interior call, preparation and guidance are given her to intensify her Christian life in readiness for the postulancy.

### **Pre-Novitiate**

35. The purpose of the postulancy is to offer the candidate an experience of our Franciscan community life during which she clarifies her motives and attitudes and prepares herself to begin the living of the Gospel message in radical and total surrender.
36. Though the length must not be less than six months, it should be flexible enough to meet the needs of the individual candidate. In the case where the postulancy is spent outside the novitiate house the postulant is always under the direction of a qualified religious in collaboration with the directress of postulants.

37. If the postulant shows signs of an ability to live our Franciscan way of life, she will be admitted to the novitiate. The postulant prepares for her reception into the novitiate by a retreat of at least five days.

### **Novitiate**

38. The purpose of the novitiate is to initiate the novice into the evangelical way of life and to provide a period of intensive preparation for her life of religious consecration. As she grows in intimacy with Christ she is encouraged to develop her unique human qualities in the peace and joy essential to our Franciscan way of life.
39. During the novitiate, the novice is further instructed in prayer and thus led to a deeper conversion through contemplation of the person of Christ as seen in the Scriptures. This enables her through the events of her life and in her relationships with others to identify with his spirit of self-surrender and humility. In studying the Rule and Constitutions she is instructed in the meaning of an evangelical life consecrated for Christ's mission to all people. She is to be thoroughly informed about the Institute, its nature, purpose, spirituality, discipline and history. This is done in the light of the Third Order Regular tradition, the life and mind of Francis and the spirit of our Foundress.
40. The special nature of the novitiate necessitates that there be times of quiet and relative withdrawal in an atmosphere free from the apostolic involvements characteristic of our way of life. However, personal conversion is not effected in isolation but takes place in vibrant community living.
41. The novitiate lasts two years.
- (a) The novice spends at least twelve months of this time in the formation community for intensive spiritual training.
- (b) One or more periods of formative activity away from the novitiate may be integrated into the novitiate program. The nature of the apostolic activity is determined primarily by the needs of a fuller formation for the particular sister. Canonical norms for absences are observed.
42. At the end of the novitiate, the novice may be admitted to profession according to the procedures for the particular formation program, international or otherwise, in which she is participating. The novice prepares by a retreat of at least five days.
43. Prior to her first profession, the novice signs a civilly valid document stating that should she withdraw or be dismissed from the Institute at any stage of her religious life, she is not entitled to remuneration for services rendered to the institute.

## **CONSECRATION FOR MISSION**

### **Profession of Vows**

44. When the sister makes a total oblation of herself by public profession of vows, God consecrates her that she may
- love with an undivided heart
  - participate in the saving mission in the world
  - be incorporated into our Franciscan Institute bringing to all its message of peace.

In this way God renews the covenant with her, setting a seal on her as a sign of eternal love.

*Jn 17: 16-19*

*Cant: 86*

*Can 657*

45. First Profession of vows is made for one or two years according to the norms established for the particular formation program. The newly professed may be admitted to renewal of profession in accordance with the appropriate established norms.
46. The act of profession is made in this form:
- I, Sister N ..., vow to Almighty God to live in chastity, poverty and obedience for (time) according to the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of Saint Francis and the Constitutions of our Institute of Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception.
- I make these vows in your presence, Sister ... (Name and office of the sister who receives the vows), asking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our blessed Father Francis and all the saints.
47. The act of profession is signed by the sister who makes or renews the vows, by the General Minister /Governance Circle Leader or delegate who receives the vows and by two witnesses.
48. Each Formation program will indicate the minimum period before which perpetual profession is not permitted. In an individual situation this period may be shortened but always safeguarding the norm that the period of temporary profession may not be less than three years and normally not more than six years.
49. During the period of temporary profession, the sister lives the life of religious consecration according to our Rule and Constitutions and prepares to make perpetual profession. She has the opportunity for further integrating the principles of the evangelical life with the communal and apostolic experiences. Moreover this period allows the Formation Personnel to judge whether God has in fact called her to our Institute. Her readiness for profession of perpetual vows is evidenced by the fruits of the Spirit and her growing capacity for reflection, evaluation and discernment of the action of God in her life.
50. During the time of temporary profession sisters are assigned to communities where the directress can guide their further formation. A proper balance is maintained between ongoing spiritual and professional formation and apostolic experience. The year preceding the profession of perpetual vows is a time of more intense preparation.
51. At least three months before the end of the period of temporary profession, the sister requests admission to perpetual vows according to the process for the particular formation program in which she is participating. The General Minister, after consulting with her Council, may admit the sister to perpetual profession. The sister prepares for her profession by a retreat of at least five days.
52. The act of perpetual profession is made in this form:
- I, Sister N ..., vow to Almighty God to live in chastity, poverty and obedience for my whole lifetime according to the Rule and Life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis and the Constitutions of our Institute of Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception. I make these vows in your presence, Sister N ... (Name and office of the sister who receives the vows), asking the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, our blessed Father Francis and all the saints.
53. The ceremony for perpetual profession of vows is public and follows the prescribed ceremonial of our Institute. The act of perpetual profession is signed by the sister who makes it, by the General Minister/Governance Circle Leader or delegate who receives the vows and by two witnesses.

*Jer 1: 7-10*

**Life in Mission**

*Mk 16:15*

*Col 3: 16*

54. As we live our consecrated lives as Christ's instruments in fulfilment of his mission, we
- share his loving concern and compassion for all people
  - call others, especially our own sisters, to a deeper attentiveness to God's action in them
  - learn the profound redemptive value of the joys, sufferings, successes and failures of life
  - spend ourselves for those we serve so that they may have fullness of life.
55. While zealous for the Lord's work, we cultivate the serenity of heart which enables us to celebrate life in genuine praise of God. Moreover, it is important that we periodically withdraw for times of intense prayer as our ability to be life-giving in our mission comes from union with God. [Governance Circle Leaders] ensure that all sisters have the opportunity to participate in programs for continued spiritual development.
56. We expect that eventually our physical strength will diminish. When we need to retire from certain kinds of activity, we recognize this as a call to a new form of presence among people and a deeper spirit of contemplation.

### **Union in Death**

57. Our share in Christ's redemptive mission will be fulfilled when God calls us in death to complete union in eternal love. At this final hour we respond by
- wholeheartedly uniting ourselves with the passion of Christ
  - totally abandoning our lives into the hands of the Father thus bringing to consummation the self-oblation made at the time of consecration.
58. As we approach the moment of death when God asks of us our complete and final surrender, we are assisted by the fraternal and loving support of those who
- speak truthfully to us of its reality
  - compassionately share our sufferings and allay our fears
  - remind us of the mercy and faithfulness of the God who calls
- so that we can welcome in joy and serenity our "Sister Death".

## **CHAPTER III OUR LIFE WITH GOD IN COMMUNITY - PRAYER**

59. Prayer is an integral part of our life of penance which is directed toward an ever more intense union with the Lord. Appreciating more and more the privilege of praising God, we
- nourish the spirit of prayer by faith and love, cultivating the inner quiet that disposes us to hear God speaking in the depth of our heart
  - participate wholeheartedly in the Paschal Mystery of Christ's death and resurrection through the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which the consecration of religious profession is daily renewed

*Can 663*

*LtOrd  
SC83,98*

- celebrate as a community the Liturgy of the Hours, interceding in the name of the Church for the salvation of the whole world
  - find inspiration in the spirit of our Foundress as she aspired to imitate St. Francis who became prayer personified.
60. The spirit of penance that permeates our Franciscan way of life
- demands a continuous conversion to the values of the Gospel
  - finds a point of greater intensity and a source of renewed strength in our meetings with Christ in the Sacrament of Reconciliation
  - prompts us to assist those in need through our own self-denial.

In our commitment to the life of penance, both personal and communal, we keep in mind with St. Francis the primacy of fraternal love.

61. As far as possible the sisters of each community celebrate the Eucharist together daily, finding in it the centre and support of community living.
62. In keeping with our Franciscan heritage, we honor Christ present in the Eucharist by frequent visits and by exposition of the Blessed Sacrament according to the decisions of the house chapter.
63. We recite daily in common Morning and Evening Prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, together with the prayers and devotions proper to our Institute.
64. In the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours we follow the Franciscan calendar where possible, incorporating special preparation for the traditional feasts of our Institute.
65. Seeking above all a deep union with God, each sister spends at least half an hour in meditation each day.
66. We recommend the practice of traditional devotions such as the Way of the Cross, the Rosary and Franciscan Crown, and other forms of prayer that enable us to share spiritual values.
67. Living the Gospel as Franciscans requires a constant openness to the word of God; therefore, we spend time frequently each week in reflective reading of Sacred Scripture.
68. In order to nourish the life of prayer, each sister devotes time regularly to the reading of Church documents and other spiritual books, especially the writings of St. Francis and works of Franciscan spirituality.
69. We make daily an examination of our attitudes, our thoughts and our deeds, asking from God the light and the grace to bring our lives into an ever closer conversion to the Gospel. *Can 664*
70. We offer Masses and prayers as prescribed by the General Statutes for our deceased sisters, parents, relatives and benefactors. We offer the prescribed Masses and prayers also on the occasion of the death of the Sovereign Pontiff and of the Local Ordinary.
71. Each sister makes an annual retreat which gives her the opportunity for an ever deeper conversion to the Lord through time spent in solitude and in more intense prayer. *Can 663.5*

Monthly days of recollection offer her a further opportunity to reflect on and renew her dedication to Christ.

72. We renew our vows as a community each year on the feast of St. Francis in order to celebrate and deepen the consecration we share.
73. We approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently to be healed, strengthened and renewed by this encounter with Christ. The use of a communal rite of penance reminds us of the fraternal and ecclesial dimension of the Sacrament.
74. Mindful of our commitment to a life of continued conversion and inspired by Francis' love for the Passion of Christ, we keep Friday as a day of special penance.
75. Voluntary self-denial which expresses sorrow for sin and a desire for deep interior conversion of heart is an essential part of our life and is exercised in various ways including the traditional practice of fasting. Fasting also strengthens and supports our prayers of intercession.

## CHAPTER IV

### OUR LIFE TOGETHER IN COMMUNITY - FRATERNITY

76. Called to live our life of penance as a community within the Church, we
  - find our inspiration in the mystery of the Blessed Trinity, the community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
  - live in the self-giving love which Christ established as the sign of his true disciples
  - form a true fraternity bound together in mutual love, providing for one another's needs according to the will and intention of Francis
  - extend the riches of our shared life to the service of the people of God
  - witness to the union in love to which all Christians are called.
77. Our profession of the same Rule binds us into a community in which we
  - see each sister as a unique gift of the Most High
  - participate together in the Eucharist, thereby deepening our unity and strengthening the bond of mutual love
  - are compassionate towards the failings of others, realizing our own need for forgiveness.

Thus, we share in the grace that Jesus asked for his followers when he prayed to the Father that all might be one.

*Jn 17:22*

78. The bond of love that unites us in community manifests itself in mutual trust, kindness and concern, so that each sister can with confidence make her needs known to the other. In this way, even when a sister is absent from the community she is assured of the support, loyalty and affection of her sisters.

*RTOR 7:21  
Can 602*

79. The Governance Circle Leader may grant permission for a sister to live outside a house of the Institute in accordance with *Institute Norms for Communion of Circles* and procedures outlined in the Governance Plan. Such an absence is not to exceed one year

*Can 665.1*

unless it be for reasons of health, studies or an apostolate to be exercised in the name of the Institute.

80. The house chapter is a dynamic expression of community life. It provides the opportunity for deepening through communal reflection and evaluation the faith response to our vocation in its apostolic, communal and personal aspects.
81. We seek not only the material but also the spiritual welfare of each of our sisters. By encouragement, by good example and at times by fraternal correction, we call one another to the ongoing conversion of our life of penance.
82. Besides our prayer in common, important elements which express the reality of our fraternal living and contribute to its growth are meals shared in common and times of relaxation and recreation. Thoughtfulness and sensitivity to others' needs ensure that a proper balance is maintained between the individual's leisure time activities and time spent together in recreation.
83. Each community fosters the quality of its life by establishing norms for reserving part of the house for the use of the sisters as well as for maintaining an atmosphere of silence. Moreover, each sister is responsible for creating an environment which is conducive to prayer, reflection, study and rest.
84. Our religious habit is a sign of our consecration, an expression of our life of poverty and of penance and a reminder to our-selves and to the world of our role in the Church. We dress simply, and always as befits persons whose lives are converted to the values of the Gospel.
85. The care of our sick sisters is a responsibility shared by all in the community who strive to serve them with Christ-like love.
86. The minister ensures that the sisters who are ill and those of advanced age have the opportunity to receive the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. When a sister is dying the other members of the community gather to assist her with their prayers.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **FRANCISCAN LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF THE CHURCH**

87. At the heart of the Gospel life of penance is a dedication to the saving mission which Christ entrusted to his Church. As Sisters of Penance and messengers of peace we carry out this mission by
  - the witness of our lives characterized by simplicity and joy
  - our oneness in community which is a reminder that Christians are called to form one body in the one spirit
  - the apostolic service we render, coming to all as heralds of the Gospel.
88. Since it is only by the gentle action of the Spirit that our apostolic work is fruitful, we
  - seek through our union with God in prayer to be ever guided by divine inspiration
  - implore grace for those we serve that they may respond to the word of salvation

*Can 673  
RTOR 5:20  
Eph 4*

*1C 16*

*EN 75*

- remember that our apostolic zeal must spring from true holiness of life and our activities in turn must increase and deepen that holiness.
89. In wholehearted response to the call to serve the kingdom of Christ, we
- minister to the needs of the faithful seeking to nourish and deepen the gift of faith which they have received
  - implant the word of God among peoples where it has not yet taken root
  - prepare the way for the Lord by bearing witness to the love and kindness of Christ laboring always for the human and social advancement of the people we serve, since every aspect of life must be permeated and transformed by the redeeming power of Christ.
90. Approved by the Church as an apostolic congregation, our Institute has as its characteristic evangelizing mission the teaching of the Gospel message through diverse apostolates and ministries. Each sister, by fulfilling the assignment she accepts in obedience, shares directly in this evangelizing mission.
91. While we strive to serve all those who need us, our Institute is committed in a particular way to the poor. In order to remain faithful to our charism, a proportion of our service is directed to those who are in circumstances of material poverty.
92. Our primary means of evangelization is the authentic living out of our Franciscan vocation, evidenced by the simplicity of our lives, genuine mutual love in community and kindness to all who come to us.
93. The Governance Circle Leader and each sister prays and seeks to discern God's will before appointment to any apostolate is made. The discernment process takes into account the suitability of a sister for a proposed work, the needs of the Church and the consistency of the particular apostolate with the nature and purpose of the Institute.
94. Sisters are assigned by appropriate leadership to the various apostolates of the governance circle after appropriate consultation.
95. When an apostolate necessitates that a sister live outside a house of our Institute, a mutual responsibility exists. The sister makes every effort to maintain ties with the community which, on its part, extends to her the support of community living which is an integral part of our vocation. Such permission is given for a limited period of time after which an evaluation of the situation is made.
96. Aware that all Christians participate in the Church's universal mission to proclaim the Gospel, we seek to foster in those we serve a concern for the work of evangelization and a readiness to follow the call to apostolic service. *EN 14*
97. In order to participate effectively in the mission of the Church, we must be sensitive to current problems of injustice. As Franciscans we shall be prepared to work personally and corporately to change unjust systems that maintain peoples and societies in a condition of oppression. By living and teaching the social principles of the Church we witness in our lives to both the oppressed and the oppressors. It is through the expression of love in our pursuit of justice that we will promote peace and reconciliation. *EN 30,31  
CM 57*
98. In opening new works or withdrawing from others every effort is made to discern the will of God. Governance Circle Leaders have the responsibility for making such decisions according to the norms of their governance plan, subject to the approval of the General Minister. The permission of the Diocesan Bishop is required for opening new works. In withdrawing from established works the Diocesan Bishop must be consulted. *Can 609  
Can 616*

99. Mindful of Francis' deep loyalty to the Church, we show obedience and reverence to the Bishop as the one who represents the pastoral authority of the Church wherever we carry out our apostolates. We collaborate with our pastors as far as possible so that our efforts may be integrated into the Church's ministry of salvation.

## CHAPTER VI

### MANNER OF GOVERNING OUR INSTITUTE

100. The government of our Institute is that ministry which
- promotes unity by coordinating the graces and gifts of all our members
  - directs our efforts toward the fullness of the life of penance in our service of the kingdom of God
  - respects the responsibility of each sister to make a personal contribution to the common good.
101. Since Christ endowed the Church with that authority he received from the Father, we recognize that
- the Church in approving our Institute conferred on it a share in this same authority for the accomplishment of its ecclesial mission
  - the sister placed in authority exercises her office in the Gospel spirit of fraternal service
  - the role of authority is one of discernment and spiritual leadership calling and guiding each sister in her unique response to God's plan for her and for our Institute.
102. The sisters of the Institute are incorporated into governance circles.
- Each governance circle
- is administered according to a governance plan which is authorized by the Superior General with the consent of her Council;
  - defines the role of leadership within the particular governance circle
  - has a leader with ordinary authority vested in her role as Governance Circle Leader.
- Subsequent revisions of the governance plan require the authorization of General Administration.
103. The Superior General has authority over the whole Institute while respecting the right of each Governance Circle to make decisions according to its authorized Governance Plan.
104. Legislative authority within the Institute belongs to the General Chapter and to officially convoked Gatherings of the Governance Circles. The Superior General, Governance Circle Leaders and Local Ministers share in this legislative authority insofar as this is necessary for the requirements of their respective offices. The General Chapter, when in session, is the highest legislative body and has the power to legislate

in all matters that concern the entire Institute safeguarding the prescriptions of Church law and of the Constitutions.

105. The legislation of the General Chapter is recorded in the General Statutes and remains in force unless amended or revoked by subsequent General Chapters. In order to make any change in the Constitutions, however, recourse to the Holy See is required, the proposed change having been first approved by the two-thirds vote of the General Chapter.
106. Executive authority belongs to the Superior General, Governance Circle Leaders and Local Ministers. The General Minister exercises the highest executive authority in the Institute. In true subsidiarity all members of the Institute work together for the common good. The areas of authority belonging to the general, governance circle and local levels of government are defined by the Constitutions; furthermore, each sister is given the authority required to carry out the task or office assigned to her.

### **Voting Rights of the Sisters**

107. All sisters from temporary profession have active voice; sisters with perpetual profession have passive voice, safeguarding the prescriptions of Church law.
108. Sisters transferred from one governance circle to another have active and passive voice only in the area to which they are assigned. Sisters residing temporarily outside their own governance circle retain their voting rights, both active and passive, in their own governance circle.
109. A General Councillor may not be nominated to any office on the governance circle level.

### **The General Chapter**

110. The General Chapter enables representatives of the entire Institute to discern together the ways in which the Institute as a whole may continue to internalize the spiritual legacy it has received and respond with greater fidelity to the Gospel life and to our ecclesial mission. Through the participation of all the sisters in preparations for the Chapter, and through the sharing at all levels of new insights gained from the discussions and deliberations of the capitulars, the Chapter functions as a unifying and animating force within the Institute. *Can 631.1*
111. The elections of the General Minister and of the General Councillors take place at the General Chapter. The newly elected General Minister assumes authority over the entire Institute.
112. The General Chapter is convoked ordinarily every five years by the General Minister. An extraordinary General Chapter may be convoked with the consent of the Council. Should the office of General Minister become vacant, the General Vicareess notifies all the houses of the Institute of the date of the General Chapter, which meets within a year from the vacancy, for the election of the General Minister and Council.
113. The following are the members of the Chapter:
  - (a) the General Minister
  - (b) the General Councillors
  - (c) the immediate ex-General Minister
  - (d) the Governance Circle Leaders
  - (e) the elected delegates.

The elected delegates must number at least over one half of the total chapter body. For the validity of the Acts of the General Chapter, at least two-thirds of the capitulars must be present.

### **General Government**

114. The General Minister is the spiritual leader of the Institute. Her role is to inspire and encourage all the sisters to strive for the fullness of Gospel living in the spirit of St. Francis. She leads the Institute as a whole in its response to the needs of the Church according to the example of our Mother Foundress.
115. To be eligible for the office of General Minister, a sister must have completed at least five years of perpetual profession and must meet all the other requirements of Church law. She is elected for a term of five years and may be re-elected for another five years.
116. There are at least three General Councillors whose role is to advise the General Minister and to assist in decision making at the general level. Together with the General Minister they serve as a centre of unity promoting the spiritual and apostolic life of the sisters, animating and inspiring each through personal contact.
117. To be eligible for the office of a General Councillor a sister must have made perpetual profession. A General Councillor is elected for a term of five years, or until the next Chapter of elections. She may be re-elected for a second term.
118. The first of the General Councillors elected is the General Vicaress. During the absence of the General Minister, the General Vicaress substitutes for her in administering the ordinary affairs of the Institute. Should the office of General Minister become vacant, the Vicaress assumes full authority until the Chapter of elections.
119. The General Secretary and the General Treasurer are appointed by the General Minister with the consent of her Council. To be eligible for these offices a sister must have made perpetual profession. These offices though distinct from those of the General Councillors may be combined with them.

### **The Extended General Council Forum**

120. The Extended General Council Forum (EGCF) facilitates collaboration, planning, coordination and mutual accountability at the Institute level. It is designed to foster communion in mission within the Institute by broadening the base of consultation in accordance with St Clare's principles of discernment<sup>i</sup>.
121. The EGCF is convoked by the General Minister with the consent of her council and is held at least three times within their term, the first meeting being within one year of the completion of the General Chapter.
122. The membership of the EGCF consists of the General Minister and Council and the Governance Circle Leaders. For specific meetings or sessions, others may be invited to participate.
123. Though the process used during EGCF meetings is one of discernment, the final decision-making authority remains with the General Minister and Council.

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<sup>i</sup> Clare's principles: *CONTEMPLATION*: listening to the voice of the Spirit; *BELIEF IN THE SPIRIT AMONG US*; believing the Spirit is active in each Sister and in the group; *POVERTY*: renouncing everything for the sake of the Gospel, the search for truth and the experience of Christ among us; *COLLABORATION*: willingness to work together to collaborate with God.

1Pet 5:3

Can 618  
Can 619

## **Local Government**

124. The local minister cares for the spiritual and material welfare of the sisters. In the midst of the community rather than placed above it, she leads more by example than by word. Respecting the dignity and the individuality of each sister, she exercises her authority in a spirit of true collegiality.
125. The local minister is appointed by the Governance Circle Leader after consultation. The appointment is normally for a term of three years and the sister may be re-appointed for a second term. Ordinarily she will not retain the office of local minister for more than six consecutive years.
126. A local councillor shares in a particular way the concern of the minister for the spiritual and material care of the sisters in the local community. Through prayer and honest dialogue with the minister she strengthens and supports her in the leadership of the community.
127. The manner of election or appointment of the local councillor(s) and treasurer and their term of office are determined by the Governance Circle Leader after appropriate consultation. This is done in accordance with the governance plan of a specific governance circle.
128. The house chapter helps to build community and to foster harmony by the active and responsible cooperation of each sister. In keeping with the principle of shared responsibility it seeks to involve all members in the discussion and decisions regarding community life and its apostolic dimension.

## **Administration of Temporal Goods**

129. The use and administration of the property and finance of the Institute must always be in keeping with our commitment to the poverty and justice of the Gospel and to the spirit of St. Francis. Since the goods of the Institute belong in common to the Institute, there must be at each level adequate consultation before major administrative decisions are made. The General Minister with her Council delegates to the governance circle administration and local communities the power to administer the goods of the Institute according to the norms of civil law in the countries where the goods are situated and in conformity with Church law.
130. At general, governance circle and local levels the goods of the Institute are administered by the treasurers under the direction of the respective leadership according to the procedures laid down in the General Statutes.
131. The General Minister, with the consent of her Council and in consultation with governance circle leadership, formulates policies determining financial competence and responsibility at the governance circle level.
132. In each Governance Circle administration of finances at the local level are determined according to the Governance Plan.
133. For the alienation of property or the incurring of debts or obligations, the General Minister and the Governance Circle Leader together ensure that the requirements of civil and ecclesiastical law outlined in the *MFIC Norms for Institute Communion* be observed and that where the amount exceeds that fixed by the Holy See, the necessary indult be obtained from the Holy See.
134. With regard to disposal of property remaining from the closure of a house, the Governance Circle Leader ensures that the requirements of justice be observed, as well as the wishes of founders or benefactors.

Can 638

135. The Governance Circle Leader may accept legacies and gifts made for the benefit of the Institute or of its works after appropriate consultation. If the legacy or gift imposes conditions which are onerous, the approval of the General Minister is required. Such legacies or gifts will not be accepted if the conditions they impose are not in keeping with the spirit of our Rule and Constitutions.

### Separation from the Institute

**Procedure for separation from the Institute is outlined in the MFIC Norms for Institute Communion of Circles. Leaders should also consult Governance Plans.**

136. Since exclaustation, departure, transfer and dismissal are all questions of separation, they are also questions of relationship - a relationship between an individual religious and the Institute. It is essential that prayerful, mutual discernment precede any decision which leads to such separation.
137. A sister in temporary profession is free to leave the Institute when the term of her vows expires. The General Minister, or the Governance Circle Leader who carries responsibility for the Formation Program to which she belongs, may exclude a sister from the renewal of her temporary profession or from making perpetual profession for just and reasonable motive, including physical or mental illness. She will do so after consultation with her leadership team and in accordance with the norms of canon law, outlined in the *MFIC Norms for Institute Communion of Circles*. Can 688
138. A sister in temporary profession, if she freely requests it, may be granted an Indult of Departure by the General Minister with the consent of her Council. Where applicable, the Governance Circle Leader who carries overall responsibility for the Formation Program in which the sister is a participant requests the dismissal after appropriate consultation with members of her leadership team. Can 686  
Can 687
139. An Indult of Exclaustation is a temporary separation of a perpetually professed sister from the Institute. A sister who receives such an indult is still bound by her religious vows and remains under the dependence and care of the Institute. She is dispensed from those obligations which are incompatible with her new condition of life. She does not have active or passive voice in community elections, but retains the spiritual privileges of the Institute. The Indult of Exclaustation may be granted by the General Minister with the consent of her Council for a maximum of three years. Exclaustation for a longer period of time is reserved to the Holy See. Can 691.1
140. The perpetually professed sister may, for grave reasons, request an Indult of Departure. The Governance Circle Leader after consultation with her leadership team will present the petition to the General Minister. The General Minister will forward it to the Holy See with her opinion and that of her Council. Can 692
141. An Indult of Departure indicates a total separation from the Institute, and takes effect automatically when notified to the sister, unless it is rejected in the act of notification. By this act the perpetually professed sister is dispensed from her vows. The Indult of Departure for perpetually professed sisters is granted by the Holy See. Can 684
142. A perpetually professed sister who wishes to transfer to another Institute must obtain the permission of both Superiors General with the consent of their respective Councils. Can 685
143. A perpetually professed sister who wishes to transfer to our Institute must complete a probationary period of at least three years before being admitted to perpetual profession. The General Minister will determine the manner in which the period of probation is carried out. After appropriate discernment the process of transfer is completed according to Church law. Can 694  
Can 695-704

144. In extreme cases it may become necessary for the General Minister to dismiss a sister with either temporary or perpetual vows. The request for the dismissal is made by the Governance Circle Leader after consultation with her leadership team. Grave reasons must exist, together with incorrigibility, all attempts toward amendment and reconciliation having proved unsuccessful.

The General Minister and her Council, which for validity must comprise four members, proceed in a collegial fashion to accurately assess the evidence, the arguments and the defense before proceeding to a decision which must be made by secret ballot and in accordance with Church norms. If a decision for dismissal is reached, the reasons for the dismissal must be juridically proven and the sister's right to defend herself safeguarded. The Decree of Dismissal must be confirmed by the Holy See before it takes effect.

145. The General Minister and/or the Governance Circle Leader will ensure that a sister leaving the Institute is provided with financial assistance according to the norms of justice, charity and equity and that she is helped as far as possible to make the necessary adjustment. Those who were formerly members of our community have a special claim on our understanding, love and concern.

#### **The Observance of the Constitutions**

146. Having freely committed ourselves to the way of life, which is outlined in our Rule and finds its expression in our Constitutions, we
- ask the grace of God, the intercession of Mary Immaculate and of our Seraphic Father, that we may remain faithful to all that we have promised.
  - live our commitment in a spirit of freedom and love
  - accept our Rule and Constitutions as a guide and stimulus for the continued conversion of our lives and for our total dedication to God and to the Church
  - remember that our unity is strengthened by our common observance of the same Rule and Constitutions, and that thus united we support one another
  - keep in mind the example of our Father St. Francis, of our Mother Foundress and of the many sisters of our community who have given glory to God by following this same way of life.
147. The precepts of the Constitutions do not oblige under pain of sin, except where the obligation arises from the divine or ecclesiastical law or from the observance of the vows.
148. Although each sister assumes the responsibility for the prayerful study of the Rule and Constitutions, the local community arranges for their public reading at regular intervals.
149. The authentic interpretation of the Constitutions is reserved to the Holy See.