

## **FRIENDS OF ST FRANCIS**

### **Letter of Emanuela De Nunzio, Minister General SFO, to the National Councils and International Councillors SFO.**

*The Presidency of the International Council SFO, in its meeting held from 1 to 7 February 1996, approved the guidelines for the SFO Fraternities that want to promote and guide groups of "Friends of St Francis".*

*We send you the text, after having translated it into the official languages, so that you can use it as a means of spreading love for St Francis and his message in today's world.*

*I greet you all fraternally, hoping that the Lenten season may help us to live with greater intensity the mystery of the Cross of Christ associated with our human suffering.*

Groups who call themselves "Friends of St Francis", or "Companions of St Francis", or by other names, already exist in some countries, especially in those where English or French is spoken. Often, they have arisen spontaneously, without any reference to the Secular Franciscan Order or to any Order of friars, and even without reference to the Catholic Church.

In front of this reality, the Secular Franciscan Order can decide not to be involved at all, or it can decide to reach out to these groups, in the spirit of its General Constitutions, Art.45, which speaks about the promotion of vocations to the SFO, and Art. 103, which says, "They should welcome with pleasure those who, without belonging to the SFO, wish to share its experiences and activities".

In the spirit of Christian ecumenism and of dialogue with persons who belong to other religions, a local Fraternity of the SFO could decide to take an apostolic initiative by conducting its own group of Friends of St Francis. In view of this possibility, the following guidelines are offered as suggestions.

#### **Membership**

Anyone may apply to belong to the Friends of St Francis (FOSF), including the very young and the elderly, Catholics, Christians and non-Christians. The only qualifications required are that the member has a personal devotion to St Francis of Assisi, or is interested in him, or wants to know more about him, and that he or she is approved for admission.

Adult Catholics should be informed about the SFO and, if they are seen to be prospective members, they should be encouraged to join a local Fraternity. In places where the Franciscan Youth Movement and/or the Franciscan Children exist or can be organized, Catholic youth and children should be referred to those fraternities rather than to the Friends of St Francis.

#### **Responsibilities of the member**

The member has no obligations or commitments additional to those of his or her state in life, unless he or she voluntarily assumes a responsibility in the FOSF group.

The member is not admitted to meetings of the SFO, or of the Franciscan Youth, or of the Franciscan Children, unless by invitation on a particular occasion.

### **Responsibility of the SFO**

The leader of the FOSF group is a professed Secular Franciscan, who is either an elected member of the Council of the local SFO Fraternity or is appointed by the Council (in which case he or she has no vote in the Council).

The leader is the fraternal animator of the FOSF group. If problems arise of a theological, spiritual or pastoral nature, the leader seeks to resolve them with the help of the spiritual Assistant of the local SFO Fraternity.

The leader forms a team of helpers who are not necessarily Franciscans or Catholics or Christians. The team members, if they are not elected by the FOSF group, are to be approved by the Council of the local SFO Fraternity.

The team of helpers assumes the responsibility of deciding on the suitability of persons who wish to join the FOSF group, of admitting them, and of organizing the regular meeting of the FOSF.

### **The Meeting of the FOSF Group**

The meeting caters to the particular needs of the FOSF Group, who may be young people only, or adults only, or a mixture of both.

The meeting is opened and closed with a prayer of St Francis. In this way, its Franciscan inspiration is affirmed and recognized.

The meeting includes an element of formation at the human or Christian or Franciscan level, depending on the needs of the members.

The meeting also includes an element of building fraternity among the members by their getting to know one another and sharing of interests.

The members are encouraged to be actively involved in service to their civil society and to the faith-community to which they belong.

An integral part of the meeting is a recreational moment, for chatting and sharing some refreshment before leaving for home.

### **Application to join the SFO or Franciscan Youth or Franciscan Children**

Adult members of the FOSF who are practising Catholics and who are attracted to the local Secular Franciscan Fraternity may apply to the Fraternity Council for admission. Likewise, young people or children who are practising Catholics may ask to join the Franciscan Youth or the Franciscan Children, where these movements exist or can be organized.

Upon acceptance, they no longer belong to the FOSF as members, but they enter the period of initiation and proceed through initial formation to their commitment as Secular Franciscans, Franciscan Youth or Franciscan Children.