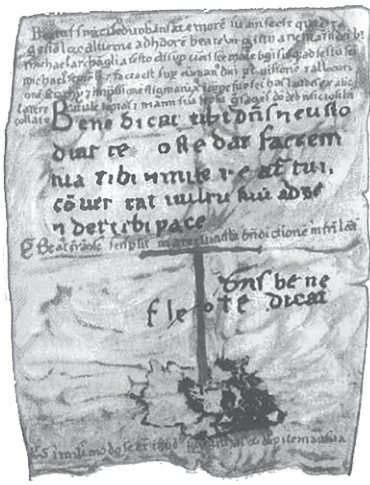


Bringing out of our storehouse the flesh and blood of our tradition in such a way as to feed future generations . . .

*The Prophetic Heart* (1994) — Joseph P. Chinnici OFM



## The TAU

From the time of Ezekiel the sign of the TAU, marked on the forehead of those turning to God in faith and repentance has long represented faithfulness and wholehearted love. It was used for healing and victory.

Pope Innocent III, evoked the sign of the TAU from Ezekiel when opening the Fourth Lateran Council in 1216 calling for the renewal of the Church, “Mercy will be granted to those to bear the TAU, a mark of a life of penance and renewal in Christ.”

And so Francis, who was present at the Council, wanted to sign himself with the TAU, and his brothers along with him. The TAU became the sign of the little Band’s mission: the preaching of faith and repentance (Rule of 1221:23).

Thomas of Celano, writing in 1252, notes, “The TAU symbol had, above all others, his preference. Francis used it as a signature for his letters, and he painted a drawing of it on the walls of all the cells.” One of these paintings, believed to be created by Francis, is found in the little chapel of Mary Magdalen at Fonte Columbo in the Rieti Valley where Francis wrote his Rule.

Another very precious document, housed in the Basilica of St. Francis, is Francis’ own handwritten blessing for Brother Leo — signed with the TAU.

*Above all else, the TAU meant mission for Francis: a mission to proclaim the Goodness of God by a wholehearted following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ because of whom all life is sacred.*



## Evangelical Identity, Chapter 1

Fr. Thaddeus Horgan S.A. & Margaret Carney OSF

The unity of the whole Franciscan movement is expressed in this opening article.



*Never before in the Order’s history have members exercised such collective responsibility and global communication . . . Our Amen!*

*To this Rule binds us together for a new stage of the pilgrimage of penance and peacemaking in our time.*

*This Rule has emerged as a sacred exchange of desires, commitments, and prophetic convictions.”*

Margaret Carney OSF. “Resource Manual for Study of Third Order Rule.” IFC-TOR, Rome. 2013. Introduction, page 3

This **identity chapter** has three short statements interlinked in a tight framework combining *eight centuries* of history with unfolding *international horizons*. It establishes:

1. An ecclesial point of belonging
2. A careful but *comprehensive* description of the *specific identity* of the penitential Franciscan vocation of the Order, and
3. A framework of essential *obediential relationships* that protects the individual from isolation and fragmentation.

The title of the opening chapter — “Rule and Life” — is the medieval way of saying it is a spiritual document containing values, attitudes and principles for a Way of Life. Not just regulations for our lives, but words forming our lives in Gospel living in light of Francis’ life, example and writings. It is our responsibility to give concrete, practical expression in our day.

This First Chapter summarizes the whole Rule and specifically identifies who we are in the Church. The first article says we are religious Franciscans in the Third Order. In this name there is a **whole unwritten history** that goes back to the ancient Order of Penance that predates St. Francis and St. Clare by six hundred years. It includes the history of the Third Order Regular and its sense of rootedness in St. Francis.

The Franciscan Order developed into *three* distinct branches; namely, the first, second, and third Orders. The **First Order** comprises members of several smaller orders who eventually amalgamated in 1897; the Friars Minor (OFM), the Capuchins (OFM<sup>Cap</sup>), and the Conventuals (OFM<sup>Conv</sup>). The **Second Order** is comprised of “the Poor Ladies,” founded by St. Clare who live in cloistered communities. The **Third Order** is divided into two sections: *Regular and Secular*. Members who take vows and live in a religious community are known as the **Third Order Regular** (TOR). Members of both sexes who do not take vows and do not live in a religious congregation are known as **Secular Franciscans** (SFO)

The distinctions that exist among the Three Franciscan Orders are not distinctions implying difference in status but differences of emphasis in the *spirituality and mission of each Order*. Together we comprise one worldwide family, inspired by the Gospel spirit of Francis and Clare of Assisi.

The desire for a *new text* that reflected *new research and study* that addressed the need to examine the life and rule of the *First* and *Third* Order Franciscans was arising in multiple places. When certain groups within the assembly — and in the preparatory meetings — asserted a conviction that a *precise Third Order identity and lineage* had to be honored and expressed *specifically* in the text, many were *startled*.

In addition to this difficult path to *shared identity*, there was a problem to

resolve in the use of terms to describe *essential elements* of the charism of the TOR. The International Franciscan Conference (CFI) defined a set of values that clearly emerged from the *first worldwide consultation* on the draft text. Taking all documents into account and having seen the results of the first international consultation on the draft text, the CFI selected

***FOUR VALUES that could be said to characterize the TOR spirit: poverty, minority/humility, contemplation and conversion.***

The debate, however, continued on. The phraseology of the *First Order Rule* (1223) where the famous *sine proprio* — “without anything of one’s own” — becomes the emblem of *minorite* dedication to poverty understood in a more radical and comprehensive form than that espoused by other religious orders. Conflicts continued within the First Order over the interpretation of Francis’s *intention* in relationship to poverty. This was different for the members of lay Third Order fraternities.

They saw to the proper disposition of personal property by developing a *system of social assistance* through charitable donations or through the insistence upon proper wills being made to insure that a tertiary’s

property would *continue to be used for alleviation of misery*.

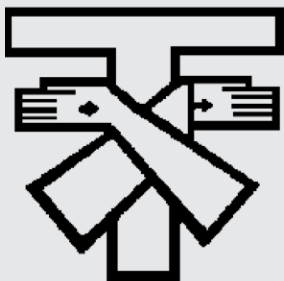
In its final draft this Rule deepened awareness of the *ancient* outlines of the **Third Order** inheritance and brought into focus:

- its inclusion of men and women,
- its infinite variety of historical forms and groups,
- its uneven history of relationships with the First Order.

What finally emerged was an agreement that took the form of the proposal that

***the call of penance/metanoia/conversion was indeed, the SINGULAR HALLMARK of the early Franciscan Third Order men and women.***

They embraced the calling in the spirit of Francis’ teaching that penance was the very response the presence of Jesus called for in the New Testament kerygma: “Repent! The kingdom of God is at hand” (Mt 3:2). The conversion to the life of grace exhibited by Franciscan penitents was characterized by First and Third Orders: *contemplation, poverty, minority* — and these combined in a way ***that the world never witnessed before***. This proposition make it possible to see the root identification as a life of penance understood as the incarnation in one’s own calling to the poverty, humility and prayerfulness that the early Franciscans embraced and promulgated as a happy way of life.



That singular moment of cooperation replaced months of contentious and fearful disagreements about how

***consciousness and a new commitment to this historic opportunity to redefine an entire branch of the Franciscan Order.***



## Article Two

As a form of Gospel living *metanoia/penitentia* is a style of Gospel life, which has three basic elements according to Francis:

- a. to *acknowledge* the Lord, in the creation, in the word of the scripture, in the manifest goodness of God, and especially in the words, life, deed and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what persevering in true faith means.
- b. to *adore* the Lord concretely with one's whole life by living prayerfully in a child-like way with purity of heart. In poverty and in loving obedience which impels the true Gospel person;
- c. to *serve* the Lord in one's neighbor by doing charity for the sake of justice and peace. (Mt. 25:34).

***This Article Two summarizes the essence of Gospel living in the penitential tradition.***

## Article Three

It is well known that Francis placed obedience to Church authority in a very prominent place in the scheme of Franciscan things. This article also calls us to deep fraternity, not only in the larger church or within our local diocesan church, but especially within our communities or fraternities which should be a microcosm of the Church itself. A sign of our fidelity is our obedience to our ministers. But this is not alone.

Of equal importance is our recognition and reverence for each other. How we love one another, even beyond the limits of our Orders and our congregations, will or will not be the witness to the authenticity of our Gospel life.

This article describes the "living in obedience" that characterizes Francis' conception of obedience as ***mutual and humble respect*** for one another leading to profound mutuality as a ground for all decision and exercises of freedom. Consistent attention to living in obedience — of hearing the other's need, advice, desire, direction as God-inspired — is a ***profoundly*** penitential form of life.

This obediential stance gives rise to a desire to see the entire Franciscan family as a blessed web of relationships. This is a call to foster a universal, and ***now international***, solidarity among all branches and entities.

***Article three calls us to the realization of new possibilities and makes it a matter of observant obedience to do all in our power to live BEYOND THE BOUNDARIES of our own singular institutions.***

While the path to these declaration was painful, and it was not without enormous effort to be attentive to the Spirit at work in contrary opinions and heated debates. That, too is part of our inheritance. We are called to an identity of continual conversion to God and each other. This chapter of the Rule was born in that spirit.

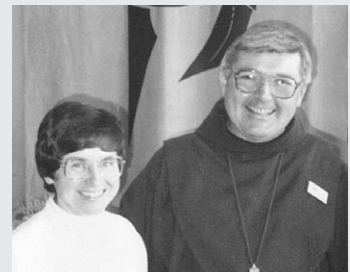
**SOURCE:** *History of The Third Order Regular: A Source Book*. ED. Margaret Carney OSF, Suzanne Kush CSSF, Jean Francois Godet-Caolgeras Ph.D. Franciscan Institute Publications, St. Bonaventure, NY. 2008. "Rome International Assembly: Matrix Presentations, Chapter 1. Pp.275-277; *First Generation Commentaries*, "The Rule and Life of The Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis." Franciscan Federation, 1982. Pp.340-344.

Also in *Resource Manual for the Study of the Third Order Regular Rule*. ED. Kathleen Moffatt OSF for IFC/TOR, Rome, Italy, 2013. PP.197-201.

And *The CORD 57.4* (2007) "Evangelical Identity, Chapter One" Thaddeus Horgan SA.

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**Margaret Carney**, *Sister of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities*, NY, with unmatched commitment has untiringly traveled, taught, written, administered and lived the retrieved message of the Rule and Life of the **Third Order Regular**. She is the first woman to achieve a Doctorate in *Franciscan Studies* from the Antonianum, Rome, Italy. One of the seven global co-authors of the 1982 TOR Rule, Margaret's service to the Franciscan family includes President of St. Bonaventure University, NY, Director of the Franciscan Institute, Council Member of the IFC-TOR, Rome and international lecturer in 7 countries.

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**This TAU Series . . . TOR #8** can be downloaded for free from The International Franciscan Conference, TOR Rome, Italy, [www.ifc-tor.org](http://www.ifc-tor.org)  
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