

SECLAR FRANCISCANS: TAU VS. HABIT

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As in most families, certain topics “pop up” for discussion every so often and need clarification. Some topics are simply a matter of majority opinion; others are a matter of “tradition” and should we/can we change the tradition; but *some* are a matter civil or Church law. Whether or not Secular Franciscans “wear a habit” is a topic that falls into the latter category.

Seculars wearing habits has come up in conversations or emails with people considering joining our Order and in conversations with family members asking where they can purchase a habit for their deceased loved one who wanted to be buried in the Franciscan habit.

If someone asked you, “Do Secular Franciscans wear habits?” How would you reply?

If you are someone who relies solely on our “Governing Documents,” you’ll probably reply, “No, our current documents state that we don’t wear a habit but wear “a distinctive sign/insignia of membership in the Order.” Our (2000) General Constitutions article 43 states, “a distinctive sign of membership in our Order may be a TAU cross or other Franciscan symbol which the National Statutes may designate;” our (2007) OFS-USA Statutes article 16 states that **our** “distinctive sign” will be a TAU cross.

The 2007 General Constitutions also state in Article 5 that the Holy See (Rome/the Pope) is responsible for the authentic interpretation of the Rule and General Constitutions, but that the General Chapter is responsible for the *practical* interpretation of the Constitutions, and that the *presidency of CIOFS* may provide clarification of specific points between General Chapters.

Such an example is found in a General Chapter letter dated Oct. 29, 2011: The practice of wearing a “habit” is not in conformity with the Rule and General

Constitutions of the OFS, as already established.

The Chapter emphasizes that the distinctive sign of membership in the Order is the “Tau or other Franciscan symbol.” (GGCC 43). A “Franciscan symbol” is a small and simple insignia worn on the person (for example, a San Damiano cross). However, an OFS National Fraternity may determine in its National Statutes that wearing a “uniform” is an acceptable sign of recognition for Secular Franciscans of their own country, providing that the following mandatory criterion is followed: ...The Chapter states that the decision replaces all previous documents in this regard, and becomes in effect now and for the future. São Paulo, October 29, 2011

In a June 24, 2018, letter, our current Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, discussed the idea of Secular Franciscans wearing a “habit.” He stated that we do not wear an outward garment called a habit but should wear visible signs of being a Secular Franciscan – of following St. Francis in Christ’s footsteps. The “visible signs” he cited were kindness, love of God, love of others, a readiness to serve, simple lifestyle, prayer life, sacramental life, commitment to our Order (a commitment to “learn, love and live” our Rule, General Constitutions and Statutes), commitment to one’s Fraternity (by attendance, participation and service - OFS Rule art. 22 - 25; OFS General Constitutions art. 30, 53.3), visibly live “from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel” (OFS Rule art. 4, 7; OFS General Constitutions art. 8, 9)

In conclusion, Secular Franciscans *don’t* wear a special outward garment called a habit, but *should* wear visible signs of a person on a “conversion-transformation journey” **and should visibly wear** some form of a TAU cross every day of our lives and be buried with one.



Postscript: In a recent email someone asked if we have a special prayer to recite as we put on our TAU cross. As an Order or National Fraternity. We don’t, but Diane Menditto, OFS, Natl. Vice Minister and former Chair of the National Formation Commission suggested,

“May I walk toward Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis today and always.”

Do you have a prayer that you recite as you are putting on your TAU each day?