



Impressions

What's in a Name?

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The dictionary defines terminology as “a system of specialized terms or the science of the proper use of terms.” What we call something, that is, the terminology that we use to describe or talk about some-thing, reflects our knowledge and understanding of the subject. You have your own specialized terms as Secular Franciscans. Terms that you use when you speak about the Order, which reveals your understanding of the Order.

It is interesting, however, to hear the terms some Secular Franciscans use while speaking about the Order, terms, which are at times inaccurate. To begin with, there are those who refer to your **spiritual assistant** as a spiritual **director**, spiritual **advisor** or even **chaplain**. The proper term is spiritual **assistant**, a term carefully chosen to reflect the nature of the position. This person, whether a friar, a sister, a diocesan priest or deacon or even a fellow Secular Franciscan, assists you with your spirituality. Although they may direct or advise you at times, they mainly help you by providing **assistance** with your Secular Franciscan spirituality. Your spirituality, the spirit by which you live, is your responsibility, they only help you. Are you aware of the fact that you are part of a larger international Order with its spiritual assistants? Do you know what a **national**, **regional**, or **provincial spiritual assistant** is? Do you know what they do, or who they are?

The terminology some fraternities still use as part of their initial formation process is somewhat antiquated and more properly used by a **religious** order than a **secular** order. **Inquirers** are still called **postulants** and **candidates** are called **novices**, terms once used, but now replaced according to the renewal of 1978. In fact, some Seculars still call the SFO a **religious** order instead of a **secular** order. These terms were changed, when your Rule and Constitutions were promulgated in 1978, to differentiate the Secular Franciscan Order from the **Regular** or **Religious** Orders.

As a **secular** Order your governing structure has its own terminology with which you should be familiar. Do you know that **CIOFS** stands for the **International Fraternity** and that **NAFRA** stands for the **National Fraternity**, the level above the **Regional Fraternity** within which your local fraternity belongs? This national fraternity (**NAFRA**), made up of the **National Executive Council, Conference of**

National Spiritual Assistants, and the **Regional Ministers**, is your governing body in this country and have produced the **National Statutes**, which make the **SFO Constitutions** more applicable to this country. Do you know who belongs to the national, or for that matter, **Regional Executive Council** of the region to which your fraternity belongs? These are the people who govern you and help you to live as a Secular Franciscan. Are you aware that you are part of a large international order? Are you familiar with your **Constitutions** and **National Statutes**?

Even in the area of finances, we hear people using the terms **per capita** or even dues for the donation given for the support of the various levels of fraternity. The proper term is **Fair Share**, a term adopted by **NAFRA**. The use of this term helps to differentiate the Secular Franciscan Order from a club or an organization.

All of this seems so basic and there is always that tendency to presume that everyone knows this, but this might not be the reality. Sometimes presumptions like that are not well founded. There may be a need to go back to basics in ongoing formation to remind yourselves of something you, hopefully, learned in initial formation. It might be helpful to use the monthly ongoing formation of a fraternity meeting to explain some of these terms, for example, a discussion of spiritual **assistance** and its structure on all levels. Maybe there is the need to review, teach, and explain the leadership structure of the SFO beginning with the International Fraternity. Formation teams have a responsibility to examine their programs to determine if they reflect the charism of the Franciscan Order. Is the right terminology being used in initial and ongoing formation programs? A good presentation on the **Constitutions** and/or **Statutes** would also be helpful to the members of the fraternity.

Maybe there is a need to examine your understanding of the very charism on which the SFO is founded. Do you truly understand the spirit of St. Francis as reflected in your Rule? The Secular Franciscan Order underwent a profound renewal 28 years ago, discovering its true identity and accepting the responsibility of living out that identity. Has this renewal really filtered into your structure? You can never say you are completely **renewed** because this, like the term **conversion**, is an ongoing process. Sometimes you need to examine, evaluate, and review your way of life and your understanding of the Order. What is in a name? **EVERYTHING**, if it reveals your understanding of the Order and how you discuss your way of life with one another.