

## Who are the Secular Franciscans?

Have you been feeling that you would like to offer something more of yourself to God?

But, you've been wondering how to do that when your life is so busy?

The answer to this desire may be the Secular Franciscan Order.

All of us are called by God to serve Him in special ways. However, those of us who are Secular Franciscans have been called to serve God by following in the footsteps of St. Francis.

Gathering in fraternity gives you a true sense of home—of being with like-minded people all working together to live out their deepened commitment to follow Christ

- The Secular Franciscan Order was formerly known as the **Third Order of St. Francis** and even longer ago as the **Order of Penitents**. Our foundations come from the desire of ordinary people living in the times of St. Francis who wanted to join his new order but could not leave their families and their own busy lives.

The old term Third Order comes from the fact that the order of Friars was established first, the order of Poor Clares was established second, and the order of lay people was established third. Our name now, **Secular Franciscans (OFS)**, is also descriptive because it tells who we are in the present day world.

- **The Secular Franciscan Order is a true order of the church**—our Rule is approved by Rome. HOWEVER as lay people:
  - **We are not bound by vows.** At our profession we promise to live the **spirit** of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience. **This simply means that we promise to live the spirit of moderation in all things according to our state in life.**
  - **We do not live in community;** we are married and single; we are young and old; we come from all different cultures and all different walks of life. Some of us are hospital workers, teachers, attorneys, factory workers, nurses, maintenance workers, or doctors. You probably know some Secular Franciscans already. St. Francis Parish has an active fraternity which has been growing. There are also many fraternities in Bergen County and in the state of New Jersey as a whole.
- As a matter of fact the Secular Franciscan Order is a world-wide Order
  - In the United States alone there are 637 local fraternities with approximately 12, 739 professed members.
  - In the world there are about 360, 000 professed Secular Franciscans
  - Our region has 34 fraternities in New Jersey, Manhattan, Westchester and Staten Island.

**Our fraternities serve as our community and our Franciscan family**

  - Generally, we gather in fraternity **once or twice a month** to pray, study, witness, engage in apostolic work, and share community with one another. When we are professed we promise to live the Gospel as set down in our Rule of life which has been

approved by the church

- **What this means is that we promise to live out more fully the commitment that was already made for us at our Baptism by following the example St. Francis of Assisi.**
  - Although we do not go out to preach the Gospel as the Friars do, through our example, **we give witness to the message of Christ in the world.** Our Rule tells us to go from Gospel to Life and Life to the Gospel. This means that we take the teachings of Christ and apply them to our everyday lives.
  - **We try to set the example of what it is to bring peace and hope into our communities and the world because as Secular Franciscans we learn to focus less on our personal needs and desires and more on what is beneficial to those around us-- whether that be in here in Hackensack or in a far away part of the world where there is war and suffering.**
- Our Rule calls us to concentrate on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in our service to others.

**IF YOU FEEL THAT GOD IS CALLING YOU TO SOMETHING MORE, PERHAPS SOMETHING SPECIAL, IN YOUR LIFE AS A CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN, YOU MIGHT WANT TO LOOK INTO 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.
- **To be admitted to the OFS in the United States**, a person must be a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church (i.e., have received the Sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist) in addition to being an actively practicing Catholic.

A person who believes he or she has been called to be a Secular Franciscan begins by attending a few fraternity meetings (up to 6) and getting to know the members and the activities of the fraternity. This is known as the period of **Orientation** which should **last no less than three months**. After this time period, we **welcome the candidate**, and he or she becomes an **Inquirer**.

**Once he or she has been welcomed, the newcomer enters the period of Inquiry.** This begins the time of study about the Franciscan way of life. This period usually lasts 6 months—but can take longer depending upon individual circumstances.

At the end of this initial period of study, **the newcomer enters the period of Candidacy** which lasts for **no less than eighteen months and no more than thirty-six months**. During all of this time, candidates are becoming familiar with fraternity life and with the spiritual life of a secular Franciscan. **After this time of study and participation, the candidate can become a professed member of the order.**

If you are interested, you may email [OLAngels@aol.com](mailto:OLAngels@aol.com) in the NY-NJ area. Other places in the United States, dial 1-800-FRANCIS.