

T *The Third Order of the Society of St Francis*



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What is the Third Order?

The Third Order is a worldwide Anglican Franciscan Religious Order of men and women over the age of 18, lay and ordained, married and single, young and old, and of various ethnic and educational backgrounds. We commit ourselves to leading our lives according to a Rule of Life, while living in our own homes, working in the community and caring for our families. There are about 3000 members worldwide, 2000 of whom are in Europe.

The Aims of the Order are:

- To make our Lord Jesus Christ known and loved everywhere
- To spread the spirit of love and harmony
- To live simply

What is distinctive about its members?

Tertiaries, as members are known, desire to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, whom we serve through prayer, study and work, after the example of St Francis and St Clare. The keynotes of our lives are humility, love and joy. We are inspired by St. Francis' challenge to the Church to follow closely Jesus' earthly life, to proclaim the gospel and bring justice and peace.

The life of the Order is rooted in Eucharistic worship and personal prayer and we believe that we are called to serve within the Church and in the world, enriched and strengthened by periods of contemplation and retreat. We know of many holy men and women who are not members of a religious order. But for us, this is an important lifestyle



and commitment that enables us to keep our most important promise — the one we made at our baptism.

Franciscans seek to worship and serve God in His creation and are therefore pledged to the service of others and to respect for all life. We aim at a simple lifestyle and at self-denial, living in solidarity with the poverty of the world and accepting its claim upon our stewardship.

Francis himself founded the Third Order for lay people who wished to live according to a Franciscan Rule of Life, without becoming members of the First Order. A Rule for the Third Order was approved by the Pope in 1221. The First Order consists of men and women who live in community under a Franciscan Rule based on the traditional vows of poverty, chastity and obedience; in SSF and CSF (our First Order) they normally wear a brown habit. The Second Order (Community of St Clare) is composed of women who feel called by God to an enclosed life of contemplative prayer, coupled with work to be self-supporting.

What do I do to become a Tertiary?

There are several stages to becoming a Tertiary:

As an Enquirer:

- You hear about us! We have sometimes been called “the best-kept secret in the Anglican Church”.
- You can contact the Provincial Novice Guardian, or a Tertiary you know, for more information.
- You will be sent some relevant material on the Third Order.
- You will be invited to attend a local meeting and become an ‘aspirant’ with a view to testing your vocation.

The next step is becoming a Postulant.

As a Postulant:

- You will test your vocation for a minimum period of about of six months.

- A Novice Guardian will be appointed to you (probably a member of your local Area) to help and guide you as a Postulant and Novice. Your Novice Guardian will do some studies with you, and will help you write your Rule of Life.
- You will be asked to choose a Spiritual Director (if you do not already have one) whom you trust and who has the skills and background to give you spiritual guidance. She or he can be someone inside or outside the Order, ordained or lay.

The next step is becoming a Novice.

As a Novice:

- You will study with your Novice Guardian for at least two years, living with your Rule of Life as you journey towards Profession (making vows).

As a Professed member:

- You will journey with the 'Rule for the Third Order' as set out in the Principles for the rest of your life, together with your personal Rule of Life — but don't worry, you can amend your personal Rule to accommodate changes in your life!
 - You will renew your vows annually.
 - You will attend a retreat each year, if possible.
 - You will meet with other Tertiaries regularly.

What is a personal Rule of Life?

A personal Rule of Life is a framework for living, written by each Tertiary, with much prayer and discussion with their Spiritual Director and Novice Guardian. The purpose of the Rule is to give practical expression in the particular circumstances of the Tertiary's life to the ways of service – Prayer, Study and Work – and to help the tertiary fulfil the principles of the Order in the spirit of poverty, chastity and obedience. Consideration must be given to the Tertiary's circumstances of life, responsibilities and duties, and to her or his personal gifts. The Rule therefore is a means of spiritual growth, developing our formation as Franciscan Christians. It is dynamic, not static and needs

therefore to be regularly reviewed and where necessary revised. This should be done with the help of the Tertiary's Spiritual Director. Above all the Rule should be a help and not a hindrance to following Christ.

In our Order a personal Rule contains the following sections:

1. The Holy Eucharist
2. Penitence
3. Personal Prayer
4. Self-Denial
5. Retreat
6. Study
7. Simplicity
8. Place in society; work; family
9. Obedience.



What are the keynotes?

The keynotes of our lives as Franciscans are humility, love and joy.

Humility (Day 23 in The Principles)

“Humility confesses that we have nothing that we have not received and admits the fact of our insufficiency and our dependence upon God.”

Love (Day 25 in The Principles)

“Love is the distinguishing feature of all true disciples of Christ who wish to dedicate themselves to him as his servants.”

Joy (Day 28 in The Principles)

“Tertiaries delight in fun and laughter, rejoicing in God's world, its beauty and its living creatures, calling nothing common or unclean. We mix freely with all people, ready to bind up the broken-hearted and to bring joy into the lives of others. We

carry within us an inner peace, which others may perceive, even if they do not know its source.”

What are The Principles?

They are the community Rule of Life which all Tertiaries share, laid out in the form of 30 daily readings. In our Profession, we vow to live by them for the rest of our lives, and we read them in conjunction with daily prayer. The Principles and our personal Rule together characterize the way we seek to live our Christian life following the ideals of St Francis.

Do I have to attend meetings?

Being a Tertiary is about being part of a religious community, so when and wherever possible, you will be encouraged to attend local meetings as the support from fellow Tertiaries is a vital part of being a Franciscan. If you live too far away to attend meetings, or if family and work commitments or health reasons prevent you from regular attendance, your local group will keep in touch with you by visits, letters, phone or email.

Am I being called to this way of life?

If you feel that you may have a calling to the Franciscan way, please visit the Third Order website for more information:

<http://www.tssf.org.uk>

Or contact:

The Provincial Novice Guardian:

Email: novguard@tssf.org.uk

