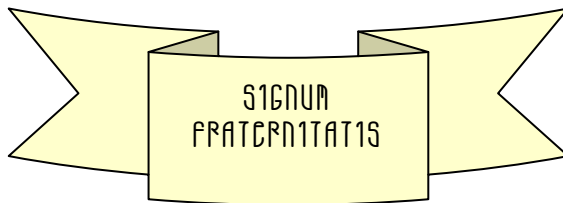


ORDO FRANCISCANUS SAECULARIS
- Initial Formation for Candidates -

Module 6: "Fraternity & St Francis"
sheet 4

4. Signs & Fraternity, & Fraternal Commitment



'Consecrated life' is a sign of communion in the Church.

i.e. the Church is—

- essentially a mystery of 'communion' a people made one by the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit
- **fraternal life intends to reflect the depth and richness of that mystery**

It is above all, at the local level that the people made one normally and completely takes place. So—

- **fraternity** = a personification of being 'Church' [that is, 'ecclesia' - the people called out by God to serve him]
- such personification = accomplished primarily and specifically in local fraternity
- brothers and sisters bound by the bonds of love, generated by the Spirit, summoned by Christ
- **fraternity** = 'ecclesia facta' [a Church accomplished], the place where the Spirit blossoms ['ubi floret Spiritus' - St Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition*], and Spirit develops the kind of spiritual gifts we read about in I Cor 12-14



— **fraternity** is not an optional extra for Secular Franciscans, anymore than communal worship is for the Church at large [Heb 10.25 'not neglecting to meet together,...but encouraging one another...'], **so never miss any meeting, but on the contrary be always faithful in assembling together.**

And wherever the brothers are and in whatever place they meet other brothers, they must greet one another wholeheartedly and lovingly, and honour **one another without complaining**. And they must beware not to appear outwardly sad and like gloomy hypocrites; but let them show that they are **joyful in the Lord** and cheerful and truly gracious.

And each one should confidently make known his need to the other, so that he might find what he needs and minister it to him. And each should love and care for his brother in all those things in which God will give him grace, as a mother loves and cares for her son. And **he who does not eat should not judge the one who does**.
[Earlier Rule for the Friars]

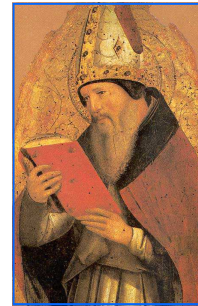
i.e. following the teaching of the NT—

- I Pet 4.9 ‘Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another.’
- Rom 12.10 ‘Love one another with brotherly affection; outdo one another in showing honour.’
- Phil 4.4 ‘Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.’
- I Thes 2.7 ‘But we were gentle among you, like a nurse taking care of her children.’
- Rom 14.3 ‘...let not him who abstains pass judgment on him who eats; for God has welcomed him.’

Francis has given **the golden rule of interdependence**.

In fraternity, asking [Matt 7.7] is as important as giving [Matt 10.8].

COMMITMENT TO FRATERNAL LIFE



The use of ‘lovingly’ [Latin, ‘**diligenter**’] is intended to underline the essence of fraternal life, a ‘love’ that gives both the depth and extent of Christian fellowship. We cannot help but recall St Augustine: ‘**dilige et fac quod vis**’ [‘love and do anything’ *1]. And nowhere are these sentiments better expressed than in the *Confessions*, Book 13 cap 10: ‘**My weight is my love. *2 By it I am carried wherever I am carried. By thy gift, *3 we are enkindled and are carried upward. We burn inwardly and move forward. We ascend thy ladder which is in our heart, and we sing a canticle of degrees; *4 we glow inwardly with thy fire—with thy good fire - *5 and we go forward because we go up to the peace of Jerusalem...There thy good pleasure will settle us so that we will desire nothing more than to dwell there forever. *6**

*1 not, ‘love God and do anything’ as it is often quoted! Love gives liberty, not licence

*2 Latin, ‘pondus meum amoris meum’; ‘weight’ cf Matt 11.30 ‘my burden is light’

*3 i.e. the Holy Spirit

*4 see Vulgate Pss 119, 133—regarded as a single series of ascending steps by which the soul moves up toward heaven

*5 see Acts 2.3f

*6 Ps 23.6