**Teleconference Usage Guidelines**

**Preface:**

It is the intent of this document to outline appropriate uses of teleconference technologies where it pertains to its use within the context of fraternal life. What is intended is to seek the balance between pastoral need to keep our homebound brothers and sisters connected to their communities that need their mutual witness, prayer, and support.

In light of the Corona-virus (COVID -19) that commenced in March of 2020, it was necessary and prudent to access and use the teleconference technologies in order to exercise prudence in the care and feeding of our brothers and sisters because there was no other way to have fraternity gatherings in a safe manner. It was necessary not only to conduct the business of the running of the Order, but it was necessary in order that our brothers and sisters could still have a connection and allow the sharing that would normally happen during the regular in person meetings.

The usage of this technology has, prior to the 2020 pandemic experience, only showed up briefly, but in light of the fact that this became normative for fraternities and councils at various levels to conduct business in this way, it also presents some challenges that this guideline is meant to address.

1. **Appropriate use of teleconference technology in conducting fraternal life:**

Technology should appropriately be used in order to bring out the best good possible. To this end, Teleconference technology should be for fraternal life, used in the following cases:

A) In the circumstance where the health and safety of its members would be in danger of life and health.

1. Where a brother or sisters is homebound, excused, and not able to attend physically due to physical disability.
2. Where a brother or sister is ill, as it is not the intent that someone who is ill should come to the meeting and put their brothers and sisters at risk.
3. **Inappropriate use of teleconference technology in conducting fraternal life:**

Teleconference technology should NOT be seen, or adopted, as a suitable replacement for normative communal life within the fraternity for anyone in the fraternity, with the sole exception of the Brother or Sister who is homebound by reason of physical disability.

It is permissible for members who are ill, to excuse themselves from the meeting both in love and in charity, to exercise self-care and for the protection of their brothers and sisters. If they are able, then attending via teleconference may be edifying for both the community and the brother or sisters who is ill. This should, however, only occur for one month, and they should let someone on the fraternity council know in advance, as soon as they are able.

Teleconference technology should never be seen as an avenue to conduct initial formation under any circumstance with the sole exception of danger to the immediate health of the fraternity members.

Extended Absences from Meetings for Professed Members :

For members who are “snow-birds” where they relocate from their Home fraternity for an extended period of time to a singular other location ( City/town) AND will be absent for longer than 2 months. The council will assist the member to find a Fraternity in the region where they are relocating. Being away from their Home community does not excuse them from being at a meeting. Once the fraternity is identified contact information is provided, and the member is expected to go to their meeting. The council should follow up in insure continuity with the hosting fraternity.

If the absence is going to be more than 6 months, then the member should transfer to the fraternity in that region.

IF the member is going to be traveling to various locations and that travel is going to be on an extended basis, then the member should temporarily withdraw from the fraternity until they decide where it is that they are going to settle and then join a fraternity closest to them.

This is because it is important for a members initial formation to include being imbibed with Franciscan spirituality and communal life.

Members who find themselves in difficulty should engage in an open and honest conversation with their council as outlined in other sections of the guidelines when difficulties arise. The Fraternity council should also follow the same guideline for when members have difficulties that need to be addressed.

Although we live in a secular state, we are none the less tied to the evangelical councils of poverty (as is part of our charism), chastity (according to our particular state in life) and obedience. It is also true that when a member moves away from our community, they must find the closest fraternity to them geographically, and transfer to that fraternity.

Often times, we find that members will be snow birds for a time and then settle in one area to complete their life’s work in one location. If you have someone in this situation, once that decision is made, then they will need to either stay with your community or transfer to the community where they are moving to.

It is a truth that as of this time, there are fewer Friars of the first or third orders, available to us to be Spiritual Assistants. If a fraternity has a Spiritual Assistant who is a friar, and that friar is re-assigned outside of the geographic boundaries of our region, it is not only right and fitting, but a point of poverty and obedience that we release that friar from their responsibility of being a Spiritual Assistant and begin an immediate search for another Spiritual Assistant. It is also a charity to our brother friar, to support them in their new assignment and make that transition as easy as possible for them. Using teleconference technology to try to “hold on” to that friar is inappropriate.

**Conclusion:**

It is the intent of this guideline to find a productive balance between the needs of the regional and fraternal life, but also to address the pastoral concern for keeping our brothers and sisters connected to their community when age or infirmity would seek to otherwise separate them from us.