

General guidelines for achieving a good visitation. The pastoral and fraternal visitors need time and information –

to learn and evaluate ...

1. the functioning of the fraternity council in all areas of fraternity life;
2. the faithfulness to the OFS Rule by the members and how it is achieved;
3. how the regular gatherings are conducted and the effectiveness of the gatherings in *guiding, animating, and intensifying* the Franciscan spirit among the members;
4. the manner of conducting *initial formation* and its effectiveness as well as the development of ongoing formation for fraternity members, the council, and the newly professed.

Councils respond to material sent by the visitors. They also send a copy of the last visitation report and their latest annual report to both the visitors.

The visitors need time ...

1. to meet with the council, formation personnel and people who wish to see the visitors. The pastoral visitor needs time to meet with the spiritual assistant(s). The fraternal visitor needs time to examine books and records, the register, and financial accounts;
2. to offer ongoing formation to the council and the entire fraternity;
3. to discern the relationship between the local fraternity, the spiritual assistant(s) and other local fraternities. (as well as friaries, convents and residences of Franciscan men and women religious).

* After the visitation, the visitors send a post-visitiation letter to the council (and others as required). It has insights, ideas and if needed, corrections for the fraternity. *It is sent within a month after the visitation.* It may be a common letter from both visitors or separate letters written by each visitor.

* About 9 to 12 months after the visitation, the visited council reports to the visitors on their implementation of the suggestions in the post-visitiation letter(s).

Visitations and elections should not occur on the same date. The fraternity is best served if the visitation follows the election by a period of time. The councils and the visitors adjust schedules in dialogue with each other.

The local or regional council asks the Seculars to pray to the Holy Spirit to guide the visitation. A prayerful spirit is important for all of us.

+++

Local Visitations

A) Local visitations are shorter than regional visitations. They require quality time for interaction between the local council, the members, and the visitors.

B) Before the visitation, the council fills out and returns questionnaires sent by the visitors. They are returned several weeks before the visitation. The council sends a copy of the last visitation report and the most recent annual report to each visitor.

C) The visitors need time to dialogue with the council and for interaction with the entire fraternity. The local council schedules adequate time for ongoing formation conducted by the visitor(s).

D) The visitors ordinarily lead the prayer during the visitation. They may use the OFS Ritual or special prayers. The local minister checks beforehand and, if necessary, invites members to bring their OFS Ritual. The visitors provide any special prayer texts.

Regional Visitations

A regional visitation needs adequate time. The people involved and the needs of the region require more time than a local fraternity visitation.

A well-planned time schedule is essential.

The Visitors need time to capture the spirit of the region, the functioning of the REC and the regional fraternity, their collaboration, as well as time for *ongoing formation*.

*** A regional visitation requires a weekend, Friday evening to Sunday noon. The REC, the Regional spiritual assistant(s), and the Local ministers of the region are required to attend the entire weekend.**

* **The regional minister** invites local spiritual assistants to a meeting with the pastoral visitor at a specific time, usually on Saturday (at least one hour).

* Observers are welcome. They may come and go as their time allows.

1. The visitors usually meet with the REC on **Friday evening**. The REC prepares a schedule in dialogue with the visitors. Friday eve should provide activities for all attendees. A social on Friday evening can help develop or deepen relationships.

Saturday morning is time for the region's chapter business e.g. budgets, planning and reports about fraternity life in the local fraternities. The REC should limit the morning session to essential regional

business. The session is led by the Regional Minister or a delegate of the Regional Minister. The visitors attend this session.

Saturday afternoon is given over to the visitors.

They need time:

- for *ongoing formation* with the whole group;
- for the pastoral visitor to meet with spiritual assistants (local and regional);
- for meeting with formation personnel and possibly with newcomers;
- for meeting with various groups in the region (as requested and/or needed);
- for the fraternal visitor to examine the books of the region;
- for the Sunday **Eucharist** – usually celebrated at or after 4:00 PM on **Saturday**.

The **Saturday evening** session provides time for an *open forum* with the regional fraternity, the observers, and the Visitors.

- A social concludes Saturday's schedule.

Sunday morning: *Round table* dialogue

(NB: The REC may need a short period for regional business.)

The *round table* dialogue is *guided by the visitors*. The dialogue shares ideas, insights, questions or conclusions of the Visitors, the Regional Fraternity and the Executive Council, Local Ministers, the Spiritual Assistants, and the Observers. This dialogue can help to *encourage, intensify, stimulate, and animate* a renewed dedication to the OFS way of life, the goal of a Visitation.



General Reflections

1. A separate visitation by the *fraternal or pastoral* visitor is permissible. Where it has been done it has been well-received both by the visitors and the visited fraternity.
2. A visitation is required once every three years. If separate visitations are chosen, a fraternity is visited two times in a three year period. Elections would generally precede the visitation with time for a new council to get experience in guiding the fraternity.

NB: This may require juggling schedules on the part of CNSA, NEC and REC (for regional visitations). **The REC will dialogue with the local fraternities. Cost and time factors can be dealt with while preparing for the annual regional chapter or a local visitation.** *Requests for a visitation should be made at least six or more months before the visitation.*

3. The visitors, fraternities, and councils are expected to dialogue about visitation option. It is legitimate to have a common fraternal and pastoral visitation or to have separate visitations. Agreement, through dialogue, will determine the form of the visitation.

*As you announce peace with your mouth, make sure that greater peace is in your hearts. Let no one be provoked to anger or scandal through you, but may everyone be drawn to peace, kindness, and harmony through your gentleness. For we have been called to this: **to heal the wounded, bind up the broken, and recall the erring.** In fact, many who seem to us to be members of the devil will yet be disciple of Christ*

Legend of the Three Companions

Francis of Assisi – The Founder – Vol. II – Page 102

OFS Visitations

*Rule 26. The purpose of both the pastoral and fraternal visits is to revive (**intensity / stimulate / encourage / animate**) the evangelical Franciscan spirit, to assure fidelity to the charism and to the Rule, to offer help to fraternity life, to reinforce the bond of unity of the Order, and to promote its most effective insertion to the Franciscan family and the Church.*

OFS Constitutions – Article 92.1

A visitation requires:

- + up-to-date information from the fraternity council and the Spiritual Assistant;
- + information on the Franciscan life of the fraternity;
- + a description of council collaboration in their leadership roles – and information about the relationships within the council and with fraternity members;
- + checking the effectiveness of *initial and ongoing* formation and how the fraternity formators follow the National Formation Commission's leadership;

Initial and ongoing formation programs nurture the Franciscan spirit and are vital to fraternity life. OFS fraternities implement the direction of the National Formation Commission in their initial and ongoing formation.

- + sharing the spirit of prayerfulness in fraternity life and gatherings;
- + examining fraternity books and records;
- + checking how the council and fraternity members deal with ecclesial and social issues.

NB: Usually a stipend is offered to visitors in addition to paying transportation costs. For local visitations, check your Regional guidelines.