

Section C

Distinctive Vocations

Solitary, Single Consecrated and eremitical life, and membership of other communities

Each Tertiary has their own unique vocation within the whole. We all share a responsibility to help each other to discern their own journey and live it to the full, as does the spiritual director. TSSF Networks and Initiatives serve to nurture the diverse and distinctive vocations of individual Tertiaries.

In recent years a handful of Tertiaries have taken a vow of celibacy in the 'Single Consecrated Life'. SCL is compatible with profession in TSSF. More detailed guidance is available below. A number of Tertiaries also identify themselves as 'solitaries', as described in more detail here, and it is possible that some may sense a vocation as a hermit.

Solitaries

Solitary life within the Order is considered in section H-1 of the Manual. If a Tertiary expresses a wish to be identified as a solitary it is important to proceed with openness, gentleness and spiritual discernment. Careful enquiry can be necessary to tease out a mixture of motives.

A call to solitary life does not necessarily mean that the Tertiary will stop attending meetings. Some solitaries value engagement in the life of TSSF as a source of spiritual strength. However Statute 1.2.3 identifies a call to solitary life as a legitimate reason for withdrawal from Third Order meetings, provided the Tertiary accounts for their absence at least once a year.

A Tertiary experiencing an authentic call to solitary life is likely to be questioning their engagement in other areas of life. They may, for instance, wish to reduce working hours, move house to a more suitable location, or withdraw from social commitments, as well, perhaps, as withdrawing from TSSF meetings.

If they wish to have a solitary vocation recognised by the Order they should:

1. Have shared their intention with their Spiritual Director, Local Group Convenor and Area Formation Guardian, including their anticipated level of attendance at meetings
2. Draw up a new rule of life mentioning how many meetings will be attended
3. If seeking to withdraw from meetings, confirm which Local Group they belong to and be able to explain how the Group understands their decision.

Determining a validity of Solitary Status

Requests for 'solitary' status can sometimes disguise other pastoral issues. Sometimes Tertiaries are unwilling or unable to attend meetings because of practical or health difficulties, pressures at home or work, or an unwillingness to engage fully in the expectations of membership. If these are the dominant reasons for withdrawing from meetings it may be inappropriate to recognise a vocation to solitary life. Please refer to the Pastoral section in the Area Team Handbook.

A solitary vocation can emerge as a positive response to forced isolation.

Some Tertiaries simply become absentees without explanation – refer to Part B – Absence from Meetings and section 4.6 of the Statutes for advice in such cases.

Professed Tertiaries and the eremitical life

Someone who is a well-established member of the Third Order might feel a vocation to life as a hermit and yet would like to remain in the Order. When this has occurred in the First Order, the person concerned has entered upon a period of discernment followed by a period of probation before the solitary state is accepted as permanent. Accepted solitaries have remained very much a part of the community because they have been kept in touch with it through prayer, intercession, correspondence and visits and have supported it profoundly through their interest, their prayers, and intercessions.

For a Tertiary, the guidance of their Spiritual Director would be of paramount importance. However, the Area Team, and the AFG in particular, would need to be sympathetically involved in helping the Tertiary find a way to continue to honour their Third Order commitment. At this stage, the Tertiary should not be considering 'Release from Vows'. Rather, the need is for a way of life to be worked out by the Spiritual Director, the Tertiary and the Area Team for a trial period. The arrangement reached would need to be presented for the approval of the Provincial Formation Guardian and communicated to the Local Group for the support of their prayers. Arrangements should include some method of non-intrusive but two-way communication. Only if the trial period reveals that combining the two vocations is not possible should the Tertiary consider a 'Release from Vows.'

Single Consecrated Life in the Third Order of the Society of St Francis

A number of Tertiaries have made profession in the Single Consecrated Life (SCL). SCL is rooted in the Church's most ancient expressions of religious life. It is distinct from solitary, contemplative and eremitical life in that the individual may follow an active or mixed life. Like marriage (another vowed expression of chastity) it is open to members of TSSF, and to be valued and cherished as an expression of our common vocation.

The vow of consecrated celibacy is a personal vow to a bishop (usually the diocesan bishop, but possibly also the Bishop Protector in the case of Tertiaries). After profession the bishop or the bishop's delegate, as 'guardian of the vow', will normally meet with the vowed person at least annually. Those in SCL should register their consecration with the Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities. The Advisory Council recognises an 'acknowledged network' also called 'Single Consecrated Life' which those who have taken a vow of SCL are encouraged to join.

Like any candidate, a Tertiary will test a call to SCL with their spiritual director, the bishop and perhaps others. It is helpful if the Tertiary consults the AFG an early stage, and shares something of their discernment journey with their local group. The initial period of discernment is usually followed by a first vow for 3 years. Because the vocations of TSSF and SCL are distinct (but compatible) it might be unhelpful for a TSSF novice, postulant or aspirant to be simultaneously pursuing a call to SCL or in a temporary vow of SCL. On retiring from office the AFG should inform their successor of any Tertiaries discerning a call to SCL.

The SCL Network requires that its members express their commitment to celibacy as a statement in a Rule of Life. Since a Tertiary's rule of life is an element of their profession in TSSF, profession in SCL would normally entail an extension to the usual nine-point individual Rule of Life. As in the case of any substantial change to an individual's Rule, the Area Formation Guardian should be informed of this additional provision.

When the time of profession in SCL comes it would be appropriate for the Order at Area and/or local level to be represented, and for the Tertiary's revised rule of life to be offered on the altar.

Membership of other communities

It has occasionally become apparent, either at the Enquirer stage or well after profession, that a Tertiary has entered, or is contemplating, membership of another religious community while still pursuing a vocation with TSSF. The situation can cause confusion with other Tertiaries, and raise questions of loyalty.

As a general rule a Tertiary may not be a member of another religious Order at the same time as being a member of the Third Order, particularly if it requires undertaking two vows of profession and rules of life.

However there are a growing number of religious communities (as opposed to Orders) with various models of membership and affiliation. Some of these are compatible with membership of TSSF, and indeed a Tertiary may legitimately find dual affiliation helps them be a 'better Franciscan'. In other cases there may be conflicts of commitment. The only way to establish compatibility is to enquire gently of the following:

- What is undertaken in the vow of profession and rule of life – are they complementary, and are there any possible areas of conflict? How are these reconciled?
- Is the Tertiary able to participate fully in the wider undertakings of profession (listed under Guidance for Annual Reports), such as Community Obedience, TSSF meetings, and renewal at Francistide?
- How does the Tertiary understand the relationship between the other community's spirituality and the TSSF Principles and Franciscan way?

When the need arises, these questions should be asked of the Tertiary, since s/he is likely to have worked hard to reach a resolution. It is also likely to be helpful to undertake your own research, for instance on the internet. Answering these questions, and establishing the implications for the Tertiary's future vocation within TSSF, may require a high degree of discernment and sensitivity. Please contact the Provincial Formation Guardian if in any doubt.

Contacts and resources

TSSF Networks: see TSSF website for current contact details.
Email :

Fellowship of Solitaries: www.solitaries.org.uk. Email: fellowshipofsolitaries@gmail.com

Authoritative guidance on SCL is published in *A Handbook of Religious Life* (Advisory Council on the Relations of Bishops and Religious Communities (2004), Fifth Edition, Norwich: Canterbury Press, pp. 87-93). Tertiaries and AFGs can also contact the Network for Single Consecrated Life (<http://singleconsecratedlife-anglican.org.uk>) to seek advice from a Tertiary nominated by the network to give such advice.

['Franciscan Solitude'. A Cirino and J Raischl \(editors\). Franciscan Institute, St Bonaventure University, New York , 1995. ISBN 1-57659-006-2.](#)

Sole Expatriate Tertiaries

1. Expatriate Tertiaries - a Definition

- permanently resident abroad

Expatriates residing in Europe can choose to link with an appropriate Area in the UK and in addition there is an informal Europe wide group which meets in Brussels about twice a year.

This group is defined as an independent Area, but is linked and supported by a UK Area (London East and Essex South)

- working and living in Europe on long-term contracts

Guided as above

- Working abroad on short-term assignments - 'itinerant' Tertiaries - moving from country to country.

Expats with no firm base should link with an appropriate Area in the UK and in addition try to stay in touch with a local group.

- Working permanently abroad or on long term contracts outside of Europe
It is recommended that they get in touch with their local Province and join with them. If this is not possible for language or distance, then a link to a UK Area maybe possible.

2. Keeping in Touch - Communication

Area and Local Group members are usually already maintaining contact with Expats via letter, phone, and visits. However E-mail has become the normal method of contact for communication between Tertiaries, wherever they are. However, there are some constraints, especially when using e-mail to communicate with expatriate Tertiaries in some countries.

Skype also has brought face to face conversations into the mix. Indeed, some Local Groups share their meetings with their expats in this way.

2.1. Security

This is not usually an issue in democratic countries. However, extreme care is required when communicating with Expats in countries with restrictive and oppressive regimes, especially those which are hostile to Christians. Constant awareness and vigilance are needed.

2.1.1. Some countries monitor mail and e-mail messages. Therefore, be careful with messages, especially to 'tent-makers', those active Christians like St Paul who work in professional jobs in countries where evangelising is 'forbidden', where correspondence may be intercepted and/or read by others. There is a constant danger of 'blowing their cover'.

2.1.2. Be discreet when sending mail/e-mails to Expats, sometimes even cryptic, when corresponding. Avoid mentioning anything that may be

construed (by the 'authorities') as being contentious, inflammatory, inciting, and proselytising

2.1.3. Avoid using names and addresses of other people in similar work, and in the same country.

2.1.4. Do not disclose your whereabouts. Only a name and e-mail address is required for the web.

2.1.5. Do not send e-mails that list all group e-mail addresses at the top which will give access to others, who may use them for entirely different purposes. When sending on copies, protect member's privacy, by using BCC (blind copy) which sends a copy of the e-mail, but hides the screen name and e-mail address of others.

2.1.6. Security is more liable to be compromised when using a local ISP.

2.2. Legal

We have to be careful as to how we pass on names, addresses and co-ordinates of individuals. Have we received their approval? How do we deal with Expats who do not wish to be contacted?

3. Keeping in Touch – Publications, Formation and Novicing

There are numerous formal and informal reasons for keeping in touch.

3.1. Publications

At present TON is distributed as a PDF and Area Newsletters usually in a 'Word' document or PDF whilst Little Portion is posted to individual tertiaries. It is expected that due to the high cost of postage that Expats and European Areas will receive Little Portion by PDF in future.

3.2. Formation

Expats who are linked to a UK Area must submit their Annual Tertiary reports to the AFG in that Area. They must also arrange their annual renewal of vows. As we are an Order, renewing 'in absence' should only be considered as a very last resort. For those who are isolated from active Franciscan fellowship for long periods it would be possible, for a local priest with whom the Tertiary has a supportive and known connection to conduct the renewal on the Order's behalf. The alternative would be a renewal on the telephone, by the Expat's home Area Formation Guardian.

3.3. Novicing

Expats will be assigned by the PNG to a link with a suitable UK Area who will appoint a Novice guardian. The Novice will be expected to return quarterly reports and stay in good communication with their NG. Profession will normally take place on a convenient occasion when they are the UK Area.

3.4. Informal communication

It is important to keep in touch with fellow Tertiaries, and the Local Group and Area in order to help them to feel part of the family and experience fellowship, and to avoid isolation and marginalisation and be part of a prayer chain and empathy list

3.5. Location

Expats should be kept informed about the whereabouts of other Expats, to enable them to access local Tertiaries, maybe in other Provinces, where they might be working.

4. Financial Contribution

The transfer of funds for a Tertiary's annual contribution can sometimes

present difficulties. Expat Tertiaries should be advised to make contact with the Provincial Treasurer to discuss best ways and means.