

Dear Minister Provincial

May the Lord give you peace!

With this letter I would like to provide you with the latest information regarding the life of the Secular Franciscan Order (SFO) and of the Franciscan Youth movement (YouFra) especially as it applies to the area of spiritual and pastoral assistance, the service which is the responsibility of the Church and of the friars of the First Order and the Third Order Regular.

With the approval of the *General Constitutions* of the Secular Franciscan Order (December 8, 2000) and the approval of the new *Statutes for Spiritual and Pastoral Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order* by the Conference of Ministers General (on March 28, 2002) we have entered into a new and very important phase concerning a new vision of the vocation of secular Franciscans and of their mission in the Church and the world. As a consequence, our relationship and service to secular Franciscans must be renewed as well.

An extremely important moment for the secular Franciscans was the celebration of the *Tenth General Chapter of the SFO* which was held in Rome from November 15-23, 2002. More than sixty international councilors, representing many countries from around the world, participated at the chapter which a common desire: to understand the new vision of the SFO and promote it throughout the world.

Taking into account the experience of the preceding years, the General Chapter indicated several priorities for the new sessennium. Among these is the privileged place of formation based on the *Rule* and *Constitutions* and realized in a "vital and reciprocal communion" with all the members of the Franciscan family. In this light, the 25th anniversary of the *Rule* for the Secular Franciscan Order, approved on June 24, 1978, will be celebrated as a true and precious gift from God for the Church and the world. The Chapter also highlighted the importance of the promotion and animation of the Franciscan Youth (YouFra) as an integral way to transmit the secular Franciscan charism to the youth.

Finally, concerning the specific rapport with the friars of the First Order and the Third Order Regular, the Chapter, in a spirit of recognition and gratitude, underlined how much the friars have done regarding secular fraternities of the SFO and YouFra on every level through their precious service of spiritual and pastoral assistance.

For all these reasons, it is my duty to inform you, as the one who has the principal responsibility for providing spiritual assistants to the SFO, of the changes regarding assistance so that, keeping in mind the new vision of spiritual assistance, we may together provide adequate formation and animation to all our friars, especially those who are preparing for service as spiritual assistants.

Furthermore, permit me to call your attention to the importance of assistance to the SFO provided by our friars. It is not necessary that they be ordained. As long as they have the proper training and capacity, any friar can be assigned as a spiritual assistant. In the case where it is not possible to offer a friar from the First Order or the Third Order Regular as an spiritual assistant, you may nominate a Franciscan sister or brother, a secular Franciscan, a diocesan priest or deacon who has been suitably prepared for the position. Where there are a number of assistants involved with the SFO on a regional or national level they should work collegially in their service to the order.

In conclusion, in order to discover this new vision of the secular Franciscan vocation and to appreciate the changes in spiritual assistance to the SFO (see enclosed) it is necessary to know and analyze the recent documents that deal with the Secular Franciscan Order.

Thank you for your service, especially for your willingness to promote the interest of the friars for work with the SFO and YouFra. I wish you every good for the Feast of Christmas.

Fraternally yours,

Fr. IRUDAYA SAMY.O.F.M.Cap.
General Spiritual Assistant the SFO

Roma, December 6, 2002

Art. 7

1. The major superiors of the First Order and the TOR are to establish together the most adequate means to guarantee spiritual assistance to local fraternities which, because of causes beyond their control, could remain without such assistance (*SFO Const 88.4*).
2. They also take care to keep in touch with local Ordinaries who have erected local fraternities of the SFO in accordance with its specific legislation, taking upon themselves the responsibility for their spiritual assistance and pastoral care or entrusting it to one of their priests or to a religious Institute.

Art. 15

1. The Assistant is appointed by the competent major Superior, after consultation with the council of the fraternity concerned (*SFO Const 91.3*).
2. Where more than one major Superior is involved in the appointment of an Assistant, the norms established jointly by the Superiors with jurisdiction in the territory should be followed (*SFO Const 91.2*).
3. The appointment of the Assistant is made in writing and for a limited time, which accumulated cannot be more than twelve years.
4. When it is not possible to give the fraternity a spiritual Assistant who is a member of the First Order or the TOR, the competent major Superior can entrust the service of spiritual assistance to:
 - religious brothers or sisters of other Franciscan institutes;
 - secular Franciscans, cleric or lay, specially prepared for such service;
 - other diocesan clerics or non-Franciscan religious (*SFO Const 89.4*).

Art. 16

1. At the international, national, and regional level, the Assistants, if there are more than one, form a Conference and give their service collegially to the SFO and to the Franciscan Youth (*SFO Const 90.3*).
2. Each Conference of Assistants functions according to its own internal by-laws.
3. The national and regional Statutes of the SFO establish the number of Assistants who are members of the national or regional Council.