



ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 5: "The Nature of the OFS"
sheet 3

3. Public Associations of the Christian Faithful

The popes, in the last two centuries, for the purpose of understanding our 'nature' and distinguishing us from simple confraternities and other lay groups, have always wanted to stress our ecclesial identity, defining us as a "true Order".

The Secular Franciscan Order is a **public association** in the Church:

Attention!
ecclesiastical
legal stuff



Associations of the Christian faithful which are erected by competent ecclesiastical authority are called public associations [CIC, 301 § 3]

The authority competent to erect public associations is:
the Holy See for universal and international associations [CIC, 312 § 1, 1°]

A public association as well as a confederation of public associations is constituted a juridic person by the decree by which it is erected by competent ecclesiastical authority in accord with the norm of Canon 312; it also receives a mission to pursue the ends which it proposes for itself in the name of the Church, to the extent that such a mission is required [CIC, 313]

The Secular Franciscan Order, as an **international public association**, is connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff from whom it has received the **approval of its Rule and the confirmation of its mission** in the Church and in the world:

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Sorry for more definitions; but, we are in this together



All this talk about 'Law' worries me. I feel like I'm going to be arrested any moment by the Inquisition! What's this 'CIC' ? Are we a 'public association' or what? OFS 'Rule' is worrying enough...I just want to love Christ like St Francis...

Well, let's try and put your mind at rest. 'CIC' is just the Latin abbreviation for 'Codex Juris Canonici' [The Book of Canon Law]. In the new Code of 1983 there are 1752 'Canons' [or rules/laws]. They are quite short, often divided into numbered parts. This new Code took some 25 years to put together, and reflects the 'aggiornamento' [updating] of Vatican II. It replaced its only predecessor, the Code of 1917—which had 2000 Canons, only two of which applied specifically to the laity! The new Code is quite different in both tone and layout. It has 'pastoral primacy', and is for the whole People of God—whom it looks after by showing how the self-understanding of the Vatican Council documents is to be reflected in the day to day life of the Church. No one gets 'arrested', and the Inquisition has long gone! Now, about 'public associations'...

CIC is divided into VII Books, Book II, 'The People of God' [Canons 204-746]—542 Canons, making it the biggest section of the Code by far. Importantly, it starts, not with the papacy, but with 'The Christian Faithful' and it is within that section that we find Title V, 'Associations of the Christian Faithful' [*before* it talks about Church hierarchy] with 4 chapters, - Canons 298-329.

- 'public associations' = erected by the hierarchy
- act in the name of the hierarchy
- their property is Church property
- totally subject to sacred pastors' authority
- canonical erection = public character = public juridical personality in the Church

As a 'public association of the Christian faithful', the OFS

- exists through deliberate act of will of the Church—we need it, so does the Church
- erected by the Holy See
- has specific mission to carry out in Church's name

But, OFS differs from other 'associations of the Christian faithful' in that

- hierarchy does not interfere in nomination/removal of officers [except in extreme cases]
- by special privilege of Holy See spiritual assistants appointed by Major Superiors, but by request of fraternities, not by imposition
- Rule & Constitutions approved by Holy See, but Statutes by SFO authorities
- functions & control of property belong to SFO

As with all public associations of the faithful, Secular Franciscans must lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection—as, indeed, do all the Christian faithful, for this is our baptismal calling. However, we are called not only to *be more* but also to *do more*. We are subject to a specific mission entrusted to us expressly by the Church, to be carried out at its mandate and in her name. And, moreover, in the light of the teachings of the popes directed to us, it is a fact that in the last 200 years, from Leo XIII to John XXIII, explicit declarations and requests make it clear that carrying out our mission is of vital importance in the Church.

More than just a prayer group then!

