

ORIGINS

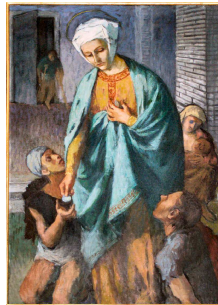
To know the origins of a great movement is to understand it better. Francis, son of a rich merchant, lived in times which were filled with warring factions, with the struggle of the lower classes, with yearning for a better life. Francesco Bernadone dreamt of fulfilment through achievements and honours of knighthood. But God planned otherwise. While convalescing from a grave illness God's grace moved him to think deeply about changing things—beginning with himself. He was converted to a new way of total dedication to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Francis' new lifestyle immediately attracted others. So many men came that he formed for them the *Order of the Friars Minor*. Soon women too longed to live his poor and simple Gospel life. With the young Clare he founded a second Order—the *Poor Ladies*. Other men and women—not called to the Religious life of poverty, chastity and obedience, desired nonetheless to live in the way of Francis. For them also he wrote a simple Rule—thus began a third Order, the *Brothers and Sisters of Penance*, approved by pope Honorius III in 1221. For centuries this Order was called the *Third Order of St Francis*; it is now called the *Order of Franciscan Secular*—Secular Franciscans—OFS.

GLORIOUS PAST

Already in Francis' time the OFS has many members. Through nearly eight centuries it has continued to prosper, bringing untold blessings to the Church and society. It has been fruitful in much personal holiness, and many Secular Franciscans have been beatified and canonised in recognition of their outstanding holiness. They came from all

walks of life: St Elizabeth [queen of Hungary] and St Louis [king of France] are patrons of the OFS; nine popes have been Secular Franciscans; household names like Columbus, Thomas More, Copernicus, Dante, and the less well known like John Bradburne and Margaret of Cortona



were all members of the Order.

PAPAL ENCOURAGEMENT

The popes have showered high praise on the Franciscan way of life, Leo XIII promoting it enthusiastically as a means of social reform. Nicholas IV's revision of 1289 remained in force for six centuries; Leo XIII's of 1883 for almost a century. But it was after the Second Vatican Council [1962-65] that Paul VI approved a completely new Rule on 24 June 1978, presenting the essential attitudes for living the Gospel way of St Francis while continuing to live *in the world*.

VALUES OF THE OFS

The greatest benefit derived from belonging to the OFS is to be heir to its time-tested and well balanced spirituality which is firmly rooted in the Gospels. Vatican II stated that the supreme norm of holiness for all people is the Gospel. Centuries ago, Francis was aware of this, and bequeathed that value to us. For Franciscan life is fully centred on Christ, whom Francis loved so intensely, and imitated in all respects. The OFS is not a 'finishing school for personal holiness'. Rather, it exists to fulfil Jesus' new commandment: 'Love one another as I have loved you' [John 15.12]. The OFS is about living out what we celebrate in the Liturgy of the Eucharist, being 'sacraments' of Jesus, allowing ourselves to be broken and given for our brothers and sisters both within the Church and the world—regardless of personal cost. It is about allowing God to use us to manifest his love for the whole of creation. We do this as members of an Order, approved by the Church, with Rule and Constitutions as our guide. The Order has true priorities for the practice of the Gospel virtues, a programme of prayer and reception of the Sacraments. Belonging to the OFS means

being in an historic Order numbering nearly half a million worldwide, and a part of the huge Franciscan family—the many Congregations of the Third Order Regular; the nuns of the Second Order; the friars of the First Order.

ENTRANCE

It is God the Holy Spirit who calls us to live our Christian lives as members of a Religious Order. Those who become members of the OFS share the Franciscan *charism* in common with the rest of the Franciscan family. To discern this call takes time and prayer; we must allow God the time to make his purpose known.

So, who can become a Secular Franciscan? Anyone who—

1. is a practicing Catholic
2. has a sincere intention of living the Franciscan way of life in Franciscan formation for a lifetime.

STEPS FOR ENTERING

1. One joins a local fraternity as a 'Visitor' for at least six months.
2. The Visitor requests the fraternity to accept one as an 'Enquirer'. There then begins a period of Initiation of at least a year which leads to admission to the Order as a 'Candidate'.
3. As a Candidate for Profession one commences a period of Initial Formation lasting no less than two years leading to 'Profession' of the Rule of the OFS and lifetime commitment as a Secular Franciscan.



If you desire to share in deeper happiness the Gospel Life of our Lord Jesus after the example of St Francis of Assisi then we invite you to—

Come and See!

<http://ofsgb.org>

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twitter: @ofsgbn

instagram: @ofsgbn

email: info@ofsgb.org

For further information please contact:

Saint Francis Is Inviting You



Francis of Assisi is known as *everybody's saint*. In fact, many people love him so much that they make a lifelong commitment to follow his way of life.



Is God calling you to follow Francis?

COME AND SEE!