

The Four Pillars – 3 Fraternity

Word Origin

Middle English: from Old French *fraternite*, from Latin *fraternitas*, from *fratern* 'brother'.

Synonyms

brotherhood, fellowship, kinship, friendship, (mutual) support, solidarity, community, union, togetherness

The word '**fraternity**' is related to the word '**friar**' – the word Francis used for his followers. Indeed, Francis called all of Creation his 'brother' and 'sister.'

Excerpts from the Message of Pope Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2014

(Attached)

OFS Rule 14:

Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.

Christ is the center of the Franciscan call. Around that heart is fraternity. According to 1 John 4:8, "God is love." That love manifests itself in the relationship among the three persons of the Trinity. Thus the Father as God is not alone; Christ as God is not alone; and the Holy Spirit as God is not alone. Thus the Trinity reveals a unity in community that shows what fraternity should look like.

Matthew 18:19-20 "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

Like Christ, Francis gathered together friars, his fraternity. His Rule of 1223 (the Later Rule) Francis wrote: "Wherever the friars ["Little Brothers"] meet one another, they should show that they are members of the same family. And they should have no hesitation in making known their needs to one another. For if a mother loves and cares for her child in the flesh, a friar should certainly love and care for his spiritual brother all the more tenderly."

Pope John Paul II, addressing the OFS: "present yourself to the world as a 'community of love.'"

In the words of the "Canticle of the Creatures," Francis showed that he considered all creation as brothers and sisters.

Fraternity is an effective agent of formation, contributes to the growth of interactive relationships and Franciscan personality, character, and attitudes. In addition to making our needs known, we are to care for the sick among us, to teach one another, to correct one another humbly and charitably and not remember faults, to provide support and encouragement, to pray together.

"The vocation of the OSF is a vocation to live the Gospel in fraternal communion. For this purpose, the members of the OFS gather together in ecclesial communities which are called fraternities." The fraternity is called upon to provide a prophetic and charismatic presence in the Church and to assist her in her universal mission. The fraternity is the special place where brothers and sisters are assisted in becoming more aware of our baptismal dignity, in living and belonging to the Church, in making present within the Church the Franciscan charism, in maturing our faith, and in becoming witnesses of Christ's resurrection.

A local fraternity is not to be isolated from the others -- that would deprive us of the vital life that the Order transmits. Each fraternity has a council, that animates and guides it -- organizing its meetings so that members grow on a doctrinal, spiritual, psychological, and social level. It must be a community of love, ongoing conversion, and support for living the Gospel in the world.

Characteristics of fraternity:

- a gift to be discovered and lived out, dependent upon the grace and the demands of God.
- based upon a free and responsible acceptance of a call -- togetherness because of personal self-giving, willful decision, and obligation flowing from intimacy.
- reflects the Father's intense love for us -- he chooses us and sends the Holy Spirit to restore all things in Christ.
- recognizes the dignity of every person to be a chosen child of God, redeemed by Christ, to have potential to respond to the Spirit's urging, and to embody a unique blend of characteristics and talents.

The earliest Franciscans, freed from all selfish love, poured all their affection into the heart of the fraternity so that Fraternal love would display unity for the world to see.

Sacramental marks of fraternity:

- an effective support system for evangelical growth
- a productive experience of group spiritual direction
- a context of stability for grounding and maturing Gospel values and practice
- a concrete, human manifestation of a deeper spiritual reality
- a sign of the justice, peace, and reconciliation of the Reign of God

Components of life in fraternity:

- a particular structure fulfilling a particular ecclesial, apostolic, and Franciscan function
- a necessary vitality brought alive by formation, deepened through permanent commitment, and matured through dialogue and harmonious problem solving

- a force for sustaining and nourishing fraternal life through regular meetings, support for members, spiritual assistance, and pastoral and fraternal visits

Fraternal service

Fraternity is a place of conversion

The Eucharist is the center of life in fraternity

Challenges of fraternal life:

- Every fraternity is a collection of individuals who are not alike -- these differences are to be respected.

- Family is faced on all sides with many forces in society bent to destroy and deform it.

- OFS accepts the challenge to make its choice for the formation of family -- a constant battle against a consumeristic and hedonistic society.

Whenever Seculars get together, we experience fraternity.

Fraternity and the Franciscan Vision:

Our Franciscan vision needs structure to assist its implementation. Structures are meant to support the vision and to serve the Franciscan vision. The OSF is a public association of the Christian faithful, approved by the Holy Father, spiritually assisted by brothers of the First Order and the Third Order Regular. establishes a permanent relationship with our Franciscan brothers and sisters throughout the world.

As an international fraternity, we wear many cultures, skin colors, languages, and walks of life, and are subject to many different societal influences -- all embracing the same Franciscan vision, all of us contributing to building the Kingdom of God and rebuilding the Church. The Church asks us for the testimony of consistency and firmness in fulfilling the promises made at Baptism and Confirmation, renewed and confirmed in our Profession. The Rule and Constitutions must represent for each of us a reference point for everyday experience, on the basis of a specific vocation.

Our Franciscan life is given preference in making personal decisions. Ordinarily nothing takes preference except for special circumstances. This includes attendance at the regular local fraternity gatherings.

[Read profession statement Ritual page 23-24, beginning with "I, NN, by the grace of God..."]
What does the word "consecrate" mean in this context? How about the phrase "fraternal bonds of community"?

Question for mutual invitation:

What contributions have you been able to make [or plan to make] to develop the spirit of "family" in our fraternity?

MESSAGE OF HIS HOLINESS
FRANCIS
FOR THE CELEBRATION OF THE
WORLD DAY OF PEACE

1 JANUARY 2014

Excerpts

1: In the heart of every man and woman is the desire for a full life, including that irrepressible longing for fraternity which draws us to fellowship with others and enables us to see them not as enemies or rivals, but as brothers and sisters to be accepted and embraced.

2: Fraternity is an essential human quality, for we are relational beings. A lively awareness of our relatedness helps us to look upon and to treat each person as a true sister or brother; without fraternity it is impossible to build a just society and a solid and lasting peace. We should remember that fraternity is generally first learned in the family, thanks above all to the responsible and complementary roles of each of its members, particularly the father and the mother. The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.

3: The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today's world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations. In the dynamics of history, and in the diversity of ethnic groups, societies and cultures, we see the seeds of a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another.

4: *"Where is your brother?" (Gen 4:9)*

To understand more fully this human vocation to fraternity, to recognize more clearly the obstacles standing in the way of its realization and to identify ways of overcoming them, it is of primary importance to let oneself be led by knowledge of God's plan, which is presented in an eminent way in sacred Scripture.

5: According to the biblical account of creation, all people are descended from common parents, Adam and Eve, the couple created by God in his image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26), to whom Cain and Abel were born. In the story of this first family, we see the origins of society and the evolution of relations between individuals and peoples.

6: [In the story of Cain and Abel, Cain] refused to regard Abel as a brother, to relate to him rightly, to live in the presence of God by assuming his responsibility to care for and to protect others. By asking him "Where is your brother?", God holds Cain accountable for what he has done. He answers: "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" (*Gen* 4:9). Then, the Book of Genesis tells us, "Cain went away from the presence of the Lord" (4:16).

The story of Cain and Abel teaches that we have an inherent calling to fraternity, but also the tragic capacity to betray that calling. This is witnessed by our daily acts of selfishness

7: "*And you will all be brothers*"(*Mt* 23:8)

The question naturally arises: Can the men and women of this world ever fully respond to the longing for fraternity placed within them by God the Father? Will they ever manage by their power alone to overcome indifference, egoism and hatred, and to accept the legitimate differences typical of brothers and sisters?

By paraphrasing his words, we can summarize the answer given by the Lord Jesus: "For you have only one Father, who is God, and you are all brothers and sisters" (cf. *Mt* 23:8-9). The basis of fraternity is found in God's fatherhood.

8: In a particular way, human fraternity is regenerated *in* and *by* Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. The Cross is the definitive *foundational* locus of that fraternity which human beings are not capable of generating themselves. Jesus Christ, who assumed human nature in order to redeem it, loving the Father unto death on the Cross (cf. *Phil* 2:8), has through his resurrection made of us a *new humanity*, in full communion with the will of God, with his plan, which includes the full realization of our vocation to fraternity.

9: Christ, with his abandonment to death for love of the Father, becomes the *definitive and new principle* of us all; we are called to regard ourselves in him as brothers and sisters, inasmuch as we are *children* of the same Father. He himself is the Covenant; in his person we are reconciled with God and with one another as brothers and sisters... Jesus Christ is the one who reconciles all people in himself. He *is* peace, for he made one people out of the two, breaking down the wall of separation which divided them, that is, the hostility between them. He created in himself one people, one new man, one new humanity (cf. 2:14-16).

10:

- Fraternity [is] the foundation and pathway to peace...
- Fraternity [is] a prerequisite for fighting poverty...
- Fraternity extinguishes war...
- Fraternity generates social peace because it creates a balance between freedom and justice, between personal responsibility and solidarity, between the good of individuals and the common good...
- An authentic spirit of fraternity overcomes the individual selfishness which conflicts with people's ability to live in freedom and in harmony among themselves...
- Fraternity helps to preserve and cultivate nature.

11: *Conclusion*

Fraternity needs to be discovered, loved, experienced, proclaimed and witnessed to. But only love, bestowed as a gift from God, enables us to accept and fully experience fraternity.

Excerpts taken from:

http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20131208_messaggio-xxvii-giornata-mondiale-pace-2014.html

OFS Rule 14:

Secular Franciscans, together with all people of good will, are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively. Mindful that anyone "who follows Christ, the perfect man, becomes more of a man himself," let them exercise their responsibilities competently in the Christian spirit of service.