



The Conference of National Spiritual Assistants to the Secular Franciscan Order - USA

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Clarification on Same Sex Attraction and Sexual Identity Issues

Brothers and Sisters, greetings of Peace and All Good!

The Church finds herself in the unhappy situation of having to say “no” to things the Church believes to be contrary to her moral teaching and the human good. But whenever there is a “no,” and of course Jesus also said “no” to certain situations in the Gospel, there has to be an open, compassionate heart of fraternal charity and dignity.

The Church teaches, and we believe, that human dignity is grounded in our creation in the image of God as male and female, and that we are identified as beloved sons and daughters of God. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church notes:

“Man and woman have been *created*, which is to say, *willed* by God: on the one hand, in perfect equality as human persons; on the other, in their respective beings as man and woman. ‘Being man’ or ‘being woman’ is a reality which is good and willed by God; man and woman possess an inalienable dignity which comes to them immediately from God their Creator.” (n.369, original emphasis)

This inalienable dignity ought to be emphasized over the choices and perspectives of individuals.

Implementation Guidelines for Leadership

Individuals who are seeking membership in the Secular Franciscan Order, or are already professed, and find themselves in situations contrary to Catholic Church teaching, must be treated with respect and compassion. There must be an understanding that as a Church organization—a Public Association of the Faithful—our Order obeys the Church’s teaching.

The call to the OFS is a vocation to be discerned between the individual and the Order. Any person in discernment may experience a conversion or the need for conversion at some point in this process. If a difficult pastoral discussion needs to take place, it should be done in person, with the fewest possible council members present, and including the spiritual assistant, with an approach that preserves the individual’s privacy and dignity.

In any dialogue of a sensitive nature, it is important to respond with loving mercy, and to know that the loving mercy of God calls us to conversion. In harmony with Church teaching, some helpful perspectives to keep in mind:

- Listen to the person. What is going on in their life? What keeps them from full communion or harmony with Church teaching?
- Understand that their life is difficult and challenging. Delicate pastoral care is necessary;
- Commend their desire to live a Franciscan life. Encourage them to live their Catholic Christian faith to the best of their ability and to the fullest extent that the Church allows;
- For you as a leader to say “no” to the person can be difficult, but doesn’t need to be the end of the relationship. Sometimes a listening heart can become a safe place that will allow for a future conversation or a different experience of God’s mercy later in life.

Those who are not living in accord with Church teaching cannot be admitted to, or continue in, the OFS. With respect to professed members who are living in a way that is inconsistent with Church teaching, councils should follow the temporary and definitive provisions of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, 2000 (Articles 56 through 60).

Same-Sex Attraction and Gender Identity Policies

Same-Sex Attraction

The National leadership has spoken with one voice about the possibility of persons with a homosexual orientation being admitted to the Order. In accordance with the teaching of the Catholic Church, as expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (n. 2357-2358), the National Executive Council and the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants state the following:

A person who has a homosexual orientation but is living a chaste life can be a member of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS). Such persons must be treated with respect and compassion. There must be an understanding that as a Church organization—a Public Association of the Faithful—our Order obeys the Church’s teaching.

A person who lives a chaste life according to one’s state in life, even though that person struggles with same-sex attraction, can become an inquirer in the OFS with the following conditions: Sufficient grace must be evident along with a determination and a confirmation to live a chaste life according to the norms of the Catholic Church. Discernment of both the individual and the Fraternity/Order can continue for consideration of a potential vocation in the OFS.

Same-Sex Civil Unions

Profession in the order is a solemn ecclesial act—a public commitment within the Church. Entering into a same-sex civil union is a public statement which is opposed to the teachings of the Catholic Church and therefore, not in keeping with the Rule of the OFS.

Those who have entered into a same-sex civil union cannot be admitted to, or continue in, the OFS. Profession in the OFS is a solemn ecclesial act, a public commitment within the Church (refer to the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, n.42.1, and the Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order, English Edition, 1985 – See Preface n.3.3).

Even if their pastor has made a pastoral decision and allows them to publicly receive the Eucharist and participate fully in parish life, that pastoral decision does not mean that we, as the Secular Franciscan Order, can make an allowance. As an Order in the Church, the OFS is bound by Church law.

Keep in mind that membership in an Order is not required for salvation.

Sexual Identity

Catholic teaching also holds that the human person is a body-soul union and that sexual identity is a fixed and unchanging endowment of God that is manifested through the body. Gender transitioning stands in opposition to a proper understanding of the nature of the human person. It presupposes that there is a “self” that is separate from the body, which happens to find itself in a body, and which might therefore be in the wrong body. Yet the human person is a body-soul unity, not a spirit inhabiting the body. In his *Theology of the Body*, Pope St. John Paul II wrote, the “human body expresses the person.” (National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly, *Transgenderism*, Winter 2016, p. 600, National Catholic Bioethics Center [NCBC], Philadelphia, PA.)

The pursuit of gender reassignment poses a serious threat of scandal and distress in a fraternity. The obvious and openly expressed intent to change one’s sexual identity is an impediment to seeking or continuing a vocation as a Secular Franciscan.

The CNSA Friars, 21 July 2020, Memorial of St. Lawrence of Brindisi, OFM Cap.