**SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER**

**Five Franciscan Martyrs Region**

*Florida, South Georgia, Lower Alabama*

[*www.francisan~sfo.org*](http://www.francisan~sfo.org)

**Spiritual Assistance Training Program Syllabus for Five Franciscan Martyrs Region**

*Introduction*

An extensive review of existing Spiritual Assistance Training Programs was conducted by the Five Franciscan Martyrs Regional Spiritual Assistant (i.e., me). Based on that review, and given the constraints of our specific region, I have developed the following curriculum for the training of future Spiritual Assistants in our region. It is generally in concert with existing training programs. The major difference between our program and those of other programs is the requirement that our program be conducted online for the most part. The focus is on what it means to be a Spiritual Assistant; there will not be much in the way of general Franciscan formation. It is assumed you already have that background or you wouldn’t be applying for this ministry. We will have an occasional Zoom meeting as a group. I’d like to schedule these Zoom meetings once each month or every other month. We can determine this later. In these meetings candidates can share their knowledge and experiences while participating in the training program. While completion of the program does not guarantee certification or appointment, it will assure that the candidate is properly prepared for this ministry should approval and appointment be forthcoming by the Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA).

Required Texts:

1. Franciscan Family Connections (Bach, 2011)
2. FUN Manual (Selected Sections)
3. Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order (Mulqueen & Sanborn, 2014)
4. Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS (Bach, 2012)
5. A Brief History of the Secular Franciscan Order and its Rules (Wicks)

All required text can be purchased via Smoky Valley Printing, see the Tau-USA publication or Google Smoky Valley Printing. I believe the FUN Manual is now online, and I will provide a digital copy of the History of the SFO and its Rules. Therefore, you will be responsible for purchasing or otherwise securing copies of the Franciscan Family Connections, Essential Documents of the SFO, and the Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the OFS. The approximate cost should be around $50 or less by my calculations.

My philosophy for developing this training program is to emphasize practicality, without sacrificing the needed knowledge to be an effective Spiritual Assistant. I know other programs go into Canon Law and other theological aspects, but we just don’t have the time. Frankly, I don’t think these areas are as relevant to the work we do as Spiritual Assistants. If needed, you can pick up this knowledge on your own time. I want to focus on specific areas that are more relevant to the Spiritual Assistant in our region.

The following details the reading requirements and monthly assignments for the 18 month program. This is an intensive program; if you think you may not have the time or motivation to complete this program it is advised that you reconsider your application to become a Spiritual Assistant. My goal is to have 100% completion rate. I don’t believe the requirements for this program are unrealistic. To be sure, not everyone is destined to be a Spiritual Assistant. It takes initiative, motivation, and discernment before embarking on this journey. It is well worth your time and effort; we are on this journey together. I’m your guide, but I expect I will learn from you as well!

*Schedule of Monthly Sessions (subject to change)*

**Month 1 (Aug. 2021): Orientation**a) A Brief History of the Secular Franciscan Order and Its Rules (*Wicks*). I will provide a .pdf file for this resource.
b) Section 1 – The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order (*Essential Documents of the Secular Franciscan Order*)

Assignment: Write an essay (not to exceed 5 pages, double-spaced) in which you discuss how our “Rule” will inform your duties as a Spiritual Assistant (SA). That is, how will our Rule be manifested in all that you do as a SA?

**Month 2 (Sept. 2021): What is a Spiritual Assistant?**a) Chapter 1 – The Role of a Spiritual Assistant (*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 1 – (*Handbook for Spiritual Assistance*)

Assignment: In Month 1 (last month) you discussed how the “Rule” will inform your duties as a Spiritual Assistant. This month we get more specific. In your own words, what IS a Spiritual Assistant? In your response to this question address what YOU will do as a Spiritual Assistant in the fraternity to which you will be assigned. No generalities, please. Try and be specific. Concrete goals.

**Month 3 (Oct. 2021): Franciscan Spirituality**a) Chapter 2 – Franciscan Theology/Spirituality (*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 3 – The Trinity and Us (*FF Connections*)
c) Franciscan Theology, Tradition and Spirituality (*FUN*)
d) St. Francis and His Approach to Divinity (*FUN)*

Assignment: These two questions are associated mainly with Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of FF Connections dealing with Franciscan Spirituality. Question #1—How do the ideas of Chapter 2 make a difference in your service to a local fraternity. Question #2—What role would you play as a SA in the process of forming people who come to the OFS?

**Month 4 (Nov. 2021): Spiritual Assistants and Formation**a) Chapter 4 – Spiritual Assistants and Initial Formation (*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 5 – Spiritual Assistants and Ongoing Formation (*FF Connections*)
c) Chapter 11 – Church, Eucharist, Ongoing Formation (*FF Connections*)

Assignment: Question #1—Are you prepared, as a spiritual assistant, to be regularly involved in initial formation? What would help or hinder your participation? Question #2—With reference to the SA Handbook, what role does the spiritual assistant play in the process of forming people who come to the SFO? Question #3—What contribution(s) are you called to make for ongoing formation as a spiritual assistant?

**Month 5 (Dec. 2021): Franciscan Influences**a) Chapter 6 – Franciscan Writers ((*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 7 – Vatican II’s Influence (*FF Connections*)
c) Our Identity as a Secular Franciscan (*FUN*)

Assignment: Question #1—What contribution have Franciscan theologians made to the Church? Which Franciscan writers are most refreshing for you and why? Question #2—*Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* offer direction for our ministry in the Church. What specific ideas in these documents are important for you? Question #3—How ready are you to make changes in your life when the Spirit calls you to change? In what specific areas of your life do you find it difficult to consider change/conversion? Why? How would you call people to conversion on a pastoral visitation?

**Month 6 (Jan. 2022): OFS Structure**a) Chapter 8 – SFO Organizational Structure (*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 9 – SFO Activity in the World/Leadership (*FF Connections*)
c) Charism and Mission of Secular Franciscans (*FUN*)

Assignment: Question #1—Why is it important to be aware of the organizational structure of the OFS? What is its value for a SA? Question #2—Explain the principle of subsidiarity. Why is it important in dealing with issues in the OFS? Question #3—How do SA’s develop good leadership among the seculars they serve? What are some important qualities needed by a servant-leader?

**Month 7 (Feb. 2022): Franciscan Rituals**a) Chapter 10 – Franciscan Rituals and Devotions (*FF Connections*)
b) Chapter 14 – Conversion – the Call of the Spirit (*FF Connections*)
c) Penitence and Conversion (*FUN*)

Assignment: Question #1—Explain why the *Ritual of the SFO* is an important tool in your ministry as a spiritual assistant. Question #2—How would you deal with individuals with unhealthy devotions? Individuals whose devotions draw them away from fraternity life? Question #3—In your own words, describe the meaning of “conversion.” Explain why it is a necessity every day. Question #4—What is the value of “penance” in the life of Secular Franciscans?

**Month 8 (Mar. 2022): Forms of Prayer**a) Chapter 18—Prayer Forms (*FF Connections*)

Assignment: Question #1—From your perspective, what is the goal of prayer? Question #2—Which form of prayer do you most identify with? Explain why that is the case. Question #3—Does God answer all our prayers? Why or why not?

**Month 9 (Apr. 2022): Profession**a) Chapter 16—Theology of Profession (*FF Connections*)
b) Profession (*FUN*)

Assignment: Question #1—Describe the commitment that comes with profession as a Secular Franciscan. List some of the expectations that profession requires of a Secular Franciscan. Question #2—Why are spiritual assistants expected to understand the SFO Rule and Constitutions? What advantage does this knowledge give a spiritual assistant in serving a local or regional council and fraternity? Question #3—Why is domination, manipulation, arrogance or rigid dogmatism unsuitable for a spiritual assistant? What are qualities that ought to be part of a SA’s “assistance” in fraternal life?

**Month 10 (May 2022): TBD**I want at least one month “open” so we can determine if we as a group wish to cover an area not specified in the syllabus.

Assignment: Conference call with Fr. Kevin.

**Month 11 (June 2022): Important Documents of the OFS (Part 1 of 4)**a) Section 2 – General Constitutions of the SFO 2000 (*Essential Documents*)

Assignment: Question #1—What did you learn in this month’s readings that you didn’t know before? Question #2—Articles 85 thru 91 specifically deal with spiritual and pastoral assistance to the SFO. After having read this section closely, what is the take home message here? Question #3—What is the difference between a fraternal visit and a pastoral visit? (Articles 92 thru 95)

**Month 12 (July 2022):**  TBD.

**Month 13 (Aug. 2022): Important Documents of the OFS (Part 2 of 4)**a) Section 3 – Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S. (*Essential Documents*)

Assignment: Question #1—Now that you have read Section 3 (Statutes of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the U.S.), what did you learn in this month’s readings that you didn’t know before? Question #2—Summarize the National Executive Council’s composition and its respective duties. Question #3—How is the “fair share” contribution of a local fraternity assessed?

**Month 14 (Sept. 2022): Important Documents of the OFS (Part 3 of 4)**a) Section 4 – Ritual of the SFO (*Essential Documents*)

Assignment: Question #1—Reflect on the various rites (Admission, Profession, and Annual Renewal of Profession). As a Spiritual Assistant, how would you describe these three rites in your own words. It’s not necessary to list the steps of the rites, but more in line with the meaning of each as you see it. Question #2—I know this may seem self-explanatory, but what is the purpose of the opening and closing prayers for fraternity meetings? Why do we do this? Question #3—A not so easy question: What IS the purpose of ritual? Why do we do these things? How do they benefit us?

**Month 15 (Oct. 2022): Important Documents of the OFS (Part 4 of 4)**a) Section 6 – Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the SFO (*Essential Documents*)

Assignment: Question #1—How would you explain *altius moderamen*? Why is this important for a Spiritual Assistant?. Question #2—Now that you all are going to be “graduating” soon it is vital you keep in touch with your Regional SA as well as Provincial SA in some cases. Who IS your Provincial SA? What can you tell me about him and his background. Your Provincial SA will be the appointing agent, so you need to know as much about him as you can. Question #3—If you were asked to conduct a Pastoral Visitation, how would you go about conducting such a visit? What aspects of the fraternity would be important to observe?

**Month 16 (Nov. 2022): Fraternity Issues**a) Chapter 2 (*Handbook)*

Assignment: Complete “Spiritual Gifts Inventory” and summarize the results.

**Month 17 (Dec. 2022): CNSA Issues**a) Chapter 3 (*Handbook)*

Assignment: Question #1—What is the role of the SA in fraternity elections? Question #2—In brief, what did the Santa Clara Statement of 1972 say to us as Franciscans? Question #3—Chapter 3 comments upon the beatitudes and Franciscans (1978 OFS Rule #11). What does this rule say to you? How do we “purify our hearts”?

**Month 18 (Jan. 2023): Conclusion and Next Steps**We made it! Congratulations!

Final Assignment: You have just completed an 18 month formation program to become a Spiritual Assistant. Your respective Provincial Spiritual Assistant (PSA) will make your designation as a Spiritual Assistant official. He will want to know what you anticipate your role will be in the future. So please respond to the following question, as I would expect this assignment (your response) will be forwarded to your PSA with my endorsement: “What role do you want to assume as a Spiritual Assistant. If assigned to a fraternity, what constraints/limitations do you have with a fraternity assignment? If you are not interested in a fraternity assignment as an SA, how will you use what you have learned to enrich or otherwise positively influence those in your fraternity?”

Please be specific in the questions above. There is no page limit to this assignment. Whatever you want your PSA to know about you should be included, even if I haven’t included it as part of the assignment. This is your final opportunity to make known what your needs are and what you anticipate for the future.

**Written Assignments:**

Each month there will be several questions or an activity in which the candidate will respond. Essays or activities will be based on the readings for that month and the experiences of the candidate. Essays or activities should be typed, and double spaced not to exceed 5 pages. If the candidate does not have a word processor let me know and exceptions can be made. Papers will be reviewed and returned to the candidate with comments/feedback. There is no specific format that needs to be used; however, all papers should be free of grammatical or spelling errors.

Specific questions or activities for each month will be provided to candidates at least one month in advance of the lesson. It is expected that candidates will submit their assignments no later than the end of the first week of the subsequent month. Thus, your assignment this month (Aug. 2021) should be submitted to me no later than the first week of next month (Sept. 2021). You can always submit earlier if you wish, but I don’t want you getting behind so we need to keep to the schedule.