

VOCATION HANDBOOK



Invite



Unite

Ignite



SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY REGION OFS

January 2026

The subject of vocations inspires a lot of conversation among Secular Franciscans at every level. It is common to hear on the one hand of the need for ambitious “recruiting,” with numerical goals and on the other that vocations come from God, and all we need to do is “be who we say we are” and people will come. This handbook assumes that fraternities are somewhere between these extremes and are willing to look at their responsibilities and are also interested in what other fraternities are doing. We realize that our professed members are aging and that we need to reach out to younger adult Catholics. Our Order isn’t going to disappear next week; however, many fraternities have the opportunity to grow and thrive. Most agree that we are “the Church’s best kept secret” and there are many things we can be doing to increase awareness of our vocation.

Once a person has the idea of a Secular Franciscan vocation, there are a number of ways he/she can get information and assistance. National and Region web sites have vocation information pages and links to view fraternity locations. There is also a national phone number, 1-800-FRANCIS that interested folks can call.

There is much to say about the welcome that those interested should receive, the interactions they should observe, and the example shown by professed seculars bringing Life to Gospel and Gospel to Life. Will they feel welcome? Will they feel the love and peace inspired by St. Francis? Will they see that we are a Third Order and not a club? Will they feel called to a deeper relationship with God? It is important to invite folks to come and see, unite with us in fraternity, and hopefully ignite hearts with the love our faith, church, and Franciscan charism.

“OFS General Constitutions, Article 45:

The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.

The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members.

Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the Secular Franciscan vocation.”

First Obligation: Personal Witness

OFS members should all be willing to provide a personal witness of their vocation, to share their stories, and invite other Catholics to a fraternity meeting. Most people who come into the order do so as a result of hearing about it from a friend or an acquaintance.

What steps can I take as an individual to promote vocations?

- *Attend diocesan or other larger area events, share your vocation, make connections.*
- *Carry business cards with your OFS fraternity name and contact info.*
- *Wear your Tau consistently and be ready to speak when asked about it.*
- *When meeting with someone who might be interested, invite them to a fraternity meeting.*
- *Given the temperament to participate in social media, do so as an OFS. In tone and demeanor, be recognizable as a Franciscan! (OFS Rule, Paragraph 19)*
- *Include vocations in prayer intentions*

Second Obligation: Fraternity Council

It is the council's job to propose ideas and activities that animate a collective witness, bringing the members beyond the gathering location.

How can a fraternity council animate a collective public witness?

- *Organize a Come and See event (samples and info are available from OFS-USA, see below.)*
- *Develop contacts with pastors at surrounding parishes, arrange to send speakers to talk to the congregations (3 minutes before or after Mass or at another event.)*
- *Propose activities to increase visibility in the home parish (Franciscan celebrations, Transitus services, animal blessings, anniversaries of profession, shared ministries, volunteering as a group, etc.)*
- *Propose activities to take the fraternity outside the parish hall: (public good works, social action, diocesan events etc. (Be the public face of the Church in the marketplace.)*
- *Publicize the monthly meeting in the bulletin "Do you have a Franciscan heart? Join us for prayer, lunch, and teaching."*
- *Develop a Fraternity Web site.*



*"Praise and bless my Lord
and give him thanks,
And serve him with great
humility."*

Regional Resources for Fraternities

Please visit our Regional Website <https://stelizabethofs.org/>, click on Resources, and then Vocations.

This Handbook was desired by fraternities and was first published in 2023 and revised in 2026 by our Regional Vocations Team.

Welcome to St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region OFS

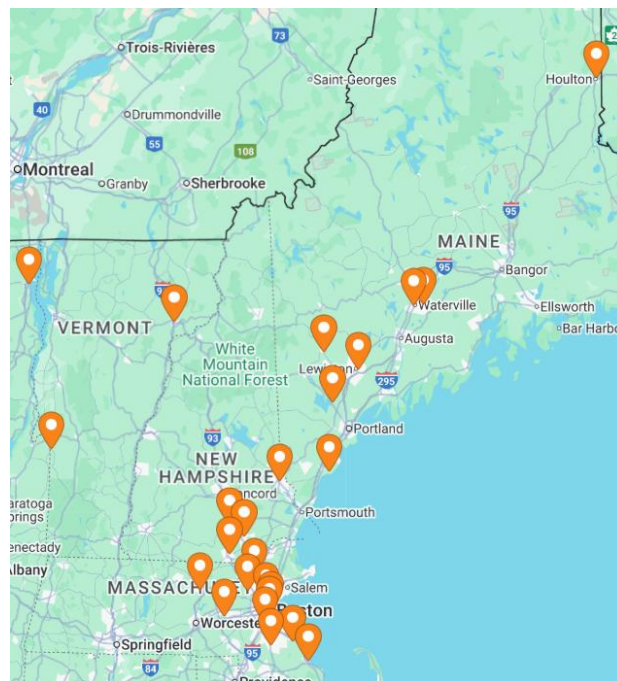


Who are Secular Franciscans?

Secular Franciscans are a community of Catholic men and women in the world who seek to pattern their lives after Christ in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. We believe that as human beings and Christians, we have such a sublime vocation that we cannot fulfill it alone. In our common response to the Gospel, we work together in community toward a deep evangelical life and toward communion with all people. This is our way of life.

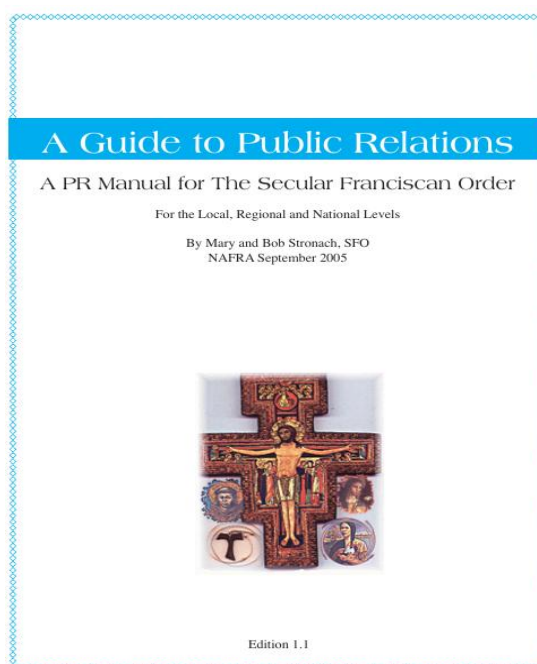
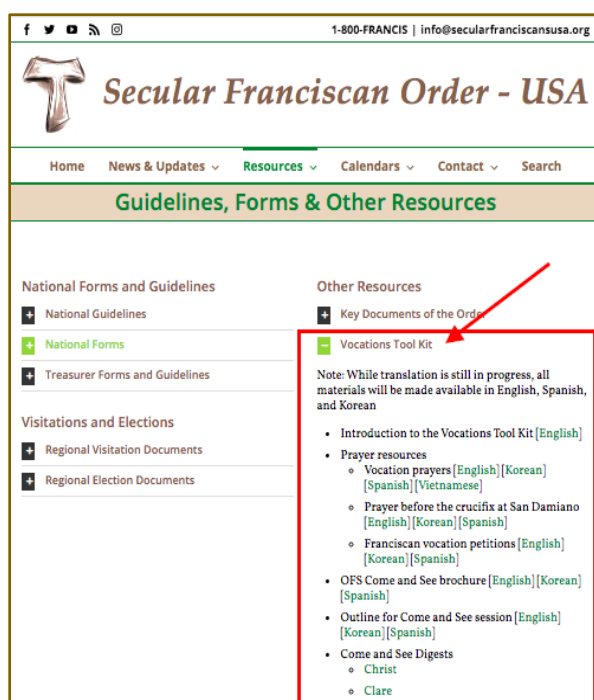
For more information on becoming a Secular Franciscan, please call

1-800-FRANCIS (1-800-372-6247) or email info@secularfranciscans.org



National OFS-USA (NAFRA) Vocation Resources for Fraternities

The National Fraternity, OFS-USA, has an online [Vocations Tool Kit](#) that every secular leader should be familiar with. It contains advice, sample documents for “come and see” events in several languages, prayer resources, and a variety of suggestions for local councils.



A Guide to Public Relations, by Mary and Bob Stronach OFS is a professional PR Manual for fraternities and regions. If your fraternity is looking to kick it up a notch with PR, this is your first stop.

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/guidelines-forms-other-resources/>
(Vocations Tool Kit)

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/are-you-called-to-the-secular-franciscan-life/>

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Nafra-PR-Manual.pdf>
(PR Guide)



Promoting Vocations to the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) “Tool Kit”

All Secular Franciscans are all responsible for promoting vocations. You may be wondering – how do I do it or where do I begin? Here are some tools that may help:

1. Pray for vocations.
 - a. Pray the National Prayer for Vocations each day! Cards with the prayer in [English](#), [Korean](#), [Spanish](#), or [Vietnamese](#) are available.
 - b. Add petitions for vocations to your morning and evening prayer routine. Distribute to your fraternity members. Petitions are available in [English](#), [Korean](#) and [Spanish](#).
2. Promotional brochures – *Click here for a template for a promotional brochure in [English](#), [Korean](#) or [Spanish](#).* Fill it out with your fraternity specifics (gathering location/date/time). With permission from the pastor, leave in the back of the church. Share it with other Catholics (including family and coworkers). Post a copy on your fraternity website.
3. Business Cards – develop professional looking cards with your fraternity name and contact information.
4. Spread the word using social media. Like us on Facebook (Secular Franciscans – NAFRA, USA), follow us on Twitter ([@SecFranNAFRA](#)) and watch and share Testimonials on YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/user/SecularFranciscans>)
5. Hold a Come & See event. Plan an event for people in your area to learn about the Order. This takes planning, preparation, advertising, but can be a wonderful way to spread the word. *Click here for a suggested outline in [English](#), [Korean](#), and [Spanish](#), with [talking points](#) for the event and an example [PowerPoint Presentation](#) with [handouts](#).* If you had some success, consider holding it annually. If you didn't have success, consider revamping the structure and trying it again. Share some of the testimonials from the YouTube Channel. Please share the outcome with us at 1.800.Francis@mail.com.
6. Practice your “elevator speech” about your vocation. (what does it mean to you? Why are you a Secular Franciscan? What does that “T” around your neck mean?) Example: “I am a follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ. Another man followed him in the 13th Century – Francis Of Assisi. Have you heard of him? Francis fell in love with Jesus’ teaching of peace, love and forgiveness – the Gospel. This is a way of life for all. I found it, rather it found me a few years ago. It is so rewarding to live by example, to help others according to the Scriptures... As we say...Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel. There is more to learn – would you like to get together to talk about it further?” *Click [here](#) for example questions to inspire your testimonial.*
7. Record your own testimony and send it to 1.800.Francis@mail.com for posting to the Secular Franciscans YouTube Channel.

Let us know what has worked well for you. Remember the best way to spread the word about vocations is personal witness and invitation. So, while you are living the Rule by spreading Christ’s peace and joy to others, it may be a good time to share about the vocation too!

Thanks to God for the gift of our vocations. It is a gift, so share it!

OFS-USA Vocations “Tool Kit”

March 2018

[https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Vocations Tool Kit-Introduction.pdf](https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Vocations_Tool_Kit-Introduction.pdf)

Personal Testimonies by Secular Franciscans

✚ I first felt a call to The Franciscan vocation the summer after my junior year in college during my summer job. I was sitting next to the runway at the local airport, eating my lunch and reading, “The Perfect Joy of St. Francis.” At that point in my life, I had little knowledge of Saint Francis, but when I read the passage where St. Francis was praying in front of the San Damiano Crucifix and heard Jesus telling him to rebuild His church, it struck a deep chord in me realizing that Jesus was talking to me. (C.P.)

✚ When I think back to my younger days, I remember that I always loved animals and nature. This led me to read a little about St. Francis. Then as I grew older, I was looking for something more; I felt I wanted to go deeper into my Catholic faith. I started reading books and I learned I learned about religious orders that had “Third Orders”. I found out that a few members of my parish were Secular Franciscans. When I asked them about their meetings and getting more information, one of them just said, “Come and see!” So, I did! The first thing that impressed me at the meeting was the joy that the members showed. I went to a few meetings, and they were starting their formation program which I entered. During my formation, there were times when I wasn’t sure I could live the Franciscan life, but I just put my trust in God and became more and more certain of my vocation. Almost 25 years later, I continue to grow in my love for Jesus and continue to try to live the Franciscan way of life. It has been such a meaningful spiritual journey which continues every day. In summary, my life has become richer, deeper, and I have met amazing people who are of “like minds”. It is an ongoing spiritual journey! I feel blessed and am so thankful to be a Franciscan. (Linda Belliveau)

✚ What drew me to the OFS originally was being akin to the servitude that I witnessed in the presence of this small but mighty group. I felt a connection in the way they were present to the lives of others. It was in these meetings that I truly understood the beauty and love of servitude to Jesus. It was also there that the Gospels took on life and took on a deeper meaning as the Fraternity makes it their mantra to bring the “Gospel to life”. The OFS has called us to serve, but not just because that is who we are, but to serve in community as we share God’s word and love in the world. This, in combination of finding the person of Jesus in every individual, has come from belonging to the OFS; it has changed my life. (Bernadette Willette)

🔑 As a new Catholic in 1991, I wanted to become the best catholic that I could be. The joy of entering into the Church was invigorating and inspiring. During my catechism, I had met several members of the Holy Family fraternity, and one couple actually sponsored me for Confirmation. I was attracted to the “family” feel to their gatherings and felt that the discipline of a life-long commitment would be beneficial in guiding my journey forward. I also appreciated the orthodoxy, being always in communion with the Magisterium. While fraternity life was going well, when I was on retreat during my candidacy, I began to wonder if it was just comforting being with these friends, or if I was really being called to this order. Through more prayer and discernment, I felt confirmed and asked to be Professed. (Bob Thompson)

🔑 I remember talking to one of my fellow parishioners and I was telling her about how I was out in my road picking up all the earthworms that were crossing the road after a rainstorm. I didn't want them to get runover, they were God's creatures. She told me that I should be a Franciscan. I was not sure what that meant or entailed but I got my answer that weekend at Mass. Our pastor was congratulating Mary G. on her Profession into the Secular Franciscan Order. After Mass, I approached Mary and wanted to know more. She invited me to the next Greccio fraternity gathering and as they say, the rest is history! (Diane Cunningham)

🔑 As someone who had recently come to true belief, I was looking for a way to stay steadfast in faith. Something that kept anyone from questioning my faith; not even myself. During this time, I came across the four major lay Orders: Benedictine, Carmelite, Dominican and Franciscan. I was quickly drawn to the Secular Franciscan Order and made arrangements to attend a gathering. Before I attended, I read about St. Francis and realized my life had a lot of similarities to his. Interestingly, I grew up in a church named after him but only knew that he loved animals. This was well depicted by the statue in front of the church. I've now been professed for over 13 years and am amazed at the inner strength I have gained, the importance of things like fraternity, love, dialogue, facing conflict, helping others come to know God as I do and most importantly striving to live a life of service. It has enhanced my marriage and family life and taught me a lot about relationships in every aspect of my life. (Lynette Dobbs)

National Prayer for Vocations to the Secular Franciscan Order

- † Pray the Prayer for Vocations at each fraternity gathering.
- † Ask Active Excused Members to pray the Prayer for Vocations each day.



O good and gracious God, God of mercy, compassion, generosity, and love, as we live our lives today in the model of St. Francis, choosing daily to live the Gospel life, help us to help others hear your call. Help us to help others recognize their vocation as a Secular Franciscan that You have already planted in their heart. Help us, so that together we all may work to bring the Gospel to life. Amen!

Composed by Marian R. Crosby, OFS, 2010 National Fraternity gathering in Scottsdale, AZ

[Additional Prayer Resources – Secular Franciscan Order – USA.](#)

Available in Spanish, Korean, Vietnamese

Pray Franciscan Vocation Petitions at Liturgy of the Hours

Sunday Morning Prayer:

O God, you revealed the mystery of your being Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier --help the Franciscan family to witness to the diversity of community life.

Sunday Evening Prayer:

O God, you have called Franciscans to be a people united in your love, --may our witness help bring about justice and peace for all.

Monday Morning Prayer:

O God, you have given us the mission of sharing the Good News of your Kingdom with all people, --continue to raise up in the Franciscan family more of our brothers and sisters to spread the Gospel.

Monday Evening Prayer:

O God, you sent your disciples to all the world to announce the Kingdom, --may all Secular Franciscans be faithful witnesses of your love and peace.

Tuesday Morning Prayer:

O God, you have called us to conform our lives to the Gospel --teach all Franciscans to embrace a life of joyful penance and keep us single minded in your service.

Tuesday Evening Prayer:

O God, you have called us to be people of prayer after the example of Francis and Clare, --may our lives of prayer be our source of strength in serving the People of God,

Wednesday Morning Prayer:

O God, the Apostles answered Jesus' call to 'come and see', --grant us the favor to invite others to our Franciscan way of life.

Wednesday Evening Prayer

O God, Francis and Clare were poor and humble, --may our living of these virtues encourage others to follow the Franciscan way of following Christ.

Thursday Morning Prayer:

O God, Francis and Clare had great awe and reverence for the Eucharist. --may our devotion to Jesus' Body and Blood be an example to those who aspire to the Franciscan life.

Thursday Evening Prayer:

O God, Francis saw your love for us in Brother Sun, Sister Moon, and all creation, --may his joyful contemplation of your handiwork lead us to a deeper knowledge of you.

Friday Morning Prayer:

O God, Francis' imitation of Christ led him to the gift of the Stigmata, --may our daily crosses lift us up to a greater love of you and your people.

Friday Evening Prayer:

O God, Jesus taught us by his life to place our lives in your hands, --give all Franciscans the courage and love to accept a share in the Paschal Mystery.

Saturday Morning Prayer:

O God, the Virgin Mary accepted the call to be the Mother of Jesus, --may the love of our own Franciscan vocation bring forth a new birth of justice and holiness in the world.

Saturday Evening Prayer:

O God, help us to listen to your will by walking in the footsteps of your Son, --so that guided by the Spirit, our Franciscan lives may call others to holiness and service.

[Additional Prayer Resources – Secular Franciscan Order – USA](#) .

Available in Spanish and Korean.

Giving Vocational Talks (St Mary of the Angels Fraternity, VT)

We gave talks in 4 parishes that consisted of 11 different churches. In some churches, we gave the talks up to 4 times (depending on the Mass schedule). We had about 12 new visitors. Of these, one couple was not eligible due to belonging to a support group for a local convent that is considered another public association. Another couple had issues with an annulment. It's difficult to tell until a "visitor" talks with you.

In parishes where we did not have a member (2 of the 4), we found that there could be some pastoral resistance, questioning our legitimacy. Apparently, they get requests from quasi legitimate organizations all the time. Emphasize that talk is only 3 – 4 minutes

We asked the pastor where our fraternity is located call the pastor where we wanted to give the talk. An easier way may be to get a letter from the pastor of the fraternity parish that can be given out when requesting permission for the talks.

We also found that going to the parish and meeting the pastor in person was a better idea than just sending a letter.

There are times in the liturgical year that we avoided - Lent and Advent, for example. However, this was at the pastor's request. Different pastors might have a different perspective about it.

Also, it's a very good idea to schedule the talks so that at least one (or two) gatherings will take place in the months immediately following. We didn't think of this one time and gave the talks when we were having a retreat in Maine the following month.

It would be best to give the talks 2 to 4 weeks before a gathering in order to give people enough time to schedule attending.

There can be a lag of months before someone acts on what they've heard. We had three people come to our spring gathering who had heard the talk a year before. We had two more come in later who had also heard the talk over a year prior.

Invite anyone who has shown an interest after the talks to come to a gathering when you run into them, but do not keep repeating the invitation every time you see them. Let the Holy Spirit work.

Not every visitor comes back for additional gatherings. Don't be disappointed. Understand that many do not want to make commitments. Coming to visit the fraternity is just fine.

Let folks know that the fraternity being comprised of men and women. It's just to clarify that we are not just an "old boys club" that the word "fraternity" might imply.

Don't overwhelm new people, with the Liturgy of the Hours, for example. Those who are familiar with smartphones and PCs, should use them to say the Liturgy of the Hours (at first) rather than using the "book". iBreviary is a great site.

Post a Gathering Schedule on your Parish Website or Bulletin Board



By Cimabue - circa 1288



THE SECULAR FRANCISCANS

(Third Order Franciscans)

Founded by St Francis in 1221

**St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity
St. Johnsbury VT**

Married or single, male or female, young or old – all are welcome. Our members & guests come from a wide area of the twin states that includes all of northern VT and western NH

Anyone interested in finding out more about us is welcome to attend in-person. Also, check our regional website: <https://stelizabethofs.org/>

“Make me a channel of your peace”

Anita at 802-751-5318 spikew@charter.net


Anne at 802-274-7917 amcsfo@myfairpoint.net

Michael at 603-616-4721 northern@together.net

In-person gatherings take place at the Fr Lively Center located just north of St John the Evangelist Church in St Johnsbury, VT starting at noon and usually on the 3rd Sunday of the month. Please feel free to contact any one of us to determine the exact time and date. No obligation; no commitment; BUT very inspirational.

Put an announcement in your Parish Bulletin(s):

Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
(Heart of St. Francis Fraternity)




If you love St. Francis of Assisi...
If you appreciate the world and all its gifts...
If you believe in peace and justice...
If your work can be a source of joy...
If you care about youth and their faith journey...
Then you are Franciscan.
AND you may have a vocation to become a Secular Franciscan living as a married or single person in the world.
Call or email today and leave a message for
(Name) @ (phone #) or (email address)
Or visit one of our gatherings (see bulletin or website)

Secular Franciscans

Advent Gathering

Please come and visit the Secular Franciscan December gathering to reflect and discuss the Franciscan perspective of the "O Antiphons".

December 14 from 1 - 3PM
Sisters of St. Joseph Center
80 Garland Rd, Winslow



Bring a potluck dish to share.
For more information, call Name at (phone #)

Print "Come and See" Brochures and Place them in your Parish



Who are Secular Franciscans?

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) is a branch of the worldwide Franciscan Family. We are single and married. We work, worship and play in the community where we live.

An official Order within the Roman Catholic Church, the OFS was founded by St. Francis of Assisi almost 800 years ago. Our purpose is to bring the gospel to life where we live and where we work. We look for practical ways to embrace the gospel in our lives and try to help others to do likewise.

In today's world we are plagued by time schedules, projects and activities that leave us tense and stressed. The OFS becomes our place of refuge and renewal where our brothers and sisters offer Francis to support and inspire us. You, too, can become a life-time member of our family -- if God is calling you.

Enhance your spiritual life, serve through apostolic ministries, continue your education in your faith and the Franciscan Movement!

What do Secular Franciscans Do?

Secular Franciscans follow the OFS rule that requires us to spend time in community with our Franciscan brothers and sisters.

We gather at least monthly. We support each other through the ups and downs of daily life. We pray together. We take opportunities to learn about our Church, our community and our world.

Our rule mandates us to be involved in apostolic ministries and with youth. When we are called to action, we embrace the call joyfully. Some of us are religious education teachers, some have a special ministry to animals, some have made a commitment to Perpetual Adoration. Some work with the poor and homeless. Some work in Soup Kitchens or visit the elderly and sick; some have youth ministries.

As a fraternity, we take action on issues that affect the lives of others. We do letter-writing campaigns in response to social justice issues; we support the efforts of our brothers and sisters who are serving the poor and lepers half-way around the world.

Is the OFS for you?

If you have a Franciscan vocation, you probably have a desire to do something more. Perhaps you feel a need for support in growing spiritually. Or, deep down, you sense a need to serve God in a special way. Or, for years, you have felt an affinity with St. Francis. He seems to pop up all around and you just don't know why. Perhaps, God is calling you!

Getting to know the OFS better may be a way to determine if you have a vocation.

You'll have plenty of time to get to know us before you make any formal commitment (profession). The OFS requires at least nine months for orientation and inquiry. During that time, you'll attend our monthly gatherings and have a few informal classes. Then if you feel the call to continue, you will enter Candidacy and have another 18 to 36 months of formal discussion, education and fraternal involvement before you make a permanent commitment at the time of Profession.

If you feel that God is calling you to do something more, please call us.



Is God calling you to walk in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi?

Don't Say "No" Before You Say "Yes"

Visit the Secular Franciscans, Get to Know Us and Ask Yourself "Is God calling me?"

Where?

Place: _____
Location: _____
City: _____

When?

Day: _____
Date: _____

Additional Information: _____

Why?

Because God won't stop calling until you answer!

Come with a friend or family member.

Journey with us.

_____ Fraternity in _____
is one of _____ fraternities in the _____ Region in the state/s of _____
and one of almost 1200 in the United States.
When you become a Secular Franciscan, you can visit any of our fraternities as a brother or sister in Christ and in Francis.

10/2019

Selection from...

The Exposition of the Our Father

by St. Francis of Assisi

...Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven:

so that we may love Thee
with our whole heart (cf. Lk 10:27)
thinking of Thee always,
with our whole soul
desiring Thee always,
with our whole mind

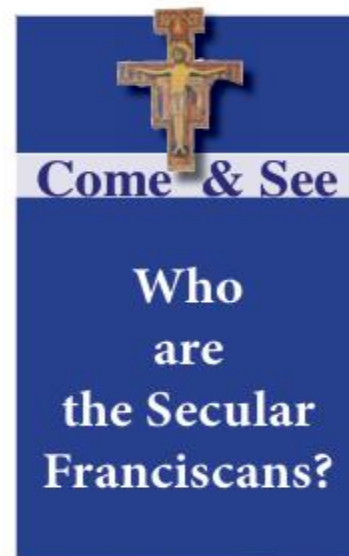
directing unto Thee all our intentions,
seeking Thy honor in all things
and with all our strength
expending our every strength
and sense of soul and body
in submission to Thy love
and nothing else;

and may we love our neighbors as ourselves
drawing all to Thy love
to the extent of our abilities,
rejoicing over the good things of others
just as over our own
and compassionating them in evils
and giving offense to no one (cf. 2 Cor 6:3)...

...But deliver us from evil:
past, present, and future.

To speak with someone about the Secular Franciscan Order and how you can meet the family, call or e-mail us:

Fraternity: _____
Contact: _____
Phone: _____
E-mail: _____



Here is another “Come and See Brochure”

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.”)
- 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. Visitors to our local fraternity meetings are very welcome! The local Secular Franciscans are part of St. John the Baptist Fraternity, which meets at:

<Location>

<Address>

<Address>

<Day and Time each Month>

If you are interested in visiting, please contact <name, phone> or <email>

Also, please check out the OFS national web site: <http://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/>

Selection from . . .

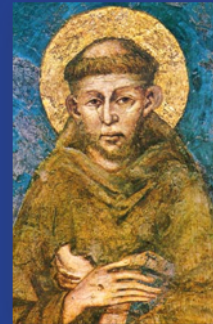
A Prayer Inspired by the Our Father By St. Francis of Assisi

...Your will be done on earth as in heaven: *Mt 6:10*

So that we may love You
with our whole heart by
always thinking of You, *Dt 6:5*
with our whole soul by always desiring You,
with our whole mind by always directing all our
intentions to You,
and by seeking Your glory in everything,
with all our whole strength by exerting
all our energies and affections of
body and soul *1k 10:27*
in the service of Your love and of nothing else;
and we may love our neighbor as ourselves
by drawing them all to Your love
with our whole strength,
by rejoicing in the good of others as in our own,
by suffering with others at their misfortunes,
and by giving offense to no one, *2 Cor 6:3*

. . . And lead us not into temptation: *Mt 6:13*
hidden or obvious,
sudden or persistent.

We invite you to visit us!



Who are the Secular Franciscans?

Who are the Secular Franciscans?

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 spoke to him from the San Damiano crucifix, and said, "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. 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

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, 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.

Francis' Prayer before the Crucifix

Most High,
glorious God,
enlighten the darkness of my heart
and give me
true faith,
certain hope,
and perfect charity,
sense and knowledge, Lord,
that I may carry out
Your holy and true command.

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*.

Print a Business Card to Hand to those who Express an Interest:

Front:

Secular Franciscan Order
Fraternity Name
Location
Address
When and What Time
Contact: Phone or Email
National: secularfranciscansusa.org
Regional: stelizabethofs.org

Back:



"The sign of Tau was a dynamic symbol for Francis, of exodus and pilgrimage. With his brothers, he wanted to be that new and humble people, the little group of faithful people who were firm in Christ. Tau, for him, meant

Christ himself, who redeemed us by his cross. He wanted to be absorbed entirely in this sign. Tau therefore became the signature that he used on all his letters and on the nameplate of his cell door. He preached about it so often and so ardently that Brother Pacificus saw it as a radiant light over his forehead."

Quoted from "Francis: Bible of the Poor" by Augustinus van Cortanje, OFM

<https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=https%3A%2F%2Fstelizabethofs.org%2Fwp-content%2Fuploads%2F2025%2F03%2FBusiness-Card-Come-and-See-Generic-Brown.docx&wdOrigin=BROWSELINK>

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION ON VOCATION PROMOTION

*«Before you were born, I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations»
Jeremiah 1:5*

From the dawn of creation, each one of us has been uniquely chosen and called by God to fulfil and participate in His mission. This eternal and boundless love of God assures us that our purpose is neither arbitrary nor accidental—it is deliberate and divine. Vocation promotion is a profound spiritual task that involves discerning and embracing God's call in our lives. It is about nurturing a culture of listening and openness to the Spirit's guidance. Every vocation is rooted in God's initiative, and He patiently awaits our response, whispering to our hearts the words of Isaiah: *«I have called you by your name»* (Isaiah 43:1). This is a deeply personal and specific invitation, grounded in His boundless love.

The Church, in her wisdom, teaches us that every individual carries a God-given vocation, a unique calling inscribed in their being. Through baptism, this call is elevated, drawing us into the Church's mission to proclaim and live the Gospel.¹ For those called to the Franciscan charism, the invitation is to live the Gospel according to the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi. Franciscan vocation promotion is about creating a culture that encourages individuals to listen for the quiet stirrings of God's voice in their lives. St. Francis himself heard this call in a moment of profound conversion, leading him to embrace a life of radical poverty and service.

The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order opens with a declaration that reflects this divine diversity of callings: *«The Franciscan family, as one among many spiritual families raised by the Holy Spirit in the Church [...]»*². This vocation calls us to embody Gospel values uniquely, responding to God's call like the Blessed Virgin Mary, who humbly submitted to God's will with her fiat: *«Let what you have said be done to me»* (Luke 1:38).

Vocation promotion is for those who have discovered their vocation and those who are still seeking vocations. For those who have responded to the call to follow St. Francis of Assisi, it is essential to continue deepening their commitment to live in the footsteps. For those who are still searching, it is important to give themselves the time to listen and respond thoughtfully.

Those who could belong to the Secular Franciscan Order

Catholics living in Communion with the Church³:

- Laity (men and women)
- The secular Clergy (deacons, priests and bishops)

Those bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of life cannot belong to the OFS.⁴

The Role of the Holy Spirit in Vocation

The Holy Spirit is the prime mover in the story of any vocation. The Spirit acts as the divine voice that whispers in the depth of the heart, inviting us to trust in God's plan and step into the unknown with courage and faith. The Holy Spirit is both the initiator and sustainer. It is the Spirit who stirs the first inklings of a call within us, often through moments of prayer and discernment. Through prayerful discernment, we must allow ourselves to be guided by the Spirit and affirm, as St. Francis did: *«This is*

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1993,

² OFS Rule 1

³ GG CC 39.2

⁴ GG CC 2.2

what I wish, this is what I seek, this is what I long to do with all my heart»⁵. Having found what one wants, one continues to «Gaze into the mirror daily, O queen bride of Jesus Christ and continually reflect your face in it»⁶. Discernment is not a one-time event but a lifelong process that aligns our will with God's plan. As we discern, the Spirit becomes our companion, illuminating the path before us and providing the wisdom and clarity needed to make decisions.

As Secular Franciscans, we are invited into a deeper union with God through our vocation. Like young Samuel, who needed Eli's guidance to say, *«Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening»* (1 Samuel 3:10), we too require spiritual mentors, prayer, and community to recognize and embrace our calling. This lifelong journey reminds us of Jesus' profound words: *« You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last»* (John 15:16).

Vocation through the Lens of St Francis and Other Saints

St. Francis of Assisi, upon hearing the Lord's call to *«Rebuild my Church»*, initially interpreted it as a directive to repair the physical structure of San Damiano. It was only through prayer and discernment that he understood his mission was to renew the Church spiritually, inspiring countless followers to embrace lives of humility, peace, and simplicity⁷. His vocation was born out of an encounter with Christ that moved him to embrace the Gospel with simplicity and joy. Francis heard God's call to *«rebuild my Church»* and responded with unwavering trust, dedicating himself to a life of service, peace and harmony with all creation.

Similarly, St. Clare of Assisi exemplified the Franciscan spirit with her radical poverty and trust in God's providence. She walked alongside Francis as a beacon of light, proving that vocation is not about seeking glory but about embracing Christ's humility. Another inspiring example is St. Elizabeth of Hungary, a patroness of the Secular Franciscan Order, who lived out her vocation as a queen by dedicating her life to serving the poor and the sick.

In modern times, St. Marianne Cope exemplified the Franciscan charism by courageously tending to lepers in Molokai, Hawaii. Her life was a testament to selfless love, mirroring Christ's compassion for the marginalized⁸. These saints remind us that every vocation, though unique, is united in its ultimate goal: to bring Christ to the world.

The vocation of another secular Franciscan saint, Gianna Beretta Molla (1922-1962), shone brightly through her devoted fulfilment of the daily responsibilities of a wife, mother, and doctor. Her heartfelt desire was to form a truly Christian family. Gianna became renowned for the sanctity of her life and her extraordinary final act of love, choosing to sacrifice her own life for that of her baby.

The common thread among these saints is their willingness to say Yes to God in the face of uncertainty, trusting that their lives would bear fruit for the Kingdom. Their stories encourage us to discern our vocations with patience and prayer, knowing that God's call is tailored to our unique identity and purpose.

Understanding Our Vocation

As the General Constitutions of the Secular Franciscan Order state: *«The vocation to the OFS is a specific vocation that gives form to the life and apostolic activity of its members»⁹. The specificity of our vocation is in the intensity of how we live and serve. Our vocation is unique in that it embraces the spirit of St. Francis while remaining fully immersed in the world as laypersons or secular clergy. There*

⁵ LM, 3.1

⁶ St. Clare, 4th letter to Agnes of Prague, 15

⁷ Sabatier, P. (2000). *The Life of St Francis of Assisi*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.

⁸ Giles, J. (2010). *St Marianne of Molokai: Servant of the Lepers*. New York: Orbis Books.

⁹ GG CC 2.1

are five aspects that are vital in understanding our vocation: Living the Gospel, Fraternity, Witnessing to Peace and Justice, Prayer and Contemplation, and Faithful Presence in the World.

However, many members often struggle to articulate the distinctiveness of their vocation. This is sometimes reduced to a list of pious practices or retellings of St Francis's life, leaving our vocation vague to others. To counter this, we must deeply understand and live out the defining characteristics of our Franciscan vocation, allowing it to become a compelling witness to the world.

Secularity: Living the Gospel in the World

As Franciscans, our vocation is anchored in secularity. The General Constitutions affirm: *«The secular state characterises the spirituality and the apostolic life of those belonging to the OFS»*¹⁰. This means we are called to build God's Kingdom through our everyday lives, working in the world while striving for perfect charity. Secularity enables us to bridge the gap between the sacred and the ordinary, infusing Gospel values into every aspect of life¹¹. The Secular Franciscans should constantly ask the Lord *«What do you want me to do?»*¹².

Pope Francis deepens the sense of our mission in his address: *«May your secularity be full of closeness, compassion and tenderness. And may you be men and women of hope, committed to living it and also to organising it, translating it into real everyday situations, in human relations, in social and political engagement; nurturing hope in tomorrow by alleviating the pain of today»*.¹³ The Minister General of the Secular Franciscan Order Tibor Kauser further explains the characteristics of the secular Franciscan vocation echoing the words of the Holy Father, *«Secular Franciscans are free to do good; they're inventive and talented; they're sensitive for justice; they're respectful of creation; they're seeking peace; they're seeking simple solutions; they seek minimum instruments but maximum compassion and solidarity; and they have courageous meekness and tender determination»*.¹⁴ This shows a maturation in the vocation a following of Christ wherever he goes.

By secularity we mean that our mission is a call to integrate faith and action in daily life; our mission is woven into the drapery of everyday experiences. Every moment becomes an opportunity to reflect the values of the Gospel. Thus, rather than preaching with words, our mission equally involves living in a way that inspires others to seek God. It is a conviction that living the Gospel means actively engaging with the world's challenges.

Promoting Vocations

Promoting vocations involves creating awareness and inspiring individuals to consider this unique calling to live the Gospel in the world. It is about sharing the beauty, joy and mission of the Franciscan Charism as it applies to our life. Experiences and statistics have demonstrated that promotion of vocations is both a privilege and a responsibility for every Franciscan. Article 45 of the General Constitution states: *«The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves»*¹⁵.

Research highlights the effectiveness of various initiatives such as «Come and See» experiences, discernment retreats, and mission opportunities in encouraging vocations. Modern tools like social

¹⁰ GG CC 3.1

¹¹ OFS Rule 2

¹² 2 Celano 6

¹³ Pope Francis, Address of his holiness Pope Francis to the participants in the General Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order, 15 November 2021.

¹⁴ Secular Franciscans USA. (2015, October 15). General Minister Tibor Kauser, OFS, of Hungary described some characteristics of the Secular Franciscan vocation Friday to some 80 ministers, delegates and observers. [Image attached]. Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=933523126702152&set=a.129336213787518>

¹⁵ GG CC 45.1

media also play a pivotal role in reaching potential candidates¹⁶ Yet, the most impactful invitation remains the lived witness of fraternity members. As one report notes, «*It was the experience of members and the way they are living religious life that was most influential in the decision to enter their institute*»¹⁷.

Authentic vocation promotion demands a sincere, prayerful and intentional approach that respects the uniqueness of each individual's calling. Thus, it requires determination, consistency, and patience. This process is often compared to the work of the Sower in Jesus' parable. As we remember well from the parable, the result of sowing depended on the soil on which the grain fell. For us, this can mean how faithfully we called like Francis to rebuild the Church. Also, inspired by his example, we live our Secular Franciscan vocation to be «*witnesses and instruments of her mission among all people, proclaiming Christ by their life and words*»¹⁸. For us, vocation promotion must reflect the charisms of simplicity, humility and fraternity. Living and sharing these values authentically demonstrates the richness of our Franciscan way of life. Thus, it must stem from a deep love for Christ and for the Church, a genuine desire to help others find their path and a commitment to walking the journey with them.

Those who feel the voice of the Lord calling them to the Secular Franciscan Order

Should listen to God's voice, pray and seek guidance.

They have to go through a process of Formation. Formation is done in stages from the time one feels drawn to join the Secular Franciscan Order to the time of solemn profession which is not the end of the vocation journey but a new beginning to live in the fullness of life in Christ following the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi. Our true vocation is tried through how we live after making the permanent profession.

Conclusion

Our vocation as Secular Franciscans is a sacred gift and a profound responsibility to live the Gospel in the world with simplicity, humility and joy, following the example of St. Francis. By living authentically and joyfully, we not only honour God but also inspire others to consider the Franciscan way of life. Our calling challenges us to be living witnesses of Christ's love, transforming ordinary experiences into opportunities to reflect God's presence. Let us pray for the grace to deepen our commitment to our vocation and to be instruments of peace, love, and hope in the world. By embracing our Rule of Life, we fulfil a unique mission to «*rebuild the Church*» and contribute to the unfolding of God's Kingdom in our secular context.

May we, like St Francis, continually seek to rebuild the Church—not with bricks and mortar but through lives transformed by the Gospel. Every day one has to remember the purpose, and always look to the beginning, holding what you holding, doing what you are now doing and not to cease.

Source: CIOFS, Vocation Promotion Commission, July 1, 2025.

¹⁶ Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (2009). Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference. Washington, DC: Georgetown University.

¹⁷ Centre for Applied Research in the Apostolate (2009). Recent Vocations to Religious Life: A Report for the National Religious Vocation Conference. Washington, DC: Georgetown University, p. 11.

¹⁸ OFS Rule 6