

GUIDELINES FOR AREA CHAPLAINS

The Third Order, American Province, Society of St. Francis



Nov. 1986; Revised*July 1989; Feb. 1992; May 1994; Jan. 2001; Dec. 2001

The duties of an Area Chaplain: An Overview

1. Pray regularly for the professed in your area.
2. Solicit, receive, and reply to, the reports of the professed.
3. Keep on file the rules of life of all the professed who report to you. Keep records on the frequency of reporting. Keep whatever other records are needed to ensure consistency and continuity of concern.
4. Approve changes in the rule of life after these changes have been worked out between tertiaries and their spiritual directors.
5. Remind tertiaries of the obligation to report, renew their vows, and financially support the Third Order, when necessary.
6. Check the Franciscan Newsletter , **Hot News** and the Directory for new people in your area, and welcome them. They could be newly professed or recently moved into your area.
7. Advise tertiaries who leave the Anglican Communion, or who wish to request release from vows, to express their concerns directly to the Provincial Chaplain.
8. Advise the Provincial Chaplain of situations requiring his/her attention: leaving the Anglican Communion, expressing the desire to withdraw from or return to the Third Order, and failure to respond to requests for reports for two years.
9. Respond to requests for dispensation.

* * *

Area Chaplains will send the personal reports on the their life in the way of St. Francis at least once a year to the Provincial Chaplain or Assistant Chaplain or another member of the Third Order, provided they notify the **Provincial Chaplain or an** Assistant Chaplain of their choice. The **Provincial Chaplain or an** Assistant Chaplain needs to know whom everyone is reporting.

Area Chaplains will send an annual report on the professed tertiaries in their area to the **Provincial Chaplain or an** Assistant Chaplain (who will **notify them for this purpose by mid-May, to be returned by mid-August.**)

Periodic meetings of Area Chaplains are held at regional and provincial convocation. They are convened by the Provincial or Assistant Chaplain, if present. Otherwise all Area Chaplains present at a convocation designate a convener, and secretary, hold a meeting to share concerns and ideas, and forward the minutes to the Provincial Chaplain.

* * *

The pages that follow are a description and elaboration of the Area Chaplains' duties as defined above.

1. Reports and Replies

Receiving the reports of the professed is the fundamental duty of the Area Chaplain and the only one specified in the Statutes of the Order. Thus, all the other duties have the origin in the requirement that reports be received.

The Area Chaplain should send a letter to each professed in their area at least once a year, introducing and sharing a little about themselves if it is the first letter. Sometimes, a request for a report needs to be included in the letter. (A "report" normally implies a review, even if brief, of all elements of the Rule.)

The Area Chaplain should send a thoughtful reply to all reports. Even when we are professed, we still need support and encouragement.

Area Chaplains have been chosen because they have demonstrated responsibility and pastoral skills. Feel free to address areas of pastoral need and to respond to questions. The ability to recognize both your strengths and limitations should be part of your equipment. You may have to fill in as spiritual director if a tertiary is temporarily without one, but personal spiritual guidance should normally be left in the hands of the spiritual director. Always feel free to consult with the Provincial Chaplain or Assistant Chaplain, who share your concern for our brothers and sisters.

Professed may report to another professed tertiary (not their Area Chaplain), usually because of a preexisting correspondence, or because their spouse is the Area Chaplain. Let them know of this option. Include everyone in your area in your report, even if they are reporting to someone else. Let the Assistant Chaplain know who they are reporting to.

2. Records

Method of Reporting: Written reports, including e-mail, are the norm, but oral reports are quite acceptable. Personal, face-to-face conferences are preferable when reporting is oral, but the telephone is an acceptable option. Inform yourself about the limitations of disabled or elderly tertiaries and be creative in meeting their needs. You may need to call them!

Record keeping. The current rule of life is kept on file, and a record must be kept of dates of reporting. Area Chaplains should keep whatever written notes they need in order to give effective counsel.

Confidentiality: The relationship between tertiary and Area Chaplain is confidential; every tertiary has a right to expect that the confidentiality of that correspondence will be preserved. You may wish to keep an individual file on each person reporting to you, with copies of reports and replies, but this file may be shared with no one without the consent of the party concerned, except the Provincial Chaplain or Assistant Chaplain.

3. Frequency of Reporting

Newly professed tertiaries report four times a year to the Area Chaplain. After two years, they must report once a year and may report more frequently. More frequent reporting is recommended (but not required) for isolated tertiaries.

4. Rule of Life

Request from each professed tertiary a copy of his/her rule of life. A revised rule should be submitted for your approval each time a change is made.

The usual practice will be for changes in a rule to be made by the tertiary in consultation with his or her spiritual director. The spiritual director, who should already have a copy of our Guide for Spiritual Directors, is thus the key person in the matter of rule changes. The Area Chaplain's role is to verify that the rule remains compatible with the Franciscan way as expressed in the Principles and Rule of the Order.

5. Financial Support

Remind tertiaries reporting to you, when necessary, that they have a responsibility to give financial support to the Third Order. Each person must give according to his or her means. Even the impoverished can probably afford a token gift of a dollar or a few stamps. Such a gift is important as an outward and visible sign. It is a recognition of love for and responsibility toward the community to which we are committed by life profession.

6. New tertiaries in your area

The Provincial Chaplain notifies the Area Chaplain when someone in their area is about to be professed. This means the Area Chaplain is to send a letter of welcome.

It's harder to keep up with the new addresses of our mobile population. Make a habit of scanning the address changes listed in the Franciscan Times, and check the new Directory, for people new to your area. They will really appreciate a note or call from you.

L Withdrawal from the Third Order

Life-professed members of the Third Order may withdraw from the Order only by petition to the Provincial Chaplain and release from vows by vote of the Chapter. This release is "automatic" only in the case of those who have left the Anglican Communion and are no longer in communion with the See of Canterbury. Even then, notification of the Provincial Chaplain is required. If a life-professed tertiary leaves ECUSA, they may apply to the Bishop Protector to remain in the Third Order, with the approval of the Provincial Chaplain.

Area Chaplains may thus report on irregularities, such as failure to report, renew, or pledge for two years, and advise on the need for action, but only Chapter is empowered to release anyone from the vows made at profession. Requests for release from vows are sent to the Provincial Chaplain from the professed. After giving the matter and the individual careful pastoral consideration, the Provincial Chaplain will make a recommendation to Chapter. Failure to report, renew, and pledge for two years,

followed by a lack of response to the subsequent telephone call and letter from the Provincial Chaplain, will be considered a request for release from vows, unless there are special circumstances such as illness or infirmity, or entering the Order before 1965 (professed reported to the First Order at that time, not other tertiaries).

Your concern as Area Chaplain should be pastoral. When letters elicit no response, express your concern in a telephone call. Do not be hasty to recommend a request for release from vows. Remember that personal crises may evolve over a period of years, during which the tertiary may be unable to handle her or his Franciscan vocation in ways we consider normal. Remember also that tertiaries professed before 1965 are justified in the comment that reporting to other tertiaries was not part of the Order they joined.

Listen carefully. Wait. Be an instrument of peace and love. Consult the Provincial Chaplain or Assistant Chaplain.

8. Reentering the Third Order

Sometimes people who have been released from the Third Order want to return. In nearly all cases, the Order stands ready to welcome them back. It is necessary to refer these individuals to the Provincial Chaplain, however. The Chaplain will also notify the Formation Director, and the members of Chapter.

Please be advised that we have no "inactive" category. A tertiary, by definition, is active. TSSF is a commitment to community.

9. Dispensations

A professed tertiary may seek dispensation from all or part of their Rule for various reasons: serious illness, physical or mental instability, a major personal crisis, or to evaluate their continued vocation. In most cases it is best that the dispensation be for a set period, and then be re-examined.

Request for a dispensation may be made to the area chaplain.

Sometimes those who "qualify" for a dispensation are not in a condition to make the request. Area chaplains are expected to handle this with compassion and common sense.

Sometimes it will be the area chaplain who may suggest a dispensation, as not all professed are aware of this possibility.

Please feel free to consult with the Provincial Chaplain or Assistant Chaplain if you are unsure how to respond to a request.