



Formation Commission

SERVANT LEADERSHIP

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When surveys are conducted to determine the needs of fraternities, one of the more frequently requested topics is leadership training.

Many of you know the National Fraternity has published a *Handbook for Franciscan Servant Leadership*. And the Institute for Contemporary Franciscan Life offers a distance-learning course based on the Handbook. Because those resources are readily available, I will not repeat that material here, although my understanding of servant leadership is basically the same. The lens through which Franciscans look at leadership is based on Matthew 20:26-28, in which Jesus tells us we are called ... *not to be served by others, but to serve, to give one's life for the ransom of many*.

Depending on your perspective and position in fraternity, service as a Franciscan servant leader can be undertaken in many different ways. Often, the Franciscan form of leadership is quite different from corporate leadership approaches. Ordinarily, organizations and corporations focus on **managing** people and resources. Secular Franciscans focus on **servicing** God's creation, especially His people.

When leaders look out for number one—they themselves—they seek success, achievement and ascendancy. When leaders are Gospel-centered—they seek wisdom and direction and the greater good for all. With the publication of Robert Greenleaf's book, *Servant Leadership*, some non-religious organizations began adopting the servant leader model.

By virtue of our baptism and profession every Secular Franciscan is a servant leader ... *following the example of Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and center of his life*

with God and people. OFS Rule: Article 4. The shape our specific leadership takes will depend on our gifts and talents. We may serve on the fraternity council, visit the sick, furnish refreshments, and so on. If we do this with love and humility, we fulfill our Christian and Franciscan calling. In essence, we *wash the feet* of our brothers and sisters. We are Christ for the other.

Some of the elements of servant leadership can be learned, but others come as the fruit of conversion. For example, one can learn how to communicate with clarity and incorporate all the leadership styles in their interaction with the fraternity members; however, the ability to inspire and motivate others comes from a converted heart. Similarly, establishing and maintaining trust is earned through consistently being **trustworthy!**

Humility is absolutely essential for a servant leader. Without it, we are not servants. Humility and authenticity go hand in hand. Humble people know the truth about themselves. They do not deny their gifts nor do they inflate them. In the play *Hamlet*, Shakespeare writes, *this above all: to thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to anyone*. Humility is the fruit of a converted heart, a heart that is willing to acknowledge truth about itself and ready to make whatever changes are necessary.

Those who know themselves are able to take charge when conditions call for decision-making. Their judgments are just because they are able to separate their personal hopes and desires from the situation at hand. They do not feel threatened by new ideas and opinions. When tensions arise, they are able to maintain perspective—neither

overreacting nor retreating. A good sense of humor, the ability to laugh at oneself, and the capacity to reduce tensions make the humble leader easy to follow. These leaders are *salt, light and leaven* in their fraternities. The good news is that you don't have to have all of these gifts. But you do have to use the gifts you were given for the good of your sisters and brothers.

Fraternity is based on respect for each member's contribution to the whole. See Saint Paul's analogy of the Body of Christ, 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. For a fraternity to function in a spiritually healthy manner, it must **share responsibility**. A fraternity is akin to a family. All members of families and fraternities share the good times and the challenges – the joys and the sorrows. Every one of us is responsible for the vitality of our fraternity. As Management Consultant Peter Drucker says, *the leaders who work most effectively never say "I." And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I." They don't think "I." They think "we."*

Along with the added emphasis on shared responsibility of council and minister, the Rule of 1978 changed the hierarchical structure of the OFS. In the previous Rule, the authority figure was the spiritual **director**. Although the role is still vital, today the spiritual **assistant** is no longer that central authority figure. Article 21 of the Rule states the fraternity is ... *animated and guided by a council and minister who are elected by the professed according to the constitutions*. The duties of the council and minister are to make decisions and perform functions that do not need the approval of the entire fraternity. This shared responsibility keeps the fraternity functioning smoothly.

Although all are called to serve the fraternity, some servant leadership positions call for specific skills and talents. And because you can't share what you don't have, it is especially important when electing council members to make sure the person's gifts and abilities fit the position. It is

unfair to the person elected and to the fraternity to misalign a person with an incompatible position.

I suppose choosing or becoming a servant leader at the council level would be less daunting if I gave you a general list of desired qualities. Then you could reflect on them when considering a position or selecting members to lead your fraternity.

CHOOSE . . .

- Secular Franciscans who demonstrate spiritual and psychological maturity
- Secular Franciscans who show respect for every member of the fraternity
- Secular Franciscans who demonstrate the Franciscan charism by their actions
- Secular Franciscans who are compassionate and just – both ends of the spectrum
- Secular Franciscans who are humble and open to the wisdom of others
- Secular Franciscans who are willing to collaborate with and empower others
- Secular Franciscan who possess good communication skills and a willingness to share information—except that of a confidential nature—with the entire fraternity.

In conclusion, all Secular Franciscans are called to be servant leaders. The form that service takes depends primarily on the leading of the Holy Spirit. Our responsibility is to stay open to the many way the Holy Spirit speaks to us and to trust that *God's Will* won't take us where His grace will not sustain us.