

**The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans' Statutes**  
(a proposal for the Order's consideration at Chapter 2015)

**Article I: Name**

The name of the Order shall be The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans.

**Article II: Mission Statement**

Celebrating God's presence and grace in everything, following the Poor Christ of the gospels in lives of mutual care and accountability in harmony with the faith and practice of the whole Franciscan family, we are the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. We seek to grow in the love and knowledge of God and to serve Jesus Christ in faithfulness to the spirit and example of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.

**Article III: The General Rule of the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans**

**Prelude**

The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised up by the Holy Spirit in the Church, unites all members of the people of God, clergy and laity, who recognize that they are called to follow Christ in the footsteps of Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi.

Christ calls us to follow this way, so that he may send us, like Francis and Clare, to offer all that we have and all that we are. We shall strive to be living witnesses among all nations to the great truth that, in Christ, "there is no longer Jew nor Greek, there is no longer slave nor free, there is no longer male nor female" (Galatians 3:28); that there are no barriers of race or nations in God's family. There is only the All-loving Creator, the Divine Redeemer, the one fellowship in the All-wonderful Comforter.

St. Francis and St. Clare recognized that people from all walks of life are called to follow Jesus and live the simple Gospel life. We strive for unity as a Whole Order, comprising those who live a radical embrace of the evangelical counsels of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, as well as those who live a secular life of simplicity. Among us are those who embrace the active life, the contemplative life, the eremitical life and various mixes thereof. We seek a life of daily conversion under a definite discipline and lifelong vows. Members may be from any Christian faith community or church. Members are clergy and lay, inclusive of all gender identifications and sexual orientations, and may be married, partnered or single.

1  
2 **OEF Principles**

3 1 through 16

4 *(It is suggested that the Order consider updating its Principles, with particular*  
5 *attention to #17.)*  
6

7 **Article IV: Chapter**

8 This Order is a self-governing body whose members meet annually and is  
9 governed by its Professed Members who shall select Council Members and make  
10 decisions as they see fit in accordance with our Principles and in harmony with  
11 Jesus Christ.  
12

13 Each year the Order comes together for Chapter/Convocation, which consists of  
14 the following: The Order's Business, Community Prayers and Worship, Ongoing  
15 Formation, the Sharing of Our Lives, the Celebration of Rites of Passage, and the  
16 Re-dedication to Our Rules of Life.  
17

18 **A. Business and Discernment**  
19

20 **1. Chapter Business**

21 Chapter business is approached through our Prayerful Discernment of God's will  
22 for the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. We boldly affirm that in opening  
23 ourselves to the Spirit through a process of silence, loving, respectful dialogue and  
24 a deep listening, we, as the gathered body, will be led into the will of God. We  
25 call this process of conducting business and decision-making Prayerful  
26 Discernment *[see Article VIII]*.  
27

28 **2. Participation of Absent Members**

29 Absent members of the Order are also encouraged to participate in Chapter by  
30 lovingly and respectfully sharing their thoughts and concerns with a proxy, who  
31 will in turn share these with the gathered body at Chapter. A present member may  
32 serve as proxy for up to two absent members. If possible, absent members will  
33 observe the silence that supports Prayerful Discernment wherever they are, and let  
34 love transcend all distance. Ultimately, discerning the will of God for the Order of  
35 Ecumenical Franciscans at any given Chapter will rest with the gathered body at  
36 that Chapter.  
37

38 **3. Agenda Creation**

39 Any member is welcomed to bring a concern, an idea or a proposal to the Council  
40 at any time for further consideration. If it is a concern that a member would like

1 to see brought to Chapter for discussion and discernment, the member is asked to  
2 bring the matter to the attention of the Council at least 4 months prior to Chapter  
3 allowing sufficient time to be added to the Chapter's agenda.  
4

#### 5 4. Annual Reports

6 Annual Reports at the invitation of the Council will be presented by the following  
7 at Chapter (copies will be made available): The Council, Formation Coordinator,  
8 Treasurer, Fellowship Coordinator, and JPIC Animator. Committees and other  
9 individuals representing and/or working on behalf of the Order may be asked to  
10 report as well.  
11

#### 12 5. Chapter Minutes

13 Chapter Minutes including reports will be sent to each OEF member in a timely  
14 manner.  
15

### 16 B. Community Prayer and Worship

#### 17 1. Worship Services

18 The Council coordinates the Worship Services at Chapter, freely delegating and  
19 inviting participation of others. The Service of Profession which includes Rites of  
20 Passage for those in formation, and the Renewal of Vows and Personal Rules of  
21 Life for the Professed will be coordinated by the Council in collaboration with the  
22 Formation Coordinator.  
23  
24

25 2. The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans welcomes all present to the Lord's Table  
26 as we worship together at Chapter or in local and regional OEF gatherings. At the  
27 invitation of the Council any person may be welcomed to lead worship and preside  
28 at the Eucharist/Communion/ Lord's Supper/Breaking of the Bread/Agape Meal in  
29 accordance with the discipline of one's respective faith community and one's  
30 individual conscience, both of which we respect and affirm.  
31

32 3. The use of inclusive language is encouraged.  
33

34 4. The expression of our diverse faith traditions is valued and celebrated.  
35

36 5. Members of OEF shall renew their Vows and Personal Rule of Life at Chapter.  
37 Absent members should renew the same within a worship setting if at all possible.  
38

39 6. Newly selected Council Members are commissioned at Chapter.  
40

## **Article V: Positions of Service to the Order**

Those in positions of service to the Order will collaborate as needed, caring for one another with respect and deep listening, approaching decisions prayerfully, and striving to reach unity for the benefit and well-being of the entire Order.

### **A. The Council**

The Council is made up of 5 Professed Members of the Order who have been selected by the Professed at Chapter to ensure the healthy and effective administration of the Order, to support the Order community in its Life and Witness, and to represent the Order to the wider Church and the world. Council Members are trusted to seek the well-being of the entire Order and are accountable to the membership.

#### **1. Responsibilities of the Council**

##### **a. Administration of the Order**

i. The Council ensures the timely tending of all financial, legal and administrative matters. The Council also ensures internal Order communication. To these ends, the Council appoints and works in consultation with the Treasurer, Scribe and any others needed to fulfill these responsibilities.

ii. The Council will coordinate preparations for our annual Chapter/Convocation, delegating responsibilities as needed. The Council will set the agenda for Chapter discernment and will facilitate dialogue, discussions and prayerful discernment.

iii. The Council serves as the public voice of the Order to other orders, churches, allies in particular ministries, and to the public at large.

b. Nurture of Community Life and Witness: The Council nurtures the spiritual well-being of the Order, seeking to reinforce the integrity of the Order and its faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

i. Council meetings: The Council will meet regularly (monthly as a guideline), asking for prayer and encouraging input from the membership. Meetings may be face-to-face or by telephone conference, Skype, or other available means.

ii. Annual discernment on community Life and Witness: At any time, but especially during Lent, members of the Order are asked to prayerfully reflect upon the Life and Witness of our Order. Each member is invited to share these reflections with the Council. Taking these reflections into consideration, the Council will prepare a report on the same which will be presented annually at Chapter, with copies sent to the membership.

1           iii. Chapter/Convocation: The Council will coordinate preparations for  
2 Chapter/Convocation, facilitate Chapter Discernment and coordinate Worship  
3 Services.

4           iv. Spiritual nurture of those in Formation: The Council will support and be  
5 in consultation with the Formation Coordinator for the spiritual nurture of those in  
6 formation and to address formation needs which may arise.

7           v. Spiritual nurture of the Professed: The Council will coordinate effective  
8 means for the Professed to report regularly on the living of their Rules. The  
9 Council will provide opportunities for ongoing Franciscan formation.

10          vi. Pastoral care: Understanding both the difficulty of a dispersed  
11 community providing pastoral care and that each member's local faith community  
12 is the primary source of pastoral care, the Council will assure pastoral  
13 communication with all Professed Members of the Order. There will be times of  
14 crisis within the Order as well as times of crisis for members – illness, loss,  
15 difficulties. The Council will strive to be a prayerful, listening, and compassionate  
16 presence, mediating among members as needed, and encouraging all members to  
17 care one for another. The Council may form committees to further support this  
18 work.

19          vii. Calling forth gifts: Recognizing and cherishing the many talents and  
20 passions present within the membership, the Council will call forth gifts of  
21 members to be used for service within and beyond the Order.

## 22 23 2. Terms of Council Members

24  
25 a. The Council will be selected every three years for a term of three years. Council  
26 Members are selected from the Professed by the Professed. A Council Member  
27 may serve up to three consecutive terms on the Council, then must step away from  
28 this service for at least two years.

29  
30 b. In the case of a vacated seat on the Council, the Council has the discretion of  
31 appointing a replacement or of asking the Chapter to select a replacement at the  
32 next Chapter Meeting. Serving a completion of term will comprise "one term",  
33 regardless of length of time actually served.

34  
35 c. If at any time during the three year term, the Council, under the guidance of the  
36 Spirit, recognizes a need for greater inclusion and/or balance on the Council, the  
37 Council may appoint up to two additional members to meet this need. Such terms  
38 also comprise "one term", regardless of length.

1 3. Selection of Council

2  
3 a. Prior to Chapter:

4 i. Members of the Order are encouraged to be in prayer individually and  
5 collectively regarding the needs of the Order and the gifts of members.

6 ii. Any Professed Member unwilling or unable to serve on the Council will  
7 notify the Scribe in writing requesting that his or her name be removed from  
8 consideration for service on the Council.

9  
10 b. At Chapter:

11 i. Community prayer and discernment: On the first full day of Chapter, a  
12 period of at least three hours will be set aside for members to pray and to seek  
13 discernment on Council selection. Members may meet informally to talk or may  
14 spend time in solitary discernment. Proxies may speak with the absent members  
15 whom they are representing. The outgoing Council will host a discernment  
16 meeting (45-90 minutes) for those desiring collective prayer and discernment.  
17 Participants are invited to speak as the Spirit moves them to speak. This is not a  
18 time to engage in debate or dialogue regarding the selection. Rather, it is a time to  
19 listen and to seek the Spirit's guidance.

20 ii. Gatherers: The outgoing Council will appoint three "Gatherers" from  
21 among those in attendance at Chapter. It is encouraged that visiting representatives  
22 from other Franciscan Orders serve in this capacity when possible.

23 iii. Emerging Council: First gathering of names. Following the time of  
24 prayer and discernment, each Professed Member, when ready, lists on paper and  
25 submits to the Gatherers the names of five Professed Members to serve on the  
26 Council. Absent members do the same via their chosen proxies. The Gatherers  
27 will announce the names of 10 Members: 5 who identify as male and 5 who  
28 identify as female. These will be the five most frequently named in each gender  
29 category.

30 iv. Second gathering of names: The membership will have an opportunity  
31 for further prayer and discernment. Following this time, and in the same manner  
32 as before, Professed Members will again select and submit 5 names, this time from  
33 this list of 10. The Gatherers will tabulate those selections, and announce the  
34 newly selected Council at the next appropriate gathering.

35  
36 The Council will consist of: 2 Professed Members who identify as male (the 2  
37 most frequently named), 2 Professed Members who identify as female (the 2 most  
38 frequently named) plus one additional Professed Member of either gender (the  
39 next most frequently named of either gender).

1 *[Note: The intention is for the Council to reflect gender balance. We recognize*  
2 *there are persons who identify as neither exclusively male nor female. Such*  
3 *persons are not to be excluded.]*  
4

## 5 B. Other Positions of Service to the Order

6 Collaboratively recognizing the gifts of members, the Council selects members to  
7 fill the following necessary positions within the Order: Formation Coordinator,  
8 Scribe, Treasurer, Fellowship Coordinator, JPIC Animator (Justice, Peace, and  
9 Integrity of Creation), Newsletter Editor, and Technology Coordinator. The  
10 Council calls forth other gifts as necessary, forming committees as needed for the  
11 good of the Order. All of the above are accountable to the Council and to the  
12 membership of the Order.  
13

### 14 1. Selections by the Council

15

#### 16 a. Office of Formation

17 i. The Formation Coordinator, in consultation with the Council, is entrusted  
18 with the training of Formation Counselors and for the materials used in formation.

19 ii. The Formation Coordinator will choose one or more Formation  
20 Assistants to aid in the fulfillment of the entrusted formation responsibilities.

21 iii. The Formation Coordinator welcomes all inquiries to the Order and  
22 coordinates introduction into the formation process.

23 iv. The Formation Coordinator in consultation with Formation Assistants  
24 and individual Formation Counselors, accompanies Postulants and Novices along  
25 the journey of formation.

26 v. The Formation Coordinator directly notifies the Fellowship Coordinator  
27 with the names, locations and contact information of serious Inquirers and those  
28 entering into Formation to facilitate face-to-face contact with Order members and  
29 to encourage participation in local and regional gatherings.

30 vi. The Formation Coordinator collaborates with the Council, Fellowship  
31 Coordinator and respective Formation Counselors in welcoming Postulants and in  
32 receiving the vows of Novices. These Rites of Passage may be celebrated locally,  
33 regionally, or at Chapter.

34 vii. The Formation Coordinator provides the symbols marking transitions to  
35 Postulancy, to Novitiate, and to Profession per current decisions of the Order  
36 regarding these symbols.

37 viii. At least Quarterly, the Formation Coordinator will share with the  
38 Council the current updated list of those in Formation and their respective  
39 Formation Counselors.  
40

1 b. Scribe: The Scribe is chosen by the Council to facilitate communications within  
2 the Order.

3 i. The Scribe is responsible for assuring that Chapter minutes and records of  
4 discernment are taken and for their distribution to all members of the Order.

5 ii. The Scribe may be asked to take minutes at meetings of the Council.

6 iii. The Scribe is responsible for the prompt dissemination of all minutes and  
7 other pertinent Order information. To this end, the Scribe may utilize  
8 Fiddlesticks, postal mail, the OEF website, OEF List and/or other available media.  
9

10 c. Treasurer

11 i. The Treasurer is responsible for the receiving and depositing of donations  
12 to the Order.

13 ii. The Treasurer is responsible for all cash disbursements approved by the  
14 Council.

15 iii. The Treasurer is responsible for filing any necessary tax returns to the  
16 IRS.

17 iv. The Treasurer is responsible for presenting a financial report quarterly to  
18 the Council and yearly at Chapters.

19 v. The Treasurer works with the Council to create an annual budget.

20 vi. The Treasurer will be sensitive to OEF members in regards to financial  
21 matters.

22 vii. In consultation with the Council, the Treasurer is responsible for the  
23 Registrar work of Chapter as well as Chapter Scholarships and pricing.

24 viii. In consultation with the Council, the Treasurer may appoint an assistant  
25 for Registrar work if needed.  
26

27 d. JPIC Animator (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation)

28 i. The JPIC Animator is asked to serve by the Council and works  
29 collaboratively to elevate awareness of Justice and Peace issues.

30 ii. The JPIC Animator establishes links of communication between the OEF  
31 and other organizations in common commitment to JPIC issues and concerns.

32 iii. The JPIC Animator, working with the Fellowship Coordinator,  
33 facilitates participation in local and regional events promoting JPIC issues and  
34 concerns.

35 iv. The JPIC Animator encourages and supports Order participation in the  
36 Franciscan Action Network, and keeps the Order informed of FAN events and  
37 actions.  
38  
39

1 e. Newsletter Editor

2 i. The Newsletter Editor is asked to serve by the Council and works  
3 collaboratively to publish a newsletter four times annually.

4 ii. The Newsletter Editor collaborates with the Scribe in disseminating  
5 pertinent Order communications.

6  
7 f. Technology Coordinator

8 i. The Technology Coordinator is asked to serve by the Council and works  
9 collaboratively to set up and maintain technological networks and communications  
10 for the Order. This will include the OEF website, Facebook, Twitter, Skype,  
11 teleconferencing and any other technological advances of the future.

12 ii. The Technology Coordinator convenes various members of the Order to  
13 accomplish the technical tasks to maintain technological advances.

14  
15 g. The Council may make other appointments and form committees in accord with  
16 its discernments of what might add to the life and well-being of the Order.

17  
18 2. Appointments made by the Formation Coordinator

19  
20 a. The Formation Coordinator enlists Formation Assistants to aide in meeting the  
21 responsibilities of the position and in the work of formation.

22 b. The Formation Coordinator matches each Postulant and Novice with an  
23 individual Formation Counselor for accompaniment on the journey toward  
24 Profession.

## 25 26 **Article VI: Membership**

27 Admission into this Order is gradually attained through a time of orientation, a  
28 period of formation of at least two years, and Profession of the Rule. The entire  
29 community is engaged in this process of growth and formation. Profession, by its  
30 nature, is a permanent commitment. Members of this Order meet annually.

### 31 32 **A. Inclusion**

33  
34 The membership of the OEF consists of those who have made vows as Professed  
35 or as Novices. Inquirers and Postulants are welcome to participate in the life of the  
36 community as they explore their vocation with the OEF.

## B. Disciplines

Recalling that Franciscans are called to rebuild Christ's Church, at every stage Members and Postulants will:

1. Have an updated personal Rule of Life, and will strive to follow it.
2. Exercise a discipline of prayer and biblical study/reflection.
3. Engage actively in a local Christian faith community.
4. Meet regularly (monthly) with a Spiritual Director.
5. Attend annual Chapter/Convocation and regional gatherings.
6. Make regular financial contributions to the Order, as well as contributions of time and talent, prayers and passion in accord with the Order's needs and modes of service.

## C. Signs of Membership

### 1. Professed Members:

Professed Members receive a San Damiano cross upon Profession and may use the monogram "OEF" after one's name.

### 2. Novice Members:

Novice Members receive a Tau cross upon Novicing, and may use the monogram "n/OEF" after one's name.

## D. Journey into Membership

### 1. Inquiry

#### a. Initial Dialogue:

The Formation Coordinator or that Office's designee dialogues with the Inquirer regarding the nature of our Order and the Inquirer's interest therein.

#### b. Entry Requirements:

The following are required prior to reception as a Postulant:

- i. Active engagement in a local Christian community or church
- ii. Acquisition of a Spiritual Director
- iii. Draft of a Personal Rule of Life addressing the eight elements: Worship, Prayer, Penitence, Work, Lifestyle, Mission, Obedience, and Community
- iv. Submission of a spiritual autobiography
- v. Submission of an application
- vi. Financial donation
- vii. Two letters of reference

## 2. Postulancy

Postulancy is an initial period of formation lasting at least six months, as an exploration of membership in the OEF.

### a. Formation:

i. Upon completion of the entry requirements, one may be received into the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans as a Postulant. Each Postulant is assigned a Formation Counselor. The Postulant will reflect monthly with the Formation Counselor on a formation chapter as well as on the following of one's Rule.

ii. The Postulant is expected to continue in the disciplines outlined in VI-B.

### b. Requirements to move into the Novitiate:

i. Completion of the first six formation chapters

ii. Letter of request from the Postulant to enter the Novitiate

iii. Letter of recommendation from the Formation Counselor

iv. Statement from the Spiritual Director

The Novicing Ceremony may take place in the presence of any Franciscan community upon the completion of all the requirements.

## 3. Novitiate

The Novitiate is the first stage of membership in the OEF, a period of formation which may last from two to five years.

Applicants to the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans who have had formation in other Franciscan Orders that led to Profession, may enter the OEF as a Novice-By-Transfer.

### a. Formation:

i. Formation continues with monthly reflections on formation chapters with one's Formation Counselor as well as reflection upon living one's Rule. The Novice is expected to continue with the Disciplines as listed in VI-B.

ii. Formation of Novices-By-Transfer into the OEF shall include reflections on their previous experiences towards becoming a member of their former Order, contrasts and similarities between that Order and the OEF, content in our 30 Chapters, and anticipations of Life and Profession in the OEF.

### b. Requirements for Profession:

i. Completion of the Formation Chapters

ii. Discussion with one's Formation Counselor about Profession

- iii. A written request from the Novice to the Formation Coordinator that one be considered for Profession
- iv. Recommendation of the Formation Counselor
- v. A written statement from the Spiritual Director
- vi. A letter of support from one's spouse/partner
- vii. Affirmation by the Treasurer of a pattern of giving
- viii. Attendance at least one Chapter/Convocation prior to the one at which the Novice will profess
- ix. Meeting of the Novice with the Council, Formation Coordinator, and Formation Counselor

c. Presentation for Profession:

- i. Upon completion of these requirements, the Novice is presented to the Professed gathered at Chapter for discernment of Profession into the Order.
- ii. For the purposes of Order business at that Chapter, those accepted for Profession will share the responsibilities of participating as a Professed Member of the Order.
- iii. If accepted, Profession of Vows will be spoken during worship ceremony at Chapter.

4. Profession

Profession by nature is a permanent commitment to the community.

a. Formation:

- i. Formation is ongoing.
- ii. Professed Members are expected to continue in their disciplines as outlined in VI-B.

b. Engagement with the OEF community:

- i. Professed Members will report quarterly, as assigned, to another in the Order during Advent, Lent, Pentecost and Francistide.
- ii. Professed Members are invited and encouraged to offer their gifts in service to the Order.

5. Release from Vows

a. Novice Members:

- i. Any Novice who wishes to be released from vows should consult with the Council, the Director of Formation and with his or her Formation Counselor.

1           ii. Following this consultation, the Novice may be released from vows by the  
2 Formation Coordinator.

3  
4 b. Professed Members:

5           i. Any Professed Member who wishes to be released from Vows must  
6 consult with the Council.

7           ii. Following this consultation, the Professed Member may be released  
8 according to the discernment of the Professed Members gathered at Chapter.

9           iii. In a situation we hope will never take place, the Council can restrict a  
10 Professed Member and bring the matter to the Chapter to consider dispensing the  
11 member's vows.

12  
13 6. Associates

14 Very occasionally the Order may grant Associate membership in the Order.

15  
16 7. Friends

17 The Order is grateful to the many friends of the Order. The Order may formally  
18 acknowledge a friendship by naming an individual "Friend of OEF".

19  
20 **Article VII: Amending the Statutes**

21 A. These Statutes may be amended by the discernment of the Professed Members  
22 gathered at Chapter.

23  
24 B. Written submissions of proposed amendments will be distributed as they are  
25 received to all Professed Members of the Order.

26  
27 C. Absent members may participate through consultation with their chosen proxy,  
28 the ultimate discernment resting with the gathered body.

29  
30 D. Amendments made at any given Chapter will be reviewed and evaluated at the  
31 subsequent Chapter meeting.

32  
33 **Article VIII: Prayerful Discernment**

34  
35 **Foreword**

36 The Order of Ecumenical Franciscans approaches decision making, such as in the  
37 Business Meeting of a Chapter, through Prayerful Discernment, a process of  
38 listening for the promptings of the Spirit until we come to the Leading of the  
39 Spirit—the experience of unity in the will of God. This process affirms Christ

1 Jesus' authority over our lives and our Order, confidence that the Spirit of Jesus  
2 will guide us, and our commitment to following God's will into the Divine plan.

3  
4 We acknowledge the primacy of the Holy Spirit in our communal process through  
5 the discipline of not running ahead of the Spirit's leading. We 'wait on the Lord'  
6 rather than rush willfully into our own limited wisdom. The difference between  
7 the two is a profound sense of peace and awe before God rather than the sense of  
8 having won or lost regarding our own perspective. This consolation is not always  
9 given to us, but we treasure the obedience of faith far more than winning or losing  
10 a debate.

11  
12 This process of decision-making is a prayerful, humbling, opening of each one of  
13 us, through which the Holy Spirit can lead us into Unity. It offers us a sacramental  
14 understanding of working together as a community in the presence of God.  
15 However, Prayerful Discernment of the Leading of the Spirit is contingent upon  
16 each individual's attitude—there must be a willingness to remain open to the  
17 promptings of the Spirit within us all.

### 18 19 **Process**

20 We come to the Chapter Business Meeting with an open mind and heart, as none of  
21 us, individually, can know before Chapter what the Holy Spirit has in store for us.

22  
23 The gathered body is served by a "Listener" and a "Recorder" appointed by the  
24 Council. These two servants do not speak personally, nor do they share their own  
25 opinion. Their work is primarily to listen attentively for the Leading of the Spirit  
26 through the gathered community, and to faithfully record this Leading. If either  
27 one feels that he or she must speak to an item of business, a replacement must be  
28 found until that particular item of business has been addressed and the meeting is  
29 ready to move on to the next item of business.

30  
31 We pray and sit in silence, at the beginning of every meeting, at the end of every  
32 meeting, and during the meeting whenever we seem to have drifted away from our  
33 central concern, the work of the Holy Spirit, in our midst and in our hearts.

34  
35 The opening and closing periods of silence are a simple way to acknowledge the  
36 presence of God with the whole of our being. The opening silence also affords us

1 an opportunity to let go of egocentric needs, personal opinions and private  
2 agendas, and thereby clear the way for each person to wait patiently for the Spirit  
3 to speak to our hearts.

5 This time of settling into the presence of God is invaluable, for therein we  
6 encounter the Beloved and the Love necessary to bear with one another through the  
7 myriad complications human nature cannot help but ‘bring to the table’, even when  
8 seeking to serve God with chastened hearts.

10 Being committed to faithfulness to God through Christ Jesus, the well-being of the  
11 Order, and respect for each member of the Order, let the Holy Spirit purify each of  
12 our hearts, let everything brought forward be sanctified. In this way all our  
13 speaking in Chapter will be of this spiritual nature, and each of our contributions  
14 will have something of the ‘promptings of the Spirit’ about it.

16 When so moved, we raise our hands and await acknowledgment from the Listener,  
17 whereupon we may respectfully and lovingly offer insights, questions or  
18 statements. Let us do so loud enough for all to hear, perhaps by standing, with a  
19 clear voice that respects one’s siblings.

21 We always address the Listener, speaking with care what we hope has been  
22 prompted by the Spirit. A time of silence should follow to hold in prayer each  
23 offering.

25 The Listener listens deeply to every message offered, hopefully messages that have  
26 been prompted by the Spirit, and seeks to facilitate the meeting. Sometimes the  
27 Listener calls for silence and prayerful reflection to help us listen for the Leading  
28 of the Spirit.

30 Passionate discussions can generate more heat than light. Anyone in attendance  
31 may request that we return to silence for prayer. One may stand in silence to  
32 denote strong objection to aggressive behavior.

34 All who are gathered are welcome to share their thoughts, questions and concerns,  
35 and these offerings received by the gathered body as prayers in and of themselves.

1  
2 Normally one speaks only once to an issue, and only to bring new light to the  
3 discussion. The Leading of the Spirit is not the collected wisdom of those present,  
4 but the collective discernment of God's will. Let us all hold our opinions lightly  
5 and be more interested in the voice of the Spirit speaking through the gathered  
6 community.

7  
8 The Recorder also engages in prayerful listening and helps the Listener express in  
9 words the sensed Leading of the Spirit. This Collective Discernment is then  
10 offered to the gathered body for potential approval. These two servants may often  
11 confer quietly with one another while the gathered body continues to hold all in  
12 prayerful silence.

13  
14 Thereafter the Listener may be enabled to speak the Leading of the Spirit, even just  
15 provisionally, and perhaps after further labor in the spirit, and with the help of the  
16 Recorder, a decision or a call to action may be tested with the gathered body (again  
17 and again if necessary) and approved.

18  
19 Records of discernments which reflect the Leading of the Spirit are only approved  
20 when the gathered body comes to an expressed Unity in the will of God.

### 21 **In Case of Disunity**

22 Sometimes a sibling may disagree with what the gathered body believes is the  
23 Leading of the Spirit. They may disagree and 'step aside', accepting the Chapter's  
24 decision while expressing a disagreement with it. Or they may feel led to 'stand in  
25 the way', humbly and courteously insisting that the Chapter consider their concern  
26 before action.

27  
28  
29 When a sibling feels led to 'stand in the way' the gathered body and the individual  
30 will patiently and lovingly labor together in hope of coming to a truer  
31 understanding of God's will. In our labor we acknowledge that our sibling may  
32 have some truth or light that the rest of the body does not yet see. We are willing  
33 to remain teachable and trust that our dissenting sibling is also teachable.

1 When the gathered body allows the truth offered by a sibling to ‘stand in the way’  
2 it is not granting the equivalent of ‘veto power’. The gathered body remains free  
3 to implement any decision the community has prayerfully discerned. It may  
4 discern the truth of one ‘standing in the way’ and include this concern in its  
5 decision. It may, through the Listener, call upon the dissenting sibling to ‘step  
6 aside’, and this may be noted in the record of discernments. Or it may decide to  
7 lay over the decision for another time. Ultimately, it is up to the gathered body to  
8 name the Leading of the Spirit and to follow that Leading.

10 There is no claim for infallibility in this process. It is always possible that Chapter  
11 failed to let the light of Christ shine fully into our Order and into our hearts, or that  
12 the Spirit has not moved to grant clarity at this time. Chapter discernments may  
13 certainly be revisited to seek more light. The Order may ask Council to include  
14 such a concern on the agenda again at a later date.

### 16 **Afterword**

17 This process may only be truly engaged in through faith and trust that Jesus is in  
18 our midst and that his Spirit will guide us. It calls for patience, prayerfulness and a  
19 willingness to listen deeply. It requires each of us to be humble and open to hear  
20 what the Spirit is saying, and, most demanding of all, the ability to let go of our  
21 attachments, what we may individually desire as the outcome.

23 It is in actually letting go of the outcome that the Leading of the Spirit may  
24 creatively guide us. This process offers an alternative to debate driven dialogue  
25 and finding a common denominator that everyone ‘can live with’. The process of  
26 Prayerful Discernment is a sacred way of letting go and of letting God lead.

28 Chapter Business Meeting discernments and decisions will most often find  
29 immediate or quick clarity and unity as discerned by both the Listener and the  
30 gathered body. Yet even these easier discernments need to reflect the spirit of this  
31 deep-listening process. It is a gift when the Leading of the Holy Spirit seems clear  
32 to all the gathered and allows us to move on to further business.

34 Although the process itself is solemn, let us remember that just as the Spirit may  
35 lead us into silence and prayer, the Spirit can and will also lead us with humor,  
36 laughter, song and dance. Let us allow the Spirit to move us, as she so desires.

1  
2 The process of Prayerful Discernment seeks to transcend debate and argument as  
3 the mode of Chapter Business Meetings, trusting that the Holy Spirit will guide our  
4 interactions towards building up the Body of Christ in mutual respect and love.  
5 Let us trust the Spirit of Jesus to guide us to right decisions and into the good that  
6 awaits us in the Mystery of God.  
7