



Who are the Secular Franciscans, and what do they do?

The Secular Franciscan Order is a *vocation*, a Way of Life approved by the Church, for men and women, married or single, who are called to take an active part in the mission of Christ to bring "the good news of salvation" to the world. Secular Franciscans commit themselves to a life in Christ calling for a positive effort to promote Gospel attitudes among their contemporaries. They are united with each other in communities, through which they develop a sense of direction according to the Gospel spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi.

FRANCIS, the saint known and loved the world over, was born at Assisi, central Italy, in the year 1181, the son of a wealthy merchant. He died there in 1226, after a life in Christ that earned him the title *Poverello* (little poor man). As a youth, Francis had a series of powerful incidents of conversion, including a vision in which Jesus told him to "rebuild my church, for it is falling into ruin." He found Jesus in the poor and suffering, especially the lepers. He and his followers became visible exemplars of a *literal* Christian life. In the words of Pope Pius XI, "So lifelike and strikingly did the image of Jesus Christ and the Gospel manner of life shine forth in Francis, that he appeared to his contemporaries almost as though he were the Risen Christ." Saint Francis attained this marvelous ideal by making the holy Gospel, in every detail, the rule and standard of his life.

Others wanted to live as Francis lived, men and women, married and single. Eventually, his followers were gathered into three distinct Orders of the Church. The First Order was for religious men (brothers and priests, called friars); the Second Order was for cloistered nuns (Poor Clares); and the Third Order was for lay men and women, married or single, and the secular clergy. The Franciscan Third Order was originally known as the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, and it has endured for over eight-hundred years, with thousands of members world-wide.

At the time of Vatican II¹ the lay vocation was clarified to mean the sanctification of ordinary life, of family, work, of every secular occupation. Thus the third orders were no longer to be seen as mere pious affiliations, but as having their own *unique vocations to live the Gospel in the secular state* according to the charisms of their founders. Today, the Franciscan Third Order is approved and recognized by the Holy See by the official name of *Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis* (OFS),² or in English, the Secular Franciscan Order.³



"The Church expects from the Secular Franciscan order, one and only, a great service in the cause of the Kingdom of God in the world today... the Church expects from you, Secular Franciscans, a courageous and consistent testimony of Christian and Franciscan life, leaning towards the construction of a more fraternal and Gospel world for the realization of the Kingdom of God."
Pope John Paul II, 2002 OFS General Chapter

¹See [Christifidelis Laici](#) (by Pope John Paul II)

²http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secular_Franciscan_Order-cite_note-OFSStatutes-2

³ Secular forms of other traditions of spirituality have also been approved by the Church, e.g., the Augustinian Secular Order, the Dominican Laity, and the Secular Order of Discalced Carmelites

What do the Franciscans do?

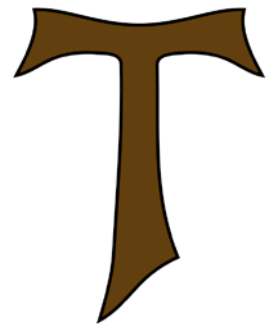
- The Secular Franciscan Order does not promote a particular work, but supports and challenges individuals to apply the distinctive Gospel spirit of St. Francis to their secular *lives* and careers. That spirit motivates everything Secular Franciscans think, say and do. Through the Franciscan way of life, Franciscans are joined with Jesus and joyfully walk with him in peace and strength on the path of salvation.
- Secular Franciscans are organized into local *fraternities*, where they assemble each month as true spiritual families, in order to share and renew their commitments to the apostolic life of the Gospel. These gatherings include prayer, learning, and social time, and are an indispensable *event* in the Secular Franciscan's life.

What is the process, and the spiritual commitment required to become a Secular Franciscan?

- The process is one of discerning, or verifying a true *vocation* to the Order, through a period of *formation*, which basically consists of studying and associating with the Franciscans. There are stages, and it takes about three years, sometimes more based on the circumstances.
- Eventually one makes *permanent profession* to the Order. It's not like a club or a prayer group; it's a *vocation* to a way of life. Like the other orders, the OFS has a Rule of Life, and the profession is a commitment to follow the *Rule*.

What are the outward commitments of the order?

- You have to be a Catholic, in good standing with the Church, and in obedience with its doctrines and practices. (The Order is canonically a part of the Church, an "association of the Christian faithful."⁴)
- Daily prayer is a part of the rule. (The Morning and Evening Office are encouraged, but other forms of prayer accepted by the Church fulfill this requirement.)
- The fraternity's monthly gathering takes precedence over other commitments.
- You wear the TAU Cross, the visible sign of the Order



How Can I find out more about the Secular Franciscans?

- Attend a meeting. Franciscans are generally jolly people. They have no secret rites, and visitors are very welcome!

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