

## THE WORK OF BUILDING FRATERNITY

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Chapter Three of our Rule is entitled *Life in Fraternity*. Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, in his commentary on article 20 of the Rule found in *FROM GOSPEL TO LIFE*, stresses that

*fraternity* is **the** characteristic of all Franciscan groupings, whether local, regional, provincial, national, or international. A new dimension given to Secular Franciscan life ... is an awareness of (and, hence, a mandate to achieve) a fraternity spirit and style operation on levels beyond that of the local fraternity. Regional, provincial, national, or international groupings are not just a federation of independent, semi-autonomous fraternities or a forum for exchange, but actually a fully operating community with its own character, interactivity and authority...

Fr. Benet notes that while fraternities have to carry out their responsibilities they are much more than just bureaucratic units. Fraternities flourish through “loving and trusting relationships between members.”

How does a fraternity go about cultivate loving and trusting relationships among its members? Take the National Fraternity for example. Meetings are infrequent and there is always more work to be done than time in which to do it. Yet a true sense of fraternity has been developed at this level through the introduction of a few simple but beautifully effective rituals.

The first night we come together, there is a “sharing of life.” Everyone has an opportunity to speak briefly but openly of their joys and sorrows of their life. Sometimes we are moved to the point of tears. Always we come to appreciate one another’s shared humanity and our bond as children of God and brothers and sisters following Christ in the footsteps of Francis. This simple sharing serves to put the work to follow in its proper perspective.

Then, near the conclusion of days and nights of meeting, there is a shared meal at a local restaurant away from the retreat center we have called home. This festive occasion reinforces the bonds of fraternity and serves as a thanksgiving for all that has been accomplished.

At the level of local fraternity, our pre-fraternity meets six times every two months or so. This frequency certainly builds a sense fraternity. Moreover, there are gatherings when we feel free set aside our planned agenda because of a pressing matter of personal concern for one of the members. Sometimes another fraternity member has some valuable insight or advice to offer. Even without the discovery of a solution to a personal problem, there is great value in just having a place where a member knows that it’s safe to unburden oneself of a matter that’s been weighing on their heart. Then we pray. And then we socialize!

### Dialogue Starter

1. How does your fraternity develop loving and trusting relationships among its members?