Visitation Report





Saint Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity

Cape Coral, Florida

May,13, 2023

**Visitation Summary**

Sheila Solomon, OFS and Mark Banschbach, OFS, Five Franciscan Martyrs Regional Councilors conducted the Fraternal Visitation and Br. Lombardo D’Auria was present for the fraternity’s Pastoral Visitation. The council had prepared well for our visit, having available the necessary documentation, records, and historical information. We were warmly welcomed from the moment of our arrival until the moment we left. The community gathered for the 9 AM Mass at St. Katherine Drexel Parish, and afterward retired to the Parish Hall, in order to gather for the meeting.

**Preparatory Information**

The pre-visitation questionnaire had been completed and received by Mark prior to the date of the Visitation. Sheila and Brother Lombardo received a completed questionnaire on the day of the visit. We thank the Fraternity Council and individual members for taking the time to complete the questionnaire in such a thoughtful manner. We also thank Doug Elliott for being such a conscientious and committed fraternity minister.

**Demographics**

There are a total of 33 active professed members in the Fraternity. There is also one Candidate, one in orientation and 2 lapsed members. On the day of the visitation 23 members were present. Most of those absent were not able to attend because of illness or illness in their families.

The fraternity council is as follows:

Doug Elliott, OFS – Minister

Bill Perri, OFS – Vice Minister

Sandra Geertsen, OFS – Formation Director

Laurie Picerno, OFS – Treasurer

Jay Bubb, OFS – Secretary

Debbi Perri, OFS – Councilor

Barbara Hunt, OFS - Councilor

Fr. Bruce Hennington, OFM Cap. - Spiritual Assistant

**Documentation**

The Fraternity’s Establishment Document was presented to the visitors. The fraternity register was available, reviewed, and signed and the council minutes were reviewed and signed as were the fraternity’s bank statements. The council member’s binders, council minutes and agendas were also viewed. All the fraternity’s records were competently organized and complete. It was noted on the pre-visitation questionnaire that the fraternity said their “collection of materials for the files was good”. The current council has worked very hard to update and complete their records and they should be commended as now they are in excellent form.

**Prayer Life**

St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity has a solid and seasoned prayer life. Many members attend Mass together on the Saturday of their Gathering and they frequently pray the Rosary and the Franciscan Crown Rosary. They also read and discuss scripture and share in church and Franciscan Rituals such as Transitus with a Mass and celebration.

**Apostolic Activity**

This fraternity is excited about their apostolates. Since the community comes from different parishes, after their meeting and social time, they get together and make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, deliver them to the “Bootstraps” location and assist in feeding the poor. Approximately 160 sandwiches are made. Making the sandwiches after the meeting allows those who are physically challenged to participate in the apostolate in both prayer AND action! Members pray a rosary while making the sandwiches. This is a beautiful example of prayer leading to action. Bootstraps maintains a soup kitchen, donation center and food pantry. For the donation center the fraternity collects clothing, toiletries, tents, bug repellant and outdoor clothing such as rain gear. St. Maximilian Kolbe members second ministry is supporting the Poor Clares who lost their monastery at Fort Myers Beach. Having lost everything during Hurricane Ian the sisters decided to build a new monastery in Naples. This fraternity, with St. Clare, Ave Maria will be helping them furnish and supply their new residence.

**Formation**

*Initial Formation*

The fraternity uses The Franciscan Journey by Fr. Lester Bach, as their primary text for initial formation. There are always 2-3 fraternity members present during initial formation as well as a solid formation team of 2-3 members meeting once a month in addition to their Gathering. Those men and women in formation are also encouraged to join the fraternity at Perkins restaurant (see later in the report). The FUN manual and other Franciscan resources are used to supplement Fr. Bach’s text.

*Ongoing Formation*

At the time of our visit, Sandy Geertsen, Formation Director, lead the Fraternity in reading parts of Pope Francis’ Encyclical on the environment, Laudato Si. The fraternity was divided into 4 small groups and given two or three paragraphs from the pope’s Encyclical. They then discussed two questions and reported out to the whole group at the end. This was one example of a varied type of activities used for formation. Others include the viewing of a video and book study.

**Community Outreach and Vocations**

As was earlier stated this community has a healthy number of members and is growing. They have 33 members, 2 Excused, 1 candidate and 1 Orientee. Note: a visitor is to be moving into formation at the next meeting.

Regarding outreach, St. Maximilian Kolbe members have defined the fraternity’s “boundaries” as they include men and women from Cape Coral, Fort Myers, and Bokeelia (Pine Island) which means they represent several different parishes. They printed a new brochure and are in the process of making themselves known in the greater region. Along with their regular Gathering members meet once a month each, at Perkins restaurant and Whisky Creek for fellowship, formation or book discussion. This routine of meeting in a public place gives them exposure and opportunities to connect with others. Lastly, Doug provided input to the Synod process when “requested by the bishop”.

**Monthly Gatherings**

St. Maximilian Kolbe meets on the second Saturday of each month. An agenda is set for the Gathering. Though there were some variations from their regular practice, this Visitation Gathering gave us a good idea of what a “normal” Gathering looks like. It began with our Ritual prayer, page on 50.

After a period of refreshment and social time we moved to ongoing formation. This was followed by a business meeting and comments and questions from the visitors. There were discussions about the apostolates and the visitors were given an opportunity to ask some questions of the community and then the community had their closing prayer and we adjourned to have lunch. After lunch the fraternity started making their sandwiches.

As is recommended by the national fraternity, the formation activity took the bulk of the gathering.

**Things You are Doing Well**

**Fraternal**

This community is very warm, welcoming and cohesive. You are growing the number of meetings you have each month because you like to be together and share time both in Fellowship and Formation. You are now meeting 3 times per month as this also allows others who might not make (due to work schedules) your other meetings to attend.

**Summation**

We understand that the fraternity was unclear about what to plan for formation during a visitation. It was thought that the visitors would be speaking during much of the formation time. The formation activity we observed may not be typical. Though the presentation and process were well done, it appeared (with exception of the minister’s meditation) to have been developed near the time of the Gathering as opposed to well before-hand. For instance, reading a chapter of a book/document ahead of time, answering questions, and coming back together at the next meeting to discuss. The problem with doing things this way is that it robs the members time to reflect. They only have the opportunity to share things that are in the forefront of the mind, and upon further meditation might have some further insight. Again, this was only from one visit and might not be typical.

**Opportunities and Recommendations**

First, the community should request to move the Fraternity information away from the Parish Ministry heading in the Parish Bulletin. The OFS is an Order, and not a Parish Ministry, as we are separate. I might suggest moving it to another area of the bulletin, or request to have it in the Website - the parish has a nice website with the Knights under the Stewardship menu etc.

Next, talk to your Pastor and see if you can place your banner in the sanctuary on your meeting days. Sit together at Mass, and see if he might make mention of the Fraternity during the Mass etc. Consider having the Fraternity included in prayer intentions on Meeting days etc.

Third, we would like to recommend that your community establish a JPIC group. JPIC is a vital part of who we are as Franciscans. This community is on a strong JPIC vocational walk and the potential is great.

Lastly, you appear to have quite a number of people who are computer literate. Along with your newsletter we suggest that you also consider a website, Facebook and Instagram site. Your Newsletter will serve those who have no computer while website/Facebook Page/Instagram will connect your community and reach others outside the fraternity. Regarding your wonderful newsletter, the minister might want to consider asking another member to write/edit it. Sharing the responsibilities within a fraternity is aways recommended. Sometimes the ministers find himself/herself doing everything and then the membership risks becoming passive. Also, ask everyone to contribute at various times throughout the year.

**Final Thoughts**

This Fraternity is a wonderful community filled with Joy and Franciscan Charism.

We have seen it be presented with great challenges and you have met those challenges with true Franciscan joy in your hearts. We are overjoyed at hearing that your community wants to meet and share more often, and that you are hungry for more relationship with the region and with other fraternities.

If there is an area that you would like to have the Region come and give a talk etc., please reach out and provide us with the topic, 3 dates within which we can try to schedule and please make it at least 6 months in advance, keeping in mind that your councilors and Regional Spiritual Assistant have a number of fraternities to manage.

We appreciate the effort of all of the brothers and sisters of St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity in graciously welcoming the visitors. We immediately recognized ourselves as extended members of their family.

**Takeaway for the Regional Councilors**

We find that the fraternity would like for us to assist them more in the areas of JPIC, Formation, Council member functions, and their connection to their Region (JPIC, Workshops, Days of Reflection), other Fraternities, their Diocese, Vocations and Youth.

We again want to thank the Fraternity members for sharing this visit with us and your wonderful hospitality. If there is any part of this report you have questions, please reach out to us.

NOTE\* This report is only from the Regional Councilors, for the Fraternal visit. The Regional Spiritual Assistant will be sharing his own report shortly.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheila Solomon, OFS, St. Thomas More Family Regional Councilor

Mark Banschbach, OFS, St Thomas More Family Regional Councilor