

**STATUTES OF THE SECULAR FRATERNITY**  
**AUGUSTINIAN PROVINCE OF ST. THOMAS OF VILLANOVA**

I. THE LAY FAITHFUL

1. “The term ‘laity’ is here understood to mean all the faithful except those in Holy Orders and those who belong to a religious state approved by the Church. That is, the faithful, who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ and integrated into the People of God, are made sharers in their particular way in the *priestly, prophetic, and kingly* office of Christ, and have their own part to play in the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world”.<sup>1</sup>

2. By *priestly*, we mean “worshipping everywhere by their holy actions, the laity consecrate the world itself to God, everywhere offering worship by the holiness of their lives”.<sup>2</sup> Dedicating themselves to Christ, the laity sanctify their daily lives.

3. By *prophetic*, we mean “lay people also fulfill their prophetic mission by evangelization, that is, the proclamation of Christ by word and the testimony of life”.<sup>3</sup> All Christians are called to be apostles of Christ.

4. By *kingly*, we mean “the laity are called to “remedy the institutions and conditions of the world when the latter are an inducement to sin, that these may be conformed to the norms of justice”.<sup>4</sup> In this way, our kingly example is Christ.

II. AUGUSTINIAN SECULAR FRATERNITIES

5. “Augustinian Secular Fraternities, which enjoy a long tradition in the Order, consist of men and women who, as members of the laity, endeavor to be faithful to their Christian Vocation under the inspiration of Augustinian Spirituality”<sup>5</sup>. “Members of these fraternities should

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<sup>1</sup> Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Second Edition, sec. 897, (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2019).

<sup>2</sup> CCC, sec. 901.

<sup>3</sup> CCC, sec. 905.

<sup>4</sup> CCC, sec. 909.

<sup>5</sup> Augustinian General Curia, *Rule and Constitutions, Order of St. Augustine*, sec. 46, (Rome, 2008).

receive a solid theological, ethical, and social formation which ought to be completed with adequate Knowledge of, and a shared experience in Augustinian Spirituality. They are governed by their own statutes, approved by the Prior General, and confirmed by the Holy See”.<sup>6</sup>

### III. AUGUSTINIAN SPIRITUALITY

6. “The spirituality of the Order, whose principal features are presented here, proceeds from the following of Christ according to the teachings of the Gospel and the action of the Holy Spirit. Its principal point of reference is the teaching and example of Saint Augustine, complemented by the tradition of the Order”.<sup>7</sup> Augustinian Spirituality has the following attributes:

7. *Evangelical and ecclesial aspects*: “Above all, we must have love for God and for our neighbor”.<sup>8</sup> To that end, “the Christian life will be renewed daily in us and will flourish in the Order if each of us will ‘assiduously read, devoutly listen to, and earnestly learn’ the Sacred Scriptures, especially the New Testament”.<sup>9</sup>

8. *The Search for God and Interiority*: “It is necessary...that we always turn back to ourselves, and entering within, diligently work toward perfecting our heart so that, praying with uninterrupted desire we may come to know God”.<sup>10</sup>

9. *Communion of Life*: “Love comes from God and unites us with God, and through this unifying process it transforms us, so that overcoming all divisions, we are made one, until finally God is all in all”<sup>11</sup>. “Community is the axis around which Augustinian religious life turns”.<sup>12</sup> “Humility and poverty are the foundation of our common life and spiritual life”.<sup>13</sup>

10. *Service to the Church and Evangelization*: “Following the example of Saint Augustine, love for the Church brings us to a total availability for its needs, by accepting the tasks which the

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<sup>6</sup> Const., sec. 46.

<sup>7</sup> Const., sec. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Const., sec. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Const., sec. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Const., sec. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Const., sec. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Const., sec. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Const., sec. 32.

Church asks of us”.<sup>14</sup> “Apostolic activity, as a service of charity, ought to spring up almost as a necessity of handing on to others the ineffable riches of Christ”.<sup>15</sup>

11. Given the focus of Augustinian Spirituality on both interiority and service, Augustinians may be thought of as *contemplatives in action*, and Augustinian Spirituality as the lived expression of the priestly, prophetic, and kingly life that all Christians are called to, according to the teachings of St. Augustine.

#### IV. THE AUGUSTINIAN FAMILY

12. “The Order of St. Augustine is composed of the following:

- a) friars, whether professed or novices, who are members of the various circumscriptions of the Order,
- b) Augustinian contemplative nuns belonging to the Monasteries of the Order, (Const. 43)
- c) the lay members of the Augustinian Secular Fraternities, legitimately established by the Prior General (Const. 45-47)”.<sup>16</sup>

13. “The union of the Order with these groups is a spiritual union of beneficial collaboration. All are united by an intimate spiritual bond and constitute one body under our father, Saint Augustine”.<sup>17</sup>

#### V. THE LIFE OF THE FRATERNITY OF THE AUGUSTINIAN PROVINCE OF ST. THOMAS OF VILLANOVA

14. Lay Augustinians are first and foremost Catholics, and as such are grounded in the four pillars of the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

15. *The profession of faith*: “We begin our profession of faith by saying: I believe or We believe. Before expounding the Church’s faith, as confessed in the Creed, celebrated in the liturgy, and

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<sup>14</sup> Const., sec. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Const., sec. 36.

<sup>16</sup> Const., sec. 40.

<sup>17</sup> Const., sec. 41.

lived in observance of God's commandments and in prayer, we must ask what 'to believe' means".<sup>18</sup> Thus, Lay Augustinians are to be properly formed in the faith as revealed by Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition, handed down by the Magisterium, and expressed in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

16. *The sacraments of the faith*: "In this age of the Church, Christ now lives and acts in and with his Church...through the sacraments".<sup>19</sup> Lay Augustinians are expected to participate fully in the sacramental life of the Church. At a *minimum*, Lay Augustinians are required to attend Mass each Sunday and on holy days of obligation, and to receive Reconciliation monthly. Daily Mass attendance is encouraged.

17. *The Life of the faith*: "In keeping with the social nature of man, the good of each individual is necessarily related to the common good".<sup>20</sup> "By common good is to be understood 'the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily'. The common good concerns the life of all".<sup>21</sup> Recognizing that living the Gospel message is *the* path to eternal fulfillment, Lay Augustinians are called to witness the Gospel in society through both word and deed.

18. *Prayer in the life of faith*: "Prayer is the living relationship of the children of God with their Father who is good beyond measure, with his son Jesus Christ and with the Holy Spirit".<sup>22</sup> Lay Augustinians are expected to pray one hour each day at a *minimum*, keeping in mind that prayer may take many forms, such as silent contemplation, reading Sacred Scripture, and praying the Rosary. Praying the Liturgy of the Hours, also known as the Divine Office, is encouraged. A daily examen is also encouraged.

19. In addition to the four pillars of the Catechism, Lay Augustinians are expected to be knowledgeable of, and live in accordance with, the Rule of St. Augustine, which is briefly outlined here.

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<sup>18</sup> CCC, sec. 26.

<sup>19</sup> CCC, sec. 1076.

<sup>20</sup> CCC, sec. 1905.

<sup>21</sup> CCC, sec. 1906.

<sup>22</sup> CCC, sec. 2565.

20. *Purpose and Basis for Common Life*: “Let all of you then live together in oneness of mind and heart, mutually honoring God in yourselves, whose temples you have become”.<sup>23</sup> Lay Augustinians strive to achieve harmony in their families, places or work or school, and fraternity through individual humility and a commitment to the common good.

21. *Prayer*: “Be assiduous in prayer”.<sup>24</sup> Prayer and the sacramental life must take priority over other obligations. Time for prayer is not fit into the daily schedule. Rather, the daily schedule revolves around prayer.

22. *Moderation and Self Denial*: “Subdue the flesh”.<sup>25</sup> Free from the pursuit of material excesses and self-aggrandizement, Lay Augustinians strive for humility, harmony, and prayerfulness, and order their lives accordingly. In this way “subdue the flesh” is liberating, not limiting.

23. *Safeguarding chastity, and fraternal correction*: “Do not say your hearts are pure if there is immodesty of the eye”.<sup>26</sup> “If you notice on someone of your brothers this wantonness of the eye, of which I am speaking, admonish him at once so that the beginning of evil will not grow more serious but will be promptly corrected”.<sup>27</sup> Polite correction of words or deeds which contradict Catholic teaching, or the teaching of St. Augustine, is an act of charity and an expectation of all Lay Augustinians.

24. *The Care of Community Goods and Treatment of the Sick*: “Whenever you show greater concern for the common good than for your own, you may know that you are growing in charity. Thus, let the abiding virtue of charity prevail in all things that minister to the fleeting necessities of life”.<sup>28</sup> Lay Augustinians view their time, talent, and treasure as gifts from God intended for the promotion of the common good.

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<sup>23</sup> Rule, sec. 9.

<sup>24</sup> Rule, sec. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Rule, sec. 14.

<sup>26</sup> Rule, sec. 22.

<sup>27</sup> Rule, sec. 25.

<sup>28</sup> Rule, sec. 31.

25. *Asking Pardon and Forgiving Offenses*: “If they have offended one another, they must forgive one another’s trespasses”.<sup>29</sup> When conflict occurs, it should be dealt with promptly, transparently, and most importantly, with love and humility.

26. *Governance and Obedience*: “It is by being more obedient, therefore, that you show mercy not only toward yourselves but also toward the superior”.<sup>30</sup> The proper exercise of authority by those in leadership positions should be viewed as an act of love and responded to accordingly.

27. *Observance of the Rule*: “When you find that you are doing all that has been written, give thanks to the Lord, the Giver of every good”.<sup>31</sup> As Augustinian Spirituality may be thought of as the lived expression of the priestly, prophetic, and kingly life all Christians are called to, the Rule of St. Augustine may be thought of as the playbook for acquiring and sustaining Augustinian Spirituality.

## VI. ORGANIZATION AND GOVERNANCE OF THE FRATERNITY

28. *Jurisdiction*: The Prior Provincial of the Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova has full authority over the Province’s Lay Fraternity.

29. *Structure*: The Augustinian Province of St. Thomas of Villanova has one Lay Fraternity, organized into local chapters. Chapters may be established at parishes, high schools, colleges, and other locations, with the written approval of the Prior Provincial and any other required local authority (i.e., parish pastor, college or high school administration, etc.).

30. *Leadership Roles*: Local chapters must have two leadership roles at a minimum:

a) *President*: The Chapter President may be elected by the chapter members or be appointed by the Prior Provincial. In either case, the Chapter President is expected to serve for a one-year term with a five-term limit. Principal duties include:

i.) Planning and presiding over chapter meetings and apostolic activities.

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<sup>29</sup> Rule, sec. 42.

<sup>30</sup> Rule, sec. 47.

<sup>31</sup> Rule, sec. 49.

- ii.) Ensuring the growth and financial sustainability of the chapter.
- iii.) Promoting the observance of the Rule by chapter members.

b) *Spiritual Director*: The Spiritual Director is appointed by the Prior Provincial and is responsible for the formation and spiritual development of chapter members. Ideally, the Spiritual Director is an Augustinian friar, but Lay Augustinians may also serve as Spiritual Directors in the absence of a friar. Principal duties include:

- i.) Participation in all chapter events.
- ii.) Overseeing the formation of new members.
- iii.) Providing spiritual guidance and encouragement for all members.

31. *Activities*: Chapters should meet as often as practical but not less than monthly. Broadly, chapters should engage in two types of activities:

- a) *Spiritual*: Examples include liturgical celebrations and continuing spiritual formation.
- b) *Apostolic*: All chapters are *required* to have an apostolic mission. The mission should be appropriate to the circumstances of the chapter and surrounding community. Preference should be given to evangelization and care for the poor and infirmed.

32. *Self-sustainability*: All chapters are expected to be self-sustaining, either through dues, fund raising, or a combination of the two.

33. *Formation*: All members are required to participate in a structured program of formation:

a) *Initial*: “The initial period of membership in an Augustinian Fraternity is to be marked by a study of the basic contents of Christian faith and by an initial introduction to the thought of St. Augustine”.<sup>32</sup> The initial formation has two components:

- i.) Completion of the province’s structured formation program for the lay fraternity.

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<sup>32</sup> Augustinian General Curia, *On the Way with St. Augustine*, sec. 101, (Rome, 2012).

ii.) Participation in the chapter's apostolic mission.

b) *Ongoing*: "Ongoing education in the faith (see General Directory for Catechesis 51) constitutes a prerequisite for the fidelity and search for truth that must always accompany believers".<sup>33</sup> It is a primary purpose of the fraternity to provide members ongoing opportunities to deepen their knowledge of the faith and enrich their spiritual lives.

34. *Admission*: All are welcome to participate in the activities of any chapter and should be welcomed as if welcoming Christ. The distinguishing characteristic between participants and Lay Augustinians is the making of promises. The following criteria must be met in order to make promises:

- a) Baptized and Confirmed Catholic,
- b) 18 years or older,
- c) having completed the initial formation requirements *plus* one year or more of chapter membership,
- d) accepted the teachings of the Catholic Church and St. Augustine,
- e) are not members of the secular fraternity another religious order,
- f) and requested and received the recommendation of both the Chapter President and Spiritual Director, and approval of the Prior Provincial.

35. *Promises*: Promises are not sacramental. They are a declaration to God, made before friends and family, of a commitment to live in accordance with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Rule of St Augustine. When all criteria are met, the spiritual director should assist the applicant in the making of this promise, and afterwards provide a blessing:

**I (state name), in the presence of my Augustinian brothers and sisters, promise to God that I will live my life in accordance with the teachings of the Catholic Faith, and St. Augustine, and through the witness of my life encourage others to do the same.**

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<sup>33</sup> On the Way, sec. 101.



36. *Virtual Membership*: When members are geographically removed from their chapter or are unable to participate in chapter activities in person, then remote participation should be offered. In these cases, the member is still responsible for fulfilling his or her contribution to the chapter's apostolic mission but may do so in a different place or a different way.

37. *Expulsion*: Expulsion from the chapter should be a last resort but would be appropriate when the following conditions are met:

- a) The member persists in behavior which contradicts Catholic teachings or the teachings of St. Augustine,
- b) has not responded to appeals for correction for a period of six months or longer,
- c) the Chapter President and Spiritual Director have recommended expulsion to the Prior Provincial, and the Prior Provincial concurs.

## VII. CLOSING GUIDANCE

38. The Lay Augustinians of the Province of St. Thomas of Villanova are expected to live fully as *contemplatives in action*, spending equal energy on interior spirituality and apostolic mission, for the glory of God. Doing so requires great effort and humility, but results in great freedom and joy.