



Tau Maria Franciscans  
Rule of Life



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## INTRODUCTION

1. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, here begins the Rule of Tau Maria Franciscans. Let all herein redound to the greater glory and honor of the Holy Name of Jesus and to the sanctification and salvation of all the children of Our Father in Heaven.
2. Tau Maria Franciscans began historically in 2008 as a private association of Christ's faithful (cf. canons 298- 311 and 321-326) called to live a life of penance, prayer, poverty and service reflective of the original charism given to St. Francis of Assisi. All Catholic clergy and laity alike are welcome to apply to join us if the Holy Spirit moves them.
3. We wholeheartedly embrace Christ's call to radical faith and conversion (Mk. 1:15) under the spiritual fatherhood of St. Francis. His first exhortation to those who sought to follow his Gospel way of life begins as follows:

All those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength and love their neighbors as themselves, who hate their bodies with their vices and sins, who receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and who produce worthy fruits of penance. Oh how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them, because the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them and make His home and dwelling place among them, and they are children of the heavenly Father Whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(St. Francis – First Letter to the Faithful)

These words summarize well our Franciscan Charism. The tertiary Franciscan vocation has always been a call to a life of penance. This should not be understood as consisting first or mainly in external acts but in a continual striving for authentic holiness. Ascetical practices are essential but must reflect a genuine interior transformation. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.” (2 Cor 5:17) “My little children, with whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you!” (Gal. 4:19)

4. More specifically, following the example and teaching of our Seraphic Father, our life entails joyfully embracing the following as essential elements:
  - a. Total submission and obedience to the Vicar of Jesus Christ, our Holy Father the Pope, the Bishops in union with him and all the teachings of the Magisterium. “He who hears you hears me.” (Lk 10:16) No one who dissents from any Church teaching may belong to this association.
  - b. Daily prayer centered on union with Jesus Christ Crucified in the Holy Eucharist, especially through the Liturgy, Sacraments, silence and total consecration to the Immaculate Virgin Mary, Queen of the Seraphic Order.
  - c. Fasting, self-denial and renunciation of all worldliness.
  - d. Visible witness of poverty and minority according to our state of life.
  - e. Corporal and spiritual works of mercy.
  - f. Participation in communal activities and formation.
5. These requirements are described in more detail in the chapters that follow. The specific precepts of this Rule may appear initially as burdensome; more things to do in an already busy life. However, with time they will ideally become second nature, actually focusing and simplifying our lives and freeing us from enslaving attachments.
6. Approval of one’s spouse is required for membership. The requirements of this Rule may be dispensed, mitigated or commuted for the following reasons:
  - a. Spouse of the member is opposed to the requirement. If this occurs the Tau Maria Franciscan should live the Rule as much as possible without offending or burdening his or her spouse.
  - b. If requirement will be excessively burdensome on any other family members.
  - c. State of life/vocational demands.
  - d. Other serious reasons with the approval of the member’s spiritual director.

## Chapter One

### PRAYER, SACRAMENTS

7. “And He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” (Lk 18:1)
8. St. Francis lived and taught that “all temporal things ought to be subservient (to) the spirit of holy prayer and devotion.” (Rule of St. Francis, C.5) He recognized clearly that the purpose of our existence is union with the Blessed Trinity through Jesus Christ, apart from Whom we can do nothing. (cf Jn 15:5) Therefore, we must strive to generously give ourselves to devout and sincere prayer from the heart and to worthily receive the Sacraments. Because our current culture is extremely fast-paced and full of distractions, fidelity to prayer requires discipline and does not allow for wasting time.
9. The following are required daily (unless specified otherwise):
  - a. Mass and Communion if possible. If not, then a 15 minute silent period including meditation on the Sacred Scriptures, preferably the readings from the Mass of the day, and spiritual communion.
  - b. The Divine Office, at least Morning and Evening Prayer to be prayed at an appropriate hour as far as possible. If necessary, twelve Our Fathers may be substituted. This should only be done rarely. Priests and Deacons are obligated to pray the entire office.
  - c. The Rosary, at least five decades, may be broken up if necessary. A family Rosary led by the Father is very strongly encouraged. Those who have died should be remembered at each Rosary, especially any departed members of Tau Maria Franciscans. The Franciscan Crown and the Seven Sorrows of Mary Rosaries are highly recommended.
  - d. One half hour of silent prayer/meditation/contemplation. Reading may be done during this time as an aid to meditation, but not as the central activity.
  - e. One hour of Eucharistic adoration per week. The day’s Rosary and Meditation requirements may be fulfilled during this Holy Hour. All are encouraged to make a daily holy hour if possible. Priests must spend at least one hour per day in adoration of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

- f. Caregivers may combine *c* and *d* if necessary.
  - g. Recite the following prayers: Prayer of the Companions, St. Michael Prayer and Marian Consecration.
  - h. Nightly examination of conscience (at least 5 minutes).
  - i. Confession twice per month at least.
  - j. Grace before and after meals.
10. Tau Maria Franciscans pray particularly for the Ordinary and priests of the Diocese or Archdiocese to which they belong (living and deceased). Our monthly community holy hour is offered for this intention. In addition, daily prayer for all priests is encouraged.
11. Meditation on the Passion of Our Lord is especially encouraged. The Stations of the Cross is an excellent way to do this and is a particularly Franciscan devotion. Also encouraged is recitation of the Angelus, visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, the Divine Mercy Chaplet and solitude retreats.
12. “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”  
(1 Cor 2:2)
13. Fulfilling these daily requirements is something that will take time for most people to grow into. Also, it is clearly recognized that there may be occasions where circumstances will make it impossible to complete everything. If so, be at peace that your good will suffices in the Lord’s eyes. However, these occasions should not be frequent nor due to our own negligence.
14. The importance of the Eucharist, “source and summit” of Christian life, cannot be overemphasized. “Let the whole man be seized with fear, let the whole world tremble, and heaven rejoice, when ‘Christ, the Son of the living God’ (Jn 11: 27), is upon the altar in the hand of the priest. O most wondrous height and stupendous honor! O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! That the Lord of the universe, God and Son of God, thus humbles Himself that for our salvation He hides Himself under an ordinary morsel of bread! Behold my brothers, the humility of God and ‘pour out your hearts before Him’ (Ps 61:9). Humble yourselves that you may be exalted by Him (cf. 1 Pt 5:6, Jas 4:10). Hold back nothing, therefore, of yourselves for yourselves, that He may receive you wholly Who gives Himself entirely to you!” (St. Francis- Letter to the Whole Order)

15. “Behold your Mother!” (Jn 19:27) So our Savior gave the Blessed Virgin Mary to us to be our Mother as He hung dying on the Cross. Friar Thomas of Celano, the first biographer of St. Francis and his contemporary, makes clear the saint’s tremendous devotion to Our Lady, loving her with a love beyond all telling because she made the Lord of Majesty our brother. He entrusted all his spiritual children to her protection and guidance and began his first order at her little church of Our Lady of the Angels. It has been the great privilege of the Franciscan Order to be foremost in promoting and defending her honor and holy titles, from the Immaculate Conception to Co-Redemptrix and Mediatrix of All Graces.
16. Our Blessed Mother is central to our spiritual lives. By God’s own design, her Queenship is distinct and subordinate to the Kingship of Christ but never separate. They both must reign in our hearts! So our association and each member individually are totally consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through the Immaculate Heart of Mary. “Holy Virgin Mary, there is none like you born in the world among women, daughter and handmaid of the most high King, the Father in heaven! Mother of our most holy Lord Jesus Christ! Spouse of the Holy Spirit! Pray for us, with St. Michael the Archangel and all the powers of heaven and all the Saints, to your most holy beloved Son, our Lord and Master.”  
(St. Francis- Office of the Passion)

## Chapter Two

### FASTING, ABSTINENCE

17. “The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” (Lk 5:35)
18. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23) True penance purifies and makes reparation, but in the end is an act of love, participating in the ultimate heroic sacrifice of the Lamb of God. So generous is our Heavenly Father that He does not disdain even our smallest sacrifices, but has deigned to make them, united to the Cross of His Son, the very price of souls.
19. The following are required beyond the obligations the Church asks of all Catholics:
  - a. The “Church fast” is defined as one main meal with two other small meals which together do not equal the main meal and no eating between meals. This fast is required everyday during Lent and the “Franciscan Lent” which runs from All Saints Day to Christmas. It is also required on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the remainder of the year. Fasting is encouraged during St. Francis’ “Lent of Benediction” which runs for 40 days beginning on Epiphany. Abstinence from meat is also strongly encouraged on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, but should not be imposed on others.
  - b. On Wednesdays and Fridays during the two obligatory Lents mentioned above a fast of bread and water, coffee or tea is required. A spiritual director or confessor may mitigate or commute this requirement if needed. The prohibition of eating between meals does not apply on these days unless it is Ash Wednesday or Good Friday.
  - c. The Lord’s Day, Solemnities, and TMF Festive Days are not obligatory fast days. Sweets (dessert-type foods) and alcoholic beverages are not allowed except on the Lord’s Day, Solemnities and TMF Festive Days. These begin with Evening Prayer I of the Divine Office. The Octaves of Christmas and Easter are considered Solemnities. TMF Festive Days include Our Blessed Mother’s Birthday, Feasts of St. Clare, St. Louis IX, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, All Saints of the Seraphic Order, and one personal Festive Day per year. Use of tobacco is not allowed.

- d. The above requirements may be mitigated if, in a particular situation, charity or health demands it according to the prudential judgment of each individual Tau Maria Franciscan. Care should be taken to exercise spiritual as opposed to worldly prudence. “Let all of us...keep ourselves from the wisdom of this world and the prudence of the flesh. (Rom 8:6)”  
(St. Francis- Rule of 1221 C.XVII)
  - e. Abstaining from eating between meals is highly encouraged but not obligatory except where mentioned above.
  - f. Expectant and nursing mothers are exempt from all fasting requirements. Those over 60 years old may substitute other penitential practices for the fasting requirements.
20. Our penitential practices should not be discussed with others unless there is good reason to do so, for example if someone is genuinely interested in joining the association. “Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then you will have no reward from your Father Who is in heaven.” (Mt 6:1)
21. “Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of His Body, that is, the Church.” (Col 1:24)

## Chapter Three

### POVERTY, DAILY LIFE

22. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.” (Mt 5:3)  
“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that by His poverty you might become rich.”  
(2 Cor 8:9)
23. The “Poverello” (little poor man) of Assisi heroically imitated his Lord in this great self-emptying of voluntary material and spiritual poverty. Throughout the history of his order all attempts to return to original observance, held holy poverty to be the keystone of fidelity to St. Francis’ ideal. We live in an age of unprecedented material wealth but widespread spiritual bankruptcy. Therefore, as sons and daughters of St. Francis, we also strive to witness to radical trust in the Providence of our loving Father and the total sufficiency of the “one thing necessary” (Lk 10:41) by freely choosing to live poverty, simplicity, and minority according to our state of life.
24. Parents are responsible to provide for the safety, security and all needs of their children. The present and future needs of the family must be taken into consideration without excessive concern for the latter. With this in mind material possessions, savings and investments should be kept to a minimum. Neither our possessions nor our manner of living should ever give the impression of seeking social status, ostentation or luxury for its own sake. Ownership and/or stewardship of possessions or wealth dedicated to directly serving God’s people is allowed and encouraged.
25. All unnecessary possessions and wealth should be given to the poor, the Church or some worthy charity, in a timely manner. “The decisive point of the social question is that goods created by God for everyone should, in fact, reach everyone in accordance with justice and with the help of charity.” [Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #2459] “The right to private property does not abolish the universal destination of goods.” (CCC # 2452)
26. Specifically, the following are required or encouraged as indicated:

#### Required:

- a. In regard to all media, all that is viewed should be carefully discerned.  
Could you watch (or listen to) it joyfully with Jesus and Our Blessed Mother?
- b. The internet should only be used with great caution, and if possible, access must be blocked to any websites that are offensive to Our Lord.

- c. No unnecessary appliances, tools, electronic devices or possessions in general. The norm is that if living without it will not cause excessive burden then we should not have it.
- d. No more than two family vehicles and these not to be considered luxury models or mainly sport vehicles.
- e. Travel and recreation should be simple and wholesome, avoiding any appearance of extravagance or luxury, a religious element ( e.g. pilgrimage) is preferred. Gambling is not permitted due to present widespread abuses in this area.
- f. No recreational events or places (e.g. movies, concerts, sporting events, plays, certain beaches etc...) may be attended that are excessively expensive or are offensive to God.
- g. Clothing should be dignified and appropriate to one's state yet modest, simple, not tightly fitting, not excessively expensive or known as a status symbol. Dull colors are preferred and secular logos/sayings or anything loud or ostentatious should be avoided. Only long walking shorts permitted.
- h. For men: No tank tops or other immodest clothing, sleeves required.
- i. For women: Skirts are encouraged, no low cut tops or skirts above the knee, sleeves required. Except for special occasions or needs, makeup should be kept to a bare minimum. All ostentation and vanity are against the spirit of our Rule. "Let not yours be the outward adorning with braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of robes, but let it be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable jewel of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious." (1 Pt 3:3-4)
- j. Dress at Church, especially for Mass, should be appropriate out of love and respect for the sacredness of our Father's house and for His greater glory and honor, e.g. no jeans, sweat pants or shirts, shorts, sneakers, T-shirts or similar clothing, ladies should wear a skirt or dress. Tau Maria Franciscans should set the example in a world that has lost its sense of the sacred.

- k. No hair coloring or wigs/hair pieces apart from special needs (e.g. hair loss due to sickness). Jewelry must be minimal, simple and not excessively expensive.
- l. No perfumes, colognes or scented after-shave except for special occasions, or if necessary for health reasons.
- m. No firearms or other lethal weapons, except for vocational demands (e.g. police officer) or hunting.

Highly encouraged:

- a. No television, computer, dishwasher, microwave ovens, other unnecessary appliances (e.g. electric can opener, bread machine etc...), expensive stereos, cameras or other electronic devices or tools.
  - b. No makeup or secular jewelry beyond an inexpensive watch and wedding band/engagement ring.
  - c. Tithing with special attention to the needs of the materially poor.
  - d. Adopting these or any other “encouraged” sacrifices should be discerned according to each individual’s life circumstances and level of spiritual growth.
27. “Do not be anxious...seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well.” (Mt 6:31-34) “Whoever of you that does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.” (Lk 14:33) May our generous embracing of a poor and simple lifestyle free our hearts for a more generous love of God and neighbor.

## Chapter Four

### MINORITY, GOVERNMENT

28. All legitimate authority comes “from above” (Jn 19:11) and should be viewed as a grave obligation of humble service. “‘I did not come to be served by others, but to serve,’ says The Lord. (Mt 20:28) Those who are set over others should glory only as much in this preferment as they would if they were deputed to the office of washing the feet of the brothers. And if they are more upset when superiorship is taken away than they would be at the loss of the office of washing feet, so much the more do they lay up treasures for themselves to the peril of their soul.” (St. Francis- Admonition IV)
29. Tau Maria Franciscans are headed by a Minister General, and Area Ministers from each area. A Spiritual Advisor and local Advisors are to be established to assure the association’s fidelity to the Magisterium and unity of the Holy Roman Catholic Church. The association is comprised of Area Fraternities which are united under the Minister General, and distance members, who should attempt to communicate monthly with other members.
30. General Chapters will be held every three years. When in session, the General Chapter holds supreme authority within the association. It is composed of all perpetually professed members and “should be a true sign of the unity in charity of the institute.” (EERL, FN 47). The General Chapter’s main obligation is to protect the charism of Tau Maria Franciscans and to initiate appropriate reform to accomplish this end. During the Chapter, the Minister General, and the Area Ministers are elected. The General Chapter has authority to change the Rule.
31. The Minister General has the authority, for a compelling reason and with the consent of the Area Ministers to convoke an extraordinary chapter. “Chapters should not be convoked so frequently as to interfere with the good functioning of the ordinary authority of the major superior (i.e. Minister General)” (EERL, FN 48).
32. The Minister General is elected by and from among the members within the association who have made perpetual profession. The Area Ministers are elected by and from among the members within the locale who have made their perpetual profession. Those elected should be exemplary in their conduct and the living out of our charism. These offices carry a three year term; only two terms may be served consecutively. All elections are by secret ballot. More specific voting norms will be determined when necessary.

33. To encourage male participation and promote the man's role as spiritual father, reflective of that of St. Francis over our association, the office of Minister is reserved to men. The Minister General may have a secretary of his own choosing to assist him in serving the association.
34. Approval of the Minister General, and a majority of the Area Ministers, in consultation with the Spiritual Advisor is necessary to erect or suppress an area.
35. All holding any office, but especially the Minister General, are responsible to ensure fidelity to this Rule of Life, in the humble spirit of St. Francis. Members should joyfully cooperate with those in authority, in appropriate matters, in imitation of the Son of God, Who "became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." (Phil 2:8)
36. In all things we should "seek the lowest place" (Lk 14:10) as did our Seraphic Father who called his brothers "friars minor" (lesser brothers). The spirit of minority is central to our charism. As Jesus taught us, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Lk 14:11)

## Chapter Five

### FORMATION

37. “And the crowds gathered to Him again; and again, as was His custom, He taught them.” (Mk 10:1)
38. Interested persons may attend the monthly meetings in order to discern whether to request to enter Postulancy or not. Postulancy will run from eight months to one year, and may be extended to two years.
39. Novitiate is one year followed by temporary profession for a period of three years. Perpetual profession may be made following this. Novitiate may be extended up to an additional year and temporary profession up to an additional three years.
40. All professions are “private” and “simple” as this is defined by canon law (cf. canons 1191-1198) and for sufficiently just and grave reasons may be dispensed by the local ordinary or those he has delegated per canon 1196. Pastors also have this authority. The vows formula is as follows:

I, \_\_\_\_\_, *state your full name*  
vow and promise to Almighty God, to the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
to Our Holy Father St. Francis, to all the saints and to you \_\_\_\_\_,  
to observe for (one year – all the days of my life),  
the Rule of Tau Maria Franciscans, striving for holiness  
by a life of total consecration to the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
in prayer, penance, poverty and loving service according to my state of life.

41. Formation will consist of a gradual embracing of the Tau Maria Franciscan Rule of Life and study of the following: life and writings of St. Francis, Franciscan/Capuchin history, lives of Franciscan Saints, this Rule, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, God’s Word, prayer and Franciscan spirituality. The Minister General, and Area Minister, along with the perpetually professed members of a region are responsible for each candidate’s sufficient progress prior to advancement to the next step of formation or acceptance as a Postulant. Norms will be established in each area for the approval of each member’s advancement to the next step of formation. Temporary profession will involve a commitment to live the entire Rule of Life for one year.

42. All novices and professed will wear the Tau Maria Franciscan wood Tau Cross. The Tau cross is part of the public witness of our Franciscan vocation. It should be worn daily unless precluded by vocational demands or other legitimate reasons. They will also have a Tau Maria Franciscan scapular. The scapular should be worn outside one's clothing during meeting days and other community functions, such as the annual retreat and profession Masses. It may only be worn under one's clothing at other times if desired.
43. Members may be dismissed from the association for sufficiently grave reasons, if this is approved by the Minister General in conjunction with the Area Minister from the member's Area, in consultation with the Spiritual Advisor.
44. Ongoing spiritual reading and study of our faith is essential for all to grow in holiness. Members are exhorted to occasionally read a life of St. Francis, yearly if possible, of which many excellent works are available. Spiritual reading should also keep the Holy Gospel in primary importance. Competent spiritual direction is strongly encouraged for all members.
45. "Be holy yourselves in all your conduct; since it is written, 'you shall be holy, for I am holy.'" (1 Pt 1:15-16)

## Chapter Six

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

50. “And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) The Tau Maria Franciscan family is made up of three distinct groups. Tau Maria Franciscan Cordbearers, Tau Maria Franciscans in formation, and perpetually professed Tau Maria Franciscans. All are invited to join our spiritual family as Cordbearers. By embracing a mitigated rule of life and attending monthly meetings, Cordbearers are supported in their Catholic faith and formed in the habits of prayer and penance. Cordbearers are welcomed at our retreat, and pilgrimages. Those under 18 are welcome to become Cordbearers with the permission of their parents. Cordbearer requirements are published in our handbook. Let us love and support one another as Jesus loves us, as brothers and sisters in Christ and St. Francis.
51. The Area Minister is responsible to establish at least one monthly meeting in his/her region. All members and Postulants are encouraged to attend the monthly meeting, if possible. The Area Minister with approval of the Minister General may also authorize other meetings within the area.
52. Let us call to mind here the admonition of St. Francis: “Do not quarrel or bicker or criticize others. Rather,...be mild, peaceful and unassuming, calm and humble; and (your) words, no matter with whom (you) are speaking, must always be respectful of the other person. ...Keep (yourselves) from all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, the cares and worries of this world, detraction and complaint.” (Rule of 1223, C.3 & 10)

## Chapter Seven

### WORKS OF MERCY

53. “And the King will answer them, ‘truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me.’” (Mt 25:40)
54. The Tau Maria Franciscan association is committed to assisting the Catholic Church in the evangelization and sanctification of the laity and building up of the family. Tau Maria Franciscans are required to be regularly involved in spiritual or corporal works of mercy. Works of mercy towards one’s own family members do fulfill this requirement. Tau Maria Franciscan “communal” initiatives are highly encouraged as are especially those directed at assisting the materially poor. Activities that promote social justice are also recommended, especially pro-life work due to the tremendous evil of legalized abortion in our time.
55. “This is how the Lord gave me, Brother Francis, the grace to begin to do penance: when I was yet in my sins, it seemed to me unbearably bitter to see lepers. And the Lord Himself led me among them, and I showed kindness toward them. And as I went away from them that which had seemed bitter to me was now changed for me into sweetness of mind and body.”  
(St. Francis – Testament)

## CONCLUSION

56. Let all whom the Holy Spirit calls to this way of life embrace this Rule with loving generosity and live its spirit and letter with zeal and joy. It is intended to be only a closer following of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. “So you also, when you have done all that is commanded you, say ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.’ (Lk 17:10)
  
57. Fear and honor, praise and bless,  
give thanks to, and adore,  
the Lord God Almighty, in Trinity and Unity,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit: Creator of all.  
Do penance! (Mt 3:2)  
Bring forth worthy fruits of penance  
for we shall soon die!  
(St. Francis – Rule of 1221, C.XXI)
  
58. “To God whose power now at work in us can do immeasurably more than we ask or imagine – to Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus through all generations, world without end. Amen.” (Eph 3:20-21)