

**FRATERNAL VISITATION REPORT**

**The Encounter Fraternity, Winter Haven, Florida**

**May 6, 2023**

Marcia Stamboulian, OFS, Five Franciscan Martyrs Regional Family Councilor conducted the Fraternal Visitation, and Br. Lombardo D’Auria, OFM Cap, Regional Spiritual Assistant, conducted the Pastoral Visitation for The Encounter Fraternity in Winter Haven.

**Preparatory Information**:

There were 7 members present at the visitation, including their Spiritual Assistant, Mark Banschbach, ofs, who was installed at the meeting. A guest was also present.

**Demographics**:

The Minister is Karen Rooney, ofs.

The fraternity consists of:

* Professed: 4
* Excused: 0
* Candidates: 1
* Inquirers: 2
* Aspirant: 0

**Documentation**:

The Fraternity Register was available, reviewed, and signed. The registry, a bound book, had all information listed. The checking account and bank statements were in proper order. The Document of Establishment was available. The Fraternity has paid its fair share and made apostolic contributions. Minutes of fraternity and council meetings were reviewed as was the checkbook and treasurer’s records. The secretary and treasurer have done an excellent job in keeping all documentation complete and in proper order.

**Prayer Life:**

The Fraternity meets on the first Saturday of every month at 9:00 AM at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Winter Haven, FL, following the 8:15 am Mass. They begin their gathering with opening prayers from the Ritual, and the Liturgy of the Hours. They also include time for meditative prayer to pray for personal intentions. They then recognize anniversaries and birthdays to be celebrated that month. The Council meets on the third Wednesday of each month at Bob Evans Restaurant.

**Apostolic Activity**:

I was very pleased to see that the fraternity has just started an outreach to the poor. They make individual sandwiches and go to different churches in Polk County who distribute help for the homeless following the monthly gathering. They then meet, visit with and hand out the sandwiches to the poor who have assembled. They hope to be doing this on a monthly basis from now on.

**Formation**:

**Initial:** “The Franciscan Journey” is used for initial formation. The “FUN Manual” is used to suplement certain topics that correspond with those in The Franciscan Journey, and also as topics for book reports.

**Ongoing:**

This fraternity uses “To Set Themselves Free”.

There is no formal formation director but has come under the supervision of the Vice-Minister. The entire council participates in formation. Participation in discussion of formation topics is good as this is a small group and can share effectively with each other.

**Recommendations and comments:**

The Encounter is a very small fraternity which I am so very happy to say is growing. Once there are new people in place, and in time following their profession, they should have a full council. They have a very good relationship with St. Joseph’s Church. They were invited to the Corpus Christi profession to each altar with their banner. They also have visitors to their meetings following the Saturday morning Mass. Their members come from a variety of churches in the area and can promote the fraternity at these during their visits their.

Recommendations: Since you already have a formation team, the council, in place, you will have to wait until there are sufficient professed numbers to complete your council and have a true team to attend to the new people coming for formation. You have indicated that Ongoing Formation is only adequate. Perhaps alternating your current book with Formation Friday topics and other things, like the Rule, the correlation among the Rule, the Constitutions and the Catechism, the life of Francis or Clare, the various Franciscan Saints, the Wild Goose film series, may enhance your ongoing formation. I would also suggest that, if your spiritual assistant is able to attend your council meetings, that some type of ongoing formation take place there also. If he is not, he may suggest a topic or you might pick somethings from the suggestions I have mentioned as your council ongoing formation.

Currently, there are no persons assigned as liaisons to JPIC and to YouFra. They do not need to be professed to do this. It only requires giving the name of the person and his/her email address to that JPIC or YouFra person on REC. Their only duty is to pass along the information they receive to the members of the fraternity. Please continue to make yourselves known to all your parishes and increase your growth.

**Summation:**

We sincerely hope we helped fulfill Article 92.1 of the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order, which states: "*The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive” the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of the unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion into the Franciscan family and the Church."*

The Encounter fraternity is doing a great job in growing their membership and strengthening their sense of community and fraternity and their spiritual growth. They are also to be commended on the apostolic work they are now doing for the community. I look forward to seeing their continued growth as a fraternity and as a positive force for good in their community.

Respectfully submitted,

**Marcia Stamboulian, OFS**

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Regional Councilor, Fraternal Visitor

Date of Report: June 26, 2023