

ECUMENICAL ORDER OF ST. FRANCIS (TOR)

ECUMENICAL FRANCISCAN OBLATES OF PENITENCE

OF THE ECUMENCIAL ORDER OF ST
FRANCIS (TOR).



P O B O X 4 7 4
L A U N C E S T O N T A S M A N I A

1. Introduction.

Welcome to the Oblates of Penitence Manual. This Manual will contain several chapters that will arrive monthly to form the complete Manual. The Manual is divided into Four Parts. Part One contains the rule and constitution of the Oblates of Penitence, Part two is the Postulant Study Part Three contains Studies no.N1 to N12 for the Novice and life of Oblation is in Part four which contains studies No. L1 to L4 that concludes the Quarterly Studies. Part Five of the Manual will contain the Order of Reception for Postulant, Novice and Profession of Life of Oblation, a list of Special Franciscan Saints Days.

Each Study contains Notes on a particular topic and ends with a short assignment. Each Assignment is to be completed and returned to the Master of Oblates on the required dates each quarter. This will mean that each time the postulant or novice makes a report they will also send in the answers to three assignments.

The Introductory Postulant Study contains an outline of the life of St. Francis and the Novices studies are based on the rule and some other aspects of Franciscan spirituality.

All studies will consist of study notes and where possible a suggested book list on the subject will also be given, then the assignment questions.

It is suggested that the candidate select a suitable time and best environment to do their study and assignments.

The Postulancy is a time of enquiry and testing before the candidate is received into the novitiate. The Postulancy is for three months, and the first two months the postulant attends meetings and gains an introduction to what it means to be an Oblate, and during the third month the introduction study is carried out and the postulant has the main part of the month to contemplate and write their assignment so it is ready to be posted off with the report on who the rule has been kept.

Once the initial three months are over the Fraternity minister receives the postulant into the novitiate. The Novitiate is for a period of one year and there will be twelve novice studies during this period, and the three assignments are to be sent to the Master of oblates every three months along with the quarterly report form.

Once the Novice reaches the end of the twelve months the fraternity Minister must put the novices name forward at Chapter to be elected into life of Oblation. If the Chapter accepts then at the next fraternity meeting the Novice is received to Life of Oblation and for the first year must continue to make the quarterly report and from the end of that twelve month period the professed (life of Oblation) reports only yearly on or before the feast of the Stigmata (Sept 17th) each year.

May the Lord richly bless you as you begin your walk with St Francis.

Yours in the love of Christ and St. Francis and St Clare.

Pax et Bonum

Brother Paul Francis.(EOSF)

Master of Oblates.

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The Rule of the Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitents of the Ecumenical Order of St Francis. (EFOP).

Canon One. Identity.

The Rule of the Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence is centred on Christ and the Christian life. The ordinary Christian can accept this rule as an aid to living a virtuous life within the Church. The Rule reminds us of the order, priorities, and discipline we should have in our lives. It is simple, compelling, and applies to any Christian. The Rule implies a way of life and a philosophy of living that reaches out beyond the person to the whole Community of Christ. The Rule is not meant only to be read and studied, but to be lived and experienced.

The form of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Ecumenical Franciscan Order of Penitents is this: to observe the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ, living a life of Simplicity and follow Jesus Christ after the example of St. Francis.

They shall foster the ecumenical spirit, by inviting those of all denominations and faiths to join the fraternity meetings, and striving to understand the religious beliefs and customs of others, looking for teachings on which we all agree, and to put aside all prejudice, and foster the spirit of universal brotherhood in God our Father.

Canon Two: Service

The word “oblate” means to serve. The Ecumenical Franciscan Oblate of Penitence (“from here on shall be referred to as Oblate”) is dedicated to be a Servant to others, through the performance of regular works of mercy, goodness, and charity. Oblates shall endeavour to do these works as The Holy Spirit reveals to them opportunities.

Canon Three: Love and Charity

The Oblates declare the principles of the holy life by committing themselves to be in "love and charity" with all people. Oblates particularly minister to the Christian community and to those Brothers and Sisters in need spiritually and temporally.

Canon four: The Sacraments

The Holy Life means the Sacramental Life. As an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace,” the sacraments remind us daily of our spiritual involvement in the Kingdom of God. To the Oblate this means availing oneself of the Sacraments in a regular, systematic, and disciplined way. Regular participation in Holy Eucharist is expected.

Canon Five: Discipline

The "holy life" is a life of discipline. It is the cornerstone to well-ordered spiritual growth. It is not easy to give oneself to a disciplined life of prayer and spirituality, particularly when one is living away from communal life; yet, there is no spiritual life without discipline. Oblates are committed to the personal disciplines of prayer and reading of the scriptures. They are committed to the outward disciplines of simplicity, obedience, service, and corporate worship.

Canon Six: Koinonia – Lectio Divina- and retreat.

The essence of the oblate is fellowship of the Christian life. As Oblates do not live in community, this fellowship is guaranteed through prayer, meditation, and contemplation, especially on the Rule. The Oblates shall pray for the members of the order daily.

The Oblate shall aim to spend time each day for meditation on the Scriptures from the Lectionary of the day. The Lectio Divina shall be the form for each Oblate to use in order to come close to the Lord Jesus as we serve him and his church.

The Oblate should, when possible, endeavour to attend the annual retreat of the friary to which they are attached. However, if they are not able to attend the annual retreat they should try to attend several quiet times at various times throughout the year at the friary they are attached.

Canon Seven: Giving

It is the goal of each Oblate to feel the need to give regularly and joyfully for the maintenance of the Order in all parts of the world, and the greater Church and its people, in the quantity and quality that God reveals.

Canon Eight: Prayer

Prayer is the focus of the life of an Oblate. Through diligent practice, prayer becomes a habitual conversation with God. Oblates use all forms of prayer, but they are bound together with the Daily Offices and the Rule. Prayer is the ground of our everyday life. For many, this will mean at least Morning and Evening Prayer. This may vary according to the denominational practices that one follows.

Canon Nine: Discipleship

The Christian religious life requires accountability. To the Oblate, accountability is a way of life, and assists the Oblate in his or her calling as a disciple of Christ. Responsibility and discipline are some of the ways that Oblates exercise accountability. The Oblate is accountable to his or her Spiritual Director and to the Prior of the Order. The Oblate shall

report on his or her spiritual growth regularly to his/her spiritual director and send a yearly report on one's spiritual growth and ministry efforts to the Abbot, during the month of January.

Canon Ten: Penance

The Oblate is taught that a contrite heart is a joy to God. To repent and renew is the road to a full spiritual life. We are sinners and fall short of the glory of God, but through His saving grace, we are able to repent and be renewed in the Spirit. This is the road to salvation and the fullness of the Christian life.

Canon Eleven: Hospitality

To be hospitable is a sign of the Christian life. The Oblate is known for his or her hospitable nature and generosity of soul that he or she shows to friend and stranger alike.

Canon Twelve : Obedience:

Once an Oblate has been received as a postulant, Novice and into temporary Life of Oblation they shall report to the Master of the Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence every Quarter with the prescribed report forms and attach their study assignment. This is their vow of Obedience, and by reporting helps the oblate in keeping this vow.

All quarterly reports should be received by the Master of Oblates of Penitence by 1st March, 1st June, 1st September, and 1st December each year.

During the first year of being received into Life of Oblation they shall report to the Master of Oblates each quarter with the prescribed report form for the first year of Life of Oblation and once that has been completed they shall then report to the Master of Oblation of Penitence once a year. This report should be received by the Master of Oblates by September 17th the feast of the Stigmata of St Francis.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE ECUMENICAL FRANCISCAN OBLATES OF PENITENCE

1. THE ORDER

1. The Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence is attached to the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis within the Australian Church of Antioch’.
2. The Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence places itself under the patronage of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Clare. Their festivals are to be specially observed
3. The Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence of the Ecumenical Order of Saint Francis is under one Province in Australia.
4. The Minister General is the servant of the whole Community and is therefore responsible for ensuring that the Rule and Constitution of the Order are observed.
5. The General Chapter of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis shall be made up of both Professed Brothers and Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence in Life of Oblation and shall coordinate the activities of the whole Order throughout Australia.
6. The Minister General shall notify all Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence (from here on shall be referred to as Oblates) eligible to vote at the General Chapter and Yearly Chapter meetings of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis.
7. Its meetings may be called by the Minister General, who shall preside at the Chapter.

2. MEMBERSHIP.

8. Normally Oblates will be communicant members of any Catholic Apostolic Church.
9. Application for membership from communicant members of other Churches shall be referred to the Bishop Protector for guidance.
10. The Oblates recognises four degrees of membership: Postulant, Novices, Temporary Life of Oblation (Two year Promise) and Life Professed. The Postulancy shall be of at least Three months and keep an experimental rule before being admitted to the novitiate.
11. The Novitiate is normally One year and no one under the age of 21 may be admitted as a novice. Exceptions to these provisions shall be dealt with by the Guardian of the Order in consultation with the master of Oblates.
12. It is understood that at Profession Oblates commit themselves to Christ within the Order with lifelong intention.
13. Admissions, Professions and Renewals will be made where possible before the altar, using the Service approved for the purpose.

14. All Admissions and Professions must be approved by the Master of Oblates and those to be professed shall be elected by the Chapter of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis. The Master of Oblates will where possible receive all Postulants, Novices, Temporary Life of Oblation and Life Profession of Oblation. If unable to attend the Master of Oblates will issue a Mandate for one of the Brothers or the Oblates parish Priest to act on his behalf.
15. Renewals may be accepted by a professed Oblates or Fraternity Minister with a mandate for that purpose. Renewals shall be each year during the Feast of the Stigmata (Sept.17th). The Master of Oblates may do this if he is in attendance.
16. Only the General Chapter of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis will approve and the Minister General shall then accept the resignation of professed Oblates and so release him or her from the obligations of Profession. The Minister General shall issue the Oblate a letter of dispensation form all obligations to the Oblates.

3. THE PROVINCE.

17. The Australian Provinces shall be made up of all the states and territories of Australia.
18. This Province of the Ecumenical Order is under the protection of the Presiding Archbishop of the Australian Church of Antioch who shall always be the Bishop Protector.
19. The Minister General has pastoral oversight of the Order as coordinator of the Order's work within the Province, and may attend any meetings of the Oblates.
20. All Temporary Life of Oblation and Professed Oblates shall be voting members of the Bi-Annual General Chapter of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis. Should there be enough Oblates within their membership; the Oblates will be granted permission from the Ecumenical Order to hold its own Chapter Meetings. The Minister General shall remain head of the Whole Order including the Oblates and shall have full voting rights on the Oblate Chapter.
21. The Province, while being part of the ecumenical Order of St. Francis shall then draw up their own Statutes for the provincial organization and shall until such times as this happens shall remain under the Statutes of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis.
22. Alteration to the Constitution may be proposed by the Chapter and shall be submitted in writing to the Minister General for circulation to the Order. Once approved by the Order, such alterations shall be ratified by the Minister General by signing the new constitution and shall take immediate effect.

4. THE RULE OF LIFE

23. Each member of the Order undertakes to keep the Oblates Rule of Life of the Ecumenical Franciscan Oblates of Penitence. The purpose of this is to give practical expression in the particular circumstances of each Oblates life, to the three ways of service - Prayer, Study and Work - and to help the Oblate fulfil the Principles of the

Order.

24. When a postulant is admitted to the novitiate he or she is committed, as a member of the Franciscan family within the Oblates, to accept the authority of the Master of Oblates and of Chapter and of those who hold pastoral office and to seek humbly and joyfully to grow in his or her vocation.
25. The Oblates Rule of Life will include a commitment under the following ten headings. The rule state clearly what is being undertaken under each heading.
 - To recite the Divine Office Daily. - To practice daily Mental Prayer. (Lectio Divina)
 - To make an Annual Retreat with the Community. - The Holy Eucharist.
 - Penitence. - Self-denial. - Study. Poverty (or Simplicity of Life).-- Work.- Obedience.
26. Each postulant, Novice and those in Temporary Life of Oblation shall report to the master of Oblates every three months on the form prepared at the end of the Oblate Manual – (and to be copied as needed). Those in Life of Oblation shall report to the master of Oblates each quarter for the first year and then once a year by the feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis (September 17th).

5. Fraternities.

27. Oblates living in the same city or town shall meet once a month, on a day and time agreeable to a all.
28. At these meetings the enquirer, postulant, novice and those in Temporary Life of Oblation shall have their studies with the professed assisting them. Their assignments shall be forwarded to the master of Oblates with their report each quarter.
29. The Minister General shall appoint one to be fraternity Minister and they shall elect from amongst them one to act as Secretary to take the Minutes and other secretarial duties as needed by the fraternity. One to act as Treasurer and two other committee members.
30. The Fraternity Minister shall hold office for four years and each elected member to the fraternity chapter shall be elected for a four-year term. They may be re-elected for further four-year terms.
31. The Minister General shall ratify all elections at each Bi-annual chapter and so all elections **must** be held in the year of the main Bi-annual Meeting of the Ecumenical Order of St. Francis.
32. A copy of the Fraternity Minutes of every monthly meeting shall be forwarded to the Minister General and Master of Oblates either by email or by mail.
33. All ministries being carried out by the Oblates of Penitence within their Fraternity **must first be approved by the Minister General. Also any advertisements going out in parish newsletters etc must also be approved by the Minister General.**

34. All fraternities shall be given a fraternity name by the Minister General.
35. The Fraternity Minister and any other member of each fraternity shall endeavour to attend the Bi-annual Chapter of the whole Order held every two years. The Bi-Annual chapter is held in Launceston Tasmania at the main friary. The Bi-Annual chapter and is held on the 6th January (feast of the Epiphany) and the annual retreat is from the 4th to 5th of January. If new years day is a Saturday and long weekend make it difficult to obtain necessary food then the retreat shall be held from 6th to 7th and chapter will be held on 8th January.

NOTES

36. Each Oblate shall have a regular spiritual director who accepts the Rule of life of the Oblate as the basis of counsel.
37. Oblates promise to keep the Rule of life for one year. This promise is renewed annually, normally at a gathering of Oblates. This annual renewal is the basis of membership as an Oblate and its object is to safeguard against nominal membership. Oblates should report regularly on the keeping of the Rule and by reporting quarterly and yearly is also an aid to obedience.

The Form of Profession

38. This shall be as set out in the Order of Receptions, and renewal in the Oblate Manual Part Five.