[Chapter One: In the Name of the Lord
Begins the Form of Life of the Poor Sisters]\(^a\)

\(^1\)The form of life of the Order of the Poor Sisters\(^b\) that Blessed Francis established is this: \(^2\)to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, by living in obedience, without anything of one’s own, and in chastity.\(^c\)

\(^3\)Clare, the unworthy handmaid of Christ and the little plant of the most blessed Father Francis, promises obedience and rever- ence to the Lord Pope Innocent and his successors canonically elected, and to the Roman Church. \(^4\)And, just as at the beginning of her conversion, together with her sisters she promised obedience to the Blessed Francis, so now she promises to observe the same inviolably to his successors. \(^5\)And the other sisters shall always be obliged to obey the successors of Blessed Francis and Sister Clare and the other abbesses canonically elected who succeed her.

[Chapter Two: Those Who Wish to Accept This Life and How They are to be Received]

\(^1\)If, by divine inspiration, anyone should come to us desiring to accept this life, the abbess is bound to seek the consent of all the sisters;\(^a\)\(^2\) and if the majority have agreed, she may receive her, having obtained the permission of the Lord Cardinal Protector.\(^b\) \(^3\)If she judges she should be received, let [the abbess] examine her carefully or have her examined concerning the Catholic faith and the sacraments of the Church. \(^4\)And if she believes all these things and is willing to profess them faithfully and to observe them steadfastly to the end; \(^5\)and if she has no husband, or if she has one who has already entered religious life with the authority of the Bishop of the diocese and has already made a vow of conti- nence;\(^c\) and if there is no impediment to her observance of this life, such as advanced age or some infirmity or mental disorder, \(^6\)let the tenor of our life be thoroughly explained to her.\(^d\)

\(^7\)If she is suitable, let the words of the holy Gospel be addressed to her that she should go and sell all that she has and take care to distribute the proceeds to the poor. \(^8\)If she cannot do this, her good will shall suffice. \(^9\)Let the abbess and her sisters take care that they be not concerned about her temporal affairs, so that she may freely dispose of her possessions as the Lord shall have inspired her. \(^10\)However, if some counsel be required, let them send her to some discerning and God-fearing persons, according to whose advice her goods may be distributed to the poor.

\(^11\)After her hair has been cut all around\(^a\) and her secular clothes set aside, she may be permitted three tunics\(^b\) and a mantle.\(^c\) \(^12\)Thereafter, she may not go outside the monastery except for a useful, reasonable, evident, and justifiable purpose.\(^d\) \(^13\)When the year of probation is ended, let her be received into obedience, promising to observe perpetually the life and form of our poverty.

\(^14\)Let no one receive the veil during the period of probation.\(^e\) \(^15\)The sisters may also have little mantles for convenience and propriety in serving and working.\(^f\) \(^16\)In fact, let the abbess, with discernment,\(^g\) provide them with clothing according to the diver- sity of persons, places, seasons, and cold climates, as in necessity she shall deem expedient.

\(^17\)Young girls who are received into the monastery before the age established by law may have their hair cut all around; and, after putting aside their secular clothes, let them be clothed in religious garb, as the abbess sees fit.\(^a\) \(^18\)However, when they reach the age required by law, let them, clothed in the same way as the others, make their profession.\(^b\) \(^19\)Both for these and the
other novices, the abbess shall carefully provide a mistress from among the more discerning sisters of the entire monastery, 20 who shall form them diligently in a holy way of life and proper behavior according to the form of our profession.

21 Let the form described above be observed in the examination and reception of the sisters who serve outside the monastery. c 22 These sisters may wear shoes. d 23 No one may live with us in the monastery unless she has been received according to the form of our profession. e

24 Out of love of the most holy and beloved Child wrapped in poor little swaddling clothes and placed in a manger and of His most holy Mother, I admonish, beg, and encourage my sisters always to wear poor garments. f

[Chapter Three: The Divine Office and Fasting, Confession and Communion]

1 Let the sisters who can read celebrate the Divine Office according to the custom of the Lesser Brothers. g 2 They may have breviaries for this reason, reading without singing. 3 Those who, for some reasonable cause, occasionally are not able to recite their hours by reading them, may, like the other sisters, say the Our Father. h

4 Let those who do not know how to read say the Our Father twenty-four times for Matins; Lauds five times; seven times for each of the hours of Prime, Terce, Sext, and None; twelve times, however, for Vespers; seven times for Compline. 5 For the dead let them also say the Our Father seven times with the Eternal Rest for Vespers; twelve times for Matins, 6 because the sisters who can read are obliged to recite the Office of the Dead. 7 When a sister of our monastery shall have passed on, however, let them say the Our Father fifty times. b

8 Let the sisters fast at all times. 9 They may eat twice on the Nativity of the Lord, however, no matter on what day it happens to fall. 10 The younger sisters, those who are weak, and those who are serving outside the monastery may be mercifully dispensed as the abbess sees fit. c 11 But let the sisters not be bound to corporal fasting in time of manifest necessity. d

12 Let them go to confession, with the permission of the abbess, at least twelve times a year. 13 Let them be careful not to introduce other talk unless it pertains to the confession and the salvation of souls. 14 Let them receive Communion seven times, namely, on the Nativity of the Lord, Thursday of Holy Week, the Resurrection of the Lord, Pentecost, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, the Feast of Saint Francis, and the Feast of All Saints. 15 It is lawful for the chaplain to celebrate inside [the enclosure] to give Communion to the sisters, the healthy or the sick.

[Chapter Four: The Election and Office of the Abbess: The Chapter, and the Officials and the Discreets]

1 The sisters are bound to observe the canonical form in the election of the abbess. a 2 Let them quickly arrange to have the General Minister or the Provincial Minister of the Order of Lesser Brothers present. 3 Through the Word of God, let him dispose them to perfect harmony and the common good in the election to be held. b 4 Let no one be elected unless professed. 5 And if a non-professed is elected or otherwise somehow given to them, she may not be obeyed unless she first professes our form of poverty. 6 At her death let the election of another abbess take place. 7 If at any time it should appear to the entire body of sisters that she is not competent for their service and common good, these sisters are bound as quickly as possible to elect another as abbess and mother according to the form described above. c
Let whoever is elected reflect upon the kind of burden she has undertaken on herself and to Whom she must render an account of the flock committed to her. Let her also strive to preside over the others more by her virtues and holy behavior than by her office, so that, moved by her example, the sisters may obey her more out of love than out of fear. Let her avoid exclusive loves, lest by loving some more than others she give scandal to all. Let her console the afflicted. Let her also be the last refuge for those who are troubled, lest the sickness of despair overcome the weak should they fail to find in her health-giving remedies.

Let her preserve the common life in everything, especially in whatever pertains to the church, the dormitory, refectory, infirmary, and clothing. Her vicaress is bound to preserve it in the same way.

The abbess is bound to call her sisters together at least once a week in the chapter, where both she and her sisters should humbly confess their common and public offenses and negligences. There let her consult with all her sisters concerning whatever concerns the welfare and good of the monastery, for the Lord frequently reveals what is better to the youngest.

No heavy debt may be incurred except with the common consent of the sisters and by reason of manifest necessity, and let this be done through the procurator. Let the abbess and her sisters, however, be careful that nothing be deposited in the monastery; for such practices often give rise to troubles and scandals.

In order to preserve the unity of mutual love and peace, let all who hold offices in the monastery be chosen by the common agreement of all the sisters. In the same way, let at least eight sisters be elected from the more discerning whose counsel the abbess should be always bound to use in those matters which our form of life demands. Moreover, if it seems useful and expedient, the sisters can and should at times remove the officials and discreets and elect others in their place.

[Chapter Five: Silence, the Parlor, and the Grille]

Let the sisters keep silence from the hour of Compline until Terce, except those who are serving outside the monastery. Let them also continually keep silence in the church, the dormitory, and the refectory only while they are eating. At all times, however, they may be permitted to speak with discernment in the infirmary for the recreation and service of the sick. Nevertheless, they may always and everywhere communicate whatever is necessary, briefly and in a quiet voice. The sisters may not be permitted to speak in the parlor or at the grille without the permission of the abbess or her vicaress. Let those who have permission not dare to speak in the parlor except in the presence and hearing of two sisters. Moreover, let them not presume to go to the grille, unless there are present at least three sisters appointed by the abbess or her vicaress from the eight discreets who were elected by all the sisters for the council of the abbess. Let the abbess and her vicaress be themselves bound to observe this form of speaking. Let this happen very rarely at the grille but never at the door.

Let a curtain be hung inside the grille which may not be removed except when the Word of God is preached or when a sister is speaking with someone. Let the grille have a wooden door which is well provided with two distinct iron locks, bolts, and bars, so that, it can be locked, especially at night, with two keys, one of which the abbess may keep and the other the sacristan. Let it always be locked except when the Divine Office is being heard and for the reasons given above. A sister may not under any circumstance speak to anyone at the grille
before sunrise or after sunset. Inside the parlor let there always be a curtain which may not be removed.

No one may speak in the parlor during the Lent of Saint Martin and the Greater Lent, except to a priest for Confession or for some other manifest necessity, which is left to the prudence of the abbess or her vicaress.

[Chapter Six: Not Having Possessions]

1 After the Most High Heavenly Father saw fit by His grace to enlighten my heart to do penance according to the example and teaching of our most blessed father Saint Francis, shortly after his own conversion, I, together with my sisters, willingly promised him obedience. When the Blessed Father saw we had no fear of poverty, hard work, trial, shame, or contempt of the world, but, instead, we held them as great delights, moved by piety he wrote a form of life for us as follows:

Because by divine inspiration you have made yourselves daughters and handmaids of the most High, most Exalted King, the heavenly Father, and have taken the Holy Spirit as your spouse, choosing to live according to the perfection of the holy Gospel, I resolve and promise for myself and for my brothers always to have the same loving care and special solicitude for you as for them.

As long as he lived he diligently fulfilled this and wished that it always be fulfilled by the brothers.

In order that we as well as those who were to come after us would never turn aside from the holy poverty we had embraced, shortly before his death he repeated in writing his last wish for us. He said:

I, little brother Francis, wish to follow the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and to persevere in this until the end; and I ask you, my ladies, and I give you my advice that you live always in this most holy life and poverty. And keep careful watch that you never depart from this by reason of the teaching or advice of anyone.

As I, together with my sisters, have ever been solicitous to safeguard the holy poverty which we have promised the Lord God and blessed Francis, so, too, the abbesses who shall succeed me in office and all the sisters are bound inviolably to observe it to the end, that is, by not receiving or having possession or ownership either of themselves or through an intermediary, or even anything that might reasonably be called ownership, except as much land as necessity requires for the integrity and proper seclusion of the monastery, and this land may not be cultivated except as a garden for the needs of the sisters.

[Chapter Seven: The Manner of Working]

Let the sisters to whom the Lord has given the grace of working work faithfully and devotedly after the Hour of Terce at work that pertains to a virtuous life and the common good. In such a way that, while they banish idleness, the enemy of the soul, they do not extinguish the Spirit of holy prayer and devotion to which other temporal things must contribute.

At the Chapter, in the presence of all, the abbess or her vicaress is bound to distribute the work that each does with her hands. Let the same be done if alms have been sent by anyone for the needs of the sisters, so that a recommendation (recommendatio) about them be
made in common.  

Let all such things be distributed for the common good by the abbess or her vicaress with the advice of the discreets. 

[Chapter Eight: The Sisters Shall Not Appropriately Anything as Their Own; Begging Alms; The Sick Sisters]

1 Let the sisters not appropriate anything to themselves, neither a house nor a place nor anything at all; 2 instead, as pilgrims and strangers in this world who serve the Lord in poverty and humility, let them confidently send for alms.  

3 Nor should they be ashamed, since the Lord made Himself poor in this world for us.  

4 This is that summit of the highest poverty which has established you, my dearest sisters, heiresses and queens of the kingdom of heaven; it has made you poor in things but exalted you in virtue.  

5 Let this be your portion which leads into the land of the living.  

6 Clinging totally to this, my most beloved sisters, do not wish to have anything else in perpetuity under heaven for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and His most holy mother.  

7 Let no sister be permitted to send letters or to receive or give away anything outside the monastery without the permission of the abbess.  

8 Let it not be permitted to have anything that the abbess has not given or allowed.  

9 Should anything be sent to a sister by her relatives or others, let the abbess give it to her.  

10 If she needs it, she may use it; otherwise, let her in all charity give it to a sister who does need it.  

11 If, however, money is sent to her, let the abbess, with the advice of the discreets, provide for the needs of the sister.  

12 Concerning the sick sisters, let the abbess be strictly bound to inquire with diligence, by herself and through other sisters, what their illness requires both by way of counsel as well as food and other necessities, and let her provide for them charitably and kindly according to the resources of the place.  

13 Because all are bound to serve and to provide for their sisters who are ill as they would wish to be served, let them be bound as if they were bound by some illness.  

14 Let each confidently make her needs known to another.  

15 Those who are ill may lie on sacks filled with straw and may use feather pillows for their head; those who need woolen stockings and quilts may use them.  

16 When these sick sisters are visited by those who enter the monastery, they may briefly respond with some good words to those who speak to them.  

17 But the other sisters who have permission may not dare to speak to those who enter the monastery except in the presence and hearing of the two discreets appointed by the abbess or her vicaress.  

18 Let the abbess and her vicaress themselves be bound to observe this form of speaking.  

[Chapter Nine: The Penance to be Imposed on the Sisters Who Sin; The Sisters Who Serve outside the Monastery]

1 If any sister, at the instigation of the enemy, has sinned mortally against the form of our profession, and, if after having been admonished two or three times by the abbess or other sisters, she does not amend, let her eat bread and water on the floor before all the sisters in the refectory for as many days as she shall have been obstinate.  

2 If it seems advisable to the abbess, let her be subjected to even greater punishment.  

3 Meanwhile, as long as she remains obstinate, let her prayer be that the Lord will enlighten her heart to do penance.  

The abbess and her sisters,
however, must beware not to become angry or disturbed on account of another’s sin, for anger and disturbance prevent charity in oneself and in others.\(^c\)

If it should happen, may it never be so, that an occasion of trouble or scandal should arise between sister and sister through a word or gesture,\(^7\) let her who was the cause of the trouble, before offering the gift of her prayer to the Lord, not only prostrate herself humbly at once at the feet of the other and ask pardon,\(^6\) but also beg her simply to intercede for her to the Lord that He forgive her.\(^9\) Let the other sister, mindful of that word of the Lord, “If you do not forgive from the heart, neither will your heavenly Father forgive you,”\(^10\) generously pardon her sister every injury she has done to her.

The sisters who serve outside the monastery may not delay for long unless some manifest necessity requires it.\(^12\) Let them conduct themselves virtuously and say little, so that those who see them may always be edified.\(^13\) Let them strictly beware of having suspicious meetings or dealings with others.\(^14\) They may not be godmothers of men or women lest gossip or trouble arise because of this.\(^b\)\(^15\) Let them not presume to repeat the gossip of the world inside the monastery.\(^16\) Let them be strictly bound not to repeat outside the monastery anything that is said or done within which could cause scandal.\(^c\)

If anyone should innocently offend in these two matters, let it be left to the prudence of the abbess mercifully to impose a penance on her.\(^18\) But if she does this through a vicious habit, the abbess, with the advice of her discreets, may impose a penance on her according to the nature of the fault.\(^d\)

[Chapter Ten: The Admonition and Correction of the Sisters]

Let the abbess admonish and visit her sisters, and humbly and charitably correct them, not commanding them anything that is against their soul and the form of our profession.\(^e\)\(^2\) Let the sisters, however, who are subjects, remember that they have renounced their own wills for the sake of God.\(^3\) Therefore, let them be firmly bound to obey their abbess in all the things they have promised the Lord to observe and which are not against the soul and our profession.\(^4\) Let the abbess, on her part, be so familiar with them that they can speak and act with her as ladies do with their handmaid.\(^5\) For this is the way it must be: the abbess should be the handmaid of all the sisters.\(^a\)

Moreover, I admonish and exhort the sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ to beware of all pride, vainglory, envy, avarice, care and anxiety about this world, detraction and murmuring, dissension and divi- sion.\(^7\) Let them be always eager, however, to preserve among themselves the unity of mutual love which is the bond of perfection.\(^b\)

Let those who do not know how to read not be eager to learn.\(^9\) Let them direct their attention to what they should desire above all else: to have the Spirit of the Lord and Its holy activity,\(^c\)\(^10\) to pray always to Him with a pure heart, and to have humility, patience in difficulty and infirmity,\(^11\) and to love those who perse- cute, blame, and accuse us,\(^12\) for the Lord says: Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.\(^13\) But whoever perseveres to the end will be saved.

[Chapter Eleven: The Custody of the Enclosure]
Let the portress be mature in her manner of acting, discerning, and of a suitable age. Let her remain in an open cell without a door during the day. A suitable companion may be assigned to her who may take her place in everything whenever necessary.

Let the door be well secured by two different iron locks, with bars and bolts, so that, especially at night, it may be locked with two keys, one of which the portress may have, the other the abbess. During the day let it never be left without a guard and securely locked with one key.

Let them most diligently take care to see that the door is never left open, except when this cannot be conveniently avoided. Let it never be opened to anyone who wishes to enter, except to those who have been given permission by the Supreme Pontiff or our Lord Cardinal. The sisters may not allow anyone to enter the monastery before sunrise or to remain within after sunset, unless demanded by a manifest, reasonable, and unavoidable cause.

If a bishop has permission to celebrate within the enclosure, either for the blessing of an abbess or for the consecration of one of the sisters as a nun, or for any other reason, let him be satisfied with as few and virtuous companions and assistants as possible.

Whenever it is necessary for other men to enter the monastery to do some work, let the abbess carefully assign a suitable person to the door, who may open it only to those designated for the work and to no one else.

Let the sisters be extremely careful at such times not to be seen by those who enter.

[Chapter Twelve: The Visitator, the Chaplain, and the Cardinal Protector]

Let our Visitator always be taken from the Order of the Lesser Brothers according to the will and command of our Cardinal. Let him be the kind of person who is well known for his integrity and good manner of living. His duty shall be to correct any excesses against the form of our profession, whether these be in the head or in the members. Taking his position in an open area that he can be seen by others, let him speak with all and with each concerning what pertains to the duty of the visitation as he sees best.

We ask as a favor of the same Order a chaplain and a clerical companion of good reputation, of prudent discernment, and two lay brothers, lovers of a holy and upright way of life, in support of our poverty, as we have always mercifully had from that Order of Lesser Brothers, in the light of the piety of God and our blessed Francis.

Let the chaplain not be permitted to enter the monastery without a companion. When they enter, let them remain in an open area, in such a way that they can always see one another and be seen by others. They may enter for the confession of the sick who cannot go to the parlor, for their Communion, for the Last Anointing and the Prayers of the Dying.

Moreover, for funeral services, and on the solemnity of Masses for the Dead, for digging or opening a grave, or even for making arrangements, suitable and sufficient outsiders may enter, according to the prudence of the abbess.

Let the sisters be strictly bound always to have as our Governor, Protector, and Corrector that Cardinal of the Holy Roman Church who has been delegated by the Lord Pope for the Lesser Brothers, so that, always submissive and subject at the feet of that same holy Church and steadfast in the Catholic faith, we may observe in perpetuity the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of His most holy Mother and the Holy Gospel we have firmly promised. Amen.
Given at Perugia, the sixteenth kalends of October, in the tenth year of the Pontificate of Lord Pope Innocent IV. Therefore, no one is permitted to destroy this document of our confirmation or oppose it recklessly. If anyone shall presume to attempt this, let him know he will incur the wrath of Almighty God and His holy Apostles Peter and Paul.

Given at Assisi, the fifth of the Ides of August, in the eleventh year of our Pontificate