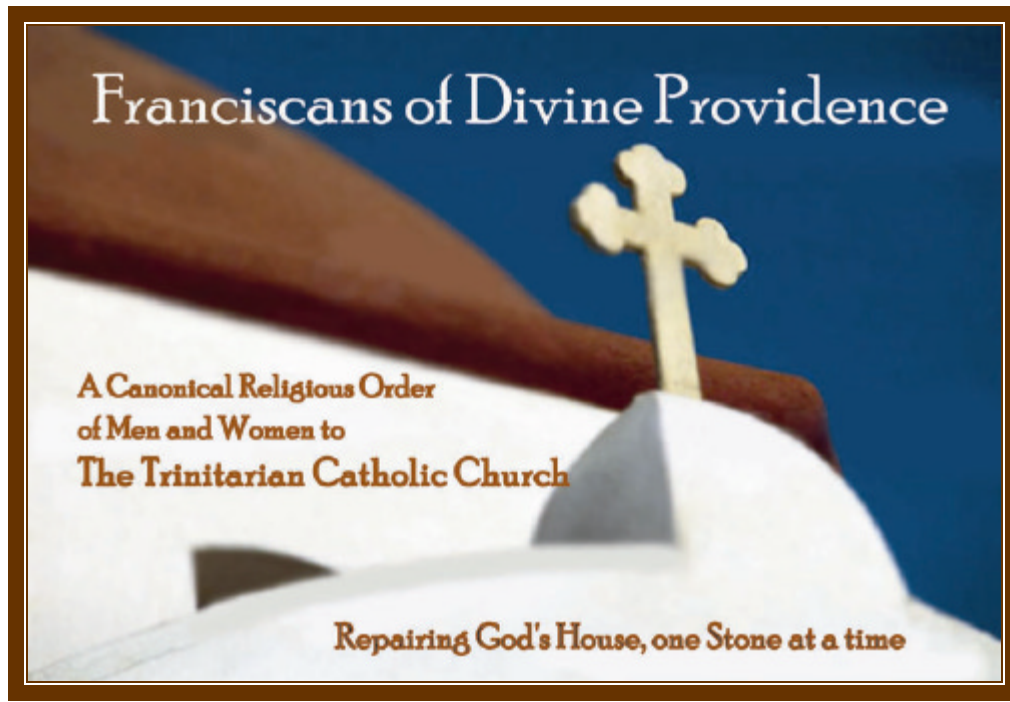


The New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence



# The Rule

*Adopted - July 10, 2007*

# The New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence



## Foreword

This is a Rule. It's not a Rule that restricts freedom but a Rule that wants to offer freedom. It is a Rule first of all written for men and women who desire to enter into a religious community, specifically, The Franciscans of Divine Providence. But since it offers ways to find the freedom to love, it would be hard to imagine that there is any man or woman who will not find in these pages something that speaks to the searching heart. It is a Rule written for people who are considering living and working in a community supported by vows of chastity, obedience and poverty. But since these vows emerge from a desire to belong completely to God, there is no human being who cannot find true spiritual counsel here. It is a Rule written for Catholics, but since it finds its inspiration in God's all-inclusive mercy, every person who desires to live an upright life will find invaluable treasures in it.

The more each of us reads this Rule, the more we keep finding here many words that help us in our struggle to live a faithful life. That is because this Rule wants to teach the heart to love. Love is not the only response of the human heart. The heart can also fear, hate, brood, be resentful and contemplate revenge. For the heart to respond spontaneously in love it needs to be taught by love. The words of this Rule speak to each sister and brother: 'You are someone only in so far as you are love, and only what has turned to love in your life will be preserved.' Turning everything to love; that is what this Rule is all about. Or maybe: letting everything be turned into love; because what this Rule shows most clearly is that the freedom to love, which is the goal of the spiritual life, is not the result of complicated human strategies or techniques, but the fruit of God's work in us.

Here the deeper meaning of any Rule in the spiritual life becomes visible. Instead of giving us methods to control, direct and determine our own life, a spiritual Rule wants to offer an open and free space within and among us where God can touch us with God's loving presence. It wants to make it possible for us not so much to find God as to be found by God, not so much to direct our life towards God, as to be directed by God, not so much to love God as to be loved by God.

This might sound quite passive. But the contrary is true. It requires active spiritual work to keep space for God. Why? Our ever-present fears keep trying to fill up every bit of free space with countless thoughts, words and actions that can give us the illusion that after all we are in control. Even though we have learned the hard way how little in control we really are, and even though we continue to suffer from the consequences of a life built on illusion, it remains very difficult to let God be the director and guide of our lives.

The more we think about this the less surprised we are at our human resistance to let God be the Lord of our lives. Because God is a jealous lover (see 2 Corinthians 11:2) who wants to love every part of us with a divine love and wants to touch every one of our thoughts, words and actions, God is not content with a divided love in which we reserve parts of ourselves for ourselves or others. God does not want to be excluded from any corner of our heart. God wants the divine love to pervade every fiber of our being.

But we hesitate because such a lover might radically change us and lead us where we 'would rather not go' (John 21:18). There are enough stories to give credibility to our hesitation. When Abram let God love him he became Abraham, a new person, being led to unknown places. When Simon let God love him, he became Peter, a new person, being sent out into the wide world and ending his life on a cross. When Saul let God love him he became Paul, a new person, persecuted, often put in prison, finally brought captive to Rome and beheaded there. And still . . . these men and many other men and women who let God love them with a jealous love all found true freedom, a freedom to love. It is for this newfound spiritual freedom that we remember them and continue to celebrate their lives.

Thus, a Rule in the spiritual life is a way to create a space where God's jealous love can reach us, heal us, transform us and guide us to freedom even when the cost of that freedom is high. There have been many Rules over the centuries: the Rule of St Augustine, the Rule of St. Benedict, the Rule of St Francis, the Rule of Taize, and many others. They differ according to the historical context in which they are written, the people they

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address and the way of life they envisage. But all of them offer creative boundaries within which God's loving presence can be recognized and celebrated.

The 'New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence' is a contemporary expression of this need for boundaries. In a very compassionate tone it calls us to a discipline of the heart and shows concrete ways in which we can become disciples of Jesus who reveals to us God's jealous love. It does not prescribe but invite, it does not force but guide, it does not threaten but warn, it does not instill fear but points to love. It presents a demanding way of life, but the demands do not come from an outer power that wants to control life but from an inner voice that calls to freedom. In everything it wants to help us to become gradually free from the compulsions of our society so that we can fully belong to God.

This Rule speaks about the "community" as the first place where we can be found and loved by God. In no way does it encourage a form of individual spiritual heroism. All through, the community is presented as the fertile ground for a spiritual life. This community makes its true nature manifest in the celebration of the Eucharist. The bread and wine, taken in small amounts, reveal the presence of a love greater than our hearts can contain and our minds can understand.

In the context of such Eucharistic community, Chastity, Obedience and Poverty are ways to deepen our sense of fully belonging to God. The manner in which these three ways of following Jesus are described make it clear that, though they are presented as religious vows, they are also aspects of the life of every Christian. All Christians are called to witness for a love greater than human beings can give each other. All Christians are called to listen to an authoritative voice and all Christians are called to detach themselves from whatever blocks their way to God. Chastity, Obedience and Poverty are ways of creating in us an inner sanctuary unoccupied by human concerns, kept free for God to dwell in.

The more we belong to God the better we can live a life of prayer and ministry. Prayer is listening to the voice of the lover inviting us to risk a new step in an unknown direction. Ministry is giving visibility to the presence of a loving God inside as well as outside our community of faith.

Finally the Rule calls us to love the Church as the Lord himself, and asks for a profound respect for her institutions and missions. A life of prayer and ministry can only bear fruit when it is deeply connected with the whole body of Christ and lived in filial communion with its spiritual leaders. Although the Church is made up of sinners and 'burdened with weakness' she continues to be the place God has chosen to meet us. When we cannot truly love this broken, suffering and often sick body of the Church we have no reason to believe that we are allowing God to reach us. In a very beautiful way the Rule says: 'Whatever is impure and useless in the Church must be healed, not attacked, and purified in suffering rather than criticized.' Thus a deep love for the Church in its concrete daily life is a criterion of our deep desire to be found, known and loved by God.

It is no surprise that at the conclusion of the Rule we are asked to look at Mary, the mother of Jesus, as the model of the spiritual life. She, more than any other human being, made space for God and let her whole being be formed by God's zealous love. Her trust and fidelity offer us an example but also encouragement in our own daily struggle to be faithful. She prevents us from becoming angry when the Church does not respond to our need and from becoming bitter when the Church leaves us dissatisfied. She keeps asking our attention for the suffering body of her Son and inviting us to an unceasing willingness to forgive. She safeguards our religion from becoming an ideology and reminds us over and over again that it is Jesus who is the source of all true joy and peace.

We live in a time in which we are constantly tempted to let our fears rule our lives. More than ever, our world gives us reasons to fear. We are afraid for our own inner impulses which we are not able fully to understand or control, we are afraid of the many strangers surrounding us and threatening to invade our lives, we are afraid of the increasing capability of humanity to destroy itself and we are afraid of a God who can punish us with eternal damnation. The greater our fears, the less our freedom. In order to alleviate our fears we often become very active, busy and full of worries about our future, always on guard for possible dangers. Our fears also make us very self-centered since they make us live our lives as an ongoing battle for survival.

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Jesus came to cast out our fears. He announced a God of perfect love in whom no fear can exist. He himself and all his messengers, whether angels or apostles, say constantly: 'Do not be afraid.' But it is far from easy not to let the many real fears make us deaf and blind to the God of perfect love. The news of every day, the concrete emergencies of our own daily life and our own inner self-doubt make us often fearful before we are fully aware of it ourselves.

What we truly need is a safe space to dwell, to take off our heavy amour and let the perfect love of God touch us, heal us and guide us from the land of fear to the land of God.

This Rule is one very concrete way of creating such a space. The disciplines it describes can help us gradually to create a new environment with a new familiarity, where we learn to trust our capacity to love more than our inclination to fear. Such a new environment takes time to create. It requires patience and hard spiritual work. But as it is being created, we discover that it indeed is possible to live in the midst of this fearful world without being imprisoned by it and that we can already here and now taste the freedom of the children of God, the freedom to love.

### **This shall be the Rule for the Novices and Professed Members of The Franciscans of Divine Providence.**

#### **1. Seeking God**

You want to seek God with all your life,  
and love Him with all your heart.

But you would be wrong if you thought you could reach Him.  
Your arms are too short, your eyes are too dim,  
your heart and understanding too small.

To seek God means first of all to let yourself be found by Him.  
He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.  
He is the God of Jesus Christ.  
He is your God, not because He is yours  
but because you are His.

To choose God is to realize that you are known and loved  
in a way surpassing anything one can imagine,  
loved before anyone had thought of you or spoken your name.

To choose God means giving yourself up to Him in faith.  
Let your life be built on this faith as on an invisible foundation.  
Let yourself be carried by this faith like a child in its mother's womb.

And so, don't talk too much about God but live in the certainty  
that He has written your name on the palm of His hand.  
Live your human task in the liberating certainty  
that nothing in the world  
can separate you from God's love for you.

In Jesus of Nazareth God shows in a special way  
how urgently He seeks for you, and how entirely  
He has committed Himself to your happiness.

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In Jesus of Nazareth, one person shows how completely we can belong to God; how much freedom and humanity, how much courage and self-forgetfulness one can possess when one has been found by God and has surrendered to Him.

In Jesus, there is also a future for you as you go by His road through sin and death towards fellowship and love, unfailing glory and life.

In faith, you will recognize Him in the works of His hands, and above all in us, made in His image and likeness, and most clearly of all in the love which is Jesus.

But even if you receive no sign, no word from Him, you will still recognize Him. His very absence is full of the mystery of his greatness. It can help you not to seek and serve some image of Him you yourself have created.

So never let yourself lose heart  
but go on seeking Him in everything,  
in everybody –  
they are all pledges that you will finally meet Him.  
Work hard to know Him face to face.

For as sure as the dawn is His coming,  
certain as the latter rains.

If you abide in love you will abide in God  
and not wander anymore in darkness.

Then live in joyfulness and hope,  
unanxious, without any trace of fear,  
at peace with yourself and the world,  
in ceaseless reverence and thanks.  
Because God's love for you endures forever.

### **2. Following Jesus**

Following Jesus does not mean slavishly copying His life.  
It means making His choice of life  
your own starting from your own potential  
and in the place where you find yourself.  
It means living for the values  
for which Jesus lived and died.

It means following the path He took  
and seeing things as He saw them.  
If there is anything in which this life,  
this way, can be expressed,  
in which God has revealed Himself most clearly,  
it is the reality of love.

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You are someone only in as far as you are love,  
and only what has turned to love in your life will be preserved.

What love is you can learn from Jesus.

He is the one who has loved most.  
He will teach you to put the center of yourself outside.  
For no one has greater love than one who dies for friends.  
He will also teach you to be unlimited space for others,  
invitation and openness:  
Come to me, all who are weary and overburdened  
and I will give you rest.'

So be converted to love every day.  
Change all your energies, all your potential,  
into selfless gifts for the other person.  
Then you yourself will be changed from within  
and through you God's Kingdom will break into the world.

You are called to follow Jesus closely.  
With Him you will take the road up to Jerusalem,  
the city of suffering and glorification.  
With Him you will give everything that the Kingdom may come.

On this road you are called to be least of all and not master,  
to carry others' burdens and not lay your own on them,  
to give freedom instead of taking it,  
to grow poor in order to make others rich,  
to take the cross upon yourself thus bringing joy to others,  
to die in order that others may live.  
This is the mystery of the gospel  
and there is no purpose in endless talk about it.  
Be silent –  
for it will be true and genuine only if you practice it.

So keep Jesus Christ before your eyes.  
Don't hesitate to go anywhere He leads you;  
don't stay where you are and don't look back,  
but look forward with eagerness to what lies ahead.

### **3. Members of One Body**

The community is the first place where you will make God's kingdom incarnate.  
It is one of the countless points where God's new people assemble in peace,  
in reconciliation, justice and joy,  
in praise of God and service to the world.  
A people whose King is the Lord.

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Accept with gratitude the companions God gives you  
to go with you on the way.

Your task is to serve and upbuild one another  
as members of one body.  
To the extent that you are filled with His Spirit  
and ready to die that others may live,  
to that extent will you grow in unity  
and reflect the face of Christ more and more clearly.

And to the extent that you are ready to die together  
that others may live  
will your community bear fruit  
for the coming of the Kingdom.

Then put aside all ambition,  
and no longer concentrate on yourself.  
Be constantly converted to your companions  
and place yourself in God's hands.

Give instead of demanding,  
trust others instead of compelling their trust.  
Serve instead of being served, bless instead of cursing.  
And be sure that when you have done all things well  
you will still be an unprofitable servant.

So be attentive to the others,  
not in order to dominate or exploit them  
but to work for their happiness discreetly and effectively  
and to build them up in all the riches of faith and love.  
And you, accept from your companions,  
family and friends the help you need.

Be thankful for the variety of gifts  
and difference of personality.  
When you put your own potential and insights  
at the service of your community  
your unity will grow stronger and richer,  
and together you will create that spaciousness  
which finds room for everyone.

Pluriformity is not the end but the means  
to make unity more powerful  
and the individual bear more fruit.

Never be satisfied with what is imperfect  
yet also realize God is patient with us.  
Let progress and development be of such a sort that all can keep pace,  
and never refuse to set out together when,  
in obedience to the gospel,  
the community travels on to a new future.

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Make the effort of listening to others  
and of understanding them.

Give your opinion when it is useful  
without false humility or assertiveness.  
Speak in such a way that you can still hear what the other is saying,  
and that he or she will still be ready to hear you.  
Whether you speak or keep silent  
let it proceed from the peace of the Lord.

Take no vengeance, not even in thought.  
Avoid every tendency to depression and sadness –  
it is death to your soul.  
Look for the light in all things and all people.  
Your night will be made radiant by numberless stars  
till the moment when the Sun of Justice rises in your heart,  
and that morning begins which knows no ending.

Your faith and love must be constantly renewed;  
your weakness and faults constantly corrected.  
Don't be afraid to open yourself to your companions.  
Choose from among them a sure and skillful guide  
who will help you advance in the way of the Lord.

Never disappoint the trust another puts in you.  
Be warm and merciful  
and let none go from you empty handed.  
The least you can offer is your time and patience,  
your affection and your prayer.

The quality of any community does not depend on age or numbers.  
The only thing that counts and will bring you a blessing  
is that you should be always seeking each other in the Spirit of Jesus.  
From Him alone comes salvation.

Have great respect for the seniors in the community.  
Don't distress them by your talk or behavior.  
Be gentle towards their weakness and incapacities –  
you are building on what they began.

Every body must have a head, every circle a center.  
Joyfully, then, accept the one who fulfills this special service.  
More than anyone else that one needs your support and mercy.  
Let the guardian be for you as a presence of the Lord,  
not because of human qualities and leadership,  
but for the sake of the guardian's special calling and grace.

Everything in your life can have love as its motive, its end.  
The vows by which you bind yourself  
are precisely your own way of embodying  
your love for God and God's creation.

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The more you grow in love,  
the more clearly you will understand  
what the vows demand;  
and the more seriously you live your vows,  
the more you will grow in love.

### **4. For the Sake of the Kingdom**

Some among us may vow to remain Celibate  
and unmarried for the sake of God's Kingdom.  
Others profess a simple vow of Chastity.  
Together, and yet in different ways,  
we all will experience the loneliness of the cross of Jesus  
and reveal the basic loneliness of every person.  
At the same time, we are all invited to build up a fellowship with Christ  
and to establish the kingdom of love among all people.

Those who choose to remain Celibate,  
put an end to the cycle of procreation and death.  
They are beginning a new kind of existence in the incorruptibility  
of a new-born generation,  
and the unimagined fruitfulness of the Kingdom of God.

Choosing Chastity, does not mean the renouncing  
of love or intimacy in committed relationships,  
contempt for the body or fear of marriage or commitment.  
Rather, it is the bringing of your potential for love  
into the new and unlimited fruitfulness of the Kingdom.

So we are each called to be a witness to love,  
and its begetter, an encouragement to all  
who are seeking love's genuine image.

So you will also be a visible sign  
against the narrow view of the world  
which identifies love only with sex.

You will be able to do this only if your deepest self  
is anchored in God, as Jesus Himself bore witness:  
I and the Father are one.  
In Him you will find a love  
which surpasses all human imaginings.

You will also have to be a community person.  
Make sure you don't grow isolated from your loved ones  
or your companions on the human level.  
Open yourself to the joys of life together as family members;  
foster a mature development of your feelings,  
and a human warmth in your life.

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Always be the first to love and be faithful to that love  
even if you get no answer.  
Don't make conditions.  
Be thankful and praise God  
when you realize you are loved.

### **5. Called to Freedom**

Following Jesus demands of you in the first place obedience to His Gospel.

You must place yourself, alone and in community,  
under the scrutiny of this Word,  
and always be determining your conduct by it.  
Then you will find the truth to free you most radically,  
and a solidarity to make your community a living gift to others.

Obedience also demands of you that you listen to the other person;  
not only to the conversation but to what the person is.

Then you will begin to live in such a way that you neither crush  
nor dominate nor entangle your companions  
but help them to be themselves and lead them to freedom.

Christ was thus obedient unto death so that we might be free.  
He was the least among the dead that we might have life.  
Don't be afraid then that your obedience to the Gospel,  
your listening to others, will impoverish your personality  
or decrease your responsibility.  
It summons you rather to live out your responsibility  
in your encounter with others.

Never make the mistake of thinking you can gain your freedom  
by your own exertions.  
It is something which you give to others  
and which you receive yourself from them.

No laws, no Rules, no therapy, no discussions are capable  
of setting our communities in order and making them fruitful  
if the Spirit of Jesus is not master there.

In the community there must always be someone  
who exercises the service of authority.  
The first task of the Guardian General and the other Guardians  
is to foster unity among you  
and make the community grow in faithfulness  
to its Franciscan charism and vocation.  
The Guardian's authority builds up the community,  
but at the same time this authority holds only in so far  
as you are ready to obey.

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For the full development of each one's potentialities  
a flexible yet definite structure is needed  
to maintain the space for our life together.  
You can't have a body without a skeleton,  
or a river without banks to guide its stream.  
Keep wholeheartedly to the arrangements that have been agreed:  
then people will never rely on you in vain  
and you will be able to put all your trust in others.

In obedience to each other and to the Gospel  
you will discover the interior freedom that makes you capable  
of comprehending the world's needs -  
without identifying in a shallow way  
with special groups and causes -  
and of entering into them yourself.

Our freedom is being threatened more than ever.  
Set yourself against every form of oppression.

Free yourself from a world that seeks  
only pleasures and possessions  
and bring others to share your freedom.  
Set yourself against everything that makes us slaves politically,  
economically or socially. You have nothing to lose.

No doubt you will have noticed  
that our fundamental bondage is to sin,  
to our short-sighted attachment to ourselves.

Through your radical surrender to God  
you will be freed from this  
and become a deliverer of others.  
a breath of fresh air for those you meet,  
a servant of all,  
a source of life, expectation and hope.

### **6. That We Might Be Rich**

You are ready to put all you have at the service of others.  
You seek poverty not for its own sake,  
nor from contempt or fear for the good things God gives you,  
but because you want to contribute something to alleviate the world's poverty,  
to make even your own possessions available.

Remember the words of Paul:  
'You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
that though he was rich,  
yet for your sake he became poor,  
so that by his poverty you might become rich.'

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The community is the place where you daily share riches and poverty,  
energy and weakness, joy and sorrow, success and failure,  
your hope and your doubt.

In this kind of community can grow something of Christ's bond with His Father:  
'All that I have is yours, all that you have is mine.'

Live like a poor person without parading your poverty.  
Stand by the poor wherever they live and work.  
Your first love must go out to the least of these.  
Don't tie yourself down to the rich or powerful of the world.  
Get rid of the inclination to court the great and influential.  
Otherwise you would deform the image of the Church  
that we followers of St. Francis are working to repair.

Put your trust in God,  
wait for His mercy and for all that you need.  
Above all, take Jesus as your riches,  
the pearl for which you will give everything,  
your treasure in heaven.

Don't be romantic about this;  
take your part in the simple struggle for a living,  
but without attaching your heart to what you earn by it.  
In this way you will be able to help many people  
and at the same time be a condemnation  
of every form of materialism or snobbery.

Don't suppose poverty consists only in big things.  
Keep clear of all competitiveness and envy;  
treat with care the gifts God has given you  
and always be a good steward.  
Be sober and restrained,  
and don't wait till you are asked outright before giving anything.  
But don't suppose poverty consists only in little things.  
Share with the whole world.

A generous contribution to relieve poverty  
is better than a little gift;  
and an intelligent and effective effort  
to fight the causes of poverty  
is better than almsgiving.

Keep in mind also how much you lack yourself;  
be aware of your own poverty  
and dare to hold out your hands  
to receive from others and to learn from them.

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### 7. The Breaking of the Bread

By the grace of God you have been called to a life  
in which everything is inspired by the sacrament of the Eucharist.  
You must grow in daily knowledge of this mystery,  
and in a greater love for the Lord who gives Himself in it.

The celebration of the Eucharist is the center of your life.  
It is the highest expression and the strongest support  
of your life as a Franciscan.  
It is the beginning and end of your actions;  
the source and consummation of your service to God.  
When you celebrate the memorial of Christ,  
give thanks to God for God's countless benefits.  
Never tire of praising God,  
one in heart and voice with your companions,  
and united with Christ, the sacrifice of praise.  
Renew yourself in the spirit of love and unity  
because you are sharing with your friends,  
the same bread, the same cup.

The celebration of the Eucharist would be nothing  
but a romantic or aesthetic sensation should you forget  
that the heart of it is the self-giving of Jesus.  
The sacrifice of yourself for the sake of the others  
is the single foundation of every community.  
Unite yourself with the Lord, then,  
in a fruitful and acceptable offering  
for the life of the world.

Each day you are nourished at the Lord's table  
and filled with His riches.  
So be ready to break the bread of your life  
for the poor and hungry everywhere in the world.  
Keep nothing for yourself but share with the others  
all you have received from God's tenderness.

In the bread of the Eucharist and the cup of blessing,  
Christ's presence is revealed at its most intense.  
Let your life be permeated with a tremendous reverence  
towards this mystery of faith.  
Your adoration needs no justification  
more than your love and wonder for the infinite,  
delicate grandeur of God,  
the unfathomable depths of Christ's gift.  
Let His praise not depart from your lips.

Life drawn from the Eucharist  
makes all kinds of demands on you  
to proclaim the meaning and greatness of this mystery.

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You are called especially to give the sacrament  
its full effect in unity, love and service.  
The unity of all Christians and all persons in the world  
must be closest to your heart.  
Always and everywhere you are called  
to rise above oppositions and divisions  
in the universal love of Christ.  
Always look for what unites  
and fight everything that estranges  
and separates us from one another.

Your calling gives you the privilege  
of living the Eucharistic mystery to the full.  
So reject nothing which the church enjoins on your faith,  
and accept nothing that might obscure  
the full meaning of this sacrament.  
To Christ the Lord who dwells ever present in His gifts  
you can bring your life's adoration.

Your whole life must be worship in spirit and truth,  
your whole existence a celebration  
and adoration of the presence of God.  
Your life is to be poured out in prayer  
and adoration before the Eucharist,  
and there it will be inspired afresh.  
In this way give glory to the Father  
through Him, in Him and with Him.

The Eucharist sets you on the way of Christ.  
It takes you into His redeeming death and gives you a share  
in the most radical deliverance possible.  
And already the light of the resurrection, the new creation,  
is streaming through it from beyond.  
Whenever you sit at table with the risen Lord,  
it is the first day of the week,  
very early in the morning.

### **8. Prayer**

The Lord Jesus Himself will teach you how you should pray.  
He is the creative Word which you may receive  
in the silence of your heart and the fruitful soil of your life.  
Listen attentively to what He will say;  
be swift to carry out what He will ask of you.  
You have been promised His Spirit  
who will bear your poor little efforts  
before the throne of grace  
and into the intimacy of the living God.

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Your prayer is therefore  
not so much a duty as a privilege;  
a gift rather than a problem  
or the result of your own efforts.

So don't tire yourself out looking for beautiful thoughts or words,  
but stay attentive before God in humility and expectation,  
in desire and purity of heart, full of joy and hope.  
Your prayer will take countless forms because it is the echo of your life,  
and a reflection of the inexhaustible light in which God dwells.

Sometimes you will taste  
and see how good the Lord is.  
Be glad then, and give Him all honor,  
because His goodness to you has no measure.  
Sometimes you will be dry  
and joyless like parched land  
or an empty well.  
But your thirst and helplessness  
will be your best prayer  
if you accept them with patience  
and embrace them lovingly.

Sometimes your prayer will be an experience  
of the infinite distance that separates you from God;  
sometimes your being and His fullness  
will flow into each other.

Sometimes you will be able to pray  
only with your body and hands and eyes;  
sometimes your prayer will move beyond words and images;  
sometimes you will be able to leave everything behind you  
to concentrate on God and His Word.  
Sometimes you will be able to do nothing else  
but take your whole life and everything in you  
and bring them before God.

Every hour has its own possibilities of genuine prayer.  
Don't be afraid to set apart a considerable time  
for your prayer every day.  
It is your vocation.

Your zeal for the Kingdom of God  
and your availability for others  
and for your sisters and brothers  
will grow all the greater for it.  
Remember that prayer is more powerful  
than anything you can achieve by your actions.  
And the Lord says there are evils  
that can only be cast out  
by prayer and fasting.

## The New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence

So set yourself again and again on the way of prayer.  
Never wait till you feel the need for it.  
Often enough, if you only make a new start,  
God will bring it to a good end.  
Make use of a method when you need it.  
Learn from your companions  
and study how the saints of God have prayed.

As we pray as a community of faith  
you will discover the wide horizon of each prayer.  
Rejoice to meet your sisters and brothers  
in the presence of the Lord,  
and to look with them to the Creator of all light.  
Let yourself be carried by the rhythm of prayer  
in the peace and joy of a new world.  
Let yourself be healed of the wounds  
you suffer every day by the saving praise of God.

Let yourself be renewed in your faith,  
hope and love by the Word that comes to you.  
Don't let yourself be distracted by accidentals.  
Try to understand God's Word  
even from the mouth of a bad reader or preacher.  
Don't be irritated by someone who sings off-key.  
The forms are only important  
to the extent that you know how to see through them.

Don't pray so that the world may admire you,  
nor to draw others eyes.  
Pray so that God may be glorified and His name praised  
Unite yourself with the unceasing prayer  
of the Church on earth and in heaven.  
Know that through your mouth and heart  
all of creation is proclaiming the glory of God  
and groaning for its redemption in the Lord.

In this way your life will be fed with prayer  
and full of this search for God.  
You will be able to give without counting the cost,  
and accomplish God's will every day.  
You will dedicate yourself heart and soul  
to the battle against the powers of evil  
and you will work with joy and indestructible hope  
for the new humanity for which Jesus gave His life and blood.  
Prayer and work are not whole without each other.

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### 9. The Harvest is Great

Your first task is to co-operate in the building  
of a strong and loving community.  
This is the condition and effect  
of what we celebrate in the Eucharist.  
In our community begins the reality of the new humanity  
in which the complex fragmentation  
of our human existence and society of life  
is healed and sanctified.

Our Order does not exist for itself  
or merely for its own sake.  
If it is truly evangelical it will guide you  
and free you to serve the people of God.  
It is itself an active element  
in realizing the Kingdom of God.  
God will urge you to go out from the community  
to give form to His message  
of reconciliation and unity among all.  
Through the suffering and joy  
of all whom you will encounter  
you will let all your daily experience  
reverberate through your prayer,  
alone and through your sisters and brothers.

You have been called to be in the world  
without being of the world.  
If the salt loses its savor it is good for nothing.  
Therefore don't reject the world  
and don't cut yourself off from people,  
but love them as Jesus, the Redeemer, did.

But where the world  
is nothing but the pride of life,  
lust of the eyes,  
and desire of the flesh,  
then flight alone is proper.

If you were to value the things of this world,  
you could not be God's friend.

Your only ambition must be to proclaim  
in word and deed Christ's gospel of freedom,  
justice and love.  
For this, use the most effective means  
without supposing that they can replace God's grace.

You are free to do the work you want to do.  
You can live as a religious  
and be a witness to the Lord  
in every kind of work.

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Discover for yourself  
what seems the most fruitful ministry or apostolate for you.  
Be enterprising and creative.  
God blesses the risks undertaken for His sake.

When you choose your work  
be influenced by its consequences  
for your life in community  
and by the needs of the local Church.  
Preferably look for work that you can do  
to the greatest benefit of the community  
and in which it can support you most effectively.

Therefore always consult with the Guardians and others.  
You will thus prevent unnecessary conflicts  
and avoid seeking yourself or losing sight of your goal.  
You are never alone in your work.  
You can profit by the insights, knowledge,  
experience and contacts of your companions,  
and your sisters and brothers in community.  
Be involved yourself with the whole group  
and take interest in the work of others;  
offer them your help where you can.  
The love of Christ will not let you rest.  
Your work is no escape into activity,  
but a sharing in the upbuilding of the body of Christ.  
You can do this only on the basis  
of an intimate union with Him  
in purity of heart and selflessness.

It is not necessary to do your work within a tight schedule  
or the structure of a labor contract.  
The Order offers you the precious possibility  
of committing yourself freely,  
and developing your own initiatives  
for growth, study, training and ministry  
for the good of God's Kingdom.

It you think you are called  
to the diaconate or priesthood  
you are striving for something good.  
See it as a high election, a responsible mission.

It will be your task to lead and instruct your people  
in the name of the Lord,  
to sanctify and upbuild them in the Spirit.  
This demands an obedient union with the Bishop  
and a collegial union with the other Priests and Deacons.

If you are called to the diaconate or priesthood.  
it will mean a new call to holiness  
and love for the Lord and God's people.

## The New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence

### 10. The Body of the Lord

The way of Jesus leads to communion with all people.  
His enduring presence in the Church is the foundation  
of a profound community in the world just as God desires it.

Love the Church as the Lord Himself.  
Though she is burdened with the weakness and sinfulness  
of a long history, she is still the instrument of His Kingdom,  
His work of salvation for the world, the seed of a new creation.

Show solidarity with all of your brothers and sisters in the faith.  
One baptism and the same Eucharist  
are the visible signs of your unity.  
Be specially mindful of those who are persecuted,  
denied equal rights, discriminated against or alienated  
by the world, for the sake of faith and righteousness.

Your love for the Church will also be expressed  
in a union of faith with our Presiding Bishop.  
The Presiding Bishop fulfills a mission of unifying  
and upbuilding for the whole Church.  
Every fracture in the body means a mutual impoverishment,  
and conflicts with the will of the Lord.

If you love the Church have a profound respect  
for her institutions and mission.  
Whatever is impure and useless in her must be healed,  
not attacked, and purified in suffering rather than criticized.

Give yourself time to discover this Church  
as a marvelously deep mystery of fellowship in faith, hope and love,  
transcending all barriers of time and space.  
Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets,  
Our Church makes you members of the household of all God's saints.

The Church comes into being in the community where you live,  
not so much in her official structures  
as in her essential form of fellowship and new creation.

Remember then, that our Order and its missions and parishes  
must before all else be One and Holy, Catholic and Apostolic.  
In this way, we each live the mystery of the Church  
in the place where you are.

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### 11. The Spiritual Life

Spiritual life is life drawn from the Holy Spirit,  
who raised Jesus from the dead  
and turns the whole world into a new creation.

The Spirit within you will bear fruit of simplicity and goodness,  
modesty and joy, sobriety and gentleness.  
He will give you interior freedom  
and bring your love to perfection.  
He will make you into a new person.

So don't carry on a futile battle against yourself,  
don't divide yourself into good and evil.  
Resist the temptation to analyze yourself –  
turn your attention to the Lord instead,  
and be deeply receptive.  
Accept yourself in His light  
and concentrate on the mission you have to accomplish.

God's Spirit will bring you to simplicity  
in an undivided dedication to Him and to your neighbors.  
He gives you no specific road map to follow but rather the chance  
of turning yourself towards love hour by hour.  
And so spiritual life is not a burden but a liberating vocation.  
It is much more a matter of simplifying  
than of complicated methods  
and extraordinary performances.

In special cases it can be good to impose  
some specific discipline on yourself.  
Your daily life among your companions, family and friends  
and others in service, openness and fidelity  
is the usual form of asceticism,  
which is both effective and enough.

Every day look at the way you are living in the light of God's Word.

Let it warm you when you are cold,  
encourage you when you are disappointed.  
You must not only be a hearer of the Word –  
you must also bring it to fulfillment.  
Happy are you if you meditate upon it daily in your heart:  
you will be like a tree by the running water,  
whose branches will stay fresh and green,  
and they will keep bringing forth new fruit.

Spiritual life will develop only in a climate of silence and solitude.  
Bring the warring voices within you to stillness.  
Create for yourself an atmosphere of tranquility and silence  
and so help others to remain concentrated on the presence of God.

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You will surely have realized that  
you can not become a spiritual person  
by merely wearing the external signs  
of the religious life, such as the Habit,  
or without developing an interior discipline  
in your dealings with the world.  
Don't let yourself be trapped into the unrest  
that comes from excessive talking and gossiping.

Be discerning in your choice of what the television,  
Radio, the Internet and newspapers offer you.  
Without a personal control on your imagination and emotions,  
you will undermine your spiritual strength and lessen your chances  
of genuinely meeting and loving one another.

You will find a source of wisdom and spiritual joy  
in the feasts of the Church.  
The year is crowned with the signs of God's goodness.

If you celebrate these feasts with the Church  
then your own life and suffering,  
your enthusiasm and work,  
your dying and rising and your waiting for the Lord  
will receive significance and impact.

Never be misled by the thought  
that after failing and sinning  
there can be no forgiveness.  
Look critically at your own shortcomings,  
but be sure that with the Lord  
there is always abundance of redemption.

Your spiritual life must be mobile;  
travel from oasis to oasis.  
Yet the Lord can prepare a table even in the desert,  
and in the furnace of trial  
He will be coolness and refreshment.

### 12. Mary

Mary will have her own place in your life.  
You cannot separate her from the Lord  
who chose her as His mother and His bride.

She is the selfless space where God became human;  
she is the silence in which God's Word can be heard.  
She is the free woman,  
subject to none,  
not even to the powers of evil.

## The New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence

She is the image of the Church.  
She is Our Lady of Divine Providence.  
Her self-effacing service will guide you to the Lord.  
Her faith and fidelity  
should be a model for your life.

She has trodden all the paths  
of our human existence;  
she has gone through darkness and suffering,  
through the abyss of loneliness and pain.

She is the little creature through whom  
God's grandeur shines out;  
she is the poor one filled with divine riches.  
She is wholly grace, and grace for you.

Then take your part joyfully  
in the prophecy of scripture:  
'Behold, henceforth all generations  
will call me blessed.'

### **13. Of Days and Years**

Your life unfolds in a continuous succession  
of experiences and expectations.  
No two days are the same,  
no year leaves you unaltered.

Every day has enough trouble of its own.  
When you go to sleep,  
bury all that has happened in the mercy of God.  
It will be safe there.  
Stand back from what has happened,  
and be grateful for it all.

When the day begins be sure that you yourself  
can be as new and pure as the new light.  
It is like a resurrection.  
The first hour is the most important of the day.  
Don't yield to laziness, but greet with joy  
the new opportunities God offers you.

Even in the complicated world of today  
try to keep close to a natural rhythm of life.  
Meals taken together with another  
should be moments of rest in your day.  
See your encounters with others  
as high peaks in your life, and upbuilding.

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The evenings are particularly suited  
for talking and companionship, joy and relaxation.  
But here too the more you give the more you will receive.  
Be careful not to prolong your evenings indefinitely.  
In the long run it will produce nothing good.  
If you are visiting family or friends,  
don't keep them away from their rest  
but know how to end your visit at a decent hour.

Your way through life will not remain the same.  
There are years of happiness and years of suffering.  
There are years of abundance, and years of poverty,  
years of hope, and of disappointment,  
of building up, and of breaking down.  
But God has a firm hold on you through everything.

There are years of strength  
and years of weakness,  
years of certainty, years of doubt.  
It is all part of life,  
and it is worth the effort to live it to the end  
and not give up before it is accomplished.

You need never stop growing.  
A new future is always possible.  
Even on the other side of death  
a new existence waits for you  
in the fullness of that glory  
which God has prepared for you  
from the beginning.

### **14. The End and the Beginning**

The Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence  
is not meant to be a burden for you.  
Nor does it pretend to be complete.  
It should help you discover and experience  
how great is the freedom  
to which you are called,  
and how great the responsibility  
which you may take upon yourself.

Be so faithful to this Rule today  
that you can be faithful again tomorrow.

Set out on the road  
together with your companions,  
your sisters and brothers,  
together with the countless people of faith,  
all pilgrims traveling to the Father's house.

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Go on your way singing,  
a song of hope on your lips  
and your heart burning within you.

Now we have the alleluias of the journey,  
soon there will be the alleluias of consummation,  
of the great Sabbath with our loving God.

Now you are being sown  
in the darkness of the earth;  
when that day comes,  
you will bloom in the light  
and warmth of God's eternity.

Set out on the road,  
and *Peace be with you for ever!*

**“I have done my part, may Christ teach you yours”**  
*St. Francis of Assisi*

**And now . . . “Go and repair My house”**



*This Rule is written from the heart to the heart. It speaks to every man and woman who seeks God, wants to follow Jesus and St. Francis and who tries to live a life of holiness and community within the larger body of the Church.*

*While this Rule is rooted in the ages old tradition of the Church, its wide perspective easily embraces the nature of our Order and also our contemporary world with all its intricacies and complexities. It teaches us to be fully in this world while fully belonging to God. This is the life we are all called to as Franciscans.*

*It needs to be read slowly and often so that its word can descend from your mind into the center of your being and bear fruit there. We trust that those who will read this Rule and listen to its voice with a heart eager to love will find their true home sooner than they had dared imagine.*

This New Rule of The Franciscans of Divine Providence shall be provided to all Professed Members and Novices of the Order. It will replace our previous Rule, effective this date. The contents of the former Rule will be incorporated into a new Constitution for the Order, thereby maintaining the effect and intent of the former Rule as another form of guidance for the members of the Order.

**For The Franciscans of Divine Providence**  
**Given This Tenth Day of July, +Anno Domini 2007**

+ *Bishop Russell F. Coates, Jr. FDP*  
+The Most Reverend Russell F. Coates, Jr., FDP, M.Div.  
*Guardian General*

*Presiding Bishop ~ Trinitarian Catholic Church*

