

BUILDING A NEW WORLD

A Commentary on
the Rule of Life of
the Secular Order of
Servants of Mary



Conrad M. Borntrager, O.S.M.

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Second Edition

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FORWARD

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Servite Family,

It is a privilege to be asked to write a forward to the *Commentary on the Rule of Life of the Secular Order of the Servants of Mary* by Fr. Conrad Borntrager, O.S.M. In recent months I heard a comment at a meeting of Servite Friar Provincials from all over the world that this is one book that every Servite should read because it gives an insight into the living spirituality of Servites.

While the clerical and sister elements of the community have declined in many places throughout the world, the role of the Secular Servites has taken on more and more prominence. Its growth has been impressive and Spirit filled letting us know that the work of God continues in spite of decline and absence of vocations in one aspect of Servite life. This is not a new phenomenon. Since our very beginning lay people have always been attracted to the Servite charism of compassionate service of others following the example of Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord. For almost eight hundred years people have been dedicating their lives to this ideal, and finding meaning and inspiration for their everyday living. They have used the Rule of Life as a way of living and experiencing Christian life.

A person does not become a Servite overnight, nor does the reading of a Rule guarantee that one is able to really live the way of life described in these pages. What we Servites are all called to do is to undergo a period of continuous preparation to learn how to live the way of life as Fr. Conrad has outlined it in the Rule. The document is a guide and inspiration to take up a way of life that demands time, energy, seriousness and dedication on the part of all of us involved in taking up this particular way of living.

When someone wishes to become part of the Secular Servite way of life, that person is taking on a particular and special task that will take time and effort to imbibe and live. The marvelous part about the rule is that it provides the newly accepted member as well as the veteran with a road map to follow in living the life of the Spirit in a Servite way. It links the Secular Servite with the other members of the Order by utilizing, where possible, the actual Constitutions of the Friar Servants of Mary. We all “draw water from the same spring” so that our spiritual thirst is satisfied through the same inspirational text. It makes clear that there is indeed a sharing and a oneness, a solidarity, rather than a focus on differences. At the present time, it is the sense of our solidarity with one another, an emphasis on our sameness that allows all of us to appreciate more and more the fact that we share the same baptismal consecration and consequent Christian mission.

When you enter into this book in a personal and spiritual way, you are indeed on the road to living the Servite life as a Secular Servite. This book, as already mentioned, serves not only as a road map for a way of life, but it is also a spiritual reading that puts us in touch with a rich heritage of Marian service and tradition. It is a book that deserves many readings in order to absorb its richness. Most especially, for those who are in the formation process reading the book together will help give additional richness to your formation, because the spirit of the word of this booklet, gives us the opportunity to reflect on THE WORD that is eternal. However, it gives us the opportunity to do so in our own unique way. What touches one person in the formation process who reads this book, may not touch another in exactly the same manner. However, together there is the opportunity to experience the richness and expansiveness of THE WORD of God, as well as the chance to appreciate the different ways that God speaks to us in our own everyday living.

To those who are about to embark on this Rule of Life, I want to say welcome to our Servite family. May the inspiration of this work,

as well as the lives of your formators, introduce you to a very specific richness of the Christian message, the richness that is interpreted in a Servite manner.

May the text inspire you to seek further the richness of Marian living, which is always a life of faithfulness to God's Word. May you find in the brothers and sisters who are part of our large family an inspiration to you during your formation period, and may you in turn inspire others to undertake the same journey in their own lives.

While encapsulated in a book, the Rule is not stagnant, but is forever new. It has to have this newness to meet the needs of the present generation of Secular Servites. So may it not be just a document, but a living document that comes alive in the way that you live your lives.

Again, welcome to the larger family of Servites. Those of us who are already on the pathway promise to be your guides as you make your own way along the path. As Robert Frost tells us, may our choosing this particular Servite path for our lives be one "that has made all the difference."

Fr. Anthony O'Connell, O.S.M.
Prior Provincial
Order of Friar Servants of Mary,
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INTRODUCTION

In 1424, over five and a half centuries ago, a Rule of Life was promulgated for lay men and women who wished to associate themselves more closely to the spirituality of the Order of Servants of Mary. Since that time various modifications, adaptations, and changes have been made in the Rule so that it would always be a living guide for people of each changing age. The most recent revision was approved by the Holy See on April 29, 1995, and it became the official Rule for all members of the Servite Secular Order on August 15 of that same year.

The *Rule of Life* is an essential guideline for members of the Servite Secular Order in their journey toward God. It takes the general commands of Jesus and makes them more concrete and practical for everyday living. The better Jesus' words are understood in their depth and breadth of meaning, the more faithful the individual will be to the Gospel.

Ideally, we should begin with a study of lay spirituality in general, especially as found in two documents of the Second Vatican Council: the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), in particular Chapter IV, "The Laity," and Chapter V, "The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness," and also the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*).

Our intention here, however, is more modest. We will take each of the articles in the present Rule and give a short explanation. A

historical study of the development of the present text, especially as compared with the various versions approved since the time of the Second Vatican Council, would be interesting, but would carry us too far from our chosen goal at present. Many of the articles, for example those on prayer, could be developed at much greater length. Examples could also be added. We will try to be succinct, yet sufficiently thorough as to leave the reader with a good idea of the meaning of each article of the Rule.

The second edition of the commentary has provided the opportunity to correct minor typographical errors which appeared in the first edition and also to clarify a few points which were not clear. But in general the text of the first edition remains essentially unchanged. In this second edition, however, we are happy to add some discussion questions at the end of each article to help our Secular Order Communities to reach practical applications and examples to fit their own circumstances and needs. These are the contribution of Gary Theis, president of Our Sorrowful Mother Community which meets in Blue Island, Illinois. These questions have proved useful in that Community's reflections on the *Rule of Life*, and so we offer them here.

SECTION I

THE ORDER OF THE
SERVANTS OF MARY

The purpose of the first section is to give a general idea of the Order of the Servants of Mary and its spirituality.

The succeeding chapters will then apply these principles to the special circumstances of lay men and women. Each one of the four articles in this chapter is taken directly from the first chapter of the Constitutions of the friars; that is, they were written for the friars (the priests and brothers of the Order), but placing them at the head of the Rule of the Secular Order means that they apply also to others seeking to live Servite spirituality in a way proper to lay men and women rather than to religious.

These four articles follow this progression of thought: 1) Identity of the Servants of Mary. 2) In order to serve, they dedicate themselves to Mary. 3) This dedication to Mary leads them to some typical ways of serving others. 4) The life of the friars inspired others to live according to the same ideals which were evident in their lives.

ARTICLE I

The first article in the Rule of Life is also the first article in the Constitutions of the friars. It tries to describe the most important characteristics of the Order of Servants of Mary:

Art. 1. The Order of Friar Servants of Mary, which arose as an expression of evangelical apostolic life, is a community of men gathered together in the name of Jesus the Lord. Moved by the Spirit, they commit themselves, as did their First Fathers, to witness the gospel in fraternal communion and to be at the service of God and all people, drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord.

The article first places the Order in the historical context of its origins. The term “evangelical apostolic life” refers to the way of life typical of the mendicant movement of the thirteenth century, the best known examples of which are the Franciscan and Dominican friars. “Evangelical” recalls that the mendicants wanted their life to be patterned on the Gospel. The ideal was to follow Christ just as the Gospels portrayed him. This places Servite spirituality within the general framework of Christian spirituality.

“Apostolic” has special reference to the way of life of the Apostles as related in the Acts of the Apostles (2:42-47; 4:32-37). In these verses the members of the early Christian community in Jerusalem are described as devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to communal life, to the breaking of the bread, and to prayer. They placed all things in common. This community of believers was said to be “of one heart and mind.” This latter expression was taken up in the late fourth century by the African saint, Augustine of Hippo, who used it to introduce his rule of life, now known as the Rule of St. Augustine. It was this Rule that the Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order chose as the basic rule of life which they would follow.

An essential part of this Gospel life as lived by the Apostles is the community aspect. This article describes the Order as a “community of men” who were drawn together by a very specific purpose: so that they could live “in the name of Jesus the Lord.” The Seven Holy Founders committed themselves to a common life and also to the service of God and others. This places Servite spirituality within the spirit of the mendicant movement of the thirteenth century. Secondly, this article applies these characteristics of the Seven Founders to their followers today, the friars, priests and brothers, who make up the Order at the present time. Like the Founders, present Servites form a community in the name of Jesus, live the life of the Gospels, and are inspired by the example of the early Christians gathered around the Apostles. They too are at the service of God and all people.

Finally the entire life of the Founders and their followers today is lived “drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord.” Servites share a general Christian spirituality with all the followers of Jesus, a mendicant spirituality common to those groups which arose in the thirteenth century, and a Marian spirituality which gave the name to the Order: Servants of Mary.

Fr. Ignacio M. Calabuig, O.S.M., has provided a thorough and thoughtful commentary on these last words: “drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord.” This is found in his article “The Virgin Mary in the Servite Constitutions,” in a booklet entitled *Mary* prepared by the Commission for the Study of the Constitutions (Oxford, 1976). We cannot do better than to quote this article extensively to understand the full meaning of this phrase:

“Drawing inspiration” has a logical modal function in this context; that is, it indicates the way Servites should act. It designates the attitude of Servites who turn their mind and heart to

the Blessed Virgin in order to learn from the example of her life motives and suggestions for their own conduct, for their choices in accord with the Gospel, and for their acts of service. “Drawing inspiration,” as a religious attitude, implies both the awareness of the highest moral perfection and holiness in the model and the joy of feeling oneself drawn to it. This inspiration never descends to mere puppet-like imitation. It consists in an adherence which does not stifle, but rather arouses a creative ardor.

There is no need here to recall the theological arguments demonstrating that the Virgin of Nazareth “shines forth to the whole community of the elect as a model of the virtues” (*Lumen gentium*, 65) and is held to be the “first and most perfect follower of Christ” (*Marialis Cultus*, 35) or “the perfect model of the disciple of the Lord” (ibid. 37). I simply refer the reader to the conciliar documents and to other statements of the papal magisterium which abound in references to Mary as our model.

“Abiding” is a modifier which indicates that for Servites their glance toward Mary is not an occasional act but a permanent attitude which characterizes and qualifies their action in every field.

“Mother and Servant of the Lord.” These are the first two titles which the Constitutions attribute to Mary. The titles were no doubt carefully chosen, even though, as we shall remark later, the combination of these two titles does warrant some comment. Both express an essential relationship of Mary to the Lord. The first, calling Mary the “Mother of the Lord,” exalts her sublime and singular dignity, the second, taken directly from the Gospel of St. Luke (1:38) expresses the attitude of the Virgin before the Lord, Mother and Servant: the surprising coupling of a title of glory to one of humility well defines the mystery of the Virgin.

We are especially interested in the term “Servant of the Lord.” Contemporary biblical exegesis has highlighted the rich religious and devotional content of this title. It arouses echoes of our condition as Servants and thus it enriches our spirituality.

Placed in the context of Gabriel’s message to Mary—an important page in the history of salvation and one filled with inti-

mations for devotion—this title leads us to recall a moment in the early years of our Order, connected with the place where the Florentine shrine of SS. Annunziata would rise. The picture of Mary venerated in this shrine graphically expresses a devotional attitude particularly dear to Servites. Later I shall have more to say on the value of the example of Mary in the act of pronouncing the “fiat.”

A remark seems in order regarding the expression “Mother and Servant of the Lord.” First of all, it would perhaps be better to invert the order of the titles so as to place them in the historical order of events: “Servant and Mother of the Lord.” Secondly, the word “Lord” in the constitutional text refers to two distinct persons. In the title “Mother of the Lord,” “Lord” refers to Christ, but in the title “Servant of the Lord,” “Lord” directly recalls Luke 1:38 and thus refers to Yahweh” (pp. 26-27).

Fr. Ignacio concludes his considerations on this phrase by pointing out that it “expresses and reiterates the living bond between the Servites and their Lady and the life commitment which flows from this.”

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1. *What are some examples of how Servites today are an expression of evangelical apostolic life?*
 2. *In what ways has Mary, mother and servant of the Lord, been for you an abiding inspiration?*



ARTICLE 2

The second article is formed by the first two paragraphs of article 6 of the friars’ Constitutions. This article shows the relationship between dedication to Mary and service to others:

Art. 2. In order to serve the Lord and their sisters and brothers, the Servants have dedicated themselves from their origins to the Mother of God, the blessed One of the Most High. They have turned to her on their pilgrimage to Christ and in their task of proclaiming him to the world. From the fiat of the lowly servant of the Lord (cf. Luke 1:38), they have learned to receive the Word of God and to be attentive to the promptings of the Spirit. From the participation of the mother in the redemptive mission of her son, the Suffering Servant of the Lord, they have learned to understand and alleviate human suffering.

This article situates our dedication (or service or consecration, as it might be more commonly called today) to Our Lady in the larger context of a means to reach a higher goal, the service of God and our sisters and brothers. Servites dedicate themselves to Mary precisely in order to serve the Lord and others more effectively. This was true from the foundation of the Order when the Seven Holy Founders called themselves “Servants of St. Mary” in a penitential or conversion experience and translated service to Mary to a service of the poor and sick in the hospice which bore the title of St. Mary’s.

Fr. Ignacio explains the opening phrase “In order to serve the Lord and their sisters and brothers” in this way:

The purpose and meaning of Servite life are energetically expressed here. I said before that according to the Constitutions service is without doubt the “social” charism of the Order. Indeed the Constitutions merely echo what emerges from historical research on the origins of the Order and the development of Servite spirituality.

Service embraces both the divine and the human, who are seen as brothers and sisters. The Servite ideal of life emphasizes the aspects of humility and service in the evangelical precept of love: “You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27). And in this it finds its grandeur (“The Virgin Mary in the Servite Constitutions,” pp. 28-29).

Fr. Ignacio recalls that the term “dedicated themselves” indicates the living bond between the Servite communities and Mary. This is both a medieval and liturgical expression. Dedication is a term which indicates an offering characterized by the totality and perpetuity of the gift itself. He also notes that when this article was formulated at the General Chapter in Madrid in 1968, the General Chapter chose the expression “dedicated themselves” over “consecrated themselves,” because, though the latter is certainly an acceptable expression, it seemed “somewhat drained of meaning and worn out by frequent use.” He further adds:

The “dedication” also gives our service a Marian characteristic. It has been noted that while the Marian dedication goes back to the foundation of the Order it is nonetheless still deeply felt by Servites today. From an interpretation of the term considered in itself and also in its use in the Constitutions, three characteristics emerge: the dedication is relative (that is, it is directed to service of God and neighbor), perpetual, and total.

Probably the original justification of the possessive case, Servants of Mary, should be sought in the spiritual content of the “dedication.” From this *dedicatio*, which is itself an act of worship, flows a series of expressions of devotion, homage, and reverence rendered to our Lady. These devotional acts originally bore a mark in conformity with the meaning which was given to the term.

Therefore, by virtue of the dedication every act of our service bears a Marian mark, and conversely, it becomes itself an act of homage to our Lady (“The Virgin Mary in the Servite Constitutions,” pp. 30, 33).

He then explores the implications of the image of life as a pilgrimage to Christ. He notes that the image is ancient and biblical, but also rich in meaning in our own times. It sees existence as a pilgrimage. When this image is applied to Servites it reflects the attitude of penance and the path of conversion to Christ, and “at the same time, it places the entire thought in the Pauline context of a race to reach

Christ, to whom the spiritual longing of the Christian is directed” (“The Virgin Mary in the Servite Constitutions,” p. 30).

To understand the phrase “They have turned to her . . .” he gives several examples from medieval writings:

We can see various images in the gaze which “they have turned towards her.” First of all, the popular and deeply felt image of St. Bernard: Mary, the star shining in the darkness which envelops man’s path. Another medieval image is that found in the celebrated hymn *Ave, Maris Stella* (Hail, Star of the Sea): the Lady who provides protection from the dangers of the journey. This image of Mary was trustfully invoked by medieval man who knew the physical dangers of impassable roads and by the contemporary person who is anxious about not less serious dangers along the way. Further, there is the image of the Lady, dear to the poets of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, who with her beauty and virtues leads us to Christ, or the image of the Queen of mercy, a favorite of the servant who looked upon himself as a sinner on the road of conversion to Christ. Finally, there is the image of her who is the exemplar of virtues, the model of the Gospels, the teacher of spiritual life who shows men and women the road, that is, the method of reproducing the image of Christ in themselves.

The historical perspective clearly outlined here flows over from the past into the life of Servites today. The expression “from their origins . . . they have turned to her” necessarily implies that they still turn to her. Their turning towards her takes place in different ways: an attentive gaze by those who look for inspiration in living a Christian life, praise by those who admire the holy splendor of the highest of creatures, supplication and invocation by those who feel the need of merciful intercession. Servites assume these attitudes in their journey towards Christ, that is, in the always present, but never definitively completed process of conversion and “in their task of proclaiming Christ to the world” (“The Virgin Mary in the Servite Constitutions,” pp. 30-31).

Mary's title here, Blessed One of the Most High, recalls that because God her savior has looked upon her lowliness all ages will call her blessed (Lk 1: 48).

The next two sentences of the article show how dedication to Mary has been and is a help on our pilgrimage to Christ and our proclaiming him to the world. Servites have turned to Mary especially in two key events of her life, the birth of Jesus (Incarnation) and the death of Jesus (Redemption).

First, from the events surrounding the birth of Jesus the article points out some lessons to be learned from Mary. From the fiat (Latin for "let it be done"), Mary's affirmative response to the angel that she would receive the Word of God into her body, we learn to receive the Word of God into our daily lives and also to be attentive, as Mary was, to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, Servants of Mary must learn from Mary's redemptive role in the death of her Son, who is called here the "Suffering Servant of the Lord." This recalls the four "Servant Songs" in the book of the prophet Isaiah which relate that the Servant of the Lord will suffer and bring redemption. See, for example, Isaiah 53: 11: "Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear." In particular the article states that by looking to Mary her servants will learn to understand and alleviate human suffering. This is stated also in the third reading-prayer of the Vigil of Our Lady addressed to the Virgin at the foot of the Cross: "Teach us to stand with you at the foot of those countless crosses where the Son of Man is still being crucified; make us living witnesses of Christian love, welcoming everyone as brother and sister." This in turn is taken from the epilogue (article 319) of the Constitutions of the friars. Thus it is a thought and attitude which permeates all of Servite life. This theme will return in article 42 where it is applied specifically to the members of the Secular Order.

1. *What lessons do we learn from Mary's fiat?*
2. *How have the Word of God and the promptings of the Spirit been an inspiration for you?*
3. *In what ways has Mary's suffering at the foot of the cross led you to understand and alleviate human suffering?*



ARTICLE 3

Article 2 gives greater emphasis to the internal attitude of the Servant to his/her Lady, an attitude of learning to receive the Word of God, to be attentive to the Holy Spirit in our lives, and to understand human suffering. Article 3 takes us a step forward, out of ourselves, into the world in which the example of Mary becomes active.

Art. 3. Sensitive to the needs of the Church, the Servants seek to know more about Mary, God's Mother and ours, and her mission in the mystery of salvation. Seeing in her the "most excellent fruit of redemption," they energetically support individuals and society in their struggle to be free. Aware of the divisions among Christians, they do all that they can so that the Daughter of Zion become a symbol of unity for all. To the insecure they propose as a model of confidence of God's children, the humble woman who placed all her hope in the Lord.

This third article is taken, with a few stylistic changes, from article 7 of the friars' Constitutions. It gives a few suggestions as to how to put this service to Mary into effect at the present time. The first step, quite naturally, is to know more about Mary and her role with Jesus in the redemption of the world. This will be applied specifically to the Secular Order members in article 13.

Three examples are given. In each case the title given to Mary suggests the way we should look upon her and what we should learn from her, in order to take a particular action in the present day world.

1) The first action is to support individuals and society in their struggle to be free. Since Mary is called here the “most excellent fruit of redemption,” the primary freedom envisioned in this article is the spiritual freedom from sin and all that sin implies in the life of an individual or a society. Secondly one would not be wrong in understanding in this all the human freedoms from the oppressions which are enslaving people today. Since Mary is completely free because she is completely redeemed, free from sin, she leads the way to throw off the oppressions and slavery we experience in our lives and the lives of those around us.

2) The second action is to bridge the divisions within Christianity itself. In many instances Mary has been a source of controversy and division especially between the Catholic and Protestant traditions. It is therefore a challenge to find the things we have in common and build upon those with our non-Catholic friends and relatives. Mary is called the Daughter of Zion to remind us of her Jewish origins, thereby also implying a need to extend this concern to non-Christians as well.

3) Finally the action of the Servants takes them among the “insecure.” The insecurity may be due to lack of material necessities such as adequate food, housing, clothing, or the insecurity might be because of uncertainty about the future, uncertainty about God or about one’s relationship with God. Jesus observed that the people were like sheep without a shepherd; without adequate spiritual leadership they were directionless. The insecurity may even be about other things such as jobs, health and so forth. The image of Mary which is proposed here is that of the humble woman who placed all her hope in the Lord. The Lord is the Rock, on whom we can find

the security we need to direct our lives aright, and Mary provides us with a model of an ordinary woman who was able to do this, and thus find direction, purpose, and security in her life in the midst of apparent insecurities.

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1. *What role does Mary play today to carry out her mission in the mystery of salvation?*
 2. *In what ways are people now struggling to be free, and how can we best support them?*
 3. *Is Mary a symbol of unity or a cause of division among Christians?*
 4. *What insecurities do you face in your life, and do you find that Mary is a model to help you overcome them?*



ARTICLE 4

The first three articles, drawn as they are from the Constitutions of the friars, present the ideal toward which the friars strive. The fourth article explains how, historically, various groups have come to be associated with the Servite Order.

Art. 4. By drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord, many religious congregations and lay groups, each of which constitutes a particular expression of consecrated or lay life, have grown up around the communities of the Order of Servants of Mary. Others already in existence, attracted by this same ideal, have associated themselves with the Order. Each of these, be it religious or lay, expresses in its own way the one vocation which is common to us all.

This article is introduced by a phrase taken from article 1 of the Rule, and also article 1 of the friars' Constitutions: "drawing abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord." As

noted in article 1, this phrase does not constitute the ideal of the Servants of Mary as such, but rather the manner in which the ideal (evangelical-apostolic life, fraternal communion, service of God and all people) is lived. Historically, individuals and groups have been inspired by the ideal of the Servants of Mary and have wanted to share in this ideal to the degree it was possible according to their circumstances. The article then describes the two principal ways this has happened in the past.

First, groups would rise up around communities of Servite friars and want to be associated with the spirituality of the friars, in so far as it was compatible with their way of life as lay people, sisters, or contemplative nuns. An example is the Ladysmith Servite Sisters. The founding group of young women was first received into the Servite Third Order and then went to teach in a Servite parish in Ladysmith, Wisconsin. There they became a religious community. The Servite Secular Institute grew out of a Third Order group in London over fifty years ago. The Servite Sisters in Swaziland were founded by the Servite missionaries there.

A second way was that other groups, already in existence, were attracted by the ideal of the Servite Order and requested to be associated with it. An example of this is the congregation of Servite Sisters in India, which was founded by a Jesuit. There were no Servites at all in India in the middle of the nineteenth century when they were founded. But because of their devotion to the Sorrows of Mary they requested to be aggregated to the Servite Order. Many Third Order groups were founded in Mexico by the Jesuits and Franciscans in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to foster devotion to Mary's Sorrows. Once founded, they too sought affiliation with the Servite Order so as to share the indulgences granted through the Order for devotional practices in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows.

Finally this article notes that these various groups, whether they be groups of religious sisters, contemplative nuns, or groups of lay

men and women are individual and particular expressions of the Servite vocation which is shared by all. We all share the same Servite vocation, but express it in different ways according to various life styles and marital status. The question of vocation will be explained more fully in articles 8 and 9.

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- 1. How did your calling to become a Servite come about?*
 - 2. How do we as Secular Servites share a vocation common to the friars and all Servites?*
 - 3. What makes the secular expression of this common vocation different from the religious expression?*



SECTION II

THE SECULAR ORDER OF THE SERVANTS OF MARY AND THE LIFE OF THE COMMUNITY

CHAPTER I

THE SECULAR ORDER OF SERVANTS OF MARY

The first section of the Rule provided a general view of the spirituality of the Servite Order. The second section begins to apply this more specifically to the Secular Order. The first chapter starts with broad general principles upon which the Secular Servite way of life is based and then gradually narrows the view to more specific aspects of that life. Most ideas are merely introduced here, but are developed at greater length in successive chapters.

The following is a summary outline of the ten articles (5 to 14) which make up the first chapter of the Rule.

- 1) Followers of the Seven Holy Founders (art. 5) and witnesses to the lay origins of the Order (art. 7)
- 2) Characteristics of our common vocation (art. 6)
- 3) The vocation or calling in the Secular Order (arts. 8- 9)
- 4) Description of the Secular Order; including some of its more important aspects (art. 10):
Community (art. 11)

Prayer (art. 12)

Relation to the Church (art. 12)

Blessed Virgin Mary (art. 13)

5) The purpose and role of the Promise (art. 14)

Before we examine each of the articles individually, it is necessary to clarify three terms which will be used throughout this commentary: 1) community, 2) the meaning of the terms “clerical” and “lay” and the terms “religious” and “secular,” and 3) Servite Order.

1. The 1995 Rule of Life replaces the term “community” as found in the previous edition with “fraternity.” But a footnote explains: “In countries or cultures where the word ‘fraternity’ can imply an exclusive gender, a suitable alternative name can be used.” We shall prescind from the use of terms such as *fraternità*, *fraternité*, and *fraternidad* commonly used in the romance languages to name the gathering of Secular Order members. But their cognate in English, “fraternity,” does imply an exclusive gender, namely male. English has two sets of terms: using the Latin root English speaks of a fraternity and a sorority, or with the Germanic root a brotherhood and a sisterhood. Each of these terms is gender exclusive. For that reason, when preparing the translation of the 1983 Rule, I posed the question to Servites in English-speaking areas throughout the world, and the majority favored “community” instead of “fraternity” and the reason given was the exclusive nature of the latter term. Moreover, the present sensitivity toward inclusive language, which is found not only in the United States but also in other English speaking areas of the world, confirms this decision. Therefore in this commentary the term “community” will replace “fraternity” as found in the official version.

The advantage of the term “fraternity,” however, is that it indicates that the relationship between members of the Secular Order should be similar to that between brothers and sisters, a family relationship. “Community” does not readily evoke that connotation and so it

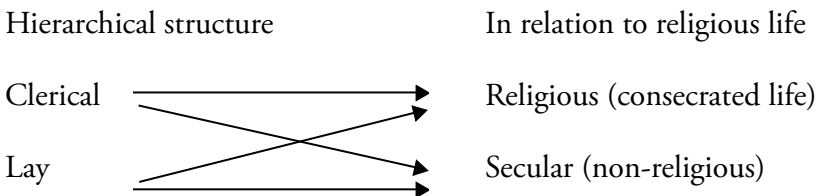
will be necessary to keep in mind that, whenever “community” is used, it has a deeper relational meaning than the term itself might suggest.

2. A second set of terms which needs some comment is “clerical/lay” and “religious/secular.” In a footnote the *Rule of Life* informs us: “The word ‘secular’ here is used strictly in the sense of the original Latin root ‘saeculum,’ meaning someone who lives ‘in the world,’ in contrast to someone who lives in a religious house.”

In the document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 43), the Second Vatican Council helps us understand the differences between “clerical,” “lay,” “secular,” and “religious”:

From the point of view of the divine and hierarchical structure of the Church, the religious state of life is not an intermediate one between the clerical and lay states. Rather, the faithful of Christ are called by God from both these latter states of life so that they may enjoy this particular gift in the life of the Church and thus each in his own way can forward the saving mission of the Church.

We might diagram it like this:



Everyone fits into both of these categories: in relation to the hierarchical structure of the Church the individual is either clerical or lay; in relation to religious life the individual is either religious or secular. This has practical implications; for example, a lay person may be either a member of a religious congregation (e.g. a religious brother, or sister) or “secular,” not a member of a religious order. A

cleric (deacon, priest, bishop) may be a member of a religious order or a member of the diocesan (secular) clergy. Thus we see that a religious order (like the Servites) may include both clerical members (priests) and lay members (non-ordained brothers); and the Servite Secular Order may likewise include clerics and lay persons. In the past there have been priests and bishops and at least one pope, Bl. Pope Innocent XI, who were members of the Secular Order, and at the present time there are diocesan priests and deacons who are members of the Secular Order.

From this we can see that in a technical sense “lay” and “secular” are not synonymous: the first one means “non-clerical” and the second “non-religious.”

But in a less technical sense frequently we use “lay” and “secular” as meaning the same thing, and Vatican II itself muddies the waters by using the term “laity” to indicate those who are neither clerics nor religious (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). The *Rule of Life* at times also uses the terms lay and secular as synonyms.

3. A third term we must consider is “Order of Servants of Mary” or “Servite Order.” At times this seems to indicate just the Order of Friar Servants of Mary (that is, the priests and brothers), while at other times it seems to mean the larger reality of all groups which share the same spirituality and which are frequently called the “Servite Family.” Usually the context will indicate which meaning is intended.

ARTICLE 5

Article 5 introduces this chapter by drawing on material from the previous chapter and presenting some concepts which will be developed further on in this chapter:

Art. 5. The Secular Order of the Servants of Mary consists of lay men and women who, united by their Christian baptism and directed by the Holy Spirit in the path to holiness, wish to align and unite themselves in the service of Christ and their sisters and brothers in the world by drawing on the inspiration of Mary, the Mother and Servant of our Savior Jesus Christ. In the Order of Servants of Mary, they commit themselves as lay or secular persons, to follow in their family and social life the path of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servants of Mary.

The first sentence of this article is almost identical to the opening lines of the following article. It identifies the members of the Secular Order as lay men and women. The following article is more inclusive by mentioning just “men and women,” since, as we have seen, clerics can also be members of the Secular Order. They are united by reason of their baptism and in turn they wish to unite themselves in the service of Christ and others.

This article borrows the phrase already found in article 1 and then repeated in article 4 that this is done drawing inspiration from Mary. There is one innovation, however. In this article Mary is called both Mother and Servant of our Savior Jesus Christ. In the first article the titles given to Mary were Mother and Servant of the Lord. As it was noted there, “Lord” indicates Jesus in relation to the title of “Mother,” but “Yahweh” in relation to “Servant.” In this article Mary is given the biblical title of Mother of Christ, but Mary is never called Servant of Christ in the bible. Paul indeed calls himself a servant or slave of Jesus Christ, as in the opening verses of the letter to the Philippians and to the Romans. Mary is called a servant of Jesus, however, as early as the seventh century in the writings of St. Ildephonsus of Toledo. Thus from the sobriety of the scriptural title “Mother and Servant of the Lord,” we come to an expansive title which reflects the development of theological thought of later ages.

One minor comment about terminology, which applies some of the distinctions we made at the beginning of this section. This article states that the members of the Secular Order commit themselves as “lay or secular” persons. This is an ambiguous use of those terms. “Or” can introduce an alternative—in this case the alternative to “lay” is “cleric” not “secular.” “Or” can also introduce an equivalent—but in this case “lay” is not the equivalent of “secular” since secular can include both cleric and lay. Perhaps this is just an unimportant technicality, but it might obscure the role that diocesan clergy may have in the Secular Order.

The main thought of this article, however, is to make explicit that the members of the Secular Order are followers of the Seven Holy Founders of the Servants of Mary. Members of the Secular Order should therefore be interested in knowing more about the Seven Holy Founders. Fortunately the English-speaking world is well served with two fine publications about the Seven Founders. The first is by Fr. Andrea Dal Pino, a historian who has written extensively about the foundation of the Servite Order in the thirteenth century. It is entitled *Brothers and Servants: The Seven Holy Founders of the Servite Order* (Berwyn, IL, 1981). The second is by Maire Ni Chearbhaill, *Early Beginnings of the Servants of Mary* (London, 1986). Both works are available from the Servite Development Office in Berwyn, Illinois.

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1. *How can the Seven Holy Founders be examples for Secular Servites in their family and social life?*
 2. *What are some characteristics of the spiritual journey of the Seven Holy Founders?*



ARTICLE 6

Article 6 treats of the relationship between the Secular Order and the other members of the Servite family: the friars, nuns, sisters, members of the Servite secular institutes, and members of other Servite lay groups. It also explains in greater detail the statement in article 4 that all these groups have a common vocation.

Art. 6. The Secular Order of Servants of Mary, made up of men and women living out their baptismal consecration in the world, is one of these expressions of the shared vocation of the Servite Order. It shares the same ideal, commitment to evangelical, apostolic life and piety towards the Mother of God; with the Servite Order it constitutes a single family.

This article makes at least three important points.

1) The fourth article stated in a general way that many religious congregations and lay groups share the one vocation which is common to all. Now this article applies that statement to the Secular Order and states that the Secular Order is indeed one of these expressions of the common vocation of the Servite Order.

2) A second point in this article is that it lists three characteristics of the common vocation shared by all the different groups of Servants of Mary. This list is taken directly from the Constitutions of the friars, article 305. All the various groups of Servants of Mary share the same ideal, the same commitment to evangelical and apostolic life and the same piety or devotion towards the Mother of God. Let us now look at each of these characteristics separately:

i) Same ideal: This article does not explain the nature of this ideal. The Constitutions of the friars, from which this statement is taken, explains that the ideal of the friars “is to reach the perfect stature of Christ” (articles 105 and 319), a concept taken from St. Paul’s letter to the Ephesians, 4: 13. Thus the ideal of the Servant of

Mary—friar, sister, nun, secular order member—is the same ideal as found in any authentic Christian spirituality: a perfect following of Christ, which implies that by the life of Christ living within us we attain the fullness of life in Christ.

ii) Same commitment to evangelical and apostolic life: While the first characteristic places the Servant of Mary within the larger Christian spiritual tradition, this second characteristic specifies the type of life to be led by the Servant of Mary as “evangelical” and “apostolic.” As we mentioned when these terms were used in the first article, they place the Servants of Mary within the tradition of the mendicant orders which arose in the Church in the thirteenth century.

iii) Same piety towards the Mother of God: It should be noted that although devotion to Mary must, quite evidently, be a characteristic of a Servant of Mary, it is not specified just what aspect of Mary’s life should be the focus of the devotion, or what particular prayers or actions should be the preferred expression of this devotion. For example, it would not be correct to limit the devotion of the Servant of Mary to the Sorrows of Mary (although this has been very important in the life of the Servite Order at least from the late 1500s) or to say that the Servant of Mary must say the rosary daily (although this would be an exemplary practice). Within the Servite tradition a Servant of Mary may well prefer to honor the obedience of Mary at the Annunciation and to recite daily the Vigil of Our Lady instead of the rosary. Devotion to Mary must be there; but it may be expressed in any one of a variety of ways.

3) The third important statement in this sixth article is that “with the Servite Order it [the Secular Order] constitutes a single family.” I think that the wording of this phrase is awkward and perhaps even ambiguous, but the meaning is quite clear. The members of the Secular Order, together with the members of the other expressions of Servite life, constitute one family. While this might have always

been true in the past, it is only recently that this concept has been put into practice by the establishment of UNIFAS (International Union of the Servite Family), a group composed of representatives of Servite friars, nuns, sisters, the Secular Order, secular institutes, and other Servite lay groups for the purpose of studying and promoting issues of common interest. The nature of the relationship between the various components of the Servite family is also changing from a model in which the friars were the source and center of all relationships to a more equalitarian model in which the friars share equally with other groups (sisters, nuns, secular Order, secular institutes, and other lay groups).

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1. *What do you believe is the meaning of your baptismal consecration?*
 2. *In what way does your Secular Servite vocation relate to your baptismal consecration?*
 3. *How does your Secular Servite Community relate to other members of the Servite family?*



ARTICLE 7

Article 7 recalls in particular the lay origins of the Servite Order:

Art. 7. As secular members of the Servite Order, these sisters and brothers are an authentic witness to the lay origins of the Order of Servants of Mary, whose Seven Founders began their pilgrimage as lay people united in prayer and service in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

According to the current historical view, the Seven Holy Founders were members of a lay confraternity which was influenced both

by the penitential movements of the time (some think they were members of the Brothers of Penance) and by the Marian movement. It appears that the confraternity had charge of a hospital or hospice for the poor called St. Mary's. The members of the confraternity called themselves "Servants of St. Mary." Later the Seven withdrew from the confraternity to organize a religious community on Monte Senario. That was the beginning of the Order of Friar Servants of Mary.

This article emphasizes the lay origins of the Order and it therefore follows that the lay groups which form part of the Servite Family are not to be thought of as secondary in importance but as an expression of the life of the Seven Holy Founders in the world before they went up to Monte Senario.

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1. *How can we be authentic witnesses to the lay origins of the Servants of Mary?*
 2. *In what way can our monthly meetings serve as our own little Monte Senario?*



ARTICLES 8 & 9

Article 6 spoke of a shared vocation, one which is common to the various groups which make up the Servite family, and it listed some characteristics of this vocation, characteristics which should be found in all the groups. These are expressed in very general terms, and it is then the duty of each group to determine in greater detail how they are lived within the life style of the group.

Articles 8 and 9 look more specifically at the vocation or calling itself.

Art. 8. The Secular Servite vocation is a special calling within the Church, the holy People of God. It consists of an invitation freely given by God to which a free and conscious response is made. In this gift, Servites recognize the efficacious maternal presence of Mary.

Art. 9. This gift of a vocation finds its roots in baptismal consecration and with its acceptance the Servants of Mary commit themselves to follow Christ and to bring to fulfillment the evangelical commandment of love.

Most people probably think of a “vocation” or calling primarily in terms of religious life or the priesthood. Here the word “vocation” is used in a broader sense. Vatican II also uses “vocation” in this wider sense because it states, for example, that the whole Church is called to holiness (*Lumen Gentium*, title of Chapter V); the laity “by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God” (*Lumen Gentium*, 31). The Declaration on Christian Education says that educators have a beautiful and very solemn vocation (*Gravissimum educationis*, 5). So we see that God can call us in various ways, not only as religious or priests. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (no. 1877) does not hesitate to say that the vocation of all humankind is to manifest the image of God and to be transformed to the image of the Son of God. This vocation takes on a personal form since each one is called to enter into the divine blessedness. Many other examples could be cited to show that the calling we receive from God is not merely to religious life or priesthood.

These two articles help us understand this special calling to the Secular Servite Order more clearly.

1) First, it is an invitation freely given by God. It is not we who choose God, but God who has first chosen us. God is under no restraint, but freely gives it. Since it is freely given by God, this same

article also calls it a “gift,” something which is not earned or something that no amount of money or effort on our part can buy.

2) Secondly, on our part, it requires a free and conscious “yes.” We cannot earn this gift from God, but we can refuse it. It is freely given and we must freely accept it. Since our relationship with God is essentially one of love, it could not be any other way. We cannot force it from God, nor can God force us to love in return.

3) Any special calling which we receive from God must be seen as flowing from our baptism. Baptism remains the basis of our loving relationship with God. To think of a calling to the Secular Order, or to religious life or the priesthood for that matter, as something separate from our original response to God’s invitation to put aside our sinful state and enter into a loving relationship with God would be to misunderstand the fundamental place of baptism in our relationship with God.

4) The result of the affirmative response to God’s invitation is that the individual consciously and with determination strives to fulfill the commandment of love as found in the Gospel (see Jn 13:34).

All of these characteristics place the spirituality of the Secular Servite on the solid foundation of all true Christian spirituality.

5) But there is still another element expressed in article 8. In this gift the Servite will recognize the presence of Mary. This is reflected in various statements in the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* (Story of the Origin of the Order), the oldest account we have of the founding of the Servite Order. According to the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* the Seven Founders were chosen to begin the Order by God and the Blessed Virgin, because it was to be an Order especially dedicated to her. Therefore the calling of members of the Order today continues to be a calling by God and by the Blessed Virgin.

While the above five elements as found in articles 8 and 9 help to explain the vocation of the Secular Servite, there is an important

conclusion which must also be drawn. Because the Secular Order is made up of men and women who have been called especially by God and the Blessed Virgin, it follows that the Secular Order differs dramatically from parish groups or organizations. One does not speak, for example, of a vocation to be a eucharistic minister, a member of the parish council, a lector at Mass. These are functions to be performed not a vocation to be lived. One may change from one function to another, cease being a lector or eucharistic minister or member of a parish organization, but one makes the promise in the Secular Order for life.

The Secular Servite remains a Secular Servite twenty-four hours a day. Everything is done in light of this calling; all actions flow from it. Emphasis is placed more on who we are rather than what we do.

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1. *What first attracted you to the Servite Secular Order?*
 2. *To what extent, if any, did you think of this attraction as a special calling from God?*
 3. *How has your sense of calling grown and deepened since becoming a Secular Servite?*
 4. *What is the evangelical commandment of love?*
 5. *How has being a Secular Servite helped you to bring the commandment of love to fulfillment?*



ARTICLE 10

Articles 4 and 6 of the Rule of Life situate the Servite Secular Order in the larger Servite family, those groups which share the same vocation which is expressed in different ways. Articles 8 and 9 explain more fully the meaning of vocation in relation to the Secular Order. Article 10 now describes this particular vocation as it relates directly to the Secular Order. Article 10 therefore is the

closest thing we have to a “definition” or “description” of the Secular Order. Certainly if anyone were to ask you what the Secular Order is, you could simply quote article 10 to give your inquirer a basic understanding of the Secular Order:

Art. 10. Members of the Servite Secular Order are men and women who support each other in their marital, family, and social life and in their active involvement in the world. They strive toward holiness according to the spirituality of the Servite Order, following its directives and their own designated Rule.

Two important things are said about the lives of members of the Secular Order: 1) They strive toward holiness and 2) they are a mutual support to each other. Although these appear as two independent statements, in reality they are very closely related. Let us first look at the question of “holiness.” Many people have an idea of holiness which is either standoffish or perhaps reserved to certain types of people—not to the ordinary Catholic. Yet the title of Chapter V of the document of Vatican II on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) is “The Call of the Whole Church to Holiness.” The Council makes it clear that all Christians are called to holiness, and it quotes Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount which is directed to all believers: “You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.” We are called by God, the Council continues, not according to our accomplishments, but according to God’s own purpose and grace. We are justified in the Lord Jesus, and through baptism we truly become children of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way we are really made holy.

The Council helps us understand better the nature of this holiness in the following quotation:

Thus is it evident to everyone that all the faithful of Christ of whatever rank or status are called to the fullness of the Christian

life and to the perfection of charity. By this holiness a more human way of life is promoted even in this earthly society (*Lumen Gentium*, 40).

The Council thus equates holiness with the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity. If we look back now at article 9 of The Rule of Life, we see that in fact article 9 was speaking of this very call to holiness, but it used different words. It says that the vocation of a Secular Servite finds its roots in baptism and by accepting this vocation the members “commit themselves to bring to fulfillment the evangelical commandment of love.” The “fullness of the Christian life,” as used by the Council to describe holiness, is the same as “bringing to fulfillment the evangelical commandment of love.” In this way we see that our Rule of Life is clearly based on the teaching of Vatican II and indeed on Catholic tradition in general.

We should, however, note this difference. The Council says that we are called to holiness, but article 10 states that members of the Secular Order strive toward holiness. This is looking at the same reality in our lives from two different angles. We are first called to holiness, and because we are called by God we respond by striving toward that goal which God has set before us. It is important to realize that our striving is nothing more than our free and conscious response to God’s invitation (as stated in article 8 of the Rule of Life).

The Council then goes on to say that “in the various types and duties of life, one and the same holiness is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God.” The Secular Servite first accepts the invitation or call by God to holiness, and then must ask in what way is this to be achieved.

That brings us to the second part of article 10: members are a mutual support to each other. This is the way in which Secular Servites strive toward holiness, not as isolated individuals but by providing mutual encouragement and inspiration for their journey together toward God. Here the Rule of Life specifies the areas of

life in which this mutual support must be found: in their marital, family, and social life, and in their active involvement in the world. The Secular Servite strives toward the goal of holiness, or fullness of the Christian life, to which God has called him or her, not alone but together with others, and together they use their marital, family, and social life, and their active involvement in the world as means to attain that goal.

This is summed up by the Vatican Council in this way: The faithful must assist one another to live holier lives even in their daily occupations (*Lumen Gentium*, 36).

These four aspects of life: marital, family, and social life, and active involvement in the world are the four key areas about which every Secular Order community must examine itself. These four areas are mentioned again in Chapter 6, on the apostolate, but they are presupposed in the other chapters as the underlying reality on which the rest of the Rule is constructed.

It is, therefore, the responsibility of each Secular Order community to see that this mutual support in these four areas is actively promoted in the manner in which the monthly meetings are conducted and in the content chosen to be discussed at the meetings.

Finally, this article tells how this should be done: according to the spirituality of the Servite Order and following its directives and the Rule of Life. In fact, the rest of the Rule is a practical application of Servite spirituality to those living in the world. The Rule codifies this for the guidance of the members. Therefore this article must be kept in mind at all times while studying the rest of the Rule.

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1. *How do you feel you are supported by other members of the Secular Community?*
 2. *How can receiving and giving this support help in striving toward holiness?*
 3. *Does receiving support help more than giving it?*

4. How can support be shown for members who are unable to attend meetings?



ARTICLE 11

Article 10 gave a basic description of the Servite Secular Order. The following articles in this first chapter introduce some major aspects or concerns in making this description of Servite Secular life a living reality. They are only an “introduction” because in effect these next three articles (11-13) merely announce several concerns which are then developed in greater detail in later chapters: The life of the Secular Order members must be that of a community (article 11, developed in chapter 2); they must also be pray-ers as well as do-ers (article 12, developed in chapters 3 and 6), and they are dedicated to Mary (article 13, developed in many articles such as 24, 29, 35, 37, 42, 47, 48, and 53). All of this is contained in the Promise which the Secular Servite makes at the end of the year of probation (article 14, developed in chapter 10).

Art. 11. They undertake to make their own the religious experience of our Seven First Fathers, who lived in fraternal communion so as to be able to render greater service to God, to the Blessed Virgin, and to their sisters and brothers. Gathered together in the name of the Lord, Secular Servites discover his presence in the secular community and find the support they need to respond to their special call to holiness.

The main thought of this article is that Secular Servites want to live a community life, just as the Seven Founders did. This community life then will have three results: 1) it will make them aware of the Lord’s presence in their midst, 2) it will be a support on their journey to God, and 3) it will aid them to give greater service to others: God, Our Lady, and their sisters and brothers.

Article 10 declared that the Secular Servites strive toward holiness according to the spirituality of the Order. Article 11 is an application of that principle because it says that the Secular Servites want to live in communion with each other just as the Seven Holy Founders of the Order did. The *Legenda de origine Ordinis* makes this point about the Seven even while they were lay men living in the world:

They were united in perfect loving friendship, for such friendship drew them to agree completely with each other in good will and love on every issue both human and divine, which is what pleases God. . . . Their friendship made them so one in mind that they tried to please each other in all things human and divine. And then this loving friendship impelled them to leave all earthly things and put them out of mind. Going even further, it left them with a definite resolve that would enable them to dwell happily together not only one in mind but actually in the same place, supporting each other in example and deed and by what they said to one another (no. 29).

This practical union of minds and hearts by the Seven Founders is the example which Servites, including Secular Servites, wish to make their own. It is a high ideal, expressed (as we have said in relation to article 1) in the Acts of the Apostles (4:32), and then taken up in the late fourth century in the Rule of St. Augustine, and then finally the Seven Founders took on the obligation of following St. Augustine's Rule which seemed to express well their own desire of a community based on oneness of thought and desire. What are the practical results flowing from such a loving communion? Article 11 here lists three:

1) First, their own communion together makes them aware of the Lord's presence among them. This is merely an application of Jesus' words: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in their midst" (Mt 18:20). Anytime believers are united in mind and heart, they make the presence of Jesus a reality among them.

2) This communion of hearts and minds found in the true Secular Order Community is the basis for the mutual support which article 10 said was an essential element of the Secular Order vocation. This is also shown in the quotation from the *Legenda de origine Ordinis* cited above: The “communion” or “community” among the Seven enabled them to dwell together “supporting each other in example and deed and by what they said to one another.”

The type of mutual support is now further specified as being not only their example to one another, but their very actions and how they speak to each other. The Secular Community therefore has a high ideal of not only not speaking ill or gossiping about one another but in a more positive way of being a support to one another by what they say. St. Paul states this same reality in his letter to the Ephesians: “Never let evil talk pass your lips; say only the good things people need to hear, things that will really help them” (4:29). Paul was keenly aware that the words we speak to and about another person can tear a person down (evil talk) or can build a person up, that is, our words can be a true support to the person.

3) Finally, the community created by a unity of mind and heart in the Lord makes it possible for us to render greater service to God, to Our Lady, and to others. Not only does our coming together benefit ourselves in giving us a more secure journey to God, but it also explodes outside of us. A true love of each other which brings about the presence of God among us cannot remain only inward looking. This love must find outlets in the service of God, Our Lady, and other men and women, our brothers and sisters.

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1. *Have you in any way felt or found the Lord’s presence in your Community?*
 2. *How do you suppose the Holy Founders would have dealt with differences of opinion?*
 3. *What have you found to be fairest and to work best in handling differences of opinion?*



ARTICLE 12

Article 12 continues to announce in summary form certain aspects of Servite Secular life which will be considered in greater detail later. Two distinct aspects are found in this article:

Art. 12. Through listening to the Word of God and prayer Secular Servites deepen their own proper Christian vocation and mission within the ecclesial community and the world. As living members of the Church they commit themselves to knowing and living her teaching in their own life and apostolate.

The first aspect found in this article is listening to the Word of God and prayer. Although the Rule does not here elaborate on the meaning of the “Word of God,” it certainly has a rich and manifold meaning. Christ is the Word of God and so the Secular Servite must listen attentively to Christ speaking in his or her life. In addition the Word of God indicates Scripture, and so the Secular Servite must also listen to Scripture, not only as it is proclaimed at Mass but also in its entirety. But the Word of God is made known to us not only in Scripture, but as the first reading “To the Virgin of the Fiat” in the Vigil of Our Lady so well states: we know life in the hearing of the Word.

the Word we hear in the profound depths of our own hearts,
the Word spoken in the lives of our brothers and sisters,
the Word spoken in the world around us and in the crises of
our times.

Prayer will be described later (article 24) as a meeting with God in faith. Certainly understood in this way listening to the Word of God can also be considered a prayer.

As in the previous article about community, we find that prayer and the listening to the Word of God, while a very internal and

personal action, must also turn outward to the world. Not only must we hear the Word of God spoken in the world around us and in the crises of our times, but we must let the Word of God within us, the intense meeting with God in faith, deepen our sense of vocation and mission in the Church (ecclesial community) and world. God not only calls the Secular Servite (vocation = the calling) but sends him or her into the world to bring God's presence to others (mission = the sending forth).

The second part of this article is the result of the first part: because the Secular Servite, through prayer, deepens the sense of mission in the Church, as a member of the Church he or she must be interested in knowing and living the teachings of the Church. Prayer leads us from God, to the Word, which is Christ, and then to the Body of Christ. Of necessity the Secular Servite must therefore be involved in the Church—but as we shall see this involvement must be precisely in the “secular” aspect. This relationship with the Church is developed further in articles 18, 26, 39, and 41.

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1. *What are some different ways we can listen to the Word of God?*
 2. *What might the Lord be trying to tell us right now?*
 3. *What sometimes prevents us from hearing what God is trying to tell us?*



ARTICLE 13

Article 13 announces a major theme which will be taken up later in at least a half a dozen articles: the relationship between the Servants of Mary and their “Lady.” This article is immensely rich in its content and also in its importance. It is rich in its importance because it explicitly says that it is according to the spirit or spirituality of the Order. While the entire Rule certainly is an expression of

Servite spirituality, the Rule wishes to draw special attention to this particular article as being in accord with the Servite spirit. It is rich in its content for it lays a foundation of the major themes which constitute the relationship between “Servant” and “Lady.”

Art. 13. According to the spirit of the Order, Secular Servites draw abiding inspiration from Mary, Mother and Servant of the Lord. They look toward her as a guiding image leading them to a life of simplicity and service, totally dedicated to God. They regard her as the perfect model for the disciple of Jesus and dedicate themselves entirely to her, honoring her especially as the Virgin of Sorrows. They commit themselves to deepening their knowledge of her and her place in the mystery of salvation through study and personal prayer.

A complete commentary on this article would require a lengthy treatise, but here we shall try to give an outline of our relationship with Mary which this article suggests. We will organize the material under two headings: first, the titles that are given to Mary, for these indicate those aspects of Mary’s life which come most easily to the mind and pen of a Servant of Mary, and secondly, the major themes which help to explain our relationship as servants to Mary.

1) Titles under which Mary appears: In this article three titles are applied to Mary: Mother of the Lord, Servant of the Lord, and Virgin of Sorrows. The first two, in reference to Mary’s being our abiding inspiration, are taken directly from the first article of the friars’ constitutions, and have been considered in the comments on the first article of this Rule. These are biblical titles, for Elizabeth said to Mary, “Who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Lk 1:43); here it indicates the unique role of Mary in the history of salvation and is the fundamental reason why we can call ourselves her servants. At the Annunciation Mary proclaimed herself the servant of the Lord (Lk 1:38) and then applied this title to herself in the Magnificat: “He has looked upon his servant in her lowliness” (Lk 1:48); Mary thus is also an example of service for us.

The title Virgin of Sorrows recognizes the virginity of Mary and her sorrows, both of which are scriptural. One might note that traditionally from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Servites have looked upon Mary especially in her sorrows.

In article 3 we have already observed two other titles of Mary: God's Mother and ours and Daughter of Zion.

Two other titles are used in the rite of admission: disciple of Christ (no. 40) and Our Lady (no. 44).

One notes immediately the predilection for scriptural titles. This certainly does not mean that the validity or usefulness of these other titles is denied, for they are indeed used by Servite writers in other contexts. But it does indicate that a "servant" tends to look upon Mary in a particular way. This is true also of the constitutions of the friars as is indicated in a study done by Fr. Lawrence Choate ("Drawing Inspiration from Their Lady: Mary in the Constitutions of the Friar Servants after Vatican Council II," in *Marianum* 45 [1983]: 629-677).

Secondly we shall look at the major themes which this article expresses in regard to our relationship with Mary. At least five themes are found in this article: 1) Inspiration, 2) Example, 3) Dedication, 4) Honor, 5) Study.

1) Secular Servites, following the ideal of the friars as expressed in their constitutions (art. 1), draw abiding inspiration from Mary. Inspiration indicates that we receive our ideals, our motivation for acting, our spiritual outlook from Mary. And this inspiration is said to be "abiding," not something which comes and goes but is permanent in our life. As we said earlier the Secular Order is a way of life not a series of disconnected actions. Since we have committed ourselves to this as a way of life, it must have an influence in everything that we are and do. We must also remember that since this way of life finds its roots in our baptismal consecration (art. 9), the Holy Spirit remains our first and primary source of inspiration.

2) Mary is the example for Secular Servites to follow in several ways. In this article Mary is portrayed as the guiding image of a life of simplicity and service. Her life was not outwardly different from that of other women of Nazareth of her time. Article 47 makes this more explicit by saying that because Mary shared on earth the life that is common to all, she is the model for every Servite. She not only proclaimed herself a servant of the Lord to the angel Gabriel (Lk 1:38), but also demonstrated this service to others by going to Elizabeth in her need (Lk 1:39-56) and noting with delicacy that the bridal couple at Cana had not secured enough wine (Jn 2:1-11). These then show us the concern we should have for God and for our brothers and sisters. In fact, in article 37, Mary is said to be our example in radiating the love of Christ throughout the world and giving of ourselves to others.

As a disciple of her Son, she becomes for us a model of our discipleship (art. 13), and her interior life of prayer becomes a guide for us in our journey to God through prayer (art. 24).

3) This article states that the Secular Servites are dedicated totally to God and dedicate themselves entirely to Mary. Our dedication to Mary is well expressed in the *Legenda de origine Ordinis*:

Fearing their own imperfection, and on wise counsel, in total heartfelt devotion they [the Seven HolyFounders] humbly placed themselves at the feet of the glorious Queen of heaven, the Virgin Mary, so that as mediatrix and advocate she might reconcile and commend them to her Son, and filling their imperfection with her abundant love, she might mercifully obtain for them a wealth of merit. Thus it is that for the glory of God they bound themselves in the service of his glorious Virgin Mother and wished from that moment forward to be called servants of St. Mary, and they adopted a rule of life on the advice of prudent men.

This dedication to Mary is expressed in terms which reflect the medieval world: The servant is aware of his weakness and helplessness and therefore searches for someone who can offer him protection

and help. He places himself in the service of the one who becomes his “lord” (or “lady”) and in return receives the protection and help which the lord (or lady) can supply. For this reason Mary’s title of “Our Lady” has been one of the favorite titles of members of the Servite Order. This dedication, or consecration as it is sometimes called, is expressed in different ways according to the time and culture. The best known form is that promulgated by St. Louis de Montfort using terminology and examples familiar to the French spirituality of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

4) As a result of our total dedication to Mary, we honor her. Article 29 will give examples of how traditionally Servites have expressed this honor to Mary and suggests that these be followed also by the Secular Servite Community. It might be well to note that these devotional practices in honor of Mary have always been regarded as expressions flowing from our dedication to Mary; they do not constitute our dedication. That is, our “service to Mary” is our total way of living and cannot be fulfilled by reciting a certain type or number of prayers or performing certain works.

5) Finally this article indicates that Secular Servites must be anxious to deepen their knowledge of Mary. The article suggests two ways this can be done: by study and personal prayer. Other ways might be through conferences or lectures at the regular meetings of the Secular Order Community or under other auspices, and so forth. Our study should consider Mary in herself and also in her role in the history of salvation.

There are two other aspects not mentioned explicitly in this article which are worthy of comment here. The first is “service” to Mary. Since we are servants of Mary, it would seem fitting that service to Mary should be mentioned more prominently here. We find service to Mary mentioned in Article 11, together with service to God and to others, and in our dedication to her (Article 2). In number 80 of the Rite of the Promise the celebrant prays for those whom God has

called to the “service of the Virgin Mary.” No definition or description of what this “service” of the Virgin Mary means is given; this is because, as we mentioned above regarding dedication (Article 2), our service or dedication to Mary is our entire way of life, not one or another devotional act, prayer, or even service to others. If someone were to ask you what “service to Mary” means, the best answer is simply to say “the entire way of life described in our Rule.”

Another element not mentioned here is Mary’s role in relation to her servants. This is expressed in a generic way when the celebrant accepts the new members into the Servite family (number 83 of the Rite of the Promise): We shall live in unity of spirit, and “follow the same ideal of life, under the protection of the Blessed Virgin.” As mentioned above, in medieval times the servant would place himself or herself in the service of the lord or lady in return for the protection which the more powerful patron could offer. Our dedication is lived under the protection and with the help of the Virgin Mary.

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1. *What titles of Our Lady are most meaningful to you at the present time? Has that always been true?*
 2. *Do you have a personal program for deepening your knowledge of Our Lady? Does your Secular Community have such a program?*
 3. *What are your thoughts on your dedication or consecration to Our Lady?*



ARTICLE 14

Article 14 concludes this first chapter of the Rule:

Art. 14. The Secular Servants of Mary express a voluntary commitment to be faithful to their proper secular vocation

and to maintain a living bond with the Order by means of the Promise.

The purpose of the Promise which Secular Servites make after the year of probation is to express publicly their commitment to be faithful to the vocation and way of life as found in the Rule, and thereby they also state that they wish to establish and maintain a living bond with the rest of the Servite Order. It is described as a living bond, because it must be constantly nourished in order to grow and remain strong. If this bond is neglected or not sufficiently cared for it will soon wither and die.

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- 1. What obligations did you assume by making the Promise?*
 - 2. What level of priority should be placed on regularly attending the monthly meetings?*
 - 3. How is the living bond which the Promise establishes with the Servite Order nourished?*
 - 4. What could cause this living bond to wither and die?*



CHAPTER 2

THE LIFE OF THE SECULAR COMMUNITY

The second chapter of the Rule of Life is a further explanation of the Secular Order Community which was mentioned in article 11. Article 11 established that the Secular Order Community is modeled on the example of the Seven Holy Founders, and therefore community is presented as part of the spirituality of the Order. The importance of the Secular Community can be inferred from the fact that holiness, which is the goal of all Christian life, is to be attained “according to the spirituality of the Order” (art. 10). Because the Secular Order life is modeled on the life of the Seven Holy Founders, community is presented as the first element of the spirituality of the Order. The way the Secular Servite strives for holiness is not in isolation from others, but in communion with other Secular Servites and the entire Servite Family.

There are seven articles in the second chapter. The first three articles (arts. 15-17) examine the purpose and internal working of the Community; the next three articles (arts. 18-20) treat of the relation-

ship of the Secular Order Community with other groups outside of itself; and finally article 21 deals with financial questions.

ARTICLES 15 AND 17

Articles 15 and 17 give the reasons for which the Secular Order Community meets together:

Art. 15. Following the example of the first Christians who “were of one heart and one mind,” the sisters and brothers of the Servite Secular Order meet together as a sign of their communion and to further their knowledge of each other and to strengthen each other on their journey together toward Christian perfection and in the loving service of all people.

Art. 17. The Secular Community meets to proclaim the Word of God and reflect together on it and to examine and study the Rule, matters of human, social, and religious concern, and issues related to Servite life.

The chapter begins with the example of the unity of heart and mind of the first Christians. This is a reference to the Acts of the Apostles, 4:32, which has had a great influence in the life of the Church and especially in religious orders.

Article 11 has already listed two reasons for community: 1) to be able to give greater service to God, the Blessed Virgin, and their brothers and sisters; and 2) to find the support they need to respond to their special call for holiness. Articles 15 and 17 add to that list, after observing that the meeting is a sign of their communion together:

3) To further their knowledge of each other: The reason for this is not idle curiosity or to gather information for gossip. Indeed the personal knowledge gained at meetings of the Secular Order should

normally be held under a confidentiality which respects each individual person and for that reason makes a free and open discussion possible. The extent of this exchange of knowledge will differ from person to person, simply because each individual feels freer to talk about some more delicate issues with some people and not with others. This article, however, indicates that each member must be interested in all the other members. The meetings, therefore, must be structured in such a way as to make this possible.

4) To strengthen each other on their journey together toward Christian perfection and in the loving service of all people: This is a restatement of the general description of the Secular Order as found in article 10. Members of the Servite Secular Order support each other in their marital, family, and social life, and in their active involvement in the world.

5) To proclaim the Word of God and reflect together on it: Any time a group comes together in the name of the Lord (art. 11), they must listen to what the Lord is saying to them at that particular moment of their lives. Ordinarily the Lord speaks through the word as found in Sacred Scriptures, but as we have seen, the Word of God may also come to us in different ways. Once we have heard the Word, we must reflect on it, so as to make it part of ourselves. The next necessary step is to put it into action. This is not mentioned here, perhaps because it is included in the chapter on apostolate.

6) To examine and study the Rule, matters of human, social, and religious concern, and issues related to Servite life: This is a natural conclusion from article 10. If the members of the Secular Order are to support each other in their marital, family, and social life and in their involvement in the world, it follows that these should be topics of discussion and study at the meetings. Since the Secular Servites strive toward holiness according to the spirituality of the Order, issues relating to Servite life should also be studied. Some examples will show the great variety and wealth of topics which are

available to Secular Servites to use in their meetings. In the decree on the Apostolate of the Laity the Second Vatican Council says that good human relations should be cultivated, and truly human values must be fostered, especially the art of living fraternally with others, cooperating with them, and initiating conversation with them (paragraph 29). These are examples of matters of human concern which a Secular Servite Community might examine and study. It might also study the social doctrines of the Church, or perhaps in a more concrete way, examine the social needs of the area in which the Community is located: e.g. questions of crime, hunger, racism, homelessness, education, etc. Items of religious concern might be some timely issue being discussed at the moment, as current topics about scripture, liturgy, spirituality, spiritual writings.

It is the role of the local Council or perhaps even of the entire membership of the Community to decide what topics should be treated at the meetings and the method in which they should be treated. It would be good for the Council to prepare a program for several months at a time, so that the topics may be fruitfully studied.

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1. *How does being of one heart and mind result in community?*
 2. *How does being in community result in being of one heart and mind?*
 3. *How does the knowledge gained of one another in the meetings promote community?*
 4. *What matters of human, social, or religious concern do you consider to be most critical today, and why?*
 5. *Is there anything we could do about this issue?*



ARTICLE 16

Articles 15 and 17 gave us the general reasons why the Secular Order is formed into Communities and they also made some suggestions for the content of the meetings. Article 16 now speaks very broadly about how the meetings are to be conducted:

Art. 16. All take an active part in the regular meetings which celebrate the life of the Secular Community. With simplicity they offer their personal contribution of experience and ideas.

Although the principles stated in this article might seem self-evident, it is always good to be reminded of them. No member should be merely a passive observer at a Community meeting. While not everyone might be able to speak with academic knowledge on a particular topic, all can contribute from their own personal experience and ideas. For this reason, each member should share these personal thoughts and experiences simply and without show or pretense. It is the role of the person presiding at the meeting to see that no one dominates a meeting to the detriment of a free exchange between all members of the Community, for only in this way can the life of the Community truly be celebrated.

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1. *In what sense do our meetings celebrate the life of our Secular Community?*
 2. *What aspects of our discussions do you consider most beneficial, and why?*
 3. *Besides information, is anything else communicated in our discussions?*
 4. *Do you perceive any growth in beliefs or attitudes resulting from our meeting together?*
 5. *In what way do you feel the meetings provide support to you and other members?*



ARTICLES 18 & 19

After examining the internal working of the Secular Community, the Rule now looks at the relationship between the Secular Community and other groups outside of itself. Each Secular Community must also be mindful of these multiple relationships so that in its meetings and general outlook it does not neglect the world around it.

Art. 18. The Secular Community has living links with the local Church and the local Servite religious community, whose spirituality it shares and in whose apostolic work it takes part.

Art. 19. Whenever possible, sisters and brothers of the Secular Community take part in the prayer life of the religious community, and, when invited, share its renewal sessions, chapters, and meals.

The first two outside relationships mentioned are those of the local Church and the local Servite religious community. Article 8 has already reminded members of the Secular Order that theirs is a vocation within the Church and because of this article 12 insists that they deepen their sense of vocation and mission in the Church and world. Article 39 on the apostolate will emphasize their active role within the Church.

The articles cited above envision more the individual Secular Servite, while article 18 speaks of the Secular Community. Therefore the Secular Community as such must be aware, through its actions, its meetings, the matters which are brought up for discussion, and through its prayers, that it remains an integral part of the larger Church around it. This could be the local parish or the diocese in which it is

located. The local Secular Community must recognize itself as part of this larger reality and show this by its actions.

The local Secular Community also has links with the local Servite religious community. This presumes that the Secular Community is in close proximity to a religious community, that is a community of friars or sisters. When this is not the case, the living link with the Servite Order is maintained through the provincial assistant, correspondence, newsletters, and so forth.

Article 19 specifies some of the ways this living link may be expressed: first by taking part in the prayer life of the religious community. Many Servite communities pray the morning or evening prayer of the Church daily with members of the parish community. This is one way in which Secular Servites may show their relationship with the community of friars or sisters. Other ways suggested are to share in renewal sessions, community chapters, and meals.

The added phrase “when invited” is not meant in a condescending way, but only to indicate that at times these sessions or chapters are directed more specifically to the needs of the friars or sisters. It is also a reminder to the religious community that it should think of planning certain renewal sessions or chapters on topics of common interest with members of the Secular Order and invite them to take part. Such planning itself should normally be done in conjunction with the Secular Community.

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1. *How does your Secular Community have living links with the local Church?*
 2. *If your Secular Community is not near a community of friars or sisters, how does it maintain living links with the rest of the Order?*
 3. *Does your Secular Community take part in the prayer life of the religious community?*



ARTICLE 20

Article 19 dealt with the relationship of the Secular Community with the nearby religious community. Article 20 looks at the relationship with two other groups of Servites:

Art. 20. The Secular Community keeps in constant touch with those sisters and brothers who, because of particular circumstances, are unable to attend the meetings of the group. It encourages them and supports them in heartfelt solidarity and in religious growth. Likewise, it maintains bonds of communion, family spirit, and association with those numerous Families and Groups who share the same Servite vocation and together form one single family. A special attention should be given to communication and collaboration with other lay associations of the Servite Order.

The first group with which the Secular Community should maintain a close relationship is composed of those members who are unable to attend the regular meetings of the Secular Community. There are instances where a member of the Secular Order may not be able to attend meetings for a long time, or might not be in a position to attend meetings at all. This might be due to illness or perhaps because the member has moved some distance from the meeting place of the Secular Community to which he or she belongs and there is no Servite Secular Community in his or her new location. Through correspondence, newsletter, cards, etc. the relationship of encouragement and support in their spiritual growth should be continued. There are also instances of “isolated” Secular Servites, that is, those who no longer belong to a regular Secular Community and live at a distance from any existing communities. This might be a challenge to the local Secular Communities to initiate contact with these persons and creatively examine together ways the “isolated” Servites may participate in the local community.

The bonds of communion must be maintained with the other groups which form the Servite family: friars, contemplative nuns, sisters, members of the Secular Institute, members of other Communities of the Secular Order, and various other lay groups which exist in different countries. The manner these bonds may be established and maintained should be explored by the local Community. One concrete way of maintaining bonds of communion at the present time is through UNIFAS, the International Union of the Servite Family, and its corresponding national units.

Knowledge of the other groups is a first step which can be acquired through reading *Servites in Mission* which has interesting articles on Servites throughout the world. *Cosmo* is a bi-monthly newsletter published by the generalate of the friars in Rome; it contains news not only of the friars, but also of the sisters and lay groups. Once knowledge of these groups is acquired, the Secular Community might discuss how to reach out to some of the groups, either by visiting them or inviting them to come to meetings of the local Community. If distance is a factor, perhaps it might be done by exchanging newsletters, photos, or in other similar ways.

Although not explicitly mentioned here, the local Servite Secular Community should also seek out and establish bonds of communion with other Servite Secular Communities in the area, nation, and also in other countries.

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1. *How can we keep in touch with those who are unable to attend meetings?*
 2. *How would you interpret "unable to attend the meetings of the group"? Give some examples.*
 3. *How can we maintain bonds with other Servite groups?*



ARTICLE 21

Article 21 is the only article which mentions finances and money and then only indirectly:

Art. 21. In the spirit of the beatitudes the Secular Community shares a communion of goods. The members contribute, according to their means, to the expenses of the local, national and international communities, and to the assistance of sisters and brothers in financial difficulties.

The reference to the spirit of the beatitudes in this context is vague, though in article 35 the first beatitude is cited regarding poverty. The meaning of the article, however, is clear, even if it is expressed in very broad and general terms. For example, it mentions that the Secular Community should share its goods. But it does not say what these “goods” are. Implied, of course, is that the Secular Community should have some income, no doubt from the members, and from this income any common expenses should be paid. Any of the members who are in financial difficulties may be helped from the common fund. It may be as simple, for example, as waiving fees for a Secular Order retreat or other activity if at the time the individual cannot afford it.

In practice, this article confirms the fact that the Secular Community is not a fund-raising organization. But each group should establish, by common agreement, what “dues” or contributions should be made by members, and with what frequency. Certainly no one should be excluded from a Secular Community because of inability to pay “dues.” One solution might be simply to have a box in which freewill donations may be anonymously placed at each of the regular meetings.

This article also implies that the Secular Community should have a treasurer among the officers. Since a treasurer is not mentioned among the officers which every Community must have (see articles

70-74), each Community should determine for itself, in its particular statutes, if a treasurer is needed, and if so, the length of term, the manner of election, and the specific duties of the office.

The income from the donations should be sufficient to cover the expenses of the Community; excess money may be used as donations to some worthwhile Servite cause or other urgent need. All decisions in this regard should be made by the Community itself.

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1. *How can your Secular Order Community contribute to the expenses of the local, national, and international communities?*



CHAPTER 3

PRAYER

The second great theme in the life of the Secular Servite after community is prayer. The ten articles on prayer make this the longest chapter in the Rule. We should not expect to find here, however, a formal treatise on prayer. Rather there are some general suggestions and useful guidelines, and the Secular Servite should use these as an incentive to read more about prayer and thereby come to a greater understanding of the role of prayer in his or her life.

The following outline will help to understand better the material found in this chapter, although in the commentary we shall proceed according to the number of the article.

- 1) Necessity of prayer (art. 22, also mentioned in art. 23)
- 2) Definition of prayer (art. 24)
- 3) Jesus and Mary as examples of prayer (arts. 23, 24)
- 4) Forms or types of prayer:
 - Personal prayer (art. 23)

- Prayer in common (art. 25)
- Liturgical prayer (art. 26)
 - a) Eucharist (arts. 27-28)
 - b) Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church (art. 28)
- Prayers in honor of the Blessed Virgin (art. 29)
- Prayers for deceased members of the Servite family (art. 30)
- 5) Days of recollection (art. 31)
- (6) Two aspects of prayers which are not mentioned:
 - other forms of prayer
 - obligation of reciting certain prayers

ARTICLE 22

Article 22 centers on the necessity of prayer, but as can be seen from the above outline, article 23 also mentions personal prayer as a necessity.

Art. 22. Prayer is an essential duty for every Christian. But for the Secular Servites who have chosen to follow Christ, his example, and his teaching, it constitutes a special commitment to growth in faith and hope and to bringing the commandment of love to perfection.

There are many “definitions” of prayer, one of which is suggested in article 24. But no matter how one defines it, prayer always includes an expression of a living and vital relationship with God. Therefore, by definition, it is essential in every Christian life. Without prayer there is no personal, conscious relationship with God, a relationship which flows both ways: from God to the individual and from the individual back to God. We certainly have other relationships with

God, for example the relationship of creature to Creator. But only in prayer do we consciously acknowledge these relationships.

Of greater importance to us here is that prayer is seen as a means of bringing the commandment of love to perfection. In article 9 we saw that by accepting the gift of their vocation Secular Servites commit themselves “to bring to fulfillment the evangelical commandment of love.” Now the Rule states explicitly that prayer is a means of achieving this. Prayer contributes not only to growth in love but also to growth in faith and hope.

The description of the Secular Servite given here also deserves comment. The Secular Servite is one who has chosen to follow Christ, his example, and his teaching. In his encyclical *The Splendor of Truth* Pope John Paul II gives a detailed reflection on the encounter of the young man with Christ and Christ’s invitation to him to “Come, follow me.” First he makes it clear that every believer is called to be a follower of Christ, not merely the Twelve to whom this invitation was first addressed in the Gospels (no. 18). Pope John Paul explains also in what the following of Christ consists:

This is not a matter only of disposing oneself to hear a teaching and obediently accepting a commandment. More radically, it involves holding fast to the very person of Jesus, partaking of his life and destiny, sharing in his free and loving obedience to the will of the Father (no. 19) . . .

Following Christ is not an outward imitation, since it touches us at the very depths of our being. Being a follower of Christ means becoming conformed to him who became a servant even to giving himself on the Cross (see Phil 2:5-8). Christ dwells by faith in the heart of the believer (see Eph 3:17), and thus the disciple is conformed to the Lord (no. 21).

This article therefore establishes the necessity for prayer in the life of the Secular Servite and adds that it contributes to the fulfillment of a basic commitment of Servite life, the Lord’s commandment of love.

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1. *What comes first, faith in and love for God, or prayer?*
 2. *How do faith and hope differ?*
 3. *What would constitute bring the commandment of love to perfection?*



ARTICLE 23

After looking at prayer in a very general way in the previous article, the Rule of Life now becomes more specific:

Art. 23. Secular Servites know well that to live constantly in God's presence, personal, silent, and hidden prayer is a necessity, as Jesus Himself so wonderfully exemplified.

Three things are affirmed in this article: First, that living constantly in God's presence is an ideal related to prayer; second, that personal, silent, and hidden prayer is a necessary means to attain this; and third, that Jesus gives us an example in this regard.

One of the themes often found in the writings of the saints is the exercise of the presence of God. God is indeed present everywhere, as Psalm 139 reminds us:

You search me, Lord, and know me.
 Wherever I sit or stand,
 you read my inmost thoughts;
 whenever I walk or rest,
 you know where I have been.
 . . .
 Where can I hide from you?
 How can I escape your presence?
 I scale the heavens, you are there!
 I plunge to the depths, you are there!

St. Paul told the Athenians: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). This is true from both the natural and supernatural point of view. As creator God gives existence to all creatures and preserves them in being. But he also shares his divine life with us, through Christ and the Holy Spirit.

To live constantly in God’s presence is therefore to recognize and bring to our consciousness a reality which exists quite independently of our adverting to it. We find God’s presence not only in all creation around us, but in particular within ourselves. As we become more conscious of God’s presence around and within us, we are more careful to avoid sin and are more zealous to serve God.

How can we achieve this great ideal of the saints? The Rule states that a necessary means to live always in God’s presence is personal, silent, and hidden prayer. In later articles the Rule states also the necessity of communal and vocal prayer. But if we wish to attain an abiding consciousness of God’s presence, we must necessarily reflect within ourselves, in the words of our heart and soul. Even Vatican II’s Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy recognizes the true importance of personal and silent prayer:

The spiritual life, however, is not confined to participation in the liturgy. The Christian is assuredly called to pray with his brethren, but he must also enter into his chamber to pray to the Father in secret (cf. Mt. 6:6) (no. 12).

Finally, the Gospels provide us with several examples of Jesus seeking a solitary place to pray in the silence of his heart:

“Rising early the next morning, Jesus went off to a lonely place in the desert; there he was absorbed in prayer” (Mk 1:35).

“When Jesus had taken leave of his disciples, he went off to the mountain to pray” (Mk 6:46).

“He often retired to deserted places and prayed” (Lk 5:16).

1. *What do you think to live constantly in God's presence means and consists of?*
2. *Are we ourselves capable of bringing this about?*



ARTICLE 24

Article 24 continues the discussion of prayer by adopting a short description of prayer and it then cites the example of Mary.

Art. 24. Prayer is a meeting with God in faith; on this journey the Blessed Virgin, the highest example of a person of prayer, is the sure guide and support of Secular Servites.

There are many definitions or descriptions of prayer. The Catechism of the Catholic Church cites two. The first is by St. Thérèse of Lisieux: “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” The second is by St. John Damascene: “Prayer is the raising of one’s mind and heart to God or the requesting of good things from God” (nos. 2558-2559). The Secular Order Rule presents a simpler description: prayer is a meeting with God in faith. The descriptions of St. Thérèse and St. John Damascene seem to imply a going out of ourselves, a look toward heaven, a raising of heart to God. The description in the Rule, however, does not try to “locate” the meeting place with God. It can take place “up” in heaven, or within the individual. The concept of place, which is certainly metaphorical and not to be taken literally in the other descriptions, is lacking in favor of the essential element that the individual and God must meet. But this meeting can take place only in faith. If God is known by faith, this is the only way such a meeting could take place. Without faith, there can be no prayer.

The example of the prayer of the Virgin Mary is explained more fully in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (nos. 2617-2619):

... her prayer cooperates in a unique way with the Father's plan of loving kindness: at the Annunciation, for Christ's conception; at Pentecost, for the formation of the Church, his Body. In the faith of his humble handmaid, the Gift of God found the acceptance he had awaited from the beginning of time. She whom the Almighty made "full of grace" responds by offering her whole being: "Behold I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be [done] to me according to your word."

The Gospel reveals to us how Mary prays and intercedes in faith. At Cana, the mother of Jesus asks her son for the needs of a wedding feast; [. . .] It is at the hour of the New Covenant, at the foot of the cross, that Mary is heard as the Woman, the new Eve, the true "Mother of all the living."

That is why the Canticle of Mary, the Magnificat (Latin) or Megalynei (Byzantine) is the song both of the Mother of God and of the Church; the song of the Daughter of Zion and of the new People of God; the song of thanksgiving for the fullness of graces poured out in the economy of salvation and the song of the "poor" whose hope is met by the fulfillment of the promises made to our ancestors, "to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

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1. *What has Mary taught you about prayer?*
 2. *What qualities of prayer does this reflect?*
 3. *Has Jesus taught any of the same things about prayer?*
 4. *What do we learn about prayer from her fiat response at the Annunciation?*
 5. *What do we learn about prayer from her response at Cana, Do whatever He tells you?*
 6. *What would be your definition of prayer?*



ARTICLE 25

From personal, hidden prayer the Rule now passes to common prayer:

Article 25. Faithful to their vocation, Secular Servites attach great importance to common prayer; together with their sisters and brothers they explore the depths of the Word of God and intercede for all people and the world itself.

One notes immediately the difference in motivation from personal prayer: personal prayer is necessary in order to live in God's presence; but common prayer belongs directly to the vocation of the Secular Servites. This is because the vocation of a Secular Servite is one of community, and therefore to fulfill this part of the Servite Secular vocation an important prayer form is common prayer, that is, prayer which is prayed together with other members of the Secular Order. One of the ways members give mutual support (see art. 10) is by prayer with and for each other.

What form should this common prayer take? Liturgical prayer, a special type of common prayer, is taken up in the next three articles, so at this point the Rule calls attention to two other possible forms. First, the community may use the Word of God, the Bible, as a basis for prayer within the community or among members of the community. One way of gaining a greater understanding of the meaning of scriptures as well as its practical application to ourselves, is to pray over the scriptures. One might also note that this is not the same as "proclaiming" and even "reflecting" on the Word of God as found in article 17. Article 17 stresses the intellectual activity of study and reflection, rather than using the text as a meeting place with God in order to listen more carefully to God speaking to us, and to formulate our own response to God's Word. It is more similar to the concept in article 12, which states that the Secular Servites

deepen their sense of vocation and mission through listening to the Word of God and prayer.

The second form of common prayer suggested in this article is intercessory prayer for all people and for the world. This certainly does not exhaust the possible types of common prayer (as will be mentioned at greater length at the end of the chapter), and so these two forms (praying Scriptures and intercessory prayers) should be taken as typical and wide-spread forms of common prayer, but not to the exclusion of other forms.

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1. *Why is common prayer important for our Secular Servite Community?*
 2. *Besides at our monthly meetings, is there any other way our Community members can pray together in common prayer?*
 3. *How do we pray the Scriptures?*
 4. *How does this differ from Bible, reading, study, and reflection?*
 5. *Where does Scriptural meditation fit into the above exercise?*



ARTICLE 26

If the Rule says that personal prayer is a “necessity,” and common prayer is of “great importance,” in article 26 it gives liturgical prayer a priority of place:

Art. 26. Among the various forms of prayer, liturgical prayer holds priority of place. Secular Servites participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

Liturgical prayer includes the Mass, the sacraments, the Liturgy of the Hours, and Benediction. The primacy of liturgical prayer in the spiritual life of the members of the Secular Order merely applies

a basic teaching of Vatican II's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to Secular Order members and provides the reason for its place of priority:

The liturgy is the summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the fountain from which all her power flows. For the goal of apostolic works is that all who are made children of God by faith and baptism should come together to praise God in the midst of His Church, to take part in her sacrifice, and to eat the Lord's supper (no. 10).

Since the liturgy includes both the Mass and the sacraments, the statement that Secular Servites should participate in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church probably should be taken not as a mere redundancy but as a more explicit way of stating that both Mass and sacraments are important elements in the spiritual life of the Secular Servites. Regarding the sacraments specific reference is made to the Eucharist in articles 27 and 28, and to the sacrament of reconciliation in article 34.

The following two articles specify this participation in greater detail.

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1. *What is liturgical prayer?*
 2. *Why is it so important?*
 3. *What are some ways to properly participate in liturgical prayer?*
 4. *What do you think about the saying *Lex orandi, lex credendi*, that is, that the rule of prayer determines the rule of faith, i.e. that the liturgy is the most effective means of preserving and interpreting the true faith?*



ARTICLE 27

Among the many forms of liturgical prayer the Mass is seen as the most important:

Art. 27. In the Eucharist the sisters and brothers of the Secular Community recognize that they make present the Passover of the Lord and establish a bond of love between themselves and all humanity. The Eucharist is the sacramental sign of communion and the highest expression of prayer.

This article too is based on the teaching of Vatican II. In the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) the Eucharist is called the source and summit of the Christian life (no. 11) and by partaking of the body of the Lord we are taken up into communion with Him and with one another (no. 7); and the Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests points out that the Eucharist contains the Church's entire spiritual wealth, that is Christ Himself, our Passover and living bread (no. 5).

Thus among the many aspects of the Mass, the *Rule of Life* presents several for the deeper consideration of Secular Order members. It is the highest form of prayer which the members may use to meet God in faith, and since it is in the partaking of the Eucharist that the many members of Christ become one body, so too the Eucharist is the sign of the unity of the local Secular Community. Among the effects of the Eucharist the Rule notes two: first the members make present the death and resurrection of the Lord and they also establish a bond of love which unites them not only among themselves but to the whole world.

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1. *How would you explain your belief in, and love of the Eucharist, to an interested non-Catholic?*
 2. *How does the Mass make the Passover of the Lord present?*

3. *Why is the Mass the highest expression of prayer?*
4. *How is the Eucharist a sign of our communion?*



ARTICLE 28

This article continues the theme of liturgical prayer:

Art. 28. Secular Servites take an active part in the Mass; whenever possible, they participate in the Mass of the local Servite religious community. They also try to take part often in the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church.

From the reading of this article it is apparent that there are three disjointed and quite independent thoughts, which are suggested here for the guidance of Secular Servites. The first two deal with the Mass and the third with the Liturgy of the Hours.

1) Although it may not seem necessary to state a principle valid for all the faithful, perhaps the first clause of this article was added as a special reminder to members of the Secular Order that they should not be merely passive observers at Mass. The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states that it is a duty of pastors of souls “to ensure that the faithful take part knowingly, actively, and fruitfully” in the Mass (no. 11). This would include the various types of ministries related to the Mass, as for example, minister of music, lector, communion minister, usher. But Secular Servites should not only strive to perform certain useful ministries according to their talents, but they should be attentive to the sacred action taking place and enter into it fully so as to derive the fullest benefit.

2) The second section of this article, that Secular Servites should participate in the Mass of the local Servite religious community, presumes that the Secular Community is located in close proximity to a community of Servite friars or sisters. While this is certainly an

ideal, there are several reasons why for the most part it will remain hard to put into practice. First of all, there are Secular Communities which are not located near a Servite religious community, and therefore it is never possible. Furthermore, the article seems to envision a conventual Mass where all the religious of the community come together for the celebration of Mass, and it is in this Mass that the Secular Servites should participate. However, in most communities which have charge of a parish, most often the priests of the community will be needed for the parish Masses; and because of the shortage of priests, most convents of sisters do not have Mass in their own chapels (if indeed their living quarters have a chapel). It would be better, therefore, to look at the value promoted by this section of the article, namely that Secular and religious Servites should pray together whenever possible, and at times arrange for a common celebration of Mass.

3) Finally, the article suggests that Secular Servites take part in the Morning and Evening Prayer of the Church. The Rule seems to make this of lesser importance than participation in the Mass of the local Servite religious community (they also try to take part. . .). The practice of celebrating Morning and Evening Prayer in parish churches is becoming more common, and, as is shown by articles in popular Catholic magazines and newspapers, lay men and women in greater numbers are praying the Liturgy of the Hours daily. Therefore this article should be interpreted in both senses: that the Secular Order members take part in praying the Liturgy of the Hours when it is done publicly in their parish church or with a religious community, but they should also be encouraged to pray the Liturgy of the Hours privately each day so as to unite themselves more closely with religious Servants of Mary and also with the entire Church.

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1. *What is one of the most meaningful parts or features of the Mass for you, and why?*
 2. *What have you found helps you get more out of the Mass?*

3. *What is the greatest distraction for you at Mass?*
- 4). *What preferences do you have concerning the ways Mass is celebrated?*
5. *What do you think about the Liturgy of the Hours?*
6. *What problems have you encountered in praying the Liturgy of the Hours?*



ARTICLE 29

The Rule now passes to the question of prayers to Our Lady and specifically Servite prayers:

Art. 29. In accordance with the traditions of the Order, the Secular Community shows special honor to the Blessed Virgin by means of particular acts of devotion such as the Hail Mary, the Vigil of the Blessed Virgin, and the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows; it celebrates as family feasts the principal Marian feasts of the Order and the local Church, and keeps the memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows, as well as the solemnities and memorials of the saints and blessed of the Servite Order.

The Marian devotion of the Secular Community is marked as being part of the tradition of the Order. First, three Marian devotions are listed; then there is a list of five types of feasts which should be celebrated. Because of the importance of this article, we shall consider each of these separately and see how they are connected with the traditions of the Order.

1) It should first be noted that the Hail Mary, the Vigil of Our Lady, and the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows are mentioned here simply as examples of the Marian devotions practiced in the Order. These are named because they are the most common of the Servite Marian devotions, but an individual might prefer others which are not listed here. Some other forms of Marian devotions are the

dedication of Saturdays to Our Lady, the Desolata on Good Friday, the Novena to Our Sorrowful Mother, the Via Matris, the praying of the Hail, Holy Queen.

a) Regarding the Hail Mary, the earliest Servite Constitutions which have come down to us, dating from the end of the 1200s, prescribed that the Hail Mary be recited before each “hour” of the Liturgy of the Hours and before any of the readings. At the time the Order was founded in the thirteenth century, the “Angelic Salutation” consisted primarily of the words of the Angel Gabriel: “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” To this was at times joined the salutation of Elizabeth: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Only in the 1400s was the name “Jesus” added to identify the “fruit of your womb.” At times an intercessory prayer was then added, but it was only toward the end of the 1400s and into the 1500s that the present wording, “Holy Mary, Mother of God...,” became common.

Therefore, before the recitation of Morning or Evening Prayers, or any other prayer of the Liturgy of the Hours, the more ancient form is used and the leader begins: “Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you”; to which the assembly replies: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus.”

The Hail Mary was always a favorite prayer among Servites. The lives of both Blessed Joachim of Siena and Blessed Francis of Siena relate that in their youth they recited the Angelic Salutation frequently. The earliest rule of the Secular Order (1424) prescribed that when the hours of the Divine Office could not be recited they were to be replaced by a certain number of Hail Marys and Our Fathers. The Hail Mary should also be a common and favored prayer of Secular Servites today.

b) The Vigil of Our Lady follows the pattern of the hour of the Divine Office which was recited at midnight: there are three psalms followed by three readings and two responsories, and after the third

reading the Hail, Holy Queen is sung or recited. The earliest Servite Constitutions provided that it should be prayed every evening.

The original form of the Vigil of Our Lady, together with a contemporary version which follows the same form (three psalms, three readings and two responsories, and the *Salve Regina*) were recently published by the Servite International Liturgical Commission in Rome.

The introduction to this recent publication provides useful background information about this Marian prayer. The Vigil of Our Lady was not composed by members of the Servite Order nor is it a prayer found only in our Order. It was used in substantially the same form by other religious orders which arose prior to our own. Its origins can be placed within the context of the Marian piety which developed among religious orders between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, first in monastic then in mendicant communities.

According to this same introduction the Vigil of Our Lady has become our characteristic homage to Mary:

With the passing of centuries, the Vigil has become a prayer form proper to us Servants of Mary, our characteristic homage to the Virgin. We can say this for a number of reasons: the very early date at which it was adopted; the love with which it has been preserved and passed on; the significance which has been attached to it as a prayer of thanksgiving for the approval of the Order and distinctive symbol of our Marian piety; the great esteem in which it has been held by our authors and the friars of every age; and finally, the fact that ours is the only mendicant order which has continuously mentioned and recommended the Vigil in its various constitutional texts down to the present day.

The Secular Servite can therefore gain much profit by a daily, or at least weekly praying of the Vigil of Our Lady. The introduction (as found in the first English edition) provides ample explanations of the form of this prayer and also how to pray the psalms and readings which have been chosen.

c) The Servite International Liturgical Commission has recently published a booklet about the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows or the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows as it is also called. It notes that: “The origins of the Rosary of Our Lady of Sorrows are not well known. They would seem to coincide with the development of devotion to the Sorrowful Mother at the beginning of the seventeenth century.” In this publication the Liturgical Commission retains the traditional form of the Rosary: one Our Father and seven Hail Marys for each of the seven sorrows of Mary. But it also proposes three other ways of reciting the rosary. While retaining the basic structure of the rosary, these introduce slight modifications which give some variety to the prayer of the rosary, and therefore provide an opportunity to reflect on other aspects of Mary’s sorrows. It is an enriching experience to pray the rosary using the various forms.

2) Certain feasts should be celebrated as family feasts. This means that they should be celebrated “both in the liturgy and in other fraternal ways” (see the friars’ Constitutions, art. 27). That is, the celebration should include, but not be restricted to, the Mass and the Liturgy of the Hours. The “other fraternal ways” could include sharing a meal together, refreshments, conviviality. Article 29 then lists four types of feasts. Unfortunately the English translation does not render well the clearer listing of five types of feasts in the original Italian of this article. We follow here the Italian:

a) The principal feasts of the Order: Since the feasts of Our Lady and the Servite saints are listed separately, we will consider here only those feasts which do not fall into either of these categories. There are, for example, the feasts of St. Augustine, lawgiver of our Order (Aug. 28), the dedication of the Basilica of Monte Senario (Sept. 22), the feast of All Saints of the Order (Nov. 16), and the remembrance of all deceased friars, sisters, parents, relatives and friends of the Order (Nov. 17).

b) Feasts of Our Lady: The principal feasts of Our Lady include the Immaculate Conception, the Birth of Our Lady, the Annunciation, Purification, Our Lady of Sorrows, and the Assumption.

c) Local feasts of Mary would be the patronal feast of the local parish, diocese, or nation, e.g., the Immaculate Conception as patroness of the United States; in Mexico and also in the United States the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated.

d) The celebrations in honor of Our Lady of Sorrows are given special mention: the solemnity of Our Lady of Sorrows (Sept. 15) and the feast of Our Lady at the foot of the Cross (Friday of the Fifth Week of Lent).

e) And finally the feasts of the saints and blessed of the Servite Order. For a short reflection on each of these feasts, you might read Fr. Joseph Chamblain's *Servants of Mary: Reflections on the Servite Saints and Blessed* (Chicago 1988). The *Prayer Book of the Servite Secular Order* (Chicago 2002) presents a short remembrance to be prayed on the feasts or memorials of our saints and blessed. The remembrance consists of a hymn, antiphon, psalm, life of the saint or blessed, and a prayer.

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1. *What is one of your favorite Marian devotions, and why?*
 2. *Vatican II's Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium) exhorts us to avoid the falsity of exaggeration on one hand and the excess of narrow-mindedness on the other in treating the unique dignity of the Mother of God: What departures from this principal in either direction have you observed?*



ARTICLE 30

Article 30 is an exhortation to pray for deceased members of the Secular Order:

Art. 30. Secular Servites will pray often for their departed sisters and brothers, imploring the Lord's mercy on their behalf. On the day of death and of burial of a sister or brother, the Secular Servite will join in the bereavement of the family by offering the appropriate prayers for the repose of the soul of the deceased.

The first part of this article speaks only in general terms. It does not specify how often one should pray, what prayers one should recite, whether it is directed at the individual or community, or whether the object of the prayers is primarily the members of one's own community, of the same country, or for deceased Secular Order members throughout the world.

This might be one article the members of the Secular Order Community will want to specify in greater detail in their particular statutes. As a minimum, however, the deceased members of the local community and deceased members throughout the world should be remembered in prayer at each meeting of the Secular Community. Those who attend Mass daily will want to remember them either at the general intercessions or at the point in the Eucharistic Prayer where all the dead are remembered. Those who pray the Liturgy of the Hours should remember them at the invocation for the dead at the end of the intercessions in Evening Prayer.

The second part of the article envisions a more particular instance: the death of a member of the local Secular Order Community. In this case all the members should be present to the relatives of the deceased in their grief and should offer appropriate prayers according to the local customs.

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1. *What do we learn from the Gospels about how Jesus showed compassion for the bereaved?*
 2. *What thoughts and feelings come to your mind and heart when you meditate on the Sixth and Seventh Sorrows of Mary?*

3. *What should we do as individuals and as a community to join in the bereavement of the family members of a departed Secular Servite?*



ARTICLE 3 I

The last article in the chapter on prayer recalls the need for longer periods of prayer:

Art. 31. It is one of the duties of the Secular Community to organize regular days or periods of recollection, in which all the sisters and brothers strive to participate.

Growth in the spiritual life requires not only a daily rhythm of prayer which accompanies our usual work, school, or home routine. It also needs periods which break the routine of time and place so that for shorter, more intense periods we can reflect with calm and ease on our journey to God. The Rule therefore wisely states that it is a duty (not merely an exhortation) of the Secular Community to organize days of recollection, weekend retreats, and other spiritual opportunities to become more aware not only of God in our lives but also of each other. Ordinarily these should be away from the usual meeting place of the Community. The council or special committee will be able to design the day or days so that they respond to the needs of the Community. The article leaves wide latitude with regard to length, place, frequency, and content.

Just as the Community as a whole has a duty to organize these, each member must “strive to participate.” Participation should be viewed not as an obligation to be fulfilled, but as an opportunity as each strives toward holiness to be that mutual support to each other as expressed in article 10.

1. *What are examples of Servite days of recollection you have attended since becoming a Secular Servite?*
2. *What do you consider the most beneficial aspects of those days of recollection?*
3. *What kind of days of recollection would you like to see in the future?*



TWO ASPECTS OF PRAYER NOT MENTIONED IN THIS CHAPTER

To complete this exposition on prayer, it is necessary to consider two aspects that are not contained in these articles.

1) First, there are forms of prayer which are not mentioned. Certain types of prayer are encouraged: personal, common, and liturgical prayer, devotional prayers to Our Lady, and prayers for deceased members of the Secular Order. This chapter should not be interpreted as to imply that only these forms of prayer should be used. Among forms not mentioned are charismatic prayer, meditation, and centering prayer, to name just a few. The prayer forms mentioned are the more common ones and without doubt the more important ones, such as liturgical prayer. But the list of examples of prayer is not meant to be complete. Each individual must search for that form or those forms of prayer which he or she needs at the present moment, and should not hesitate to investigate and try other forms, even if they are not mentioned here. The opening statement of this chapter should be remembered: Prayer is an essential duty for every Christian. How we pray, however, must be tailored to each person's needs.

2) Second, this chapter does not oblige members to pray any particular form of prayer. This is different from previous versions of the Rule. When the rule was first published in 1424 every member was obliged to recite the entire Divine Office, or if they were not able to

do that, a certain number of Hail Marys and Our Fathers for each of the hours of the Divine Office. The Rule approved in 1966 gave as an obligation one of the following: The Office of Our Lady, the shortened Divine Office, the Vigil of Our Lady, the Rosary of the Seven Sorrows, twelve Our Fathers, Hail Marys, and Glorias, or the Hail Mary before and after work and before and after meals.

Since no one particular form of prayer is obligatory for all, it means that each member of the Secular Order must draw up a rhythm of prayer which corresponds to his or her present needs and possibilities. It would even be good to write this rhythm of prayer down so that it can serve as a check. I say “rhythm” because in our prayer life we might have a daily pattern, a weekly pattern, a monthly pattern, and a yearly pattern; or we might follow the rhythm of the liturgical year: a rhythm for Advent and Lent, for the Christmas and Easter seasons, and for Ordinary Time. We have the opportunity now to choose those forms which serve us best. The monthly meetings might also serve as a check-point to see if we are living up to the programs which we have set before ourselves. There are many possibilities and each Secular Order Community must search out the one which is best for it.

CHAPTER 4

PENANCE AND CONVERSION

After treating the community aspect of the life of the Secular Order members (chapter 2) and prayer (chapter 3), the Rule now passes to a short consideration of penance in the life of the Secular Servites. In the pre-Vatican II version of the Rule this chapter was entitled “Fasting, Penance, Mortification.” In the present Rule penance is seen in relationship to conversion. In this respect this chapter is based upon chapter 10 of the friars’ Constitutions, also entitled “Penance and Conversion.” In English there are two words which translate the Italian *penitenza*: penitence and penance. Although they can be used as synonyms, “penitence” generally implies a state or quality of repentance in a person while “penance” frequently implies an outward action. In this chapter the word “penance” bears the burden of both meanings, but usually the context will indicate which is to be preferred.

ARTICLE 32

Article 32 brings into relationship with each other the three concepts of penance, conversion, and the commandment of charity:

Art. 32. For Secular Servites, dedicated to bringing the commandment of charity to perfection, penance is a Gospel value and a sure means of conversion.

According to this article the ultimate goal for Secular Servites is the bringing of the commandment of charity to perfection. This was first stated in article 9: by the acceptance of their vocation the Servants of Mary commit themselves to bring to fulfillment the evangelical commandment of love. In article 22 prayer is presented as constituting a special commitment to bringing the commandment of love to perfection.

Now in article 32 two other dimensions of our life take their place with prayer in aiding the Secular Servite to attain this goal: penance and conversion, and penance (perhaps meaning repentance) is seen as leading to conversion. The relationship between these two acts is at times ambiguous. Conversion in its most common meaning, as found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 1432), is a work of the grace of God who makes our hearts return to God. Penance is some voluntary, and normally difficult action, we undertake as expiation for sin or to direct our steps toward God and away from those things which will distract us from God.

Which comes first, penance or conversion? The Secular Servite, as presented in article 32, has already experienced the first conversion which culminates in baptism. Thus this article envisions only the ongoing conversion: we are called daily to conversion. One might see here the experience of many Catholics during Lent and Easter: Lent is a period when we perform those acts of penance which make us more conscious of God's absence in our lives, and

therefore we turn to God once more with greater fervor at Easter. The renewal of our baptismal promises at Easter signifies a further conversion toward God. The acts of penance, therefore, lead to the Easter conversion.

But there is also another way of looking at the relationship between penance and conversion. The Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 1434), looks upon the acts of penance as an expression of conversion. The Catechism cites the three most important forms of penance as found in Scriptures and the Fathers—fasting, prayer, and almsgiving—as expressing our conversion in relation to ourselves, to God, and to others.

Certainly, however, we can agree with article 32 that both the penitential acts, which lead to and flow from our continued returning to God, and the conversion itself will help us to bring the commandment of love to perfection in our lives.

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1. *What is the essence of penance?*
 2. *What are some examples of penance?*
 3. *Is there a difference between penance and mortification?*
 4. *What is conversion?*
 5. *How do penance and conversion relate to the perfection of charity?*



ARTICLE 33

While article 32 states the importance of penance and conversion in the life of the Secular Servite, article 33 identifies the type of penance which the Secular Servite should undertake:

Art. 33. Following the example of our first Fathers and the tradition of the Order, penance for Secular Servites consists

primarily of charity, understood as acceptance and service of one another.

The primary penance to be practiced by Secular Servites is to accept one another and to be of service to one another.

Although this article seems to indicate that the acceptance and service are directed to other members of the Servite family, certainly the meaning is that it should be extended to all other people as well.

This penance is particularly difficult because the actual practice of it does not fall under our control. We do not have control over the personalities of the people we come in contact with; we cannot say when difficult situations in their lives will spill over and create tensions which we must “accept”; we cannot just be accepting of others at our convenience and not at their need. We have no control. If penance is to serve the needs of others, we cannot control what these needs will be nor when we will be asked to serve them.

It is for that reason that penance understood in this sense is a particular characteristic of Christians in general and of Secular Servites in particular.

Although it is stated that this is based on the example of the Seven Holy Founders and the tradition of the Order, I am not aware of any studies which show this understanding of penance to be truly traditional in the Order.

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1. *Is acceptance and service of others almost too simple to pose much of a challenge?*
 2. *What factor actually makes this most difficult?*
 3. *What do you think of the claim in the old Rule that there is no penance more meritorious and acceptable to God than patiently bearing the trials of life?*
 4. *How practical and realistic would it be to follow the example of our Holy Founders of whom the Legenda says: “Their friendship made*

them so one in mind that they tried to please each other in all things human and divine”?



ARTICLE 34

The general principle that penance should consist primarily in acceptance of and service to one another is now further specified in article 34:

Art. 34. Convinced that the following of Christ requires a constant orientation toward the will of God, Secular Servites are alert to the many opportunities everyday life offers for practicing penance, regarding them as graces and calls to conversion. They make frequent use of the sacrament of reconciliation, the works of mercy, and the virtue of moderation, particularly during the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent.

The first part of this article applies the practice of penance as found in article 33 to the principle annunciated in article 32: the trials and difficulties which we encounter in our daily lives are indeed opportunities for true acts of penance, and these acts of penance are graces (that is, gifts from God, because they lead us to God) and calls to conversion (that is, a call to leave aside those things which have distracted us from God and to return to God).

One might also add that by turning more fully to God we cannot help but be more accepting of others and ready to help them in their needs. Thus conversion can also lead us back to penance. In a certain way, therefore, penance is a means of conversion (as the Rule states), but conversion may also be viewed as leading to penance.

This article then lists three more specific applications of penance:

1) First, Secular Servites should make frequent use of the sacrament of reconciliation. It might be especially important to note this

at the present time when the sacrament of reconciliation or penance is not received as frequently as in the past. But we should hasten to add that no particular frequency is recommended, for example, once a week, once a month, etc.

2) They also make frequent use of works of mercy. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is helpful here in giving us a better understanding of this term:

The works of mercy are charitable actions by which we come to the aid of our neighbor in his spiritual and bodily necessities. Instructing, advising, consoling, comforting are spiritual works of mercy, as are forgiving and bearing wrongs patiently. The corporal works of mercy consist especially in feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, clothing the naked, visiting the sick and imprisoned, and burying the dead. Among all these, giving alms to the poor is one of the chief witnesses to fraternal charity: it is also a work of justice pleasing to God (no. 2447).

3) Thirdly, Secular Servites are urged to follow the virtue of moderation. “Virtue” is used here in a general way, as a firm disposition to do good, for we do not speak often of the “virtue” of moderation. The meaning here seems to be that practices of penance (perhaps understood here more in the traditional sense of fasting and abstinence) should be kept within reasonable limits and excessive or extreme desires to practice penances should be tempered, though moderation should also be practiced in things which give pleasure.

Finally it might be mentioned that the concept of equating penance with the daily trials and problems we all face is not entirely new. This element is found also in the pre-Vatican II edition of the Rule which states that members of the Secular Order “should be mindful of the fact that there is no penance more meritorious and pleasing to God than to bear patiently the trials of daily life.” What is new in the current Rule of Life is that fasting and abstinence are not also required.

The article ends with the recommendations that penance, understood in this way, be practiced especially during Advent and Lent.

1. *What opportunities has your everyday life offered for practicing penance?*
2. *Did you consider them to be graces?*
3. *Did they lead you to conversion?*
4. *How does Confession help you?*
5. *What is the virtue of moderation and how would you practice it?*
6. *What work of mercy do you have the greatest opportunity to perform?*



CHAPTER 5

THE WITNESS OF POVERTY

This chapter is composed of only two articles. As with the other chapters the first article is in the form of a general principle from which the second article draws more specific and practical norms. One might also note that only penance (chapter 4) and now poverty were thought to be sufficiently significant or specific in the spirituality of the Secular Servite as to warrant special treatment. Other virtues and exercises of a devout life are presumed but are not the subject of an entire chapter.

ARTICLE 35

Article 35 states simply that:

Art. 35. The Secular Servant of Mary strives to live the evangelical beatitude “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven,” following the example of Mary, poor and humble servant of the Lord.

In this regard the Secular Servant of Mary, or any Servant of Mary, is called to that norm to which all followers of Christ are held. It was enunciated by Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:3). The meaning of “poor in spirit” has been interpreted in many different ways by those who have studied the scriptures and also by those who have meditated on these words of Jesus. But the Secular Servants of Mary are given here an aid in applying the first beatitude to their lives: it is to be interpreted as the way Mary lived, a poor and humble servant of the Lord. Article 47 provides further insight into how this Rule looks upon the life of Mary: she shared a life which is common to all, full of family worries and hard work. A life of poverty, the relationship which the Secular Servites have with material goods, should be a life which is not distinguished from the people among whom they live, and one which is characterized by hard work. This poverty, following the example of Mary, is not seen as an end in itself, but as a means of rendering service to the Lord.

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1. *What does the beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” mean to you?*
 2. *What does the concluding phrase, “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven,” tell us about the “poor in spirit”?*
 3. *What comparison could you draw between this beatitude and Jesus’ statement, “My kingdom is not of this world”?*
 4. *How do you think Mary lived this beatitude?*
 5. *How should we go about implementing this beatitude in our lives?*
 6. *What difficulties could living this beatitude pose for us personally and in our relationships with family and others?*



ARTICLE 36

The second and last article in this chapter gives more specific indica-

tions both of what practices of poverty should be part of the Secular Servite's life and also in what way they constitute a "witness:"

Art. 36. By conscientious work, simplicity and austerity of life style, sensitivity to the needs of others, and service to those most in need, the Secular Servants of Mary give testimony of their love for the poor Christ, both individually and communally, and proclaim to the people of today, tempted by wealth, power, and pleasure, that God is the one necessary good, who alone can satisfy the longings of the human heart.

This article first lists four practices of poverty: work, simplicity, austerity, and sensitivity to the needs of others. These should not be taken as a complete list of all that a Secular Servite need do in order to give a "witness of poverty." Rather they show the type of practices which will produce a "witness of poverty." The conscientious work which we do places us in the midst of the common people who must work for their living. It constitutes a bond with them. Simplicity and austerity demonstrate to others that we do not have need of excess material things in order to enjoy a full life. These should be considered in relation to the last example given: sensitivity to the needs of others. Simplicity of life is not something to be sought for its own sake; rather it makes us aware of the needs of others and willing to share with them our own material possessions. Those who are overly concerned with their own style of life often have neither the inclination nor time to be bothered with others much less to share with them the goods they have accumulated.

The "witness of poverty" is then explained as demonstrating to others who are tempted by wealth, power, and pleasure, that God alone is necessary. Secular Servites must therefore look deeply into their own lives to see first how they ward off the temptations to wealth, power, and pleasure in their own lives, and then question whether their lives show clearly to others that God forms the center of their desires.

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1. *What would be an example of not meeting the Rule's prescription for conscientious work?*
 2. *What would be examples of either meeting or failing to meet the prescription for simplicity and austerity of life style?*
 3. *What are examples of how we might fail to show sensitivity to the needs of others?*
 4. *How can we provide service to those most in need?*
 5. *How might we succumb to temptations of wealth, power, and pleasure, in subtle ways that we may not even realize?*



CHAPTER 6

APOSTOLATE

The preceding chapters guide the Secular Servites in their personal lives and in their relationships with one another. But no truly Christian vocation ever stops or is totally consumed by looking inwardly on itself; it necessarily is outgoing to others. Before we look at the articles of this chapter, some general considerations are useful to see how the more specific recommendations for the Secular Servites arise out of the general teaching of the Church as found in the Second Vatican Council and some papal documents since that time.

First of all it is good to clarify two terms which can be used interchangeably: apostolate and mission. Both mean a “sending forth.” “Apostolate” comes from the Greek word for “sending forth,” and “mission” from the Latin word. The same is true of the words indicating the person who is sent forth: apostle (from the Greek) and missionary (from the Latin) have the same meaning. In practice,

however, we tend to favor “apostolate” for being sent forth into our immediate surroundings, and “mission” for being sent to a distant place, especially a foreign country.

The Second Vatican Council provides the context in which to situate the articles of this sixth chapter. In the document on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*, 31 and 33) the Council says:

A secular quality is proper and special to lay persons. . . . But the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God so that by exercising their proper function and being led by the spirit of the gospel they can work for the sanctification of the world from within, in the manner of leaven. . . . Lay men and women are closely involved in temporal affairs of every sort. It is therefore their special task to illumine and organize these affairs in such a way that they may always start out, develop, and persist according to Christ’s mind, to the praise of the Creator and the Redeemer (no. 31).

The lay apostolate, however, is a participation in the saving mission of the Church itself. Through their baptism and confirmation, all are commissioned to that apostolate by the Lord Himself. . . . Now, the laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can she become the salt of the earth. . . . Besides this apostolate, which pertains to absolutely every Christian, the laity can also be called in various ways to a more direct form of cooperation in the apostolate of the hierarchy (no. 33).

In the period before Vatican II, “Catholic Action,” as the lay apostolate was generally called, was defined as the participation of the laity in the apostolate of the hierarchy. That is, the real apostolate was that of the hierarchical structure of the Church (bishops and priests) and the laity merely cooperated in their apostolate. But Vatican II

makes it clear that all baptized members of the Church are called upon “to expend all their energy for the growth of the Church and its continuous sanctification” (no. 33). The special role of the laity, however, is to make the Church present in those places where they alone have access. Secondly the laity can also be called to cooperate in the apostolate of the hierarchy. Thus the clerics (bishops, priests, deacons) and the laity have their own primary apostolate according to the very nature of the cleric or lay state. But that does not exclude the mutual help that each can and should give to the other.

In practice this means that the proper role of the Secular Order, precisely as Secular, is in the world: in the family, the business world, technological circles, in matters of ecology, science, education, and so forth. Only secondarily should the Secular Order as such be involved directly in promoting the more “religious” aspects of the parish, diocese, or religious family.

Secular Order groups might profitably study together Chapter IV on the Laity in the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), and the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*). In addition to these the *Rule of Life* suggests other sources which could be usefully read and discussed: the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1994, especially numbers 863-864, and 898-903; the Apostolic Exhortation on the Family (*Familiaris Consortio*) of Pope John Paul II, of November 22, 1981; *Letter to Families from Pope John Paul II*, 1994; *Letter of the Pope to Children in the Year of the Family*, 1994; the *Charter of Rights of the Family*, 1983; and the apostolic exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (The Lay Members of Christ’s Faithful People), 1989.

ARTICLE 37

As we examine each of the seven articles of Chapter 6, we will see that much is taken directly from these recent documents of the Council and Pope John Paul II.

Art. 37. Faithful to their vocation of service, Secular Servites will radiate the love of Christ throughout the world and offer to all people a living testimony of self-giving to others, following the example of Mary.

The basis for this article is a “vocation of service.” This is the first instance in the *Rule of Life* that vocation is used in this sense. In articles 8 and 9 the vocation of the Secular Servite is a more general calling to the way of life itself of the Secular Order. But we saw while discussing those articles that the word “vocation” is used also in more specific ways, as for example, the vocation of a teacher. A vocation of service flows not only from the general baptismal vocation, but for a Servite, dedicated to the service of Mary, it flows also from “service” which takes on a special importance. That our “service” is part of the general vocation as a Servite means that, as any other vocation, it is part of who we are, not something that can be turned on and off at will. In article 33 we saw that penance is understood as acceptance and service of one another. This service is part of our vocation and therefore cannot be refused to others without denying part of who we say we are.

This vocation of service is expressed by spreading the love of Christ in the world around us. There is no need to search out distant lands and unique circumstances to spread the love of Christ. The needy neighbor next door, the sick person down the street, the lonely people of the community, all these are daily opportunities to spread the love of Christ. There are also times of crisis in people’s lives where they need the love of Christ made real and present to them through the love of one of his followers. The love of Christ in us, if it is real, is always active, never passive.

Secondly, the vocation of service will motivate the Secular Servite to be a witness of self-giving to others. It is always easier to preach self-giving than to demonstrate it. Yet it is only by showing it in our daily lives that we fulfill our vocation of service. The article here

specifically mentions the example of Mary. Mary called herself a “servant of the Lord,” and demonstrated what this meant in her own life when she accepted the unique mission offered her by the angel; as servant of others, rather than speaking about it, she showed it in her hastening to visit her relative Elizabeth who was with child and in her concern for the wedding couple who ran out of wine.

1. *What are some of the obstacles, problems, and difficulties you have encountered when trying to live your Servite vocation of service?*
2. *What are some of the failures, frustrations, disappointments, criticism, discouragements, and backlashes you have met with in trying to live your Servite vocation of service?*
3. *What example of Mary inspires you to want to be more self-giving to others?*
4. *Does Mary’s example provide you with any insights about the approach to use when serving others?*



ARTICLE 38

This article concentrates on a particular form of apostolate: that of the family.

Art. 38. Recognizing the fact that the family is the cornerstone of all civil and lay society, Secular Servites will give primary importance to the apostolate and testimony of Christian family life. Within the community of this “domestic church” of family, the mutual love and respect of parents, together with the care and Christian upbringing of their children, shall be a particular focus of prayer and encouragement by the Community.

The first specific type of apostolate mentioned in the Rule is that of the family. The reason for this is stated very simply: the family is the basic cell of society, or as the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says, the family is the original cell of social life (no. 2207). The exact distinction between civil and lay society, as suggested by the article, is not clear, but the general meaning surely is to emphasize the “lay” quality of family life. It also mentions that the family constitutes the domestic church, the smallest unit of the Church. Because of the fundamental importance of the family as basic unit of both civil and religious society, we can see why much importance has been given the family in recent years, and why the Rule of Life also mentions it as the first of the apostolates.

In recent Church documents when family or marriage is mentioned there are always two aspects which go hand in hand: mutual love of husband and wife, and the procreation and upbringing of children. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states it in this way: the family “is the natural society in which husband and wife are called to give themselves in love and in the gift of life” (no. 2207). Article 38 recalls this twofold aspect of the family: mutual love and respect of parents, and the care and Christian upbringing of the children.

The article does not offer specific recommendations about the type of apostolate of family life that the Servite Secular members should promote. The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity in Vatican II, however, does offer some concrete suggestions on the type of work which might be included under the general heading of family life apostolate:

Among the multiple activities of the family apostolate may be enumerated the following: the adoption of abandoned infants, hospitality to strangers, assistance in the operation of schools, helpful advice and material assistance for adolescents, help to engaged couples in preparing themselves better for marriage, catechetical work, support of married couples and families involved in material

and moral crises, help for the aged not only by providing them with the necessities of life but also by obtaining for them a fair share of the benefits of economic progress (no. 11).

In this way Vatican II clearly identifies the types of works most urgently needed at the present time. It gives a wide range of possibilities, and these might inspire others based on current local needs. You will notice also that these are mostly “lay” works, not “religious” works attached to a local church or a local parish. Some of them, however, could also be sponsored by the local parish or diocese, as for example the preparation of engaged couples for marriage.

The second sentence immediately following the above list in the Vatican II decree should cause all Secular Servites to reflect carefully. “It can help them achieve the goals of their apostolate more easily if families organize themselves into groups.” The group identity and support found within the Secular Order should therefore be a greater help in achieving some of these goals than if the members were working by themselves.

In the face of the urgent needs listed candidly by Vatican II, this article closes, it seems to me, rather timidly by going no further than saying the family life apostolate should be a particular focus of prayer and encouragement. It is to be hoped, on the contrary, that the prayer and encouragement will result in positive programs and activities.



ARTICLE 39

If Article 38 urged Secular Servites to look closely at a particular type of apostolate, Article 39 places that and all other apostolates into a larger context:

Art. 39. As members of the Church and the world, they share the anxieties and the aspirations of both, and urged on by the

love of God, they cooperate in the building of a new world in the light of Gospel values.

First we note that this is not a question of Secular Servites as such, but Secular Servites as members of the Church and world. That is, this article is not specific to Secular Servites but is equally applicable to all “members of the Church and the world.” “World” frequently is used in Scripture to indicate that part of creation which is at variance with God, in opposition to God. For example, in John’s Gospel (17:14) Jesus says “I gave them your word, and the world hated them, because they do not belong to the world any more than I belong to the world.” But “world” is also used to indicate all creation, the universe, and all God’s creation is good. In this article “world” has more the second meaning than the first.

The motivation for action is not some altruistic ideal, or pity for the suffering of much of humanity, but rather the deepest motivation for action in the Secular Servite must be the love of God working within him or her.

The work of building a new world is not the responsibility of the Secular Servites alone, but they cooperate with others in this great task. The type of new world is also specified, one built in the light of Gospel values. This implies that the Secular Servites not only have studied the Gospel so as to be able to draw out from the written word the values which give it life, but they have made these values a part of their own lives. The work of building a new world is not just an intellectual exercise but grows out of the daily lived experience of each individual Servite.

The “new world” which we want to build around us is reflected in the words of St. Paul that by our baptism we ourselves are a new creation and that in fact a new world has already come about: “So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Cor. 5:17). The same

thought is expressed in the motto of Pope St. Pius X: “to renew all things in Christ.” It is also part of the vision of the book of Revelation in which the author saw “a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away. ... The one who sat on the throne said ‘Behold, I make all things new’” (Rev. 21:1, 5). Our work in building a new world is therefore one which begins among us but which will have its completion only at the end of the world. We are part of this great work.

1. *What Gospel values are the most important ones for building a new world, and why?*
2. *What is the most practical and effective way for us to cooperate in building a new world in the light of these values?*
3. *What are the most pressing anxieties and aspirations of the Church and the world today?*
4. *What are the most significant achievements and setbacks in our times toward building a new world upon Gospel values?*



ARTICLE 40

Secular Servites must indeed see their work as part of a great world project as in article 39. But it is the daily life, frequently characterized by routine and ordinary actions, which in fact transforms the world into the new creation in Christ. This article looks at these ordinary daily actions:

Art. 40. Each day, Secular Servites will strive to live according to the Spirit in their prayer and apostolic endeavors, their married and family life, their daily labor and in their moments of leisure, that all these may be transformed into the spiritual sacrifice acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

This article, as the footnote to the text informs us, is virtually a direct quotation from the Second Vatican Council (*Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, no. 34) which was taken up by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Christifideles Laici* (no. 14). Both of these in turn take their inspiration from the first letter of Peter (2:5): “Like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Both the Council document and the encyclical place this reflection in the context of lay faithful sharing “in the priestly mission for which Jesus offered himself on the cross and continues to be offered in the celebration of the Eucharist for the glory of God and the salvation of humanity.” All the activities of the day, therefore, are seen in union with the offering of Jesus on the cross and in the Eucharist. Three key aspects of life are specifically included in this offering: spiritual, consisting of both prayer and apostolic activity; familial, consisting of married life for married couples and family life for them as well as for all others; and finally daily labor together with the necessary periods of relaxation. While absolutely every action of one’s daily routine might not fit well under one or other of these categories, certainly the meaning is that, because we share in the priestly mission of Jesus, our entire daily life, even the parts which seem least significant, take on a new meaning and importance because they are offered as a spiritual sacrifice to God through Jesus Christ. No action, however insignificant, is valueless if offered to God.

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1. *What would you consider to be true ways of living according to the Spirit in your prayer and apostolic endeavors?*
 2. *Which of the following areas presents the greatest challenge for you in living according to the Spirit: married and family life, daily labor, or moments of leisure?*
 3. *In what sense can these endeavors and areas of life be transformed into spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God?*



ARTICLE 41

The preceding article looked at the personal daily actions of Secular Servites. Article 41 takes us into the relationship between these personal actions and the local Church.

Art. 41. As active members of the Secular Community, Secular Servites cooperate in the apostolic endeavors taken on by the group in response to the needs of the neighborhood and the local Church. According to their means and talents they also strive to take part in the particular works of pastoral service of the local religious community or parish.

Like the preceding article, article 41 is taken from official pronouncements of the Church: the teaching of the Second Vatican Council (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, no. 10) which was then quoted in Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Christifideles Laici* (no. 33). But there are three special nuances which have been added and which merit attention.

First, the type of apostolic work mentioned here is that taken on by the group, not the individual initiatives of each member. This is the only mention of group activity, and the *Rule of Life* here neither mandates it nor gives it a status higher than individual apostolic action. A subtle suggestion is therefore made that the Secular Order Community should discuss whether or not it wishes to engage in some apostolic action as a Community. In this case each individual member should cooperate in carrying out this decision with loyalty and a willing spirit.

A second nuance was added to the quotations from the Council and the encyclical. The *Rule of Life* speaks of the response of the group to needs of the neighborhood and the local Church. The context

of the conciliar quotation refers here only to the needs of the local Church (though nos. 9 and 13 of *Apostolicam Actuositatem* do speak of a wider interest of the laity). Thus the *Rule of Life* broadens the scope of activity to include not only church related activities but also those social, economic, and cultural needs of all the people in the area, and those civic and other organizations and agencies which have been formed to further these activities.

Finally, a third nuance is that while the Council refers to collaboration with apostolic and missionary undertakings sponsored by the local parish, the *Rule of Life* adds those activities sponsored by the local religious community as well. It thus makes the Council document “Servite” by reminding the Secular Servites that their collaboration might also be directed to the local Servite community when one exists in the area. The Council illustrates the type of collaboration it has in mind by giving a few examples:

[Lay persons can] lead to the Church people who are perhaps far removed from it; they earnestly cooperate in presenting the Word of God especially by means of catechetical instruction; and offer their special skills to make the care of souls and the administration of the temporal goods of the Church more efficient (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 10).

Thus the Council identifies the major thrust of the apostolate of the laity as the secular realm for it affirms that: “The laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7). It does not, however, limit it to the temporal order, but rather invites collaboration in parish activities as well. Secular Servites justly find a place in the religious tasks of a parish or the local Servite community, but they must remember that their special obligation remains the renewal of the temporal order.

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1. *What apostolic endeavors could be taken on by our Community as a group?*

2. Do you see any obstacles to our taking on these endeavors?
3. How might these obstacles be overcome?



ARTICLE 42

The preceding articles about the apostolate of the laity in the Church, based as they are on the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, could easily apply to any lay woman or man. Article 42 now links the apostolate with a more specifically Servite interest and view.

Art. 42. Through devotion to the Mother of Sorrows, the Secular Servite acquires a particular interest in service to the sick, the infirm and the most needy, whether physically, spiritually or morally. In this commitment of service, the figure of Mary at the foot of the Cross will be their guiding principle. Because the Son of Man is still being crucified daily in his sisters and brothers, the Secular Servant of Mary wishes to be present with Mary at the foot of these infinite crosses.

Article 13 has already presented Mary as the guiding image in the life of Secular Servites, and it notes that they honor her especially as the Virgin of Sorrows. The second part of this article, based on the epilogue of the friars' Constitutions (art. 319), transforms the honor given to Mary as Virgin of Sorrows from mere memory of the past sufferings of her Son to the present and very real suffering of Jesus in his brothers and sisters. It is no longer sufficient to recall Mary's sorrow on Calvary, without wanting to be with her at the foot of the countless crosses on which Jesus is still being crucified today. The remembering of Mary's sorrows brings us to the present reality of the suffering which is still being endured by countless innocent people today. Can we pretend to be devoted to Mary and neglect her suffering children?

That is why this article specifies that the Secular Servites must take a special interest in those who are more in need, whether this need be physical, spiritual, or moral. There are so many ways that people are suffering today, and this article does not want to limit the attention and action of Secular Servites to one particular type, since all are children of God and Jesus is suffering in all of them. Individual Secular Servites or perhaps Secular Servite Communities therefore can apply this to the particular pressing needs of people in their own areas.

It is still the responsibility of individuals or the Community to observe the social, economic, and cultural needs of people around them, and then make a practical assessment of what is within the capabilities of the individuals or Community to do, and finally action must be taken.

This article reminds us that until we reach that final point of action taken in favor of the poor, sick, and those most in need, we cannot speak of true devotion to Mary at the foot of the cross.

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1. *In what ways can we be present with Mary at the foot of those countless crosses on which her Son is still being crucified today in his brothers and sisters?*
 2. *Who do you think are among the most needy and what do you consider their greatest needs?*
 3. *Which of these do you believe we could be best able to help?*



ARTICLE 43

The concluding article of this chapter on apostolic activities is also taken directly from the decree on the Second Vatican Council on the Apostolate of the Laity (no. 10), which was then quoted by Pope John Paul II in his encyclical *Christifideles Laici* (no. 27):

Art. 43. The Secular Servite Community supports and participates in the Order's work for vocations and in its apostolates, especially the missions.

This article adds balance to the preceding thoughts on apostolic action. While the Council indeed insists that “the laity must take on the renewal of the temporal order as their own special obligation” (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7), it does not exclude that the laity also participate actively in the life of their own parish or as in this case in the life of their own religious family.

The types of collaboration suggested are probably those which are most common and where the help of lay people can be important: vocations and missions. It is generally acknowledged that one of the important influences, if not the most important influence, in an individual's response to a call from God is the upbringing and family life. If family life is promoted as suggested in article 38, an environment is created in which a call from God can be heard and the individual will have the faith and strength to respond affirmatively. Other types of collaboration in vocational programs are also to be encouraged.

The entire church is missionary, and so individual Secular Servites and the Secular Servite Community must feel themselves deeply involved in the proclamation of the Gospel in those areas (near and far) where the message of Jesus has not been heard or has not been effectively heard. This should also be an incentive to members of the Secular Order to learn more about the missionary activities of the friars, the various congregations of Sisters, the Servite nuns in Mexico and Mozambique, and of the members of the Servite Secular Institute. At the present time the yearly publication of the *Servites in Mission* is an excellent way of keeping oneself well informed about Servite missionary activity.

1. *How can we support and participate in the Servite Order's work for vocations?*
2. *Why is there such a shortage of vocations today?*
3. *What has been wrong with the process of attracting, recruiting, screening, selecting, forming, and retaining good candidates with true vocations?*
4. *How can the process best be improved for both the religious secular elements of the Order?*
5. *How can we support and participate in the Order's apostolates, such as the missions?*
6. *In what ways are vocations and missions interrelated?*



CHAPTER 7

FORMATION

Formation is a guided process which fosters the learning, acceptance, assimilation, and integration into one's life of those principles, values, habits, and actions characteristic of a Secular Servant of Mary. It "forms" an individual into a Servant of Mary. Chapter 7 treats of this process only in very general terms. More specific norms are found in Article 53 on the year of probation.

ARTICLE 44

The first article of this chapter gives the general context in which the formation process takes place:

Art. 44. The vocation of the Secular Servant of Mary is nourished within the Community and in communion with the whole Servite Family. In their continuing formation, the Secular Servants of Mary will seek through study to deepen

their knowledge of the official documents of the Church and the Order.

The individual does not undergo those changes in his or her values and life style which are required to become a Secular Servant of Mary in a vacuum. Quite naturally, this process takes place within the Secular Servite Community where the individual sees concretely what Secular Servites are like, how they relate to each other, how they have made the general principles of the *Rule of Life* operative in their lives, what difficulties there are. Put simply, the individual sees a model toward which he or she is attracted and according to which he or she would like to change.

But the integration of the individual into the Servite Secular Order is also done in communion with the whole Servite Family. The Secular Order, as any other component of the Servite Family, is not an end to itself. Rather, its own life and values are nourished and strengthened through interaction with the other parts of the Servite Family. So the individual who wants to be a Secular Servant of Mary cannot ignore the other expressions of the Servite vocation, but on the contrary learns from them as well.

The second sentence of this article is a reminder that while the formation process takes on a greater importance during the year of probation, it is in fact a continuing process throughout life. This is true of any of life's endeavors. A doctor, lawyer, technician, auto mechanic, teacher, and so forth, cannot remain merely with the knowledge and skills they acquired through their first formal training in their profession. They must keep themselves updated with the newest methods and skills. So too Secular Servites must be eager to continue their formation throughout their entire life.

This article presumes that Secular Servites will be interested in their continuing formation, and it suggests that this can be promoted by deepening their knowledge of the official documents of

the Church and of the Order. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list; rather a knowledge of official Church and Servite documents is a starting point. The continuing formation can and should include many different methods and subjects; e.g. workshops, conferences, private reading and study on any topic which is found in the *Rule of Life* as necessary or useful for the life of the Secular Servites. One might want to reread Article 17 which provides a useful listing of such topics: the *Rule of Life* itself, matters of human, social, and religious concern, and issues related to Servite life.

1. *What do you think is the most significant way your Servite vocation has been nourished within your Secular Community?*
2. *What would you like the Community to do in order to better nourish your vocation?*
3. *What is the most meaningful way your vocation has been fostered through your communion with the whole Servite family?*
4. *What do you hope to do individually and personally in order to make the Community more effective in enhancing your continuing formation and that of your Servite brothers and sisters?*



ARTICLE 45

The preceding article notes that the formation process takes place within the Secular Community and in communion with the Servite Family. Article 45 now specifies more clearly what the role of these is:

Art. 45. The Secular Community offers to every sister and brother the experience of communion of life and constant help; the community of the whole Servite Family offers the riches of the Church and the Order.

These are very general statements and are clear in themselves. The Secular Community brings the lived experience and personal help of the other members of the Community to all the members. This restates in a different context the substance of article 10 that the members of the Secular Order support each other in their marital, family, and social life and in their active involvement in the world.

The larger Servite Family gives the members of the Secular Order the rich tradition of the Church and the Order. The Constitutions of the friars makes this more explicit by saying that the prior general, priors provincial and local priors should encourage qualified and willing friars to foster among the religious and lay groups of the Servite Family “an adequate knowledge of Servite history and spirituality, and above all, of the doctrine of the Virgin in the mystery of Christ and the Church” (art. 311).

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1. *What are ways in which we experience a communion of life within our group?*
 2. *In what sense can the help experienced within our group be considered constant?*
 3. *What are examples of the riches of the Church and the Order offered by the whole Servite family?*
 4. *How does the Secular Order provide any value to the overall Servite Order?*



ARTICLE 46

Article 45 spoke of the responsibilities of the Secular Community and the whole Servite family in the continuing formation of each member of the Secular Order. Article 46 now looks at the responsibilities of the members themselves in this regard:

Art. 46. Servants of Mary are aware that bringing their vocation to full maturity demands personal commitment and the effective use of their gifts and talents in relationship to God and all humanity.

The experience of communion of life and assistance offered by the Secular Community and the riches of the tradition of the Church and Order offered by the whole Servite Family to each individual member of the Secular Order remain ineffective until they are taken up and utilized by the Secular Servite. This personal commitment on the part of the individual Secular Servite is indispensable if a living relationship is to be established.

In order to grow in faith and reach full maturity mere intellectual assent is not sufficient; the practical application of gifts and talents for the honor of God and the betterment of humanity are just as necessary.

In these last two articles we see the coming together of the various threads which have been the subject of all the previous articles: the vocation offered by God must be consciously accepted by individuals, who then commit themselves to God and demonstrate the seriousness and reality of that commitment by use of their God-given gifts and talents. In return, the Servite Family, in all its components, surround the individual with knowledge, experience, love, and help on the journey.

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1. *What are ways of measuring the degree of maturity to which one's Servite vocation has been brought?*
 2. *How would you explain what is meant by the personal commitment demanded to reach full maturity?*
 3. *Within our Community, what indicator of commitment do you feel might be cause for concern?*



ARTICLE 47

Article 47, the closing article of this section on the Secular Order and the life of the Community, refers not only to the chapter on formation but to the entire section. Once more Mary is presented as the model so that we can recognize clearly the life of a member of the Secular Order:

Art. 47. While the Virgin Mary shared on earth the life that is common to all, full of family worries and work, she was always in intimate union with her Son, sharing in the Savior's work in a most singular way. She is therefore the model for every Secular Servant of Mary.

Two aspects in Mary's life which the Secular Servite should imitate are highlighted here. The first is the ordinary life that Mary lived on earth, as mother and wife, with all the anxieties and joys, work and leisure that it entailed. In this way we can feel close to Mary because our lives too are made up of ordinary routine experiences of daily life. But the second is what gave true life, meaning, and inspiration to these daily tasks: her close union with her Son. This then is the way in which we should find meaning and inspiration in our daily tasks — union with Jesus, sharing his work of bringing the Kingdom of God and God's peace to all. Thus we conclude this section by reiterating the statement found near its beginning: Secular Servites strive toward holiness (union with God through Christ) according to the spirituality of the Order (art. 10).

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1. *How can we best strive to gain a more intimate union with Jesus?*
 2. *Can we still remain in intimate union with Jesus even when involved in performing all our earthly duties and responsibilities?*
 3. *In what segment of your day or life would it be most difficult to share in the Savior's work?*



SECTION III

ENTRY INTO THE SECULAR COMMUNITY

Official entry into the Servite Secular Community takes place in three stages: admission (chapter 8), the year of probation (chapter 9), and the final commitment or Promise (chapter 10). While these are the official stages, it might be good to acknowledge the fruitful experience of many Secular Communities which encourage those interested in joining the Secular Order to attend meetings and other activities of the Community so that they might form a better idea of the nature of the Secular Community and the life of its members. After a period of observation by the prospective candidate about the Secular Community, and by the Secular Community about the prospective candidate, a more mature decision can be made by both regarding admission to the period of probation.

Many of the articles in this section are short and require little or no comment.

CHAPTER 8

ADMISSION

The four articles in this chapter deal with the personal characteristics of the candidate which would indicate a vocation to the Servite Secular Order (art. 48), the formal request (art. 49), the manner that the admission takes place (art. 50), and the following period of probation (art. 51, and also all of chapter 9).

ARTICLES 48 TO 51

Art. 48. Those may be admitted into the Servite Secular Order who manifest a sincere desire to share the ideals of the Order of Servants of Mary, undertaking to live and express in their own family and social context the human and evangelical values of the Christian life, honoring and imitating the Blessed Virgin in a particular manner, according to the spirit of the Order.

This article is a summary of the concepts found in articles 5 and 6. The characteristics which should be present in the prospective candidate are a desire to share the ideals of the Order, to live the Christian life, and to honor and imitate the Blessed Virgin.

Art. 49. For admission to the Secular Order, a written request must be submitted to the council of the Secular Community, whose right it is to accept the candidate.

This written request should then be kept as part of the documentation in the archives of the Secular Community. While it is preferable that the written request be stated in the candidate's own words, experience has shown that it is useful to have a sample formula which the candidate may use as a model or even, if necessary, simply sign. The council must then act upon the request (see article 72, no. 2). Since there is no specification about the voting by the council, it is presumed that a majority vote of the council members present is sufficient. It would be desirable, however, that those council members who are not able to be present would be asked privately about such an important matter.

Art. 50. Admission to the Secular Community is conducted according to the Ritual proper to the Secular Order of the Servants of Mary.

The formal ritual of admission to the Secular Community should be observed, for it gives a clear sign to the candidate and others in attendance that the step taken by the candidate is a serious one, involving a great degree of commitment. This is brought out in greater detail in the following article and in chapter 9. This ritual is found at the back of the Rule of Life. The introduction to the ritual should be read carefully, especially regarding the invitation to be extended

to Servite friars, sisters, and other Secular Order Communities to participate at least in prayer on this occasion.

Art. 51. Following admission, in order to determine the authenticity of the candidate's vocation, the candidate, through study and practice of the Rule, begins an experience of life in the Secular Community.

The period of probation following admission is more fully explained in chapter 9.

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1. *Can you think of any reasons why someone should not be admitted into the Secular Order?*
 2. *If so, how should such a person be dealt with by the Community?*
 3. *What would be a reasonable way of assessing the sincerity of a person's desire before their admission into the period of probation?*
 4. *What do you think should be the format and content of the written request?*
 5. *How soon after first expressing a desire to join, should someone be allowed admission into the period of probation?*
 6. *How frequently should the Rite of Admission be offered?*
 7. *What could be done to better manifest the significance and seriousness of the Rite of Admission?*
 8. *What do you consider to have been the most beneficial aspect of your experience of initial formation?*



CHAPTER 9

PERIOD OF PROBATION

This chapter treats the length of the period of probation (art. 52 and art. 54) and the type of experience and study which the candidate should undertake during the period (art. 53).

ARTICLES 52 TO 54

Art. 52. Probation is a period of time from admission to the Promise. Normally this will last at least one year.

Art. 54. For sound reasons and taking into account the candidate's preparation and maturity, the period of probation may be shortened or lengthened at the discretion of the council of the Secular Community.

From these two articles it is clear that the council enjoys considerable discretion with regard to the length of the period of probation. The general principle is that it should be at least one year, but the council may shorten or lengthen it. In making this decision the council should consider the candidate's preparation and maturity. For example, it might look at the number of meetings which had been missed (and therefore might decide to lengthen the period), or for other good reasons, after being assured that the candidate is in fact ready to proceed to the Promise, it might shorten the period.

Art. 53. During the period of probation, the candidate, under the guidance of the person responsible for formation and the assistant, undertakes:

- *to gradually discover and assimilate the specific vocation of the lay-person in the Church and the characteristics proper to the Servite Secular Community;*
- *to study the Rule and Statutes proper to the Secular Order of the Servants of Mary;*
- *to deepen their knowledge and understanding of the doctrine on the Virgin Mary in the Mystery of Christ and the Church;*
- *to understand the essential elements of the history and spirituality of the Servite Order.*

This program for the period of probation is also expressed in slightly different words in the request which the candidate makes to the presider, representing the Order.

We ask to be admitted
 into the period of probation
 in order to experience the communion and life
 of the Secular Community of the Servants of Mary.
 We desire to live more intensely
 the commitment of our baptismal consecration.

We wish to share the ideal
of life of the Servants,
and to give a living witness
of our devotion to the Mother of God.
We therefore desire to learn about
the history, life and spirituality of the Order,
and to collaborate in fulfilling
its mission in the Church (no. 14).

Finally it is well to recall that these same items are also found in the Rule of Life as applying to all members: The role of all members of the Secular Order as lay men and women is found especially in articles 5 and 7. Their role in the Church is expressed in article 12. The study of the Rule is recommended for all in article 17. Article 13 requires all members to commit themselves to deepening their knowledge of Mary and her place in the mystery of salvation through study and personal prayer. According to article 17 examination of issues relating to Servite life is one of the reasons the Servite Community meets.

From these various sources it is therefore possible to draw up a comprehensive program for the instruction of the candidates during the period of probation.

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1. *Do you think the normal length of probation should be changed?*
 2. *What qualifications should the person responsible for formation have?*
 3. *Should that person be elected or appointed?*
 4. *Should formation sessions be part of the regular community meetings or separate meetings?*
 5. *When should a person's period of probation be longer than the normal period?*
 6. *Should it ever be shorter than the normal period?*



CHAPTER 10

THE PROMISE

The five articles of this chapter deal with the nature of the Promise (art. 55), its effect (art. 56), necessary age and written request (art. 57), the rite (art. 58) and dispensation (art. 59).

ARTICLES 55 & 56

Art. 55. The Promise is the act by which the candidate renews the consecration made at baptism, undertaking to live it according to the spirituality of the Servite Order, in solidarity with all the communities of the Servite family and in accordance with the Rule and Statutes of the Servite Secular Order.

This article is a summation of what has been said in earlier chapters of the Rule: The Secular Servite vocation finds its roots in baptismal consecration (art. 9); the members strive toward holiness according

to the spirituality of the Servite Order and following their own Rule (art. 10); and by means of the Promise the Secular Servites express a voluntary commitment to be faithful to their proper vocation and maintain a living bond with the Order (art. 14).

Art. 56. By the Promise, the candidate is enrolled perpetually into the Secular Order of the Servants of Mary, and shares in the life of the whole Servite family.

The effect of the Promise is to make the candidate a lifetime member of the Secular Order, sharing in the life of the entire Servite family. God's calling is for a lifetime of service, even though, as we shall see in article 59, it is possible to receive a dispensation from the Promise.

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1. *What obligations did you assume in making the Promise?*
 2. *How serious do you consider those obligations, and what priority do you give them in relation to other conflicting interests?*
 3. *Why do you think so many who make the perpetual promise to a lifelong commitment, afterward, feel no significant obligation to remain active community members when they are truly able to do so?*
 4. *What could be done to reduce the above tendency?*



ARTICLE 57

Art. 57. The request for admission to the Promise must be made by the candidate in writing and be accompanied by a written report from the person responsible for formation. The request is made to the Council of the Secular Community. The candidate must be at least eighteen years of age.

Similar to the request for admission to the year of probation, the request for admission to the Promise must be in writing, addressed to the Council which must approve the request. As with the request for admission to the year of probation, this request may be made in the candidate's own words, or a form might be prepared to help the candidate if this is necessary.

The candidate must be at least eighteen years old at the time of making the Promise.

This article and also article 53 mention a person responsible for formation, who, according to article 53, is presumed to be distinct from the assistant. This person is not mentioned among the officials of the Community, and so it would be a matter for the particular statutes of the Community to determine the manner of election, length of term, and specific responsibilities of this person (see article 76). The Rule indicates in this manner that even the formation of new members is the responsibility of the Community itself, and not that of an outside member, even the assistant. The Community should have within itself all the resources necessary to assure the proper formation of its members.

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- 1. What do you think should be the format and content of the written request?*
 - 2. If you were responsible for formation, what factors would you consider in the evaluation and recommendations included in your written report?*
 - 3. Do you think the minimum age requirement should be changed?*



ARTICLE 58

Art. 58. The rite of the Promise follows the formula prescribed by the Ritual of the Secular Order of Servants of Mary and is presided over, according to circumstances, by the prior of the religious Community or by a delegate of the Order.

The rite of the Promise is found in the ritual for the Secular Order immediately following the rite for the admission to the year of probation. The greater solemnity of the rite of the Promise is shown by two differences in the ritual:

1) The rite for the admission to the year of probation takes place during a liturgy of the Word, during the Liturgy of the Hours, or during the Vigil of Our Lady (no. 5 of the ritual). But the rite of the Promise takes place at Mass or at the Liturgy of the Hours (no. 71 of the ritual).

2) There is also a difference in the one who presides. The Rule does not mention who is to preside at the rite of the admission to the year of probation; but the ritual itself, no. 3, specifies that: “The local prioress/prior or assistant of the Secular Community presides at the rite of admission. If the Secular Community is erected in a convent of sisters, the local prioress/superior or the sister assistant may preside.” Although it is not mentioned, one may presume that the prior of the local community of friars may also preside.

For the rite of the Promise the present article (art. 58) merely restates what is found in the ritual (no. 69): “The prior of the local religious community or a duly named delegate of the Order presides at the rite.”

The presider at the ritual for the admission to the year of probation, therefore, may be the prior/prioress/president of the local Secular Community or the assistant; or the local superior of a priory

of friars or a convent of sisters. But for the rite of the Promise, the presider must be the prior of the local Servite community of friars or a delegate designated by the Order, here presumably meaning the friars, since that is the context of the article. This probably was done to show not only the greater solemnity of the rite but also the living bond which the Promise creates with the whole Order, represented by the prior general and the prior of the local community of friars.

Since it is not specified who has the authority to delegate someone to preside at the Promise, we may presume that the competent authority would be the prior general, prior provincial, vicar provincial, and local prior, each within his own jurisdiction.

Since there is no restriction placed on the person who may be delegated, any of the persons named to preside at the rite of admission to the year of probation may also be delegated to preside at the rite of the Promise.

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1. *What could be done to better manifest the dignity, significance, and seriousness that should be associated with of the Rite of Promise?*
 2. *What thoughts and feelings did you have as you completed the Rite of Promise and thereby became a fully professed, secular lifetime member of the Servite Order?*



ARTICLE 59

Art. 59. For just and valid reasons the council of the Secular Community can dispense from the Promise, temporarily or definitively, and can dismiss a person with the Promise, after having set forth its reasons and having heard the person concerned.

Article 56 states that the Promise enrolls the candidate perpetually into the Secular Order. The present article, therefore, determines the method by which this living bond with the Order may be broken. The council of the Secular Community is given the authority to dispense from the Promise or dismiss the member. In the case of the dispensation the initiative comes from the individual; in the case of dismissal the initiative comes from the council itself.

If the person requests the dispensation, the request should be presented in writing and duly recorded in the minutes of the council meeting, together with the vote of the council. The dispensation may be given for a specific period of time, if the individual intends to take up the obligations again at a later date, or definitively. For example, a member of the Secular Order moves to an area where there is no Servite Secular Community and wishes to join the local Secular Franciscans. In this case, the individual might prefer to be dispensed from the Promise, so as not to be a member of the Secular Orders at the same time with perhaps conflicting obligations.

The council may also dismiss a member from the Secular Order. However, to assure that justice is done, the council must first set forth its reasons to the person and invite the person to present his or her side to the Council. After having heard the person (or if the person fails to appear), the Council may then proceed to a vote on the dismissal. Dismissal should be used only as a last resort. For example, the member leaves the Catholic Church and joins some other Church and sees no need to request a dispensation.

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1. *If reasonably unable to fulfill all Secular Servite responsibilities (such as attending meetings), do you think it would be more appropriate to request to be dispensed from the Promise, or simply to fulfill those responsibilities you are still able to fulfill to the extent you can?*
 2. *What reasons would you consider serious enough to warrant dismissal?*



SECTION IV

ORGANIZATION OF THE SECULAR COMMUNITY

The three chapters of this section explain first the general organization of the Secular Community (chapter 11), then how a new group receives official recognition (chapter 12), and finally a more detailed description of the officials of the Secular Community and their duties and responsibilities (chapter 13). Many of these articles are clear in themselves and need little or no explanation.

CHAPTER I I

ORGANIZATION

ARTICLES 60 TO 63

Art. 60. The Secular Order of the Servants of Mary is made up of local Communities which, united by the same ideal of life, form the international Community.

Art. 61. Secular Communities may group together according to city, region, or country.

Art. 62. The internal life of each Secular Community or group of Communities is regulated by the Community itself under the leadership of the respective prioresses/ priors/presidents and councils.

Art. 63. Each Secular Community is connected to the Order through a duly designated assistant.

The union of all the local Secular Communities forms the international Community. In addition, according to need or desire, the local Communities may also form regional or national groups in order to profit from larger numbers and a greater range of experiences and talents. But article 62 is quick to point out that, regardless of the larger units, the local Secular Community retains its own autonomy over its internal life under its own local leadership. The assistant acts as the connecting link with the rest of the Order. The link to the rest of the Order is seen more clearly when the assistant is a Servite priest, brother, sister, or member of a

secular institute. In the case of a diocesan priest, the link is present through the nomination made by the competent Servite authority, even though the person is confirmed by the local ordinary (bishop). The role of the assistant is treated in greater detail in article 73.

1. *What could be done to increase the sense of bonding we feel with other Secular Servite Communities around the world?*
2. *Is there any type of grouping you would like for your Community to form with any other communities?*
3. *What would you see as the pros and cons of belonging to such a grouping?*
4. *What would be the most practical way of managing a group of communities, considering that each member community is to remain autonomous in governing itself?*
5. *What kind of problems could ensue if a community did not have a competent Assistant to keep it connected to the Order?*



CHAPTER I 2

OFFICIAL ECCLESIAL RECOGNITION OF COMMUNITIES

ARTICLES 64 TO 67

Art. 64 a). In the case of a group originating around a community of friars, it pertains to the conventual chapter of the friars to recognize it as authentically Servite and to support its request for official ecclesial recognition.

b) The other branches of the Servite family (enclosed nuns, sisters, secular institutes) may also recognize the authenticity of a group originating around them, and similarly support its request for official ecclesial recognition.

c) In the case of Secular Communities originating away from Servite communities, the competent authorities for recognition are, according to the particular case, the vicarial, provincial or general councils.

Art. 65. Official ecclesial recognition of a Community of the Secular Order is accomplished by a decree of the prior general.

Art. 66. For official ecclesial recognition a written request is necessary. In the case of a Community originating away from a community of the Servite Family, authorization from the ordinary of the place is also required.

Art. 67. The secretary general for the Secular Order and lay groups is to be informed of each official ecclesial recognition.

For a group to be recognized as an official part of the Servite Secular Order the following steps must be taken: 1) It must be recognized on the local level as being authentically Servite; 2) a request must be made to the prior general, who then 3) issues a decree to that effect and 4) so informs the secretary general for the Secular Order and lay groups.

1) If the Secular Community originates in Servite surroundings, around a group of friars, nuns, sisters, or members of the secular institutes, that local Servite group may recognize it as authentically Servite. In the case of the friars, however, the Rule specifies that it must be the conventual chapter which takes this action. Since the Rule was drawn up in the context of the friars, it was possible to determine who is responsible on the local level to recognize the Servite authenticity of a group. It is presumed that corresponding entities will be designated by other members of the Servite Family as being the competent authority to take similar action. It might also be noted that a) and b) of this article merely repeat article 308 b of the Constitutions of the friars.

When a Secular Community originates away from Servite communities, then it is the responsibility of the provincial (or vicarial) council in whose area the Community is located to give this recognition. For example, if a group originates in Cleveland or New Orleans, where there is no presence of Servite friars or sisters, it is the responsibility of the provincial council to recognize the group as authentically Servite.

2) The conventual chapter (or provincial council or similar entity of another member of the Servite Family) then presents its declaration of the Servite authenticity of the group, together with a request that it be erected as a Secular Community of the Servite Order, to the prior general. If the new group originates away from

a community of the Servite family, the authorization of the local ordinary (bishop) is also needed.

3) The prior general then issues the decree recognizing the new group as an official part of the Secular Servite Order.

4) Finally the prior general informs the secretary general for the Secular Order and lay groups of this action.

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- 1. What do you think is necessary in order for a secular group to become authentically Servite, so that it can be recognized as such by some local religious Servite jurisdiction?*
 - 2. What is a reasonable size, and length of time, in order for a newly formed Servite group to establish its viability, before seeking submission of a request to the prior general for official ecclesial recognition?*
 - 3. How might other Lay Groups—e.g., The Confraternity of Our Lady of Sorrows—be used as a stepping stone for the formation of Secular Servite Communities?*



CHAPTER 13

GOVERNMENT

The chapter on government describes the role and duties of the officials of the Secular Order: the prior general (art. 68), the secretary general (art. 69), the prioress/ prior/ president of the local Community (art. 70-71), the council (art. 72), the assistant (art. 73), and the secretary (art. 74). These articles are generally clear in their meaning and require little comment.

ARTICLE 68. THE PRIOR GENERAL

Art. 68. The prior general of the Order, sign of unity of the whole Servite Family, exercises authority in a spirit of service over the whole Servite Secular Order, respecting its autonomy.

The role of the prior general, who is a sign of unity of the whole Servite Family, is seen as one of service to the Secular Order, whose autonomy is to be respected. Except in extraordinary circumstances the prior general should exercise this service through the various levels of authority, especially through the prioress/prior/president of the local Secular Order Community and the assistant.

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1. *What do you think it means to exercise authority in a spirit of service?*



ARTICLE 69. THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Art. 69. 1) The secretary general is named by the general council of the Order. The secretary general's principal task is animation and coordination on the level of the entire Order.

2) In collaboration with the members of the general secretariat and the other assistants at various levels, the secretary general directs the attention of the Secular Communities to the spiritual and pastoral directives of the Church and of the Order, and also communicates information about the more significant activities and experiences of the individual Secular Communities.

The general secretariat for the Secular Order and lay groups is one of the general secretariats and officials recognized by the Constitutions of the friars (art. 285 a). The general council of the friars elects the secretary general for the Secular Order and lay groups and specifies the responsibilities and manner of operation of the secretariat (art. 285 b). The description of his principal task—animation and coordination on the level of the entire Order—is a logical assumption from the nature of the secretariat, but is not found in the Constitutions.

In the second paragraph of this article the only way in which this “animation” takes place is through communication of various directives of the Church and Order which might be of interest or help to the local Communities and other information from the various Secular Communities throughout the world. According to the Rule, therefore, the general secretariat operates as an international communications center for the Secular Order, but other responsibilities may also be given to the general secretary and the secretariat by the general council of the friars.

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1. *What kind of animation and coordination is needed, and how might it be better achieved.*



ARTICLES 70 TO 71.

THE Prioress/PRIOR/PRESIDENT OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Art. 70, 1) The prioress/prior/president, first among the sisters and brothers, presides over the community in a service of love; together with the council and each member of the Community, she/he has responsibility for the Community.

In the exercise of service the prioress/prior/president should be aware of bearing witness to Christ who came not to be served but to serve, and to give more abundant life to his disciples.

2) It is the role of the prioress/prior/president:

- to convoke and preside at the meetings of the Secular Community and its council;*
- to foster and encourage the spiritual and apostolic endeavors of the Community;*
- to be vigilant about observance of the Rule and Statutes;*

- to collaborate with the assistant and the officials of the Community.

Art. 71. The prioress/prior/president is elected according to the norms of the particular statutes of the Secular Community.

The *Rule of Life* gives the titles of prioress or prior to the person chosen to preside over the local Secular Community. In a footnote the Rule states that the title of “president” may be used in place of prioress or prior. The Rule in this way merely recognizes that in the English-speaking countries all three titles are in fact used, and so the Rule permits the local Community to decide the title it prefers. The traditional title of prioress or prior emphasizes the religious character of the group, dependent upon a medieval religious Order; the more recent title of president expresses better the lay character of the group. For example, in the Servite Secular Institute the ranking official is called president, not prioress, and the purpose is to call attention to the non-religious secular character of the organization.

While the prioress/prior/president presides over the community, the responsibility which she/he has for the Community is shared with the members of the council and all other members. Each member of the Community should therefore feel the responsibility for the welfare and advancement of the Community as a whole.

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1. *Are there any decisions the prioress/prior/president should be able to make alone?*
 2. *How long a term should a prioress/prior/president have, and what limits should there be on reelection?*



ARTICLE 72. THE COUNCIL

Art. 72.1) Each Community has a council. The members of the council are the prioress/prior/president, the assistant, and at least three councillors elected by the Community itself.

2) It pertains to the council:

- to collaborate with the prioress/prior/president in the leadership and animation of the Community;*
- to accept candidates for admission and the Promise;*
- to dispense from the Promise;*
- to dismiss a member of the Community, when this proves necessary after hearing the person concerned.*

Each Secular Community must have a council which includes the prioress/prior/president, the assistant and at least three councillors. The council works with the prioress/prior/president in planning, promoting, and, in general, advancing the goals of the Community. The councillors must be elected by the Community itself, that is, they are not named by the assistant or the prioress/prior/president. We have already seen that the vote of the council is needed to accept a candidate for admission (art. 49) and the Promise (art. 57) and also to dispense from the Promise (art. 59) or dismiss a member (art. 59).

Experience has shown that a well-functioning council is essential to the growth and success of a Community. There are no rules for the frequency of meetings or the matters to be treated in them. One essential role is the planning of the meetings, and the council should meet at least as often as necessary to assure that the content and dynamics of the meetings actively foster the aims of the Secular Order.

1. *What decisions should be made by the Council, and what decisions should be made by the entire Community?*



ARTICLE 73. THE ASSISTANT

Art. 73.1) Each Secular Community, or group of Communities, has an assistant, named by the competent authority of the Servite Family. In cases where the assistant is not a member of the Servite Family, the competent authority of the Order makes the nomination upon presentation by the local Community and confirmation is then given by the local ordinary.

2) The assistant may be a sister or brother of the Servite family (friar, nun, sister, member of a Servite Secular institute), a priest member of the Servite Secular Order, or another priest.

3) The assistant should be competent and willing, committed to studying more deeply the specific vocation of the Secular Servite with the sisters and brothers with whom a common journey of faith is shared.

4) The assistant is to foster the spirit of the Servite family among the members of the Community and to offer a spiritual service of encouragement.

Article 63 described the assistant as the person through whom the Secular Community is connected to the Order, the link between the local Community and the rest of the Servite Family. It stands to reason therefore that each Secular Community must have an assistant. The assistant is named by the competent authority, which is not further specified. Perhaps it would be well to identify the competent authority in this case with the one who has the right to recognize the group originally as authentically Servite (article 64 a, b, and c). If the assistant is not a member of the Servite Family, the competent authority first listens to the local Secular Community,

then makes the nomination to the local ordinary (bishop), whose right it is then to confirm the nominee.

The assistant may be a Servite religious or secular institute member, a priest member of the Secular Order or another priest. And since the assistant is the connection between the Secular Order and the rest of the Servite family, it follows that the assistant should be willing to study the vocation of the Secular Servite, including Servite spirituality, so that she/he may guide the members on their journey of faith which is made according to the spirituality of the Servite Order, its directives, and the Rule of the Secular Order (see article 10).

1. *What is the Assistant's role regarding decision making in the Secular Community?*



ARTICLE 74. THE SECRETARY

Art. 74.1) Each Secular Community will have a secretary.

2) It is the responsibility of the secretary:

- to keep the minutes of the meetings of the Community and its council;*
- to keep the register of admissions and Promises up-to-date;*
- to look after and keep up-to-date the records of the Community;*
- to maintain contact with those sisters and brothers who cannot attend the meetings.*

Besides the assistant, prioress/prior/president, and three councilors, the only other official required by the Rule is a secretary. The duties of the secretary are to keep the minutes of the meetings of

both the Community and the council, and to maintain the records of the Community. It is also the role of the secretary to keep in contact with those who cannot attend meetings.



- 1. What would be the advantages or disadvantages of the Council appointing one of its own members as secretary?*



SECTION V

PARTICULAR STATUTES OF THE SECULAR COMMUNITY

ARTICLES 75 & 76

The particular statutes of each Secular Community are the attempt by that Community to apply the general rules to its own particular circumstances and needs.

Art. 75. Each Secular Community, or group of Communities, must have its own Particular Statues for the practical implementation of what is laid down in the present Rule, and they are responsible for their approval.

Art. 76. In particular, these Statues should establish:

- *the method of election and length of term of office of the prioress/prior/president;*
- *the method of election and length of term of office of the members of the council;*
- *the number of councillors, if more than three are required;*
- *the number, the responsibilities, the method of election and length of term of office of other officials of the Community;*
- *other duties of the secretary.*

These are two of the most important articles in the *Rule of Life*. Throughout the Rule we have seen that frequently the guidelines for the way of life for members of the Secular Order are quite general, because the rules had to be written for many different circumstances and cultures. This article allows each local Community to make these more general rules fit the local situation. The particular statutes must be approved by the local Community itself.

There are some matters which must be placed in the particular statutes. These include the method of election and length of term for

the prioress/prior/president and the councillors; the number of the councillors if more than three are needed; any other officials which might be needed together with their responsibilities, terms of office, and method of election; and any other duties of the secretary.

Groups tend to favor election by a written ballot, for a secret vote allows for greater freedom of expression. In that way, too, it is not known who voted for or against a certain candidate. However, other methods are not excluded. The particular statutes might also set up a nominating process or a nominating committee.

Some groups favor one-year terms, on the grounds that those who do well can be reelected; others favor longer terms for the sake of greater continuity. For the election of councillors some groups have favored a staggered method, so that there are always some experienced councillors and some new council members. The question of term limits must also be considered: after a certain number of terms should any officials be ineligible to be reelected.

It should be remembered that two other “officials” are indicated in the Rule, but no provision for their election or duties is found in the Rule itself. A treasurer is presumed in article 21 and a person responsible for formation is mentioned in articles 53 and 57. The Community might leave the selection of these positions to the council itself or it might elect them by the Community at large.

The Community should also specify if any positions are mutually incompatible. For example, should a member of the council be elected treasurer or the person responsible for formation? Might it be advisable, especially in smaller groups, for the secretary to take on the duties of the treasurer as well? In general, it is not advisable for the prioress/prior/president to be treasurer, for in so delicate a matter as the handling of money, it is good for the treasurer to report to a higher official. This is not possible if both prioress/prior/president and the treasurer are one and the same person. But it might not be impossible for the prioress/prior/president to take on the role of the one responsible for formation in the Community.

There is much freedom and autonomy given to each local Community to organize its life according to the circumstances of the time and place. The creative spirit of each Community will assure that these decisions truly promote the common good of the individual members and the community as a whole.

1. *What should the statutes for a group of communities cover, and how would they have to differ from statutes for an individual community—especially in regards to the authority and responsibilities of officers.*
2. *What new provisions do you feel should be added to your Community's statutes?*



