



THE SPONSOR AS AN AGENT OF SECULAR FRANCISCAN FORMATION

Please use this document to develop the “Role of the Sponsor” for your fraternity, which will be given out during the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming

From the earliest days of the Order, Francis sent the brothers out two by two to preach the good news of repentance to any and all they met. As with other things in his life, Francis' choice of two by two was Gospel-based. In his wisdom, he would probably have paired up an older member of the brotherhood with a newer member. In time, the pairs would all return and share the bounty or the sorrows of their missionary adventures.

Take time now and be present to one of these pairs. Imagine their journey. There would definitely be times of prayer; there'd be times of sharing the workings of the Holy Spirit in their lives. How they came to be drawn to this band of men following Francis of Assisi would certainly enter into the conversation. They would have asked each other questions they had concerning truths Francis had shared with them. As, they were preaching they would probably have shared their personal insights into the meaning of different Scripture passages. As they walked from town to town, the beauties of creation and how creation perfectly conforms to the will of God would have come to mind. After time together, they would even come to confide in each other the parts of this mendicant life they found hard to live. They would seek each other's advice as to how to better live out poverty, chastity, obedience, charity, humility, penitence. They might even admonish the other as to how to better live this way of life. They would praise the goodness of God that had brought them to this point of their spiritual journey.

Would you think this sharing helped the brothers grow in their vocation? Would it have helped to form deeper bonds of unity within the community? Would it have caused stronger bonds of support between the brothers? This might have been one of Jesus' original intents when sending the disciples out two by two. It was probably one of Francis' ideas also.

How do we have this experience of companionship built into the Secular Franciscan Order today? In the role of Sponsor in the formation process, this role is alive and active. What is a Sponsor? Very basically, it is a journey companion: an active, professed member of the fraternity who chooses to walk the initial journey with a new Inquirer. What occurs between these two persons? Much the same as occurred on the imaginary journey we just walked with the original Friars Minor. These two persons share prayer, Scripture, how they came to this vocation, the teachings of this way of life, the movement of the Holy Spirit in their own lives. When asked, the professed member might offer points on how to better live the *Rule*. Inquirer and Sponsor share times of leisure with each other, as well as times of worship, times of being present to the creation that surrounds them, times of opening up to God within and God they

discover outside of themselves, and, of course, times of service to others. All in all, they share how this call to live the Gospel life in the manner of St Francis is exploding in their very being.

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY TO BE A SPONSOR?

A love of your own Secular Franciscan vocation and a desire to share it
A willingness to be open to the Holy Spirit and to another
A desire to share God's goodness in your life with another
An openness to share your understanding and love of Saints Francis and Clare
A listening, discerning heart
A prayerful spirit
A sense of nurture for another's vocation
A lived experience of Sacred Scripture
A call to service
An appreciation of creation

How does this process begin? The particulars will vary from fraternity to fraternity. In some fraternities, the person who introduced the Inquirer to the Secular Franciscan way of life might be the Sponsor. In another case, the Fraternity Council could match up professed members with the Inquirer. In whatever way is chosen, the Sponsor is not chosen by the Inquirer. Your fraternity may have another manner in which to pair people. The mode of connecting one person with another can be as varied as there are fraternities.

Interaction is key to this process. Initial contact most times becomes the responsibility of the professed member. One scenario would be for the professed member to invite the Inquirer for a cup of coffee or, better still, breakfast one morning. And just begin the conversation: "I first heard about St Francis..." or "I was invited to consider a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order when ..." or "I saw a brochure or announcement in the bulletin that there was an open house at the fraternity meeting and I went..." or "I became interested when I read a life of St. Francis..." or "My spiritual director thought this might be a path for me to explore. ..." or "I can remember first hearing about St Francis when I was in the second grade..." Whatever your introduction to St. Francis and the Order, share it and then ask your partner to do the same.

What other avenues are there in this Sponsor relationship? Together you might try reading a biography or a book on Franciscan values and share your gleanings. You might watch a movie or see a play about Francis and share your insights. You might go to a Franciscan prayer service at your parish or a nearby Monastery of St Clare. During Lent, you might attend Stations together. You might set aside a time once a month to share Scripture and how a certain passage has affected your life. Be ready to answer any questions that might arise in the regular formation session and try to attend the sessions when you are able. Most of all be open to each other and the movement of the Holy Spirit. Allow the Spirit to guide your relationship, remembering that the Holy Spirit and the Inquirer are the primary agents of Formation. The rest of us, including the Fraternity, the Council, the Formation Director and Team, the Spiritual Assistant, and the Sponsor are present merely to help facilitate this awesome interaction.

Companions on the journey is a tradition that goes back to the very beginnings of the Franciscan Movement, a tradition that is rooted in the ministry of Jesus' earliest disciples, a tradition that enriches all who partake in it. Partaking in the role of Sponsor is being actively engaged in the formation process as a professed Secular Franciscan. It is accepting the invitation to journey with another, following our Lord Jesus Christ in the example set forth by St. Francis himself.

So, be adventurous! Take the first step! Encounter another on the Journey! Enjoy the benefits! Reap the rewards! Accept the role of formation Sponsor.



CEREMONY OF SPONSORSHIP

MINISTER: Introduction to Ceremony

We celebrated the Ceremony of Introduction and Welcoming for _____.

Name

At this time, a professed member will be commissioned as Sponsor of an Inquirer.

FORMATION DIRECTOR: Calling of Inquirer(s) and Sponsor(s)

Would the Inquirer(s) please come forward?

Would the Sponsor(s) please come forward? Place your hand on the shoulder of your Inquirer.

Let us continue with a reading from St. Paul's Letter to the Ephesians, *4:1-16 NAB**, that gives guidance for your journey. God's word is urging us to live to attain "Unity in the Body" by the grace given to each of us in our "Diversity of Gifts."

Unity in the Body

I, then, a prisoner for the Lord,
Urge you to live in a manner worthy of the call you have received,
With all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another through love,
Striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace:
One body and one Spirit, as you were also called to the one hope of your call;
One Lord, one faith, one baptism;
One God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Diversity of Gifts

But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift.

Therefore, it says:

"He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; He gave gifts to men."
What does "he ascended" mean
Except that he also descended* into the lower [regions] of the earth?
The one who descended* is also the one who ascended far above all the heavens,
That he might fill all things.
And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists,
Others as pastors and teachers,*
To equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,
Until we all attain to the unity of faith and knowledge of the Son of God,
To mature manhood, to the extent of the full stature of Christ,
So that we may no longer be infants,
Tossed by waves and swept along by every wind of teaching arising from human trickery,
From their cunning in the interests of deceitful scheming.
Rather, living the truth in love,
We should grow in every way into Him who is the head, Christ,
From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament,
With the proper functioning of each part,
Brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love.

MINISTER: Response to Scripture Reading

All praise be Yours, Oh Lord, for the gift of community, which You have given to us. Today we stand firm before You, renewing our commitment to life in fraternity. We confidently ask for Your power and strength to help us bring about unity with creation, harmony among people, oneness with other Franciscans, and reconciliation with You.

FORMATION DIRECTOR: Role of Sponsor

(Each fraternity includes the responsibilities/description of the role of their sponsors)

What is the role of Sponsor? You have been chosen to share your Franciscan life with this Inquirer through prayer, study, apostolate, dialogue and leisure. Together you will experience the fullness of the Franciscan family, grow spiritually in God's presence and embrace living and proclaiming the Gospel in the spirit of our seraphic father, Saint Francis, and holy mother, Saint Clare. Are you ready and willing to become a "companion on the journey" for this Inquirer during Initial Formation?

SPONSOR(S): Response to Question

I am ready and willing. I promise to be a "companion on the journey" for _____.
Name(s)

INQUIRER(S): Response to Sponsor(s)

I am so blessed to continue my journey. I know that as you share your Franciscan life with me I will be even more blessed. Thank you for promising to be my "companion on the journey."

INQUIRER(S) AND SPONSOR(S): Closing Prayer

O God our Father,
We truly desire to live together as brothers and sisters
In the spirit of Francis and Clare.
Anoint us with Your spirit of love,
So that we may listen to one another and may find together
That oneness of mind and heart, which You have given us.
Let our lives together in fraternity express and bring about the Gospel life
We strive to achieve after the example of Francis and Clare.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

MINISTER: Conclusion of Ceremony

_____, we offer you our prayers and support during Initial Formation.
May God, in His unfailing love, be with you and bless you during your journey.

*...But Christian unity is more than adherence to a common belief. It is manifested in the exalted Christ's gifts to individuals to serve so as to make the community more Christ like.

*The "descent" of Christ refers more probably to the incarnation than to Christ's presence after His death in the world of the dead.

*Evangelists: missionary preachers, not those who wrote gospels. Pastors and teachers: a single group in the Greek, shepherding congregations.