

SFO Constitutions – Articles 11, 12.2, 13.1

Article 11: Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the source of their vocation and the animator of fraternal life and mission, secular Franciscans should seek to imitate the faithfulness of Francis to His inspiration. They should listen to the exhortation of the Saint to desire above all things "the Spirit of God at work within them"

Article 12.2: *Rule 10* With Jesus, obedient even to death, they should seek to know and do the will of the Father. They should give thanks to God for the gift of freedom and for the revelation of the law of love. In order to carry out the will of the Father, they should accept the help which is offered to them through the mediation of the Church by those who are constituted as authority in her and by their confreres. They should take on the risk of courageous choices in their life in society with decisiveness and serenity.

Article 13.1: *Rule 7* Secular Franciscans, called in earlier times "the brothers and sisters of penance", propose to live in the spirit of continual conversion. Some means to cultivate this characteristic of the Franciscan vocation, individually and in fraternity, are: listening to and celebrating the Word of God; review of life; spiritual retreats; the help of a spiritual adviser, and penitential celebrations. They should approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation frequently and participate in the communal celebration of it, whether in the fraternity, or with the whole people of God.

The Saint – Prayer inspired by the Our Father [Expositio in Pater Noster] - pp. 158-160:

Two thirteenth-century examples of this type of commentary on the Lord's Prayer suggest that this style of prayer forms a "catechism of prayer" offering strong attitudes toward, as well as images of, God. In fact, this writing is perhaps the only instance in which we find an example of how Francis responded to his brothers' request to teach them how to pray.

Our Father most holy: Our Creator, Redeemer, Consoler, and Savior:

Who are in heaven:

in the angels and the saints,
enlightening them to know, for You, Lord, are light;
inflaming them to love, for You, Lord, are love;
dwelling in them and filling them with happiness,
for You, Lord, are Supreme Good,
the Eternal Good, from Whom all good comes
without Whom there is no good.

Holy be Your Name:

May knowledge of You become clearer in us
that we may know *the breadth* of Your Blessings,
the length of Your promises,
the height of Your majesty,
the depth of Your judgments.

Your kingdom come:

That You may rule in us through Your grace
and enable us *to come to Your kingdom*
where there is clear vision of You,
perfect love of You,
blessed companionship with You,
eternal enjoyment of You.

Your will be done on earth as in heaven:

That we may love You
with our whole heart by always thinking of You,
with our whole soul by always desiring You,
with our *whole mind* by directing all our intentions to You,
and by seeking Your glory in everything,
with all our whole strength
by exerting all our *energies* and affections
of body and soul
in the service of Your love
and of nothing else;
and we may love our neighbor as ourselves
by drawing them all to Your love with our whole strength,
by rejoicing in the good of others
as in our own,
by suffering with others at their misfortunes,
and by giving offense to no one.

Give us this day:

in remembrance, understanding, and reverence
of that love which [our Lord Jesus Christ] had for us
and of those things that He said and did and suffered for us.

our daily Bread:

Your own beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

Forgive us our trespasses:

through Your ineffable mercy
through the power of the passion of Your beloved Son
and through the merits and intercession of the ever blessed Virgin
and all Your elect.

As we forgive those who trespass against us:

And what we do not completely forgive,
make us, Lord, forgive completely
that we may truly love our enemies because of You
and we may fervently intercede for them before You,
returning no one evil for evil
and may strive to help everyone in You.

And lead us not into temptation:

hidden or obvious,
sudden or persistent,

But deliver us from evil:

past, present and to come.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

The distinctiveness of the Church's charitable activity

31. The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbour is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature. It is also a result of the presence of Christianity in the world, since Christianity constantly revives and acts out this imperative, so often profoundly obscured in the course of time. The reform of paganism attempted by the emperor Julian the Apostate is only an initial example of this effect; here we see how the power of Christianity spread well beyond the frontiers of the Christian faith. For this reason, it is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance. So what are the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity?

a) Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of Caritas (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. Gal 5:6).

b) Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. It is not a means of changing the world ideologically, and it is not at the service of worldly stratagems, but it is a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs. The modern age, particularly from the nineteenth century on, has been dominated by various versions of a philosophy of progress whose most radical form is Marxism. Part of Marxist strategy is the theory of impoverishment: in a situation of unjust power, it is claimed, anyone who engages in charitable initiatives is actually serving that unjust system, making it appear at least to some extent tolerable. This in turn slows down a potential revolution and thus blocks the struggle for a better world. Seen in this way, charity is rejected and attacked as a means of preserving the status quo. What we have here, though, is really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the moloch of the future—a future whose effective realization is at best doubtful. One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes. The Christian's programme—the programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus—is "a heart which sees". This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

c) Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends. But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows—to return to the questions raised earlier—that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity—as well as their words, their silence, their example—they may be credible witnesses to Christ.

Scripture Reflection: *Mark 3:1-6*

The Man with a Withered Hand

Again he entered the synagogue, and a man was there who had a withered hand. And they watched him, to see whether he would heal him on the sabbath, so that they might accuse him. And he said to the man who had the withered hand, “Come here.” And he said to them, “Is it lawful on the sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?” But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” He stretched it out, and his hand was restored. The Pharisees went out, and immediately held counsel with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him.