

DIRECTIONS FOR ESTABLISHING AUGUSTINIAN RECOLLECT FRATERNITIES

English translation of the book “Guía para erigir la fraternidad seglar agustino-recoleta” (Roma, 1995), 69-89. The text have suffered some adjustments.

Constitutional Doctrine

Our Constitutions mandate that “the religious promote our Augustinian Recollect secular fraternity (Third Order), whose members strive for Christian perfection according to the charism of the Recollection as lay men and women... The Prior General in the whole Order, the Priors Provincial in their Provinces, and the local priors, having been authorized by them, may erect the secular fraternities” (n. 114).

Resolutions of the last General Chapters

Our last General Chapters also speak and with insistence about our secular fraternities.

1. The General Chapter of 1980 says: “In order to better promote the renewal and the up-dating of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity (Third Order) it is recommended to the Prior General and his Counsel to study the manner of elaborating some *Statutes- Plan or Norm of Life* -, and, after a brief experimentation, should try to publish them within six years” (*Ordinance IX*).

Effectively, after a long period and great efforts of adaptation to the post-conciliar instructions, through an official letter dated December 14, 1984, the Generalate was able to communicate to the Order the approval of the *Law of Life* and the *General Statutes* of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity.

2. The General Chapter of 1986 adverts that “the recent beatification of our tertiary Magdalene of Nagasaki is a propitious opportunity to give impetus to the figure of the Augustinian Recollect lay, a participant of our charism and collaborator in our apostolate.” And adds: “The Chapter entrusts to the Prior General and his Counsel the promotion, through the Secretariat of the Apostolate, an intensive campaign through conviction and motivation, so that in all our communities said fraternity may be established.

In the same manner, it urges the Mayor Superiors to name a director or visitor of our fraternity in their respective territories. In addition, let them promote this apostolate seeing that it is included in the pastoral plan of each community” (*Ordinance XII*).

3. The General Chapter of 1992, in its *Ordinance n. 7*, entrusts the Prior General and his Counsel with the responsibility:

a) “To continue, through the General Secretariat of the Apostolate, an intensive campaign through conviction and motivation so that in all our communities said fraternity may be established according to our legislation;”

b) “To prepare and publish a *guide* containing every practical way of establishing a fraternity;”

c) “To update in the general archive the personal files and the number of our secular fraternities in order to facilitate the familiarization with their members and the communication with all of them.”

The Chapter asks the Major Superiors to:

a) To use the necessary means so that the secular fraternity may be established in all communities;”

b) To encourage the practice of regional encounters in which the lay brothers and sisters can enrich themselves by knowing each other and a closer relationship of the fraternities;”

c) “To promote the publication of some means of information of the fraternities;”

d) “To appoint in their respective territories a director or visitor of the fraternities;”

e) “In addition, to promote this association, making an effort to include it in the pastoral plan of each community.”

The General Chapter of 1998 in its *Ordinance* n. 7

“If religious life has a place in the Church, the Secular Fraternity does even more so. It is an extension of the religious life in the secular world, since its members participate in both the charism of the institute and in the works of its apostolate.” (*Report of the Prior General to the Chapter* 9.3; cf. can. 303).

The chapter has joyfully seen that during the sexennium many SAR’s have conscientiously and happily committed themselves “to live the Gospel according to the experience and spirituality of the Order of Augustinian Recollects” (RL 4). The chapter also rejoices in the publication of the Guide for the Erection of the SAR Fraternity.

In the same Chapter Determination’s there are given some practical regulations for the prior general and the Major Superiors

4. The General Chapter of 2004 in its *Ordinance* n. 8:

The Chapter views with satisfaction the progress of the Secular Fraternities which has taken place during the last sexennium as well as the interest which has been shown in improving the formation of the members. Such a development emanates from an awareness of the charism of the Order as a gift of the Holy Spirit which is in itself diffusive and which calls us to a spiritual communion with the men and women who feel called to share, within their situation as lay persons, the charism and mission of the Order. Such a benediction implies spiritual and pastoral care of the members of these fraternities.

The Chapter urges the Prior General with his Council to:

1. Transfer to the General Secretariat of Spirituality all of the competencies with respect to the fraternities and charge said Secretariat with the task of elaborating and revising, in collaboration with the lay members, the programs and materials pertinent to the various stages of formation.
2. Require that the same Secretariat maintain an archive with the appropriate personal data concerning the members of the fraternities.
3. Continue urging our religious to follow closely the spiritual development of the fraternities and to establish fraternities in those places where such have not yet been established.
4. Promote the celebration of regional, national, and, also, if such were possible, international assemblies.
5. Organize, under the guidance of the General Secretariat of Spirituality, workshops on formation both for the spiritual assistants and for the lay agents of formation in order to facilitate their development in the human, spiritual and charismatic dimensions of their tasks.

Other Motivations

There are other reasons, of practical nature, which also suggest the establishment of our fraternity. Among them, we can enumerate the following:

1. On one hand, the secular fraternities are known as powerful centers of vocations, and, on the other, they make possible the organic insertion of the religious in the team of apostolate.
2. The careful attention given to the Augustinian Recollect Fraternity is a public recognition of the esteem, respect and growth that our institutional charism deserves, extended in the fraternity. And, nothing is more logical, than that the members of the said fraternity strongly feel the happy need of saturating themselves with true spirit of their spiritual family.

SPIRITUAL ADVISER

1. The one who is charged by the Superiors to direct as *spiritual adviser* a new fraternity must be convinced of the great value of the said fraternity. This is the first step and, at the same time, an indispensable condition in order to proceed to its erection. Without this conviction it is impossible for him to convince future aspirants.
2. The following are suggested as means of achieving such persuasion: a meditative reading of the Constitutions, n. 114, and of the *Manual of the Augustinian Recollect Fraternity*, specially pages 1-4; 23 ff., 51-53. In the second place, he must slowly read chapter I of Vol. I of *Augustinian Recollect Spirituality*, pp. 21-29, of Fr. Francisco Moriones, and everything that is said in this *Guide*.
3. Once the spiritual adviser is convinced of the value of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity, it is necessary to enlist members. Ways of persuading

the possible candidates of its values, of a higher rank that it occupies among religious associations and of its juridical personality must be conceived or thought of, starting with those who live near and work with us or feel attracted by the figure of St. Augustine and by our spiritual disposition.

Experience has shown that an adequate and enthusiastic presentation of the nature and purpose of the fraternity, of the opportunities it offers in order to more intensely live Christian life, is well received by the candidates. More than talking about obligations, the stress must be placed on the means of sanctification that the fraternity places within reach of its members.

MEMBERS OF THE FRATERNITY

It is impossible and unnecessary to specify the means of attracting aspirants. Each place has its peculiar characteristics. The spiritual adviser and the local community should determine the more proper means to encourage persons of either sex, whom they may consider qualified to join the rank of the Augustinian Recollect family as tertiaries.

However, it cannot be an open invitation, for example, during the time for announcements on Sunday Mass, because there could be a danger that lay people who do not possess the required conditions would, for one reason or another, present themselves. Invitation should be made to people who are known, who show interest and religious restlessness and offer a certain guarantee of Christian life.

Once a regular number of interested persons is obtained, initial meetings should be planned. In them the spiritual adviser will explain the objectives that are intended to attain, the reason for the existence of the fraternity, by progressively and clearly explaining themes, such as, the life of St. Augustine, the Augustinian Recollect Spirituality, the History of the Order, its actual situation, etc. Importance should be given to the threefold love – contemplative, communitarian and apostolic – that constitute the Augustinian Recollect charism.

As primary source of information we have the *Manual of the Fraternity*, recently published (that includes the *Rule of St. Augustine*, *Rule of Life*, *General Statutes and the Ritual* of the fraternity), the *Confessions of St. Augustine*, the three volumes of Fr. Francisco Moriones on *Augustinian Recollect Spirituality* and the article of Fr. Angel Martínez Cuesta *En torno al carisma agustino recoleto*¹.

We know for certain through explicit testimonies that the presentation of these doctrines is very well accepted. We frequently hear expressions of admiration and joy for the novelty and beauty of these teachings, which they consider very different from what they commonly hear either in a parish or in retreats.

FIRST MEETING

In it the following ideas could be expounded.

¹ *Recollectio* 7, (1984) 27-63. *Agustino Recoletos: Historia y espiritualidad*, Madrid 1995, 307-45.

The Augustinian Recollect Family

It is one of those families of consecrated Christians that search for the meaning of the invitation of Christ "come follow me" and includes among its members male religious (clergy or not), female religious (nuns and sisters), and lay men and women. As our Constitutions say, n. 112: "Our fraternal love must also embrace the institutes of nuns and sisters, as well as associations of the faithful who, following the *Rule* of St. Augustine and the spirit of the Order, are dedicated to contemplative life or to diverse apostolic works, or endeavor to achieve Christian perfection according to their secular state in life."

The Augustinian Recollects form a religious Order "brought into being in response to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and approved by the authority of the Church."² "The charism of St. Augustine is subsumed in the love for God without condition that unites souls and hearts in a common life of brotherhood and is diffused outward toward all human beings in the hope of winning and uniting all people in Christ within His Church³.

The Augustinian Recollect Fraternity

If we are looking for a reason that may explain why our laws and our superiors insist in exhorting us to work for the establishment and renewal of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity, we can encounter it in the very nature of the fraternity.

When canon 303 of the Code of Canon Law is closely studied, the very clear difference that exists in the eyes of the Church among the different associations of the faithful, on one side, and the Third Order, on the other, is very impressive. The canon 303 says "Associations whose members lead an apostolic life and strive for Christian perfection while living in the world and who share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction of that some institute are called third orders or some other appropriate name."

It is true that Third Orders have much in common with other associations of the Christian faithful; their members strive for spiritual goals to which all Christian must tend by virtue of their baptism. However, they have peculiar characteristics that distinguish them from those associations and give them new dimensions.

What are these peculiar characteristics: The constitutive elements the distinguish the Third Orders from any other spiritual association are the *communion* and *participation in the spirit* of a religious institution, and the *spiritual direction* or *assistance* that the same institute gives them. Without juridical bond and participation in the charism of an institute, no association can be a Third Order.

² *Constitutions OAR*, n. 6.

³ Cfr. *Ibid.*

Communion and Participation in the Spirit

According to our Constitutions, the members of the Third Order follow the *Rule* of St. Augustine and the spirit of the Order⁴. They strive for Christian perfection according to the charism of the Recollection as lay men and women⁵. Communion with their brother of the Order is brought about and developed by their participation in the Order's charism"⁶.

The *Rule of Life* and the *General Statutes* insist on the same idea: "The Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity receives Christians who, called by the Holy Spirit, to the perfection of charity, commit themselves to live the Gospel according to the experience and spirituality of the Order of Augustinian Recollects"⁷. And to guarantee the authenticity of this participation in the Augustinian Recollect ideal the *Rule of Life* prescribes that the formation of the candidates be "faithful to the Augustinian Recollect spirit"⁸. Finally, the new members promise to search for perfection of Christian life "according to the *Rule of Life of Secular Augustinian Recollects* and the spirit of the *Rule* of St. Augustine"⁹.

The participation of the members of the Third Order in the spirit of St. Augustine and of the Order is so total and so intimate that our laws do not hesitate to consider it a branch of the Augustinian Recollect family¹⁰. The *Rule of Life* and *General Statutes* reiterate in vivid terms the same ideas contained in our Constitutions. The members of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity are full members of the Augustinian family and share in her ideal, her benefits and riches. They are sons and daughters of the Augustinian Recollects in fraternal communion of her spiritual goods¹¹.

Nothing can illustrate in a more eloquent way the esteem that the Church has for Third Orders and the high position that they occupy in the hierarchy of associations, than the fact that the Holy See reserves for itself, not only the initial approval of its *Rule of Life* and *General Statutes*, but also whatever modification may be introduced later.

In order that the communion in the spirit of St. Augustine and of the Order be effective and contribute to the spiritual growth of its members, it is necessary that this spirit

permeate their formation, personality, spiritual life and apostolic expressions. Their progress in this path will depend on how they grow in the process of their formation, and their familiarization with the teachings and examples of St. Augustine and with the original charism of the Recollection. The *Constitutions* of the Order and

⁴ Cfr. *Constitutions OAR*, n. 112.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cfr. *Constitutions OAR*, n. 114.

⁷ Cfr. *Rule of Life of Secular Augustinian Recollects*, n. 4.

⁸ Cfr. *Rule of Life*, n. 34.

⁹ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, p. 44.

¹⁰ Cfr. *Constitutions OAR*, n. 112.

¹¹ Cfr. *Rule of Life*, n. 4.

the *Rule of Life* and *General Statutes* of the tertiaries speak very clearly and with insistence about this¹².

But, what are the elements of the Augustinian charism? Where are the sources of information? How can a spiritual guide have access to the works of St. Augustine, presupposing that they are within his reach? Is it reasonable to expect that he dedicate a good part of his time to personal research in order to acquire self confidence whenever he is asked to talk to the tertiaries in a meeting?

The questions that have just proposed are perfectly legitimate. However, there is a vast literature about St. Augustine: the *Constitutions* of the Order are a rich source of information about the charism of St. Augustine and the spirituality of the Order¹³. And, above all, the new *Rule of Life* and the *General Statutes* of Secular Augustinian Recollects contain abundant material about the more characteristic elements of the Augustinian secular ideal.

Among the elements of Augustinian Recollect charism, we can mention the following: the primacy of love as the center and heart of our life; restlessness of the soul alienated from God; an attitude of personal conversion and interiority; the knowledge about God and about oneself, specially through love; the spirit of prayer and mortification; the beauty of virtue and the freedom of charity; the value of friendship; the union of hearts and minds intent upon God; the contemplation, the community and the apostolate; openness to the needs of the Church.

All these can offer us abundant material both in preparing our talks to the tertiaries and in fostering reflection and discussion among them.

Spiritual Assistance

The second fundamental element of the Third Order is the spiritual assistance that the superiors of the religious institute offer to their members. Canon 303 is very incisive in this matter: they share the spirit of some religious institute under the higher direction of the same institute. Without this spiritual assistance no association, however great its participation in a concrete institute or might promote some of its objectives, could be classified as Third Order.

What does this bond to the first Order imply? The new Code of Canon Law, faithful to the principle of subsidiarity, refrains from imposing so many norms. Besides canon 303 there is no other norm that governs the Third Orders. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the religious institute to determine the identity of its secular branch, and if its Third Order is a public or private association, if it has or no juridical personality, define the perimeter of its autonomy or independence and establish its relationships with the members of the religious institute. All this, of course, is under the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, who has the authority to approve the decisions of the religious institute.

¹² Cfr. *Constitutions OAR*, nn. 122-123; *Rule of Life*, n. 35.

¹³ *Agustinos Recoletos: Historia u espiritualidad*, Madrid 1995, 307-45.

In our Order, many of these prerogatives have already been adopted by laws that are in force¹⁴. Major Superiors, aided by General Secretariat of the Apostolate, have the mission of supervising the progress and the vitality of the Secular Fraternities in their respective areas¹⁵.

OTHER MEETINGS

Those people who, after the first meeting continue to be interested in Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity, are invited to other meetings. The pre-trial period begins.

Pre-trial Period

It is a period that should not last indefinitely; neither should it be reduced to just one day. The formation should always respect the formative flow of each aspirant.

During the meetings of the this initiation period the nature and fundamental elements of secular fraternities, the history and charism of the Order, its organization and actual situation must be slowly expounded; everything with the purpose of sharing experiences and of offering to the aspirants the opportunity to assimilate the characteristics of our religious family. It is a period destined to know the secular fraternities, in general, and in particular, the Augustinian Recollect secular fraternity to which the aspirant wishes to belong. Consequently, the candidate has to live it intensely:

His presence in the fraternity must be assiduous and, in a certain way, also active.

He must strengthen his interpersonal relationships with all the members of the fraternity, particularly with all those who are responsible for its operation.

He must deepen his faith and the effects of his Baptism.

The pre-trial period, often neglected, is, nevertheless, very important: because it is the initial approach to the secular fraternity, and because first impression lasts during the entire life; whatever the initiation may be, that will be his apathy or enthusiasm in all the stages of his life. In a certain way, it is the basis for later consideration of one's vocation.

When it is considered timely, the canonical erection of the new fraternity may follow¹⁶, and the first group of candidates for admission to the trial period is organized¹⁷.

¹⁴ Cfr. *Rule of Life*.

¹⁵ Cfr. *Rule of Life*, n. 47.

¹⁶ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, pp. 85-86.

¹⁷ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, pp. 55-62.

Trial Period

The purpose of trial period¹⁸ is to offer the candidate opportunity to authentically and personally live the calling that he has chosen, in order to become later on, a full member of the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity. In order to reach these ends, it is necessary that:

1) The candidate participates responsibly in the activities and life of the fraternity during the trial period, particularly in the works of mercy, which is the best interpretation of the *Rule of Life*.

2) He deepens his knowledge of the *Rule of Life* and *General Statutes*, of the life and work of St. Augustine, the history and charism of the Order.

3) He studies the characteristics of his spirituality, through the person of St. Augustine, of the Order of the Augustinian Recollects and the historical evolution of its charism.

4) He interiorizes his call by means of a life of more intense and frequent reception of the sacraments.

5) That he strives to know and live the commitments that he has to assume.

These are some of the courses of action that must be kept in mind during the trial period. It is a time of grace, during which the disposition of the candidate to the actions of God must be particularly generous.

Those who are responsible must place special care in how this trial period is conducted, in the preparation of classes, in their example and testimony of life. During the last months the *General Statutes* are studied and the *Particular Statutes* are prepared in order to structure the respective local fraternity.

Having finished the trial period, and in an atmosphere of complete freedom, the candidates are invited to express their promises¹⁹. The attendance at meetings is a good criterion for admitting the candidates.

Evangelical Promises

The trial period is concluded with the profession of evangelical promises. From them come the following demands:

Authentic testimony of social, family and professional life.

Greater awareness of his belonging to the Church and of his obligation of doing apostolate.

Interpretation of the signs of times, under the perspective of faith, the doctrine and teaching authority of the Church and his peculiar spirituality.

A predisposition to serve *in* and *for* the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity: local, regional, national.

¹⁸ Cfr. *General Statutes*, n. 15.

¹⁹ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, pp. 63-67.

To sum up: the profession demands a constant conversion, an openness to the stirring of grace, a deep anxiety to update oneself, to become better, to give oneself to others, an attitude of service and of charity.

Newsletter

It would be desirable that every local fraternity publish monthly or bi-monthly a newsletter. Some of our fraternities call it *Tolle Lege*. Perhaps it would be convenient if all adopt that title, thus it would serve as bond of unity and communication among them.

The newsletter could contain announcements of meetings, the theme of the next spiritual conference, interesting news about the Order and the tertiaries, birthdays, and important saints of the month.

The Start of Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternity

When the fraternity has enough number of professed members, the assembly (Chapter) should take place in order to elect, for the first time, the President and Council²⁰, which is repeated every three years. When the fraternity has started, it already has established norms to govern it.

Besides the prescribed meetings, it is left to the initiative of each fraternity to find ways of promoting the spiritual progress of its members and to organize appropriate ways of apostolate. It has been written very well that the Augustinian Recollect Secular Fraternities are the “the channel through which the apostolate of Order is extended to the world”²¹.

²⁰ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, nn. 79-86.

²¹ Cfr. *Manual de la Fraternidad*, n. 20/