

Impressions

Co-responsibility, Personal Presence

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While reading *Pick More Daisies* by Father Lester Bach, OFM Cap, I came across two paragraphs from the **General Constitution of the SFO**, which caused me to reflect and, indeed, go to the Constitutions! I have included a third paragraph from the Constitution, one that was in close proximity to the others.

The brothers and sisters are co-responsible for the life of the fraternity to which they belong and for the SFO as the organic union of all fraternities throughout the world. (GC, Article 30. 1) This is quite an article. Imagine! All of the members are **co-responsible** for the life of the fraternity, not only on the local level, but also on the regional, national and international level! This is something we must think about and examine ourselves about. Are we really involved in the fraternity so much so that we feel co-responsible? What about our Region? It is tempting to think that service to the fraternity, as a leader is an option. No, it is not. We are all co-responsible! The life of the local fraternity is extremely important, but it is not the only part of the Order. Each member has brothers and sisters in the SFO all over the United States and, indeed, all over the world. The members are connected by a common Rule and spirituality. How developed is that concept and reality in my local fraternity? This must be asked and each fraternity should be finding ways to express this inter-connectedness.

The sense of co-responsibility of the members requires personal presence, witness, prayer, and active collaboration, in accordance with each one's situation and possible obligations for animation of the fraternity. (GC, Article 30. 2) In another article by Father Lester, the Seculars are called to DO something. He emphasizes “**personal presence**.” The fraternity is not the fraternity without you there. In addition, for **active collaboration**, you must not only be here, you must collaborate – work with others! The fraternity depends on each and every one. You are a Franciscan. Your life must reflect this call, this vocation: **witness**. It is fairly impossible to do it for one hour a month. That would be like eating only once a month. For instance, **prayer** is something we do each day. Our witness and our prayer are linked organically. There cannot be one, authentically, without the other. The SFO is not a contemplative Order. There must be action and contemplation!

The **personal presence** is essential to build your community. One hour a month is the very least you can give. Perhaps you already know that the burdens of being minister are great. Do you offer to help? Do you jump at the chance to volunteer to organize an event? In what way do you work with other fraternity members so the burden is lighter for all? We must all animate the fraternity, whether it is on the local, regional, national or international level! It calls on us to give of ourselves.

The leaders should see to the spiritual and technical preparation and animation of the meetings, both of the fraternities and of the councils. They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities by their own witness, suggesting appropriate means for the development of the life of the fraternity and of apostolic activities in the light of the fundamental Franciscan options. They should see to it that the decisions made are carried out and they should promote collaboration among the brothers and sisters. (GC, Article 31. 4) While this article does address the leaders, please remember what was said earlier about co-responsibility. We all help decide the appropriate activities to be developed for the fraternity, both on the spiritual and apostolic side. (This includes Spiritual Assistants!) The **General Constitution** says: “*They should seek to inspire life and soul into the fraternities.*” This is quite a tall order. Perhaps many are daunted by the idea of leadership. Too often at elections, it is difficult to find fraternity members to serve in all the positions. Our documents do not allow the same person to serve over and over. There are “term limits.” We are all called to serve. None of us should feel we are in it alone. We are able to call on the whole fraternity to help in the responsibilities.

As I reflected on these articles of the General Constitutions, I was reminded that these ideals are something that we need to bring to mind and strive toward. It is difficult for us to be doing well in all areas of our Franciscan life. It almost never happens. We are human beings. Only God is perfect. But the key is to keep striving, keep trying, and continue being active. The Rule is something for SFOs to work at their whole lives. Many, I fear, are not familiar with our documents. Some are too familiar and get lost in legalism. For all, the admonition is to live the Rule, bring it to life in your own home and workplace and neighborhood and parish. To borrow from the popular saying, you are the only Franciscan many will ever meet.

Our Franciscan life constantly challenges us to grow. Remember Saint Francis saying, “Let us begin, for up to now we have done very little.” This was at the end of his life! We can grow and change and constantly become better Franciscans!