

ANSWERS

to an inquirer's questions

My grandmother belonged to the Third Order of St Francis. Is that the same?

Paul VI changed the name from the "Third Order of St Francis" to the "Secular Franciscan Order", when he revised our Rule in 1978.

Why the change of name? "Secular" doesn't sound very religious.

The Second Vatican Council gave a very positive value to the vocation of secular people, that is, men or women, married or single, working for a living or retired from work.

But you are an "Order"? I thought only priests, Brothers and Sisters belonged to an Order.

We are not a religious Order, and religious priests, nuns, Brothers and Sisters cannot belong to our secular Order. But diocesan or secular priests can join our Order. In fact, we have some Secular Franciscan priests in Oceania.

What's the difference between being a Catholic and being a Franciscan?

Catholics, like all Christians, are followers of Jesus Christ and live according to his

Gospel. Franciscans are first of all Christians, and we are Catholics. The difference is that we follow Christ in the way that St Francis did, belonging to a fraternity, imitating his virtues, sharing his charism.

Sharing his charism? What does that mean?

A charism is a special grace or gift from God to a particular person, not just for that person but for the good of the whole Church. St Francis was specially gifted to "rebuild the Church", by living the Gospel of Jesus faithfully. If God calls you to be a Franciscan, whether religious or secular, he gives you a share in the charism of St Francis.

How do I know if God is calling me to be a Secular Franciscan?

You would need to be, at least, a practising Catholic with a good public reputation. If you are attracted by Saint Francis and his gospel-based way of life, that's a good sign, worth following up.

How do I follow it up?

On the back of this leaflet, you will find the name and address of a Secular Franciscan whom you can contact. He or she will put you in touch with a local Fraternity. You can attend its meeting as an inquirer. If possible, a member will accompany and introduce you.

What happens at a meeting?

There is no hard and fast rule for conducting meeting of the local Fraternity, but it usually opens with prayer, which could be the Eucharist, or an Hour of the Divine Office, or prayer of St Francis. There could be half an hour of instruction or spiritual formation, given by a Franciscan priest or Brother or another "Spiritual Assistant". Then information about the life and various activities of the Fraternity and its members may be shared. The meeting always ends with a "cuppa" and a recreational moment, so that the members can relax with one another, like brothers and sisters.

Do you have to say particular prayers each day?

Full members are expected to join in the Church's official prayer, at least the Office of the Twelve Our Fathers which St Francis gave to his friars. But you are instructed about it in the course of your formation.

What is involved in formation?

You arrive first as an inquirer or aspirant, and you remain so for at least three months. If you are ready and if the Fraternity Council agrees, you can then become a candidate and receive formation for at least a year. Formation is not only instruction but it involves also showing that you can live peacefully in the Fraternity and can contribute to its life. If you are sure

that God is calling you to live as a Secular Franciscan, and if the Fraternity Council agrees, you can ask to be “professed”, that is, to make a permanent commitment to this way of life.

Is there a lot of study involved?

There can be, but that depends on a person’s level of education. The candidates need to have studied the Secular Franciscan Rule sufficiently to understand what they are committing themselves to live for the rest of their lives. While you are an aspirant and a candidate, your initial formation is largely taken up with learning and appreciating the Rule. After you are professed, your Fraternity meeting provides you with ongoing formation for as long as you are able to attend the meetings. The Franciscan life is immensely rich, but how much study you put into it depends on your capacities.

My grandmother was clothed in a brown robe and a white knotted cord when she died? Do you wear clothes like that now?

Some members still ask to be laid out and buried “in the Franciscan habit”, but it is a shroud, not the habit worn by religious. In day to day life, the “habit” of the Secular Franciscans is their ordinary secular clothing. Our distinctive emblem is the Tau Cross, shaped like the letter T, which St Francis used as a sign of conversion to the Gospel. We wear it either round the neck or pinned to our clothing.

What do Secular Franciscans do?

The Franciscan life combines prayer and activity, both contributing in their own way to rebuilding the Church. In daily life, Secular Franciscans give priority to their families, then to their work and workplace, to their duties in civil society, and to cooperating with the clergy in building up the church community. Often, as individuals, Secular Franciscans are quiet but effective workers in their parish. In their fraternities, they often team up with other members to do an apostolic work. The list of examples is endless. You will find them in schools as catechists, in hospitals and prisons as visitors, as volunteers in soup kitchens and collecting centres. They simply look for a need that they can do something about, and do it.

Are you interested?

Contact:

SECULAR FRANCISCANS

***Questions people ask us,
and some answers***

***Lord, make us instruments
of your peace!***