



## **Tau Maria Franciscan Family Handbook**

### ***Introduction***

The Tau Maria Franciscan (TMF) family is made up of three distinct groups. TMF Cordbearers, TMF in formation, and perpetually professed TMF. TMF Cordbearers accept and live by a few requirements that make them part of the Tau Maria Franciscan family and Charism. They attempt to incorporate the tools provided by their new family into their personal lives as a path to more fully live the Sacramental life available to all, as provided by the Holy Roman Catholic Church. These tools have been developed to aid us on our penitential path to perfection. The first part of this handbook defines and explains the Cordbearer path.

*“Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Matthew 5:48 – Douay Rheims)

*“11... (109)... Fortified by so many and such powerful means of salvation, all the faithful, whatever their condition or state, are called by the Lord, each in his own way, to that perfect holiness whereby the Father Himself is perfect.”* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *LUMEN GENTIUM*, Pope Paul VI, November 21, 1964 – Chapter II)

Jesus and His Church have made it quite clear what is expected. Yet, life and an honest examination of conscience make it clearer still that we all fall short of the Glory of God. One could not be blamed for thinking these expectations impossible, but as the Angel Gabriel said to Our Blessed Mother, “For nothing will be impossible with God.” (Lk 1:37 – NAS)

A sincere attempt to grow in holiness requires, for many people, some guidelines, structure, organization, and community. This is what being a TMF Cordbearer provides. We are members of a spiritual family (Tau Maria Franciscans), called to live a life of penance, prayer, poverty, and service reflective of the original Charism of St. Francis of Assisi. All practicing Catholics, committed to the Vicar of Christ on Earth, are welcome.

As members of the TMF family, Cordbearers have work to do and a role to fill. While the chief purpose of living a Cordbearer life is to promote personal holiness, we must keep in mind that as members of a “family” (our own; Catholic; or TMF), all that we say and do reflects on each “family.” It is hoped that the life of penance will enrich the Cordbearer, and bring glory to the Holy Trinity, Our Blessed Mother, The Holy Roman Catholic Church, St. Francis and St. Clare, and bring souls to God.

After we have examined the Cordbearer life, we will reflect on TMF in formation, and in perpetual vows. These two groups live by a more clearly defined Rule of Life, and after years of formation take a vow to observe that Rule. Yet, the aspirations and intent are the same as those of the Cordbearer.

## **Cordbearer Formation**

### ***I. Prayer***

Prayer is the foundation of the Cordbearer life. Each day Cordbearers is ***required*** to pray the following:

- a) Prayer of the Companions of St. Francis of Assisi
- b) Marian Consecration Prayer
- c) St. Michael Prayer
- d) Five Decades of the Rosary

All Cordbearers are also ***urged*** to add the following prayers to their daily routine, whenever possible:

- a) Morning Prayer (*or Creed and 5 Our Fathers*)
- b) Evening Prayer (*or Creed and 5 Our Fathers*)
- c) Prayer before and after meals
- d) Prayer for Priests (*Any prayer may be said – must be offered specifically for priests.*)
- e) Examination of Conscience

### ***II. Daily Mass***

Cordbearers will try to attend daily Mass whenever possible. The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the unbloody Sacrifice of Calvary, is the greatest, the most perfect of all prayers. Frequent assistance at this Sacrament of Love will, without a doubt, increase our love of God and neighbor, and help us to grow in holiness. As St. Pio of Pietrelcina says, “It would be easier for the world to exist without the sun than without the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.”

### ***III. Monthly Confession***

Sin separates us from God. Even our smallest sins are displeasing to the Blessed Trinity. In the Gospels, Our Divine Savior speaks repeatedly of our need for repentance and forgiveness. In response, Cordbearers attempt to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation monthly. Not only is frequent confession an aid to humility, more importantly, it helps bring us into line with Our Lord’s admonition to “repent.”

## **Cordbearer Formation**

### ***IV. Fasting***

Cordbearers try to follow the Church fast every Friday. The Church fast is described as one main meal with two other small meals which together do not equal the main meal, with no eating between meals. Cordbearers abstain from eating meat on Fridays, whenever possible.

Fasting serves a multitude of purposes. When we fast or deny ourselves anything, we are, in a small way, more open to God and what HE wants to give us because we are not “filled” with earthly things. Fasting is also a means to exert control over “the flesh and its desires.” It gives us an opportunity to think, in a unique way, about the poor, whom Our Lord loves so much.

Finally, fasting is a powerful spiritual tool as Jesus reveals to His disciples when He says, "But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting." (Mt. 17:21 – NAS) We should remember that food is not the only thing from which we can fast. We can fast from anything that we genuinely and legitimately like, want, or enjoy. (E.g. television, movies, air conditioning, sleep, etc...) and offer it up as a penance. Ending bad habits such as smoking, talking too much, etc...are also excellent opportunities for fasting.

### ***V. Daily life***

As members of the TMF family, we seek to imitate the life of our Holy Father St. Francis, in our individual lives. The Cordbearer way of life seeks to incorporate the Franciscan Charism of penance and poverty which are to be lived as well as we are able.

- a) Attire in Church – Dress in 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. Jeans, sweat pants or shirts, shorts, sneakers, T-shirts are all obvious examples of inappropriate clothing, although this is not an exhaustive list. Ladies are encouraged to wear a skirt or dress. Reverence is the spirit we are seeking, yet there is a penitential facet to this.
  
- b) Daily dress – Clothing should be dignified and appropriate to one’s state in life, yet modest, simple, not tightly fitting, not excessively expensive or known as a status symbol.
  
- c) Recreation / TV / Movies – St. Francis said, “Where there is mercy and discernment, there is neither superfluity nor hardness of heart.” In the Cordbearer life, piety and discernment are the judges, as to whether or not, what one is engaged in at the moment is actually, here and now, in accord with the will of God. (Love’s Reply, p. 195) Careful discernment is called for as relates to entertainment. Could you watch or listen to it joyfully with Jesus and Mary?
  
- d) Tau Cross and Cord – Wearing these items is optional but highly encouraged. The Tau Cross is part of the public witness of our Franciscan vocation. The cord, which is worn under the clothing, is a reminder to the Cordbearer of his/her deeper striving for holiness, and is known only to the Cordbearer.

## **Cordbearer Formation**

### ***VI. Growing in Love of Neighbor***

All men and women are called by Jesus Himself, to love and care for their neighbor. “And the king answering shall say to them: Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.” (Mt. 25:40 – Douay-Rheims) And, “A new commandment I give unto you: That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.” (Jn. 13:34-35 – Douay- Rheims) Cordbearers are encouraged to be involved in charitable work, especially in the areas of pro-life, assisting the materially poor and increasing our assistance and involvement in our own families and parishes.

### ***VII. Community***

Cordbearers are encouraged to attend all regional Tau Maria meetings as well as all larger group functions such as retreats and social gatherings. The one restriction on Cordbearers is that they cannot vote at our Chapters.

*Embracing the Cordbearer way of life is nothing more than a response to Our Divine Lord’s invitation to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him. It is truly a privilege to share the Cross of Our Lord, by carrying our own cross in joyful surrender. We have joined every bit of our lives to his Cross, through Our Blessed Mother, and the Sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist. This makes everyone of our sacrifices, joys, and all of our work meritorious in Him.*

*The invitation to the Tau Maria family is an invitation to listen to how Our Lord Jesus Christ is calling us to live. The Tau Maria Rule of Life clearly states that this is a calling and a choice to respond to that call. Ambition and seeking of accomplishment are not and have never been part of the Franciscan Charism.*

*It is our hope and prayer that we are able to provide a loving and joyous family to all those Our Lord and Lady would call to the Tau Maria Franciscan life. You are invited to become a Cordbearer today. Please feel free to study the rest of this handbook, use it for your personal walk with Jesus and Mary, pray, and discern if God may be calling you to a lifelong embrace of this life, and perhaps even a perpetual vow to live the Tau Maria Franciscan Rule of Life.*

## **TMF Family Handbook**

## *Tau Maria Franciscan Formation*

In the first paragraph of our Rule of Life we begin with the hope that our Rule and our lives bring, "...glory and honor to the Holy Name of Jesus and to the sanctification and salvation of all the children of Our Father in Heaven." (TMF Rule #1)

We resolved that we should do what Our Holy Father Francis did. He set out to reflect the life of Our Lord Jesus Christ. He did this by following the Church Our Savior founded.

We discovered that our vocation is a call to a life of penance. Ours is a call to "radical faith and conversion." We had been taught that this call is essentially one of external acts that reflect a "genuine interior transformation." (TMF Rule of Life #3) This cannot be accomplished without clear and careful direction and formation. Paragraph 4 (a) makes it clear who we follow. It requires 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.*

This is a clear mark of a TMF. Those who would dissent from Church teaching can be sure that they are not called to be a member of TMF or TMF Corderbearer.

Most of us come to the Franciscan life with many good, sometimes frivolous, and bad habits. When we view the requirements of the Rule they may appear difficult and time consuming. Few, if any of us, came to Tau Maria Franciscans looking for something to fill up our time. As we slowly began to take on each of the requirements and work them into our lives we began to understand something right out of the Rule itself. Old habits, good, bad and otherwise were taken from us.

We could see how they served or seemed to have served us in the past, but had to be allowed to leave us. Most of us saw how this had happened not so much through our determined effort as through God's mercy. Each step in living the new life became an exciting adventure in learning to do God's will for us. We began to feel like genuine Franciscans, as we let go of "enslaving attachments." (TMF Rule #5)

None of us has ever lived this Rule of Life perfectly. In fact there are provisions in the Rule itself that dispense, mitigate and commute its requirements. We are not to offend or excessively burden our spouses or other family members. As lay persons, and with our clerical members, our state of life and vocational demands must be considered when seeking to live the Rule.

It cannot be stressed enough, that we need to have good, clear, and orthodox spiritual direction, as individuals. When a good priest is unavailable, we can work on our particular issues with the ministers of TMF, or someone we trust in final vows, until we find a more permanent spiritual director.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *January*

Each month TMF pray and meditate on a particular subject. Our Rule of Life tells us, “And He told them a parable, to the effect that they ought always to pray and not lose heart.” (Lk 18:1) [TMF Rule #7] The Month of January is spent meditating on **The Franciscan Charism**.

We begin each year rededicating ourselves to our commitment to prayer and meditation, “Because our current culture is extremely fast-paced and full of distractions, fidelity to prayer requires discipline and does not allow for wasting time.” (TMF Rule #8)

The following are required of TMF daily:

- 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 TMF. 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 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. Caregiver 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. (TMF Rule #9)

As one moves toward profession it is important to realize that a day soon comes when a vow is taken. This begins with a temporary vow, but a vow nonetheless. Our commitment to this prayer life needs to be unconditional, yet charity, our state in life, or our responsibilities can interfere with our living this Rule as it is written.

It is absolutely essential that we understand the teachings of the Magisterium of the Holy Roman Catholic Church on sin, vows, scruples, and presumption in order to take this Rule as our own. The importance of spiritual direction, from a priest who is true to the Church, cannot be over emphasized. Members in final vows can be helpful as we walk this minefield of error.

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### *January*

We pray for the Ordinary of our Diocese and the priests of our area. This is a requirement that is a lifeline to our charism. Without the Bishop we are not in communion with the Vicar of Christ on Earth. Without this communion, we are left to our own efforts. These can get us nowhere. But TMF is in communion. We pray for and seek to work with the priests and bishops of every diocese where our meetings take place, as individuals and groups.

*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. (TMF Rule #13)*

The Franciscan Charism cannot be separated from prayer, the sacraments, or the Holy Roman Catholic Church. Since it is a calling, we must clear a channel for Our Lord to speak to us. In meditating, studying, and discussing this subject for a month, many of us discover who we are as Franciscans. Our hearts are set on fire by “poverty”, “penance”, “prayer”, “minority”, or some other aspect of our life. We then meet in community and hear what draws our brothers and sisters to St. Francis. This is when we realize that this is a lifelong journey into the love of God.

Our primary vocations to personal holiness and to our families come into sharper focus for us. Many of us have thought of vocation as separate from our everyday lives; something only for priests and religious. Living the Rule of Life has made it easier for us to see that our families, jobs, and everyday relationships are the means God has provided to bring us to Him. While the Church has always said this, TMF has helped us internalize this reality. For many of us, our families are our Franciscan Charism.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *February*

Whether in our families, at work, or in our relationships with our friends, we find opportunities to sacrifice. These lessons can be useful in working with the poor, sick, imprisoned, or just helping out at our neighborhood parish. The Month of February is spent meditating on **Self Denial in the Following of Christ.**

“The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.” (Lk 5:35) [Rule #17] So begins the second chapter of the Rule of Life. There are some today who would deny the importance or even the relevance of fasting. This is what makes our penance even more urgent. “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.” (Lk 9:23) [Rule #18] As **TMF**, we seek to deny ourselves through the following practices:

- 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.
- 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.
  - 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 and Solemnities are not obligatory fast days.
  - Sweets (dessert-type foods) and alcoholic beverages are not allowed except on the Lord’s Day and Solemnities.
  - These begin with Evening Prayer I of the Divine Office.
  - The Octaves of Christmas and Easter are considered Solemnities.
  - 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 member of **TMF**.

*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) [Rule #19]*

- Expectant and nursing mothers are exempt from all fasting requirements.
- Those over 60 years old may substitute other penitential practices for the fasting requirements.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *February*

*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) [Rule #20]*

*“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) [Rule #21]*

As we contemplate the subject for February, Self Denial seems to many to be the essence of the Franciscan Charism. Yet, many of us have discovered that the tool of fasting has awakened in us a new humility. In failing to properly fast we are encouraged by those who have gone before us to pray and trust Jesus and Mary. We witness a change in ourselves that has not come about by our strenuous efforts, but through surrender.

All the benefits to fasting and self denial become sources of gratitude to God for His great patience with us. Fasting has been difficult for all of us. For some it was food, some it was time, others had difficulty with another form of self denial. In time we have learned that these struggles became our clearest indicators of who we were, and what Jesus wanted to do for us.

It is only in meditating upon, and sharing these experiences that they take on their full value. Besides granting us opportunities for humility, they give us the chance to express how great our God is, and enthusiasm for the next challenge He sends us.

This is an area that demands charity. Our desire to fast should not become a source of pride. We need to avoid social situations that conflict with our schedule for fasting, but when this is not possible we need to be a gracious guest and “eat what is set before us.” (Lk. 10:8) We need to remember, even in these situations, that there are always opportunities for penance, and decide on a simple alternative sacrifice.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *March*

The “world, the flesh, and the devil”, and our own self-centeredness fight constantly against much of what our rule seeks to accomplish. This struggle never ends, during this life. At the beginning of Spring we meditate on **Franciscan Poverty**.

Throughout the history of the Franciscan order poverty has been considered the “keystone” of St. Francis’ ideal. In our attempt to follow Our Holy Father, we are seeking to imitate Our Lord. As Jesus trusted Our Heavenly Father in all things, right up to His death, we seek to trust in His Providence. This trust can be developed by, “freely choosing to live poverty, simplicity, and minority according to our state of life.” [#23] Those of us with families must take care of their needs. All of us have serious material responsibilities. Yet we all are required to practice this poverty by minimizing our possessions, and providing for service dedicated to God and His people.

We rid ourselves of all unnecessary property and wealth, but giving it to the poor. “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) [TMF Rule #25]

Specifically, the following are required:

- a. One television/DVD player per household, maximum.
- b. Internet, and all media must be viewed with great caution.
- c. Recreational events or places (e.g. movies, concerts, sporting events, plays, certain beaches, parks, etc...) may not be attended which are excessively expensive or are offensive to God.
- d. 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.
- e. Only necessary family vehicles, 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.
  - Family vehicles are not to be considered luxury models or mainly sport vehicles.
- f. 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.
  - Please avoid jeans, sweat pants or shirts, shorts, sneakers, T-shirts or similar clothing,
  - ladies should wear a skirt or dress.
  - TMF should set the example in a world that has lost its sense of the sacred.

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### ***March***

- 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.
  - Men should avoid tank tops or other immodest clothing, sleeves required.
  - For women: Skirts are encouraged, no low cut tops or skirts above the knee, sleeves required.
- h. Except for special occasions or needs, makeup, perfumes, colognes, and aftershave 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)
  - Hair coloring or wigs/hair pieces apart from special needs (e.g. hair loss due to sickness) are prohibited.
  - Jewelry must be minimal, simple and not excessively expensive.
- i. Firearms or other lethal weapons, except for vocational demands (e.g. police officer) or hunting are not allowed.

We also encourage our members to attempt the following:

- 1) Discontinue all unnecessary use of televisions, computers, dishwashers, microwave ovens, other appliances (e.g. electric can opener, bread machine etc...), expensive stereos, cameras or other electronic devices or tools, cellular/car phone.
- 2) Stop using makeup or secular jewelry beyond an inexpensive watch and wedding band/engagement ring.
- 3) Tithing with special attention to the needs of the materially poor.
- 4) Adopting these or any other "encouraged" sacrifices should be discerned according to each individual's life circumstances and level of spiritual growth.

To embrace these many requirements will take time. Much prayer and meditation will be needed to make such basic changes. Discussions with TMF who have succeeded in these areas will be invaluable. The Holy Spirit has taught many of us the deep reasons for this poverty, and has changed us to point that we have gratefully let go of our desires that we might possess the "one thing necessary."

*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.(#13)*

## **TMF Family Handbook** *April*

Some might believe that seeking the lowest place is a simple technique to achieve a stealthy sort of worldly power. Others see it as an opportunity to avoid responsibility. We have come to believe that in imitating this aspect of the Life of Christ we find Him, and His will for us, as Franciscans. Nothing else can compare to this gift. The Month of April is spent meditating on **Franciscan Minority**.

*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 superiority 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) [Rule #28]*

This is the spirit of TMF leadership. Our history has proven to us the truth of our Holy Father’s warning. Each of us has had to struggle to let go of “our plan” and serve the will of God, as it unfolds. Patience from those we serve has been much appreciated, as we grow closer to our ideal of being a good Franciscan. We have attempted to create a government that contains checks and balances over each of our servants. As TMF, we are not experts in the truth. Our Holy Mother Church provides us with an abundance of such men and women. We are not experts in the Franciscan way of life. Again, the Franciscan family is old and distinguished, our reading list is ample evidence of this.

As TMF, we present a simple way to seek the perfection that we are told to live. Our founders have given us a Rule of Life that is a beautiful tool for us to use to get closer to Jesus and Mary, our families, and each other. We share our experience in seeking a simple way to cling to Our Glorious Savior, and His Church by our feeble attempts to live this gracious rule.

We are not yet saints. We use our Rule of Life to exam our consciences; we fall short each day. We submit ourselves to the Divine Mercy. Yet, we are called to live out our vow, internally and externally to the best of our ability. In this way we follow Our Holy Father St. Francis of Assisi toward perfection. Some of us become adept in living the externals of our rule, but internally the struggle to deepen our dependence on, and appreciation for God’s love never ends.

Our servants are not necessarily our holiest members. They are the TMF that Providence has given the desire and ability to serve for a short time, and we are grateful for their service.

Tau Maria is headed by

- Minister General Area Ministers
- A Spiritual Advisor assures 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.
- Each region is served by an Area Minister

## **TMF Family Handbook**

*April*

*“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 TMF and to initiate appropriate reform to accomplish this end. During the Chapter, the Minister General, the Area Ministers are elected. The General Chapter has authority to change the Rule.” [Rule #30]*

Those in temporary vows are allowed to attend the General Chapter, and participate, although they are not able to vote. TMF in perpetual vows who are unable to attend a General Chapter may designate another member (who is in perpetual vows) to vote for them. This designation must be in writing.

*“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 local region who have made 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.” [Rule #32]*

Elected service positions are always held by secret ballot. A simple majority of the votes of those present and those who have designated a proxy will determine the member who will take these positions.

*“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.” [Rule #33]*

*“All holding any offices, 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) [Rule #35]*

*“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) [Rule #36]*

Seeking the lowest place is more than sitting in the back of the church, for TMF. We have learned, through painful experience, that it is good for us to instinctively seek out the lesser place. Power, pleasure, and prestige are all poison to us. Our calling is to serve in joyful contemplation of how patient and kind Jesus and Mary have been to us. It is for this that we do not, as an association, run or manage any ministries, but seek to serve those who need our help as individuals in ministering to the Body of Christ, particularly in our families and local parish.

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### *May*

Each day we give ourselves, our lives, all we possess, even our eternal merits to Our Blessed Mother Mary. Each year we repeat our Total Consecration, to Mary Mediatrix of all graces. Our very

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name reminds us of the trust we put in Mary the Mother of God. The Month of May is spent meditating on **Marian Consecration**.

### ***Marian Consecration Prayer***

*To you do we turn, O Holy Mary, glorious and ever-Virgin Mother of God, Queen of Angels and of Saints, the “Virgin made Church”. To you do we cry, O Handmaid of the Lord, Mother of the Suffering Servant, who made the Lord of Majesty our brother. For through you the most exalted Son of God emptied Himself for love of our love, taking the form of a slave in your womb and dying in destitution on a cross as He gave you to us, O Refuge of Sinners.*

*To you do we fly, O Mediatrix of all Graces, as we beg you to obtain for us the true spirit of the Gospel. Holy Immaculate Conception, Spouse of the Holy Spirit, taking you into our home, we consecrate and entrust ourselves and our fraternity totally and forever to your Immaculate Heart, as your slaves and your property.*

*Make us your true sons and daughters and use our fraternity as an instrument of Christ our King to convert sinners, to sanctify souls, to serve the poor and sick, and to strengthen and renew the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, that God – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – may be glorified, praised and adored by all mankind. Amen.*

This is the prayer we say each day to consecrate ourselves to Our Blessed Mother.

*“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.” [Rule#15]*

*“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) [Rule #16]*

### **TMF Family Handbook** **May**

St. Louis de Montfort tells us the effects of this most perfect way of living out our Baptismal promises:

FIRST EFFECT We will understand our own evil, our corruption, and our incapacity for anything good. Our Lady will communicate to us her profound humility.

What a great mercy, to be shown our true selves.

SECOND EFFECT Our Blessed Lady will give us a portion of her faith. We will be given a share in the greatest faith the world has ever seen.

What a consolation, to rely on her faith rather than our own.

THIRD EFFECT Our Mother will take away all scruple and disordered fear.

This can take time, but it will happen when we allow her to work in us.

FOURTH EFFECT Mother Mary will fill us with great confidence in God and in herself, because we will approach Jesus through her.

This is the confidence for which we were created, not for confidence in ourselves.

FIFTH EFFECT The soul of Our Blessed Lady will communicate itself to us, to glorify the Lord.

What beauty, glory, and truth, to glorify God through His Blessed Mother.

SIXTH EFFECT If Mary, who is the tree of life, is well cultivated in our soul by Fidelity to the practices of this devotion, she will bear fruit in her own time, and her fruit is Jesus Christ.

This is our job, to cultivate our souls through these practices.

SEVENTH EFFECT By this practice, faithfully observed, we will give Jesus more glory in a month, than by any other practice, however difficult, in many years.

*Day 25 – Preparation for Total Consecration*

The meditations and prayers for the month of May are full of mysteries. Franciscan spirituality has always been Marian. St. Louis de Montfort has done a great service to the Church. His vision of total consecration has been carried on to great effect by the church, in our day most notably by St. Maximilian Kolbe and Pope Saint John Paul II the Great.

This is a great gift, when properly understood, and deeply personal. The Mother of Our Lord knows each of her children well, and we have learned to know her better as we entrust everything to her care, even our eternal rewards. This consecration is the very breath of the Tau Maria Family.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *June*

It would seem that if we need to comment on the Eucharist, then you will not understand. Yet, to refrain from “shouting from the housetops” about the greatest gift of all would be wicked ingratitude. The Month of June is spent meditating on **St. Francis and the Eucharist.**

*“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)”[Rule #14]*

O sublime humility! O humble sublimity! These words of Our Holy Father ring through the month of June more profoundly because we spend the time to contemplate, pray, and discuss this greatest of all treasures. Man could not have imagined the notion of our communion with our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier that Jesus has given us in the Blessed Sacrament.

June is the month of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. This holy devotion has allowed us to pierce the mystery of the Eucharist in a concrete way. Our sorrows are not joined to the sufferings of Jesus through some abstract intellectual formula, but in His very body, blood, soul, and divinity.

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and behold I am with you all days, even to the consummation of the world.” (Mt. 28:20) Even today He remains with us, physically. We can visit Him at any time.

“The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.”<sup>136</sup> “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1324) It is worth repeating that, “...all ecclesiastical ministries and word of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and oriented toward it.” Everything draws our prayers, meditation, suffering, and work to Jesus.

Yet, we all can attest to the regular and unabashed disrespect suffered by Our Glorious Savior. Dress, attitude, words, music, architecture, and liturgy have often reflected at complete lack of appreciation for who rests in our tabernacles. TMF seek to make amends for the rampant lack of respect in many of our congregations by doing everything we can to show our love for Him.

Our daily mass, reception of the Eucharist, holy hours, and visits to the Divine Presence all afford us a great opportunity to make amends for this great injustice against the adoration due God.

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### *June*

Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J. informs us that...

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“Moreover, for our purpose, the Mass is a sacrament which pours numerous graces on the human family. What kind of grace does the sacrifice sacrament of the Eucharist confer?”

The grace of propitiation for sin. Propitiation means obtaining graces from God that will make up for, amend and expiate the ravages of sin.

- The grace of repentance and true interior sorrow for our having offended God.
- The grace of remission of the sufferings that are due to us because we have sinned.
- The grace enlightening our minds which have been darkened by sin. Sin and darkness go together throughout the bible and throughout human history.
- The grace of strengthening our wills to do good and avoid evil, because our own wills have been weakened by sins.
- The grace of obtaining grace for others, especially the grace of conversion for hardened sinners and the grace of conversion to the true faith for those who may never have even heard the gospel effectively preached to them.”

*The Sacrifice Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist, 1998 Inter Mirifica*

What a great inspiration to us all. TMF learn, in living out the Rule of Life, that our greatest blessing is to be able to genuinely center our lives on the Great Sacrament. All of the graces earned are put at the feet of Our Blessed Mother and we learn what is meant by the saying that she cannot be outdone in generosity.

Some of us have had difficulty in getting to Mass every day. Over the years of formation, and after, we have been grateful to learn that Mary continues to find ways for us to make it there without too much anxiety. For us, the highlight of our day is when we get to assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. We begin to experience it as a luxury in which we can indulge. We meditate on people throughout the world who must go to great lengths to just meet their Sunday obligation and we realize how fortunate we are. Praise be to God!

## **TMF Family Handbook** *July – August*

St. Francis of Assisi is a canonized saint because he sought to live as Our Lord Jesus Christ lived. God saw fit to give him a heroic path and the graces to live it. He embraced these graces fully. Tau Maria seek to follow St. Francis, and live as he lived, in order to better follow Jesus. The month of July is spent meditating on **The Life of St. Francis.**

Each day TMF say:

**Prayer of the Companions of St. Francis of Assisi**

We see this prayer as joining us to the eight centuries of those who see in Our Holy Father St. Francis as the example we hope to imitate on the road to perfection. We understand that perfection, as the perfection we will know when we become the people that we were created to become, in Jesus, through Mary. The prayer expresses our understanding of our Franciscan spirituality.

*Draw us to yourself, most worthy Father Francis that we may run after your fragrance of holiness.*

It is the “fragrance” of the holiness that God gave to Francis that draws us to him and to our Rule of Life, as a means to reach this holiness. Being a TMF is not an accomplishment that we seek to gain. It is a calling to a particular path to be walked.

*As you know, we are lukewarm because of our sloth, languid because of our idleness, half-alive because of our negligence. This little flock is following you with hesitant steps.*

We are not yet saints. We are slothful, languid and half-alive. This is because of our negligence. Even years after taking our final vow we say this prayer every day. Our vow does not make us perfect, even in observing the Rule. We can do no more than our best in living the Rule.

Our Lord’s patience is much appreciated by those of us who have taken our final vow. In His mercy he shows us that we still fall far short of His glory. Yet, we strive for progress in the Rule, and in that we see progress toward living out His will for us, in our lives, our families, and our state in life.

*Our weak eyes cannot bear the dazzling rays of your perfection. Renew our days as from the beginning, O mirror and model of perfection, and do not allow us, who are like you in our profession, to be unlike you in our lives.*

When we fall short of our commitment to the requirements of TMF, whether as Cordbearers, those in formation, or those professed, we first of all recognize our need for prayer. We pray to Our Holy Father Francis to renew us in our commitment to live as he lived.

*Holy Father, remember all your sons and daughters who, surrounded by inextricable dangers, follow your footsteps, though from so great a distance. Give us strength that we may resist. Purify us that we may gleam forth. Fill us with joy that we may be happy. Pray that the spirit of grace and of prayer be poured upon us; that we may have the true humility you had, that we may observe the poverty that you observed, that we may be filled with the charity with which you always loved Christ Crucified. Who with the Father and the Holy Spirit, lives and reigns, world without end. Amen.*

**TMF Family Handbook**  
**July – August**

In meditating on the life of St. Francis of Assisi the TMF family recommends many books, and our reading list is included in this handbook. Yet, we use three books in particular in our own formation. These are *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents*, *The Saint*, *The Founder*, and *The Prophet*. The 2001 edition, copyrighted by Franciscan Institute of St. Bonaventure University, St. Bonaventure, NY, and published by New City Press is what many of us use today.

We are to read a “life of St. Francis” every year, and July and August have been set aside to read, pray, and meditate on his life. In these months we cannot help but contemplate how he has affected our lives, especially since joining TMF. This is different for each of us, which makes our sharing with each other so important. These conversations draw us closer to each other and to him. This is also a time for us to seek out better ways to imitate him.

Our book list has been put together by our Chapter. In the event that a book on our list be found to be inappropriate to our purposes, it will be taken off the list. Our purpose is to encourage each other in following the teachings of the Magisterium of the Catholic Church, by living out the requirements of our vocation in TMF.

Francis of Assisi: The Man Who Found Perfect Joy Bedoyere, Michael De La	Richest of the Poor Maynard, Theodore
The Life of St. Francis Bonaventure	Mirror of Christ: Francis of Assisi O’Brien, Isidore, OFM
The Little Flowers of St. Francis Brown, Raphael (Translator)	St. Francis of Assisi and the Conversion of the Muslims Frank M Rega
St. Francis of Assisi Chesterton, G.K.	
The Life of St. Francis De Robeck, Nesta	The Peace of St. Francis Sticco, Maria
St. Francis of Assisi Englebert, Omer	The Friends of St. Francis Wicks, Sidney
The Knight Errant of Assisi Felder, Hilarin, OFM Cap.	St. Francis of Assisi Wilmot-Buxton, E.M.
God’s Fool-The Life & times of Francis of Assisi Julien Green	The Joyful Beggar Wohl, Louis de
My God and My All Goudge, Elizabeth	Early Franciscan Classics Order of Friars Minor
As The Morning Star Habig, Marion A., OFM	Francis of Assisi: Volume I (Omnibus)
Francis and Clare: Saints of Assisi Homan, Helen Walker	Francis of Assisi: Volume II (Omnibus)
Letters to St. Francis and His Friars Homan, Helen Walker	Francis of Assisi: Volume III (Omnibus)
St. Francis of Assisi Jorgensen, Johannes	Francis of Assisi History, Hagiography & Hermeneutics into the Early Doc.
St. Francis of Assisi: The Legends and Lauds Karrer, Otto (Editor)	Francis of Assisi Index to the Early Doc.
Blessed are the Meek Kossak, Zofia	The Illustrated Life of St. Francis DACA Publications, Assisi
Francis of Assisi Kybal, Vlastimil	St. Francis of Assisi: The Annals of Blessed Poverty (Comic)
The Mirror of Perfection Leo of Assisi	The Prayers of St. Francis Bader, W. (Compiled by)
	Writings of St. Francis Fahy, Benen OFM (Translator)

## TMF Family Handbook

### *September*

We are not made in the image and likeness of a single person, but of a Trinity. We are created to love and that takes place in a community. The Most Blessed Trinity lives in perpetual love and we are meant to share in this for all eternity. The month of September is spent meditating on **Community.**

*“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. 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.” [ TMF Rule #38 and #39]*

Our contact with those interested in investigating TMF will usually begin with an individual contact. As the discussion advances we will invite people to one of our area meetings. These meetings differ in many ways depending on the needs of the local members, but in the spirit of unity we do demand a few common elements.

Our meetings vary in form and length, throughout the USA. We do have a standard to help guide new meetings and promote unity within our association.

Our meetings must:

- Begin with the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, a Holy Hour, or praying the Holy Rosary,
- Allow for a discussion phase of the meeting of no less than 20 minutes, with the discussion being focused on the monthly topic.
- These topics are
  - January – Franciscan Charism
  - February – Self Denial in the following of Christ
  - March – Franciscan Poverty
  - April – Franciscan Minority
  - May – Marian Consecration
  - June – St. Francis and the Eucharist
  - July and August – The Life of St. Francis of Assisi
  - September – Community and Charity
  - October – Works of Mercy
  - November – Franciscan History
  - December – Franciscan Theology and the Incarnation

Our meetings are meant to be a time for us to help and encourage each other in better living the requirements of our TMF vocation. This cannot be done unless we all appreciate who we are. The heart of who we are lies within the vow taken by our professed members.

"A *vow* is a deliberate and free promise made to God concerning a possible and better good which must be fulfilled by reason of the virtue of religion," A vow is an act of *devotion* in which the Christian dedicates himself to God or promises him some good work. By fulfilling his vows he renders to God what has been promised and consecrated to Him. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2102)

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### ***September***

*“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 \_\_\_\_\_ 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 striving for holiness by a life of prayer, penance, poverty and loving service according to my state of life.” [Rule #40]*

Our experience makes it clear that our “striving for holiness” means that we embrace our Rule of TMF gradually. We see God working in our lives as we progress toward His perfection for us. Even when we fail completely, our Rule provides a sure path to begin moving back towards His perfect will for us.

Another mark of our community is the requirement for those in formation and professed to wear the Tau cross. This tells the world at large that we are Franciscans.

### **TMF Cross**

Our own TMF Tau Cross is made of wood as a witness to evangelical poverty and Franciscan love of natural beauty. The charism of primitive observance, exemplified by the Capuchin reform, especially emphasizes a visible witness to the world of the poverty of Jesus, which frees us to love. The wood is burned to remind us that our hearts, like our “Seraphic” Father St. Francis, should be on fire with love for Jesus Christ Crucified and our neighbor, as He loved us. “For our God is a consuming fire.” (Heb 12:29)

The golden “M” at the foot of the cross signifies the Blessed Virgin Mary, our Mother and Queen. We are totally consecrated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus through her Immaculate Heart. Her role as Co-Redemptrix, accomplished at the foot of the Cross, is a striking model of our vocation to a life of penance. With the Blessed Mother we are called to offer ourselves totally to the Father, in union with the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Like St. Francis, the daily sacrifice of our lives is offered in reparation for sin, for the conversion of sinners, and for the love and glory of the Holy Name of Jesus.

*“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) TMF is a spiritual family. Let us love and support one another as Jesus loves us, as brothers and sisters in Christ and St. Francis. 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)—[Rule #46 and #48]*

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### ***October***

“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) So reads paragraph #49 from the Rule of TMF. Our progress in holiness is again not some accomplishment that we can or should be proud of, but a tremendous undeserved gift that we must share. The month of October is spent meditating on **Works of Mercy**.

*“Members of TMF 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. TMF “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.” [Rule #50]*

It is important to note that our TMF vocation is meant to support our primary vocation. The changing of a diaper on a baby, in the middle of the night, is an important penance and great act of love, properly understood and carried out. “Suffering” teenage children can be a great source of grace when joined to the Cross of Jesus. Patient endurance of our daily lives is central to our calling.

Some of the “communal initiatives” that are encouraged a special opportunities to strengthen our unity as well as compare notes on how best to live out our Rule. The pilgrimages to the March for Life have brought us closer to each other and to St. Francis.

*“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)[Rule #51]*

Those of us who have worked with the poor, the addicts, the mentally and emotionally challenged, the imprisoned, and our own families when needs were bountiful and intense can testify that we discovered something that surprised us. As with Francis and lepers, where the work most frightened us we found our greatest reward.

Yet, this did not excuse us from reality. The more we sought to relieve people of their suffering the more pain we experienced and saw. In our more immature days, we had thought we might “fix” problems and end suffering. Utopian notions and high minded solutions filled our brains until we saw that the more we tried to build a culture of life and goodness the more death and wickedness we could see. Not to worry. We do not love the poor because we are the great “fixers.” We love them because Jesus loves them and we love Him. He needs nothing from us, but His children need our best effort.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *October*

***“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42)***

We begin the work of evangelization by helping each other live out the requirements of our TMF vocation. The Cordbearer requirements are set out at the beginning of this handbook. The history of the Cordbearer in TMF and our past has always one of a warm family relationship. A great deal of the work that has been done in service to TMF is done by our Cordbearers.

As individuals we eventually find the work that Jesus would have us do. We learn that whether this is “communal” work, or home-schooling our own children, that in this work we find the path to perfection by joining our work with the work of God, through Mary. Each Holy Mass that we assist at grants us an opportunity to join our sacrifices to the Holy Sacrifice.

As a private association of the faithful, we seek a way for each of us serve our Catholic Church. When possible our communal spiritual and corporal works of mercy are obvious ways that we aid the church. Yet, we do not forget that being faithful to our call to holiness is our primary gift to God’s Church. A day may come for each of us when we can rejoice at Our Lady’s accomplishment, for our growth in Christ is due to her love for us. This accomplishment could be that we find ourselves living the Rule of Tau Maria to the letter and in the proper spirit. On that day we will be set on fire, and become a good Franciscan.

*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) [ Rule #55]*

## **TMF Family Handbook** *November*

The history of the Franciscan family is a great study in the roots of TMF. Our founders sought to return us to the spirit of the Order of Penitents, which was the Third Order created by St. Francis. Many reforms have taken place of the last eight centuries and in studying them we understand more clearly what Francis would have us do. The month of November is spent meditating on **Franciscan History**.

Penance did not begin with St. Francis. The roots of this human response to God's mercy and our sinfulness go back to the sacrifice of Abel. Yet, in the middle ages there was a popular *Ordo Poenitentium*. The penitents were oblates, hermits, recluses, and pilgrims. In the centuries leading up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century there was great reforms of monastic and eremitical institutions.

At the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, after the Gregorian reform, a spontaneous movement grew among the laity. Although it expressed itself through poverty, popular preaching, penitential practices, and acts of mercy towards outcasts there also existed a tendency toward heresy.

Most would agree that the Franciscan lay movement began with the First Version of the Letter to the Faithful (c1215). In the LegMaj IV, 6, Bonaventure states: "Carried away by the force of his preaching, great numbers of people adopted the new rule of penance according to the form instituted by St. Francis which he called the Order of the Brothers of Penance".

In 1221 Pope Honorius III approved the first legislative text of the Third Order of St. Francis, *Memoriale Propositi*. It had been written by Cardinal Hugolino, Protector of the Order of Friars Minor, and given to the Order of Penitents. The first time the term "Third Order" had been used was in a Bull (*Detestanda*), written by Gregory IX protecting the right of the Order of Penitents not to carry arms and to be free of military service. This was a great blow to the feudal system.

Portions of the Second Letter to the Faithful:

### **Chapter I: Those Who Do Penance**

To all those who love the Lord with their whole heart, with their whole soul and mind, with their whole strength (Mk 12:30) and love their neighbors as themselves (Mt 22:39) and hate their bodies with their vices and sins, and receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and produce worthy fruits of penance: Oh, how happy and blessed are these men and women when they do these things and persevere in doing them, since the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon them (Is 11:2) and He will make His home and dwelling among them (Jn 14:23). They are children of the heavenly Father (Mt 5:45) whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers, and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 12:50).

### **Chapter II: Those Who Do Not Do Penance**

To all those men and women who are not living in penance and do not receive the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ; who practice vice and sin and follow wicked concupiscence (Col 3:5) and the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16); who do not observe what you have promised to the Lord, and bodily serve the world by the desires of the flesh (1 Pet 2:11), the anxieties of the world and the cares of this life; you who are held fast by the devil, whose children you are and whose works you perform (cf Jn 8:41): You are blind, since you do not see the true light, Our Lord Jesus Christ. You do not have spiritual wisdom, since you do not possess the Son of God, Who is the true wisdom of the Father. It is said of such people: Their wisdom has been swallowed up (Ps 106:27), and: Cursed are those who turn away from Your commands (Ps 118:21). You see, acknowledge, know and do evil deeds, and knowingly, you lose your souls.

## **TMF Family Handbook**

### *November*

- 1289: Third Franciscan Order was given a new Rule by Pope Nicholas IV, who issued the Bull "*Supra montem*". The Rule of Nicholas IV does not add any new material to the "*Memoriale Propositi*" of 1221, but it gives a more legislative style to this document.
- 1689: Innocent XI, with the Bull "*Ecclesiae catholicae*" of 28 June 1689, commented and adapted the Rule of 1289 to the times.
- 1882: In the aftermath of the French Revolution and with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, Pope Leo XIII, famous for the "*Rerum novarum*" and social reform in a Christian context, took to heart the renewal of the Franciscan Third Order. In his encyclical letter "*Auspicato*" (1882), he announced that he wanted to give a new orientation to the Third Order of St. Francis.
- 1883: In a letter written to Fr. Bernardino dal Vago da Portogruaro, Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, the Pope expressed his ardent wish to renew the Third Order in its genuine Franciscan spirit, in order to help him in his efforts at social reform. He even gave the Third Order a new Rule, with the Bull "*Misericors Dei Filius*" (1883).
- 1912: Pope Pius X, who was himself a member of the Third Order, wrote the letter "*Tertium Franciscalium Ordinem*" (8 September 1912), in which he asked the Friars of the First Order to take spiritual care of the Third Order with the aim of promoting genuine social reform.
- 1950: During the international congress of the Third Order in 1950, many voiced the need for an updating of the Rule of Leo XIII. They were of the opinion that it lacked the evangelical impetus which should be at the roots of Franciscan legislation.
- 1957: Third Order was given new General Constitutions, with the aim of renewing the contents of the Rule and giving the Order a spiritual, social and apostolic orientation. Vatican Council II was the turning point for radical reform in the Third Order.
- 1966: Work was begun on a new Rule for the Third Order of St. Francis.
- 1978: Paul VI formally approved the new Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order with the Apostolic Letter "*Seraphicus Patriarca*". The new Rule proposed a new name for the Third Order of St. Francis: Secular Franciscan Order (SFO).

TMF draws from the history of Third Order to develop our charism. It is important that we know and understand the mind of the Church on how we are to live out our Rule. This is the reason that we have a Spiritual Advisor for each meeting and for the group at large. These Spiritual Advisors are priests who make sure that we do what is necessary to stay in good standing with the Bishop of our area.

### **Franciscan History Reading List**

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<p>The Capuchins Volume I Cuthbert, OFMCap.</p> <p>The Chronicles of Thomas of Eccleston Cuthbert, OFMCap.</p> <p>The Order of St. Francis Esser, Cajetan, OFM</p> <p>Franciscans in the United States</p>	<p>The Franciscans in Medieval English Life Green, Victor G. OFMCap</p> <p>XIIIth Century Chronicles Hermann, Placid, OFMCap. (Translator)</p> <p>The Franciscans Fr. James, OFMCap. Friars Minor</p>
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### **TMF Family Handbook** *December*

St. Francis deeply grasped the heart of the mystery of God made man. The Son whom the Father loved from all eternity “took the flesh of our humanity and frailty.” Becoming like us in all things but sin. The month of December is spent meditating on **Franciscan Theology and the Incarnation.**

**Matthew 5: 1** And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain, and when he was set down, his disciples came unto him. **2** And opening his mouth, he taught them, saying: **3** Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Lady Poverty is one of the Franciscan’s greatest loves. Our Lord Jesus Christ told us of her that she would bring the “kingdom of heaven” with her. We let go of the things of the world as best we can in order be with Jesus in His kingdom, now and forever.

**Matthew 5: 4** Blessed are the meek: for they shall possess the land.

Since we claim nothing but what Our Lord would give us, we can be confident that He will provide for our genuine needs. Our docility to His will, in all things, keeps us open to the Holy Spirit, and the path to perfection.

**Matthew 5: 5** Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. **6** Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill. **7** Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. **8** Blessed are the clean of heart: for they shall see God. **9** Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called children of God. **10** Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

In all things we wait on the Lord. He was like us in all things but sin. Tau Maria are all sinners who trust what Jesus tells us. Whether we mourn for our sins, or hunger and thirst for justice, we trust that in His time the Providence of God will show us His holy will. It is for us to be merciful, purify our hearts, and be at peace. In the life of Jesus and Francis, there were those who hated them and thought them fools. We thank Our Lady if we are found worthy of the same treatment.

**Matthew 5: 11** Blessed are ye when they shall revile you, and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: **12** Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven. For so they persecuted the prophets that were before you. **13** You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men. **14** You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. **15** Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house.

We study the great Franciscan Theologians in order to understand how Jesus could use us to carry these words to the world, and this is good. Yet, in living the Rule that has been given to us we are confident that somehow God will shine through our feeble efforts to love His children.

## **TMF Family Handbook** *December*

Bonaventure sees in Christ, “the first and the last, the highest and the lowest, the circumference and the center, the Alpha and the Omega, the caused and the cause, the Creator and the creature.” For simple lay people He is all. We meditate on His birth in this month designated for His birthday, Christmas. We contemplate the sinner Bonaventure who, after two years as Minister General of the Friars Minor withdrew to mount La Verna to find peace in this heavy responsibility. This is a simple analogy of all the great Franciscan theologians who have contemplated Our Holy Father St. Francis and his attempt to follow the example that God gave us by allowing the Incarnation of His only begotten Son.

TMF recognize how pitiful our attempt to live out this life is in light of these great saints. We see each day, in our own lives, how we fall short of such love. Each time we forget to say grace after meals, or want to give up because, “It is just no use. I will never do all of this.” We are reminded that we are a penitent people. Our Tau means that we are sinners, and that our life is penance for our sins and the sins of the whole world. Our Rule of Life is the cross we embrace as the way back to the path that will take us to the perfection God has planned for us.

Jesus and therefore our salvation came to us through Mary. He gave us to her and her to us as one of His final acts before His death. Franciscan theology has expressed her Immaculate Conception and prayed to her as Coredemptrix and Mediatrix of all graces even while these ideas were not fully developed.

She is with Jesus in His Glorified body, in heaven, physically, since she was assumed into His presence. She is with His Mystical Body, in His Church. She is with His body, blood, soul, and divinity in His Sacramental body, in the Holy Eucharist. She is with us, Cordbearer, those of us in formation, and professed. She is our life, our sweetness, and our hope. Because this is all true, we carry our cross with her. We have given her our all in order to see, with our own eyes, that she cannot be outdone in generosity.

## ***PEACE AND BLESSINGS***

### **THE TAU CROSS**

Pope Innocent III called the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 in an effort to address the great need for reform in the Church and to once again appeal to Christendom, to take back the

Holy Land from the Muslims. The opening session was an impressive gathering of Cardinals, Patriarchs, Bishops and other assorted ecclesiastical and political dignitaries. Also present was a poor man in a beggar's robe named Francis Bernardone from Assisi, head of a new order of penitents and mendicant preachers. St. Francis took to heart Innocent's impassioned plea for reform, which the Pope developed from the following text from the prophet Ezekiel:

“Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a Tau upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it... Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; ...but touch no one upon whom is the Tau.” (Ezek 9:4-6)

“Tau” is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and means “mark”. In Greek and English transliteration “Tau” takes the form of a letter “T”, which is also a variant form of the Cross. St. Jerome and other Fathers of the Church saw the Tau of Ezekiel as a solemn symbol of the Cross of Christ. It was now evoked as a symbol of spiritual renewal in the Church. As the Pontiff explained these things St. Francis heard the voice of the Lord Jesus speaking through His Vicar.

- † He heard a resounding confirmation of his vocation to “rebuild the Church” by radically embracing the whole Gospel and preaching penance and conversion. The Tau Cross became the mark with which he would sign himself, his brethren and all who would respond to his pleas to repent and believe. The Poverello's union with Christ Crucified in the depths of his soul was now externally expressed by the Tau. He set himself and his order to the task of preaching the Gospel with renewed zeal. This zeal sought to implement the Pope's commission so that all would experience God's mercy, and thus also avoid eternal punishment. Finally, St. Francis also saw the humility of the friars minor, called to be the least of all, signified in this last letter of the Hebrew alphabet.
- † Today there is in Assisi a parchment containing the blessing of Brother Leo, written in St. Francis' own hand, which he signed with the Tau together with a skull.
- † Thomas of Celano relates that Brother Pacificus saw a vision of St. Francis with a Tau on his forehead (II Cel, 106)
- † St. Bonaventure relates: “For even while (St. Francis) lived among men he imitated angelic purity so that he was led to hold this firmly and devoutly because of his ministry ‘to call men to weep and mourn, to shave their heads and put on sackcloth’ (Is 22:12), ‘and to mark with a Tau the foreheads of men who moan and grieve’ (Ez 9:4), signing them with the cross of penance and clothing them with his habit, which is in the form of a cross.” (Legenda Maior, Prologue).

And thus the Tau has become especially associated with the Franciscan family. The centuries old coat of arms of the order includes a Tau Cross behind two crossed arms, each with a nail wound in the hand. These represent Christ and the stigmata of St. Francis.