

The Secular Franciscan Order

The Secular Franciscan Order, formerly known as the Third Order of St. Francis, is an official Order within the Catholic Church, and was established by St. Francis of Assisi early in the thirteenth century. Members do not live in community, but live their everyday lives in the world. However, members gather together in fraternity on a regular basis. By profession, they promise to follow a Rule of Life approved and confirmed by Pope Paul VI in June of 1978.

The spirit of the Rule can be found in Article 4:

To observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people. Christ, the gift of the Father's love, is the way to him, the Truth into which the Holy Spirit leads us, and the life which he has come to give abundantly. Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel.

The Secular Franciscan Order is a public association in the Roman Catholic Church. It is divided into fraternities at various levels: local, regional, national, and international. The SFO is governed by the universal law of the Church; and by its own: the Rule, the Constitutions, the Ritual, and the particular statutes.

The Rule calls Secular Franciscans to four apostolic areas: Ecology, Family, Peace and Justice and Work

Ecology and the Environment

Following the example of St. Francis, Patron of Ecology, they collaborate with efforts to fight pollution and to conserve all

that is valuable in nature. This conservation keeps in mind that the exploitation of the environment often puts disproportionate hardships on the poor, especially if they live in the affected areas.

Family

Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, for the Word of God, and for Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception till death. Married couples find in the Rule of the SFO an effective aid in their own journey of Christian life, aware that in the sacrament of matrimony their love shares in the love that Christ has for his Church. The beauty and the strength of the human love of the spouses is a profound witness for their own family, the Church, and the world.

Peace and Justice

Secular Franciscans are called to be bearers of peace in their families and in society. The renunciation of the use of violence, characteristic of the followers of Francis, does not mean the renunciation of action. Peace is the work of justice and the fruit of reconciliation and of fraternal love. While acknowledging both the personal and national right to self-defence, they should respect the choice of those who, because of conscientious objection, refuse to bear arms. However, the brothers and sisters should take care that their interventions are always inspired by Christian love.

Secular Franciscans are called to make their own contribution, inspired by the person and message of Francis of Assisi, towards a civilization in which the dignity

of the human person, shared responsibility, and love may be living realities. They should firmly commit themselves to oppose every form of exploitation, discrimination, and exclusion and against every attitude of indifference in relation to others. They promote the building of fraternity among peoples: they should be committed to create worthy conditions of life for all and to work for the freedom of all people. Secular Franciscans attempt to be in the forefront in the field of public life. They should collaborate as much as possible for the passage of just laws and ordinances.

Work

For St. Francis, work is a gift and to work is a grace. Daily work is not only the means of livelihood, but the opportunity to serve God and neighbor as well as a way to develop one's own personality. In the conviction that work is a right and a duty and that every form of occupation deserves respect, the brothers and sisters should commit themselves to collaborate so that all persons may have the possibility to work and so that working conditions may always be more humane. Leisure and recreation have their own value and are necessary for personal development. Secular Franciscans should maintain a balance between work and rest and should strive to make meaningful use of their leisure time.

Youth

Out of the conviction of the need to educate children to take an interest in community, "bringing them the awareness of being living, active members of the People of God" and because of the fascination which St. Francis can exercise on them, the formation of groups of children should be encouraged. With the help of a pedagogy and an organization suitable to their age, these children should be initiated into a knowledge and love of the Franciscan life. National statutes will

give an appropriate orientation for the organization of these groups and their relationship to the fraternity and to the groups of Franciscan youth. The Franciscan Youth is formed by those young people who feel called by the Holy Spirit to share the experience of the Christian life in fraternity, in the light of the message of St. Francis of Assisi, deepening their own vocation within the context of the Secular Franciscan Order.

Is God Calling You to the Secular Franciscan Order?

The process of becoming a professed Secular Franciscan is a journey that involves three separate stages and culminates in a lifelong commitment to live the gospel following the example of St. Francis of Assisi. This formation process unfolds in regularly scheduled formation sessions during which the home study material is thoroughly discussed.

The first stage, Orientation, provides time for dialogue and developing relationships in fraternity. During Orientation you will be introduced to the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare and share in Franciscan prayer life. You will be given general information about the Secular Franciscan Order. Orientation is a time to discern if the Spirit is calling you to a Secular Franciscan vocation. The period of Orientation is a minimum of three months.

The second stage, Inquiry, is the first formal period of initiation. It is a time of in-depth study of the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare. During Inquiry you will learn about the Franciscan charism and Franciscan history. You will deepen your understanding of what it means to be secular and Franciscan, and you will continue to discern if the Spirit is calling you to the Secular Franciscan way of life. The period of Inquiry is a minimum of six

months. If a vocation is discerned, the Inquirer is received into the Order.

The third stage, Candidacy, is the final formal period of initiation. It is a time of preparing for permanent commitment by immersion into fraternity life. Central to this stage of formation is Article 4 of The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order which states, "The rule and life of the Secular Franciscan is this: to observe the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ by following Saint Francis of Assisi, who made Christ the inspiration and the center of his life with God and people." The period of Candidacy is a minimum of eighteen months and culminates in permanent commitment to the gospel life.

After profession of the Rule and permanent commitment to the gospel way of life, the newly professed member joins the rest of the fraternity in ongoing formation.



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Secular Franciscan Order



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