



FIVE FRANCIS MARTYRS REGION

PASTORAL and FRATERNAL VISITATION REPORT

St. Maximillian Kolbe Fraternity

Debary, FL ~ December 21, 2024

Part 1: Fraternal Visitor

Visitation

Larry Bleau OFS and Fr. Tobias Wirmum OFM Cap. conducted a fraternal and pastoral visitation of the St. Maximillian Kolbe Fraternity (Debary) (#51-13401) on Dec 21, 2024, at St. Ann's Church in Debary, FL.

Statistics and Composition

The fraternity was established Jan 1, 1983, by the Stigmata Province (OFM Cap), and is currently bonded to Our Lady of Guadalupe Province (OFM). The original document of Canonical Establishment was available for examination.

The previsitation report showed 22 active professed members, 2 excused professed members, 3 candidates, 3 inquirers, 1 orientee, and no affiliates. According to the database, however, there are currently 26 active members, of which 23 are professed and 3 are candidates. None of the members listed in the database are Active-Excused, and the 3 inquirers are not yet reflected in the database.

Since the fraternity has been hosted at its current location (St. Ann's) it has grown almost twice its previous size, with many more in initial formation and expected to profess in 2025.

The current council was elected on Oct 15, 2022. Their previous visitation was Apr 17, 2021.

The current Spiritual Assistant is Karen Szczesniak, OFS. The database does not reflect her date of appointment. It is not currently known if the region has the SA's official appointment on file.

Preparatory Information

A previsitation questionnaire was completed and received in a timely manner. No individual questionnaires were submitted. In addition, a thumb drive containing various fraternity records was given to the visitors at the visitation.

Records

The overall status of the record keeping is excellent, even given the exception noted below.

The following were checked:

- A complete and up-to-date photo directory of members was provided in digital form, which had also been distributed to members.
- An Official Profession Register was available and was reviewed. It contained entries for both those professed of all statuses and those in initial formation.
- The NAFRA database information was reviewed and differences noted earlier in this report.

- A copy of the Regional Guidelines was present, as was a copy of the *Ritual*. While copies of the Rule, General Constitutions and National Statutes were not in evidence, they are easily available online.
- Minutes of Council meetings were in a large binder that covered more than 3 years.
- Attendance records are kept in a bound journal which members sign as they arrive.
- Treasury Reports are summarized in the minutes. There are two bank accounts – the Common Fund and Poverello Fund – and the checkbook for each account is well maintained. The Treasurer's home, in which detailed records, including the ledger, were retained, flooded recently, so no other Treasurer records could be viewed.
 - The Treasurer gives a monthly report to the Minister at every fraternity gathering and presents the report to the fraternity during the business section of the meeting.
 - There has been no yearly budget but Council is now trying to create one; they describe it as a work in progress.
 - They do not they have a copy of Fraternity Internal Controls and Guidelines, but these are no longer available as part of the National Statutes, so this is understandable.
 - The Fair Share is paid from the general fund and payment is made annually.
 - Records are kept of member donations.
- The Annual Report for 2022 was received by the Region in a timely manner and was reviewed by the visitors prior to the visitation.
- A history of the fraternity with pictures and descriptions is kept in a separate, large binder.
- The fraternity publishes a monthly newsletter. They also have Facebook and X account to post fraternity news.

Participation in local, regional, and national activities

Several fraternity members were present at the previous Annual Regional Meeting.

Their minister currently serves on the Regional Executive Council as a Family Councilor. Their S.A. was once on the Council of another fraternity in upstate New York.

Fraternity members receive the TAU-USA National newsletter and the JOYFUL MESSENGER newsletter of the Region.

They have partnered with other local fraternities in a Day of Reflection and Public Prayer for Peace; have attended the Greccio experience in 2023 and plan to do so this year; along with another fraternity supported the Greccio experience by providing food and beverage; and they provided meeting space, food and beverages for one of the Family Gatherings. Four of the six Formation team members attended the family gathering and day of reflection.

Council

This visitor met with Council apart from the members to assess their interaction, raise certain matters, and respond to their questions. They are seasoned and work well together, each understanding his/her duties and responsibilities. They interacted well with each other and the visitors, with no one person dominating. The members think highly of them and during dialogue complimented their leadership.

Council members have been professed between 3 and 14 years, with the average being 9 years.

The Formation Director was not present due to ongoing medical condition that is now severe; he is expected to resign shortly. We discussed the options to fill that vacancy.

The Spiritual Assistant was ill on the day of the visitation and could not be observed or consulted. Council praised her contributions to the fraternity, however.

Gathering Observations

The program which was utilized did not have time for observation and interaction; it took the place of the regular gathering. Since it had been prepared ahead of time and distributed to members, it was nonetheless used to minimize confusion. Therefore there was less interaction than typical and no business activity. The visitors held a dialogue with members, though, in which all were encouraged to take part, and many did.

There was sufficient time before the gathering to give members a chance to socialize and bond. This visitor felt welcomed from the very start.

Council described the typical gathering format, which included a number of novel ideas. A regular feature of their gathering is a short presentation by a member of a Franciscan saint or blessed. Also, at their November gathering there is an empty chair to represent deceased members, an idea worth emulating in other fraternities.

The gathering had previously been held in the social hall, a larger space, that Council determined was too large and therefore not suitable. They now meet in a room of a smaller building, which is of proper size and layout so as to foster a stronger sense of belonging and assist with small group interaction.

Part 2: Pastoral Visitor

Spirituality

The fraternity has a sizable membership. They pray together, including the Liturgy of the Hours. They recently finished an extended review of the Franciscan virtues. At each gathering there is a presentation on a Franciscan saint. During Council meetings they have ongoing formation and servant leadership training. They celebrate the Transitus each year as a fraternity. They express their Franciscan spirituality by these and other ways and should regularly search for additional ways to do so.

Formation

They have enough formators to carry out their formation. Both initial and ongoing formation is led by a four member formation team, two of whom are on Council. The Vice Minister has stepped in to fill the role of the Formation Director, who is currently ill and is expected to resign soon. The team has developed a set of lesson plans to follow in case a formator is not available that month. They are looking forward to a retreat. The recommended time frames for initial formation phases are used.

Initial formation is held separately from the gathering. The team uses *Franciscan Journey* by Lester Bach for initial formation. For ongoing formation they use Formation Friday emails, the *For Up To Now* (FUN) manual, and a book on Franciscan virtues. They report that the ongoing formation is always Franciscan based.

Fraternity

Being with them one could feel a sense of joy, peace and warmth among themselves. It's an aging fraternity that needs some young people.

Apostolate

The fraternity financially supports a family in India through the Franciscan Family Apostolate and families in the Amazon through the Amazon Relief Fund. Each year they raise funds and donate them to the local pregnancy center. They also raised funds to assist victims of Hurricane Milton; a relief effort volunteer purchased needed items and distributed them locally to those in need.

Members paid visits to sick and old members who no longer attend meetings.

Part 3: Joint Summary

Commendations and Recommendations

Commendations:

- The fraternity is strong and growing, is welcoming, has strong social components, and its members bond well.
- There is a genuine effort to care for each other. Their sense of joy, peace and fraternal warmth is an attractive feature of this fraternity.
- The formation program is varied and Franciscan focused, with those initial formation enthusiastic about the fraternity and their vocation.

Some recommendations:

- To comply with the restrictions on 501(c)(3) organizations and follow National's guidance on this matter, discontinue distribution of monies from the Poverello Fund – or any fraternity funds – to individuals. Council should discern what charitable organizations or purposes can benefit from the existing monies while maintaining faith with those who donated to it. If Council still desires to help members who are in financial need, collect funds on an as-needed basis in cash only so they do not pass through the fraternity's account, and give them directly to the member in need. This can still be done with the recipient's identity being known only to Council.
- Start to use a standard format of Treasurer reports to Council. This will enable a consistent way to digest this information, maintain monthly summaries, and make the next Treasurer's task simpler.
- Council should review the Fraternity Internal Controls and Guidelines and implement those parts which apply to the local fraternity. If these are not available or not used anymore, review National's Treasurer Reporting Requirements.
- Council should encourage more "hands-on" apostolates. They should also work on the YouFra aspect in order to develop and animate the Franciscan Youth.
- Designate a person who will communicate promptly with the Region's database manager when there are changes to member status, etc., in order to keep the local roster and national database consistent.

- If the Formation Director resigns, properly accept the resignation and fill the vacancy promptly with someone Council believes is well qualified, either by election from Council or appointment from the membership.

The minister is to share this Report with members of the fraternity.

The fraternity members are to dialogue about the contents and hold each other accountable for the implementation of the practical applications and the suggestions. Suggest that they take their pulse at regular intervals and review this Visitation report periodically.

Visitors' names and contact information

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Not yet submitted*