

VISITOR

Index of Booklets

- a selection of useful material which introduces the life and emphases of the OFS

[These may be printed and distributed to those expressing interest in the Order, or used by Formators as a basis for discussion with guests to a fraternity wishing to know something more about our way of life]

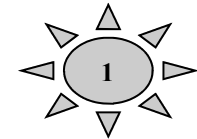
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Remember that being professed in a religious Order—a professed member of OFS—is a **VOCATION**. Like all vocations it is not right for everyone; there are many ways to follow God's will in the Christian life.

So, make your decision and be at peace. These decisions are good but not infallible. Go with them! If it becomes clear that your decision requires some adaptations, consider these prayerfully and patiently.

Many things influence us in our decision making:

- 'Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God.' [1 John 4.1]
- reflect on what you are looking for until it becomes clear
- seek the advice of a competent spiritual guide [Spiritual Companion/Spiritual Director]
- Do you find you are constantly putting off making a decision? This may be an indication that this not right for you—at the moment; at all....



Discernment





What is discernment?

- Discernment is the human, prayerful discovery of God's preference for my life.
- It considers movements and tendencies in life in order to discover their source. Some come from one's own human spirit, some from the Spirit of God and others may come from 'another source'.
- Ultimately we can say that IT SEEMS that God is calling someone to this decision.

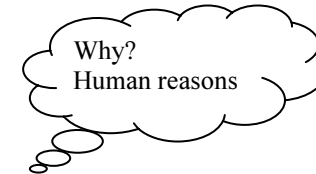


Deciding: OFS or not OFS

- Your reflection may tell you that our Franciscan way is not what you're looking for.
[Thank God for helping you know that. Continue your search for other ways to follow Jesus]
- Perhaps you are still attracted, but not totally certain that this is the way you wish to live your baptismal promises.
[Continue in your search, taking time to decide whether God is calling you to our Franciscan way of life. Together we will ascertain whether you have been called to it.]
- You may be certain this is the way you wish to follow Jesus.
[Thank God for your decision.]

Every decision is reached after discussion. It is best if there is agreement all round—everyone involved must be open and honest. Here are a few ideas regarding discernment.....

THE HUMAN SPIRIT



These ideas arise from one's emotions—which need to be taken into account. What reasons do you have for making this decision? Do you have enough information to make this decision? What is influencing your decision? Testing: do you feel at ease with this decision? Have you talked it over with others?

THE HOLY SPIRIT



The movement comes from a for Jesus—it's an increase of Spirit is stretching you to sur-completely to Gospel living.

deeper love faith. The render more

Testing?

- What is the source of your decision?
- Do you sense an inner prompting from the Spirit?
- Even though you are aware of a struggle to accept daily conversion, do you feel at peace with the decision?
- Is there joy in this decision?
- Do you feel urged to act on your decision?
- Have you talked it over with someone else?

When the Holy Spirit acts it is like water on a sponge: it soaks in!

Our role—as Secular Franciscans—is to be light for the world (people) who are often in darkness and despair. Reflecting and persevering in the Franciscan way of life helps us come to see people and creation through the eyes of love—no matter what! Our task—to bring life to others in this world, often absorbed by destruction, greed and the disappointment of transience. We are called to be instruments of

- **celebration**
- **hope**
- **forgiveness**
- **acceptance**
- **life**
- **respect**
- **community (rather than individualism)**
- **prayerfulness and blessing**

but above all the POWER OF LOVE—God’s love flowing through us, for we are his channels of his love and peace.

We do this not by ourselves, but in the fraternity of the ‘Monthly Meeting’. It is here that we share in Franciscan fellowship and grow as we journey together in our common calling—that of following Christ in the footsteps of St Francis of Assisi who reminds us:

“O how happy and blessed are these men and women while they do such things and persevere in doing them...they are children of the Heavenly Father whose works they do, and they are spouses, brothers and mothers of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are spouses when the faithful soul is joined by the Holy Spirit to our Lord Jesus Christ. We are brothers to him when we do the will of the Father who is in heaven. We are mothers when we carry him in our heart and body through the divine love and a pure and sincere conscience and give birth to him through a holy activity which must shine as an example before others.” [Letter to the Faithful (1209-1215), 7]



Franciscan Values and Theology

There is a Franciscan way of perceiving God, the world, and humanity. It offers a way of seeing God as acting through love and goodness—rather than an all-seeing judge. Franciscans are encouraged to understand and embrace this way of looking at God and his relationship with all creation.



Sharing, compassion for others:

serving, caring for the poor and oppressed;
concern for social justice; taking responsible social action

- call for interaction with others & creation
- 'love the Lord your God with all your heart,...and your neighbour as yourself' [Lk 10.27]
- healthy respect for our dignity makes us able to respect the dignity of others
- As the Father sees in every person the features of his Son, the firstborn of many brothers and sisters, so the Secular Franciscans with a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ. A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people, especially with the lowly for whom they shall strive to create conditions of life worthy of people redeemed by Christ. [OFS Rule, 13]

Creating a caring community:

respect for individual dignity;
hospitality, courtesy, kindness, friendship, openness, fostering
loving relationships

- respect of individual means taking an active stance when people are oppressed—solidarity with poor and oppressed wherever they are
- St Francis saw in all things the footprint of the Creator, reverencing all creatures as God's imprint
- Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which "bear the imprint of the Most high"...[OFS Rule, 18]

Reverence for creation:

respect for all creatures; fostering a simple lifestyle, stewardship;
human dignity and empowerment of people; concern for environmental issues

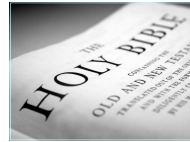
- resources of our planet are meant to be shared by all people
- we choose the kind of lifestyle that best reflects our priorities
- Let the Secular Franciscans seek a proper spirit of detachment from temporal goods by simplifying their own material needs. Let them be mindful that...they are stewards of the goods received for the benefit of God's children. [OFS Rule, 11]
- love of the creation was the reason for the Incarnation
- God's desire was to be with his people on earth & Jesus is the perfect expression of God's love

Peacemaking:

healing and reconciliation, conflict resolution, forgiveness, care and
understanding to eliminate fears

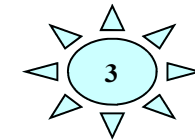
- as we promote & support the God-given dignity of all people, reconciliation & peacemaking become the hallmark of our Franciscan life
- we are ambassadors of peace
- 'Blessed are those who endure in peace' [St Francis]
- in following Francis, his thinking permeates us, helping us, like him, to be conformed to Christ who said, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.' [John 14.27]

But there are obstacles to listening to Scripture—as well as human obstacles, that hinder our listening to God. Listening to Scripture requires that we remove any barriers to listening. We may think that such barriers protect us, but they actually keep us from growing.

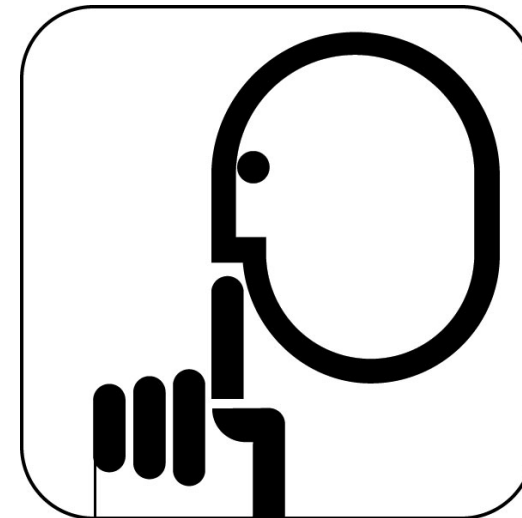


- When we read Scripture we trust God to share with us.
- When we read the Scriptures within our faith community we are unlikely to go astray. Rather, it keeps us on track and allows us to test our understanding.
- Alone we can be misled. Being comfortable is not a sign of truth. It may simply mean that we don't want to be disturbed!

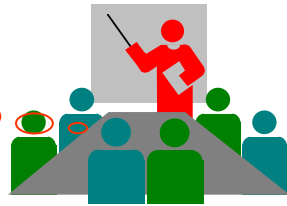
As we move forward let us, therefore, keep in mind the importance of **LISTENING**. We must work at removing obstacles—this is an important part of the conversion that takes place within the OFS. As St Francis reminded his brothers: 'Wherever the brothers may be and meet one another, let them show that they are members of the same family. Let each one confidently make known his need of the other, for if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, [Cf. I Thes 2.7] how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit!'



Listening



I *am* listening—
but is it attentive
listening?



Attentive listening means we are able to:

- listen to God and recognise the ways in which he speaks to us
- listen to one another so we hear what's being said
- listen to our own spirit to see how it is touched by the Holy Spirit
- listen to the wonders of God's creation in universe and people
- listen to the signs of the times and express our faith accordingly
- listen to our imagination and discover how we can extend our understanding of Paschal mysteries in a way that leads to salvation
- listen to Scripture and let it permeate our lives

But my people did not listen to my voice;
Israel would not submit to me.
So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts,
to follow their own counsels.
O that my people would listen to me,
that Israel would walk in my ways!
Then I would quickly subdue their enemies,
and turn my hand against their foes. [Ps 81.11-14]

- Listening is demanding; we must put aside our own agendas and listen to another's story
- Attentive listening can be difficult...



What are the ob-
stacles to atten-
tive listening?

- Sometimes we hear what we want to hear rather than what is being said. Generation gap?
- Personal experiences get in the way
- Stubborn convictions keep us from hearing what challenges/threatens us
- Distrust, dislike or fear of others around us
- Tiredness, anger or illness can drain our powers of concentration
- A fundamental unwillingness to change our way of thinking, or our way of life, no matter what is said

So, we need to ask for grace to be open to fresh ideas and avoid the traps of rejecting them out of hand; refusing to change. Sometimes our pride means we refuse to listen because we think we already have all the answers!

As St Paul reminds us, as Christians we will not continue to be asleep, 'but we will all be changed' because—

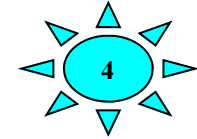
He will change our humble bodies,
so that they may be conformed to his glorious body,
by the power that also enables him to make
all things subject to himself. [Phil 3.21]

So, what is expected of a dedicated Franciscan?

1. Faithful to liturgical & personal prayer
2. Read Gospel daily—letting it influence their lives
3. A healthy loyalty to the Church; treating others with respect
4. A love for the Blessed Virgin Mary which brings them closer to Jesus himself
5. Willingness to fulfil daily their vocational duties
6. A life lived simply, wishing to serve rather than dominate
7. Acceptance of every person with respect & love
8. To stand up for justice, defending it by word & action
9. Working for peace in one's family & the world
10. A respect for all creation & having an ecological awareness
11. To 'be still & still moving', growing in faith & love, welcoming Sister Death when she comes

And, ways Secular Franciscans might fail?

1. Partial adherence to the Rule of the OFS
2. Irregular, casual attendance at fraternity meetings
3. Using gatherings to promote oneself and one's own interests rather than those of the fraternity
4. Loudly & publicly criticising the private lives of others
5. Failing in respectful listening & dialogue thereby promoting dissention & disharmony
6. A desire to be right, rather than Christ-like, in matters of disagreement
7. Not really willing to be conformed to the crucified Christ after the example of St Francis



Pointers when discerning whether someone has a vocation to the OFS





Signs that a person MAY have a call to the OFS

- Individual is good, practicing Catholic
- Has desire to follow Jesus & his Gospel
- Has personal relationship with Jesus—not just an intellectual knowledge about him
- Is hope-filled not pessimistic about things, having a reverence & respect for all creation
- Has some knowledge of St Francis & St Clare
- Has a willingness to commit to the Rule of OFS & live as part of a fraternity
- Is not prejudiced, arrogant or closed-minded



Signs that person MAY NOT have a call to the OFS

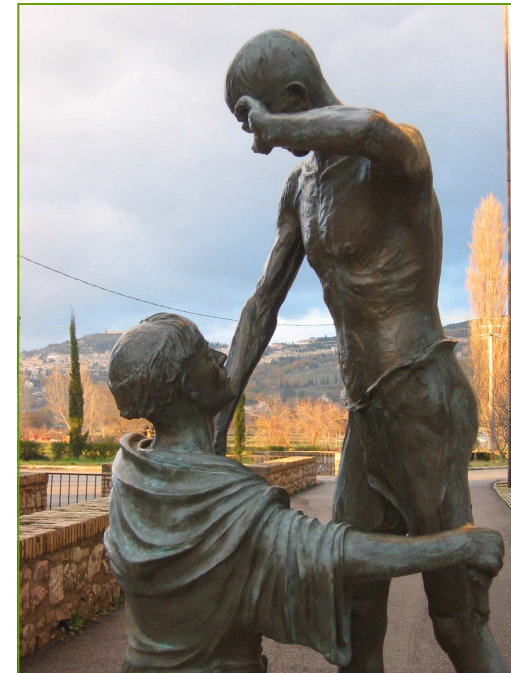
- Someone already belonging to another Order/Third Order
- Who is not a Catholic
- Someone with interpersonal problems or problems in relationships; a person seeking to escape from problems
- One who is self-centred or too individualistic
- Someone who wishes to force personal devotions & ideas on others; a bigot
- Someone whose lifestyle runs counter to that of the Gospel
- A gossip or critic; one who is irresponsible in family and work situations
- Someone inflexible, who is unwilling to change or be changed
- A person using power, violence or prestige to control life and other people

- Faithful and prudent is the servant who does not delay in punishing himself for all his offences, inwardly through contrition and outwardly through confession and penance for what he did.
- Blessed is the servant who loves his brother as much when he is sick and cannot repay him as when he is well and can repay him.
- Where there is charity and wisdom,
there is neither fear nor ignorance.
- Where there is patience and humility,
there is neither anger nor disturbance.
- Where there is poverty with joy,
there is neither greed nor avarice.
- Where there is rest and meditation,
there is neither anxiety nor restlessness.
- Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment,
there is neither excess nor hardness of heart.
- Blessed is the servant who stores up in heaven the good things which the Lord shows him and does not wish to reveal them to people under the guise of a reward, because the Most High himself will reveal his deeds to whomever he wishes.
- Blessed is the servant who safeguards the secrets of the Lord in his heart.

[St Francis of Assisi: *Early Documents*, Volume I, 136-137]



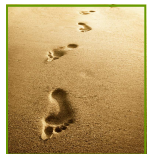
The Call to Holiness



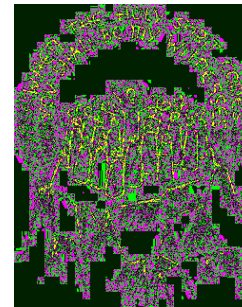
The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one—that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in his glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity. [Lumen Gentium, 41]

All Christians are called to holiness, but fundamental to our Franciscan way of life is the fulfilling of this quotation from the Second Vatican Council.

- We do not disengage with the world; as Secular Franciscans *the world is the sphere of our calling's activity*
- We are present to the world as Jesus' witnesses, living the Gospel in everyday life
- 'we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us' [II Cor 5.20] & 'as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way...as having nothing, and yet possessing everything' [II Cor 6.4, 10]
- We make no false distinctions between the professional and the spiritual since separation runs counter to a Franciscan vision of life—unity is important to us, personally and as community, in implementing the Gospel and reaching out in love to a needy world
- Our calling is to live our Christian life through the OFS—which calls for a radical interior change which the Gospel calls CONVERSION
- Striving to live by the Rule of the OFS is our way of contributing to building up the Church; following the poor Christ in the footprints of St Francis of Assisi



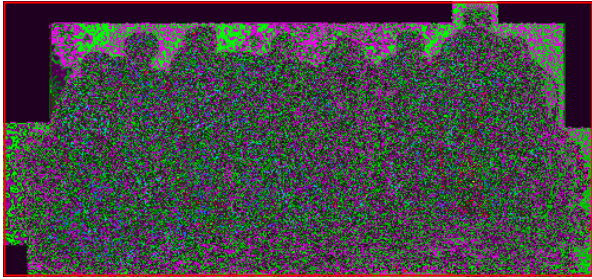
'United by their vocation as "brothers & sisters of penance", and motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that RADICAL INTERIOR CHANGE WHICH THE GOSPEL ITSELF CALLS "CONVERSION". Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily.' [OFS Rule, 7]



- The Spirit of Jesus propels the Church now as always. It is the Spirit of Jesus working through God's people called the Church.
- Franciscans always begin with Scripture—we are exhorted 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit' [Eph 4.30]; we are told 'the heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him' [Lk 11.13]; that 'the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control' and that 'those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us be also guided by the Spirit' [Gal 5.22-25].
- We see the bible as the guide for our way of life. St Francis willingly accepted the implications that the Gospel required of him and his trust in God found expression in poverty and contemplation. Within the framework of the Church, he brought new life to the Church of his day—the 13th Century. We, as Seculars, can do no less in our world. He could indeed say,



- 'I carry the marks of Jesus branded on my body. [Gal 6.17]



What OFS is all about



Secular Franciscans DO THE GOSPEL!



'Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the Gospel, going from Gospel to life and life to Gospel.' [OFS Rule, 4]

- This is at the root of our lives, for our life is a life conformed to Christ following in the footprints of St Francis of Assisi—our inspiration under God:

'Motivated by the dynamic power of the Gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the Gospel itself calls "CONVERSION"...' [OFS Rule, 7]

- This Gospel-focus is the heart of our lives—for nothing in life is outside the reach of the Gospel & we work together as an Order, in our fraternities, to achieve this ideal
- We seek to develop a prayerful spirit
- We have a hopeful spirit
- Daily conversion is essential



- The Franciscan Family St Francis founded is like a plaited cord, three Orders woven together & committed to the task given by Christ—

1. Order of Friars Minor—brothers in friaries
 2. Order of St Clare—sisters in convents
 3. Order of Franciscan Secular—brothers & sisters but **in the world**
- And, as Scripture says, 'A threefold cord is not quickly broken.' [Eccles 4.12]

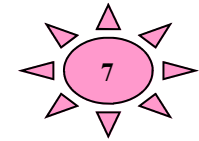
How do they do it?

Secular Franciscans [amongst other things] -

- Live in the world
- Share in the spirit of the Franciscan Family
- Seek to give flesh to the Gospel vision
- Serve others through social justice; ministries of charity & peacemaking
- Make a life-long commitment to a way of life set out in their Rule
- Are members of a local fraternity where they together grow in the understanding of their calling with their brothers & sisters living the Rule
- Have a good sense of humour in that they are serious-minded but full of the joy of the Holy Spirit
- Are meditative & reflective, esp. on Scripture, seeking ever to be still & still moving

Of course, following the Gospel is never easy or simple. But our fraternal life helps us to find our way, supporting each other in our quest for holiness— conversion which of course is conformity to Christ, and which, of course, is daily.





You and the Holy Spirit



Spirit—a biblical understanding

In Hebrew [ruah] and in Greek [pneuma] literally means “wind” or “air” respectively. In Scripture as a whole ‘spirit’ is used in a variety of ways. It can signify the ‘soul’ which continues even after the death of the body [Acts 7.59 ‘While they were stoning Stephen, he prayed, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.”’]. Good angels are called ‘spirits in the divine service’ [Heb 1.14]. There are ‘evil spirits’ [I Sam 18.10; Mk 5.13; Lk 7.21]. The spirit can be acted upon [Gen 41.8 ‘Pharaoh’s spirit was troubled’] and so on. The Psalmist [51.11] invokes God not to remove his holy spirit from us.

It is, however, in the New Testament that we see the richest development. Here, Holy Spirit—sometimes referred to as God’s Spirit; the Spirit of Christ—is that which is the permanent possession of the believer [Rom 8.9 ‘the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.’]. Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’ [John 20.22] - the fullness of which is seen in the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost [Acts 2.4] - as promised by Jesus before his departure to the Father [John 16.7]. The presence of the Spirit is what empowers the believer, endowing with spiritual gifts—I Cor 12-14; Eph 4.11ff] and producing spiritual fruits—Gal 5.22ff. It is because the Church has the Holy Spirit that she can be called the Body of Christ—she does the work of Christ as his hands and feet and voice and power in the world.



Spirit—a Franciscan understanding

‘To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and Lord Jesus Christ. [II Thess 1.11-12]

- The **Spirit’s call** to follow the Franciscan way of life is **our call**
- With the grace of the Holy Spirit, we must examine our hearts in order to:
 1. **reflect upon our perspectives in life**
 2. **consider how others see us, how we see ourselves and how Jesus sees us**
- The Spirit is at work in different ways—through prayer, pain, love, people, even through hatred; loneliness and loss, sorrow and joy
- The Spirit blows with kindness. We must wait patiently for the Spirit’s call, and respond by allowing him to take control of us and work through us...

Secular Franciscans—

- Express their ardent love by imitating Mary [OFS Rule, 9]
- Strive to purify their hearts from yearning for possession and power [OFS Rule, 11]
- With a gentle and courteous spirit accept all people as a gift of the Lord/an image of Christ [OFS Rule 13]
- Seek to build a more fraternal world/in the spirit of service [OFS Rule, 14]
- Promote justice by their lives and courageous activity [OFS Rule, 15]
- Seek ways of unity and fraternal harmony though dialogue, love and pardon [OFS Rule, 19]