

THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN FORMATION PROCESS

Part II: The Inquiry Phase

When we look at the Secular Franciscan formation process, it is important to see it as a continuum, that is, each stage flowing into the next. Aspects that are essential in the first phase, Orientation, will still be essential in the second, Inquiry, the third, Candidacy, and into the Ongoing Formation of professed members.

The Inquiry phase of initial formation is a time for the most serious and prayerful discernment of the Inquirer's vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order. During this phase of initial formation, the Fraternity and the Inquirer continue to get to know each other more fully. Opportunities for dialogue and sharing continue to be important to ensure that the aspirant and the Fraternity are compatible.

During Inquiry and ***before the Rite of Admission***, certain aspects of the relationship between the Inquirer and the Fraternity must be examined. Prior to the Rite of Admission, the Fraternity needs to be confident that the Inquirer has an adequate grasp of the Catholic faith to sustain their deeper journey into the Franciscan way of life. The Inquirer's life should reflect a determination not only to know the faith intellectually, but also to live the faith in practice. The Inquirer must be a fully initiated member of the Catholic faith. The Inquirer should understand and be able to articulate the concept of vocation and, more specifically, a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order.

Note the emphasis on "before the Rite of Admission." Once this Rite is celebrated, the Inquirers officially become Candidates and are admitted into a local Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order to prepare for permanent commitment. If the discernment of vocation is incomplete or mistaken during the Orientation and Inquiry phases, it must be rectified before the Rite of Admission takes place.

- The Inquiry phase, as the first formal period of initiation, is a time of discernment and choice of the Franciscan life. During this time, the Inquirer participates in the life of the Fraternity and comes to understand our way of life. At the same time, the Fraternity comes to know the Inquirer better, so that it can discern how best to respond to the Inquirer's request to become part of the Fraternity.
- The Inquiry phase begins with the Ceremony of Welcoming. This is a simple paraliturgical service that promises the support of the Fraternity on the journey that the Inquirer is about to undertake. It does not take place as a separate ritual, but as part of the regular meeting or gathering of the Fraternity.
- During this phase, the Inquirer, with the help of the Formation Director/Team, must seek to determine honest responses to these basic questions:
 - What is a vocation, and how am I called?
 - What is Gospel life, and how am I called to live it?
 - What is a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, and am I called to live this way of life?
- **Time frame: *at least* six months**

• Suggested content for the Inquiry phase:

- a deeper understanding of discernment and vocation specifically to the SFO
- awareness of the agents of formation (see *Guidelines for Initial Formation*)
- a more in-depth study of the life of Saint Francis (a more scholarly version, such as *St. Francis of Assisi: A Biography* by Englebert)
- a more in-depth study of the life of Saint Clare (a more scholarly version, such as *Clare of Assisi* by Bartoli; or *Clare: Her Light and Her Song* by Karper)
- first-hand exposure to the writings of Saints Francis and Clare (as contained in, for example, *St. Francis of Assisi: Writings for a Gospel Life* by Armstrong; *Francis and Clare: The Complete Works* by Armstrong & Brady; and *Clare of Assisi: Early Documents* by Armstrong)
- history of the Secular Franciscan Order, including the evolution of its Rules
- overview of the organizational structure of the Secular Franciscan Order
- introduction to the *SFO Rule*, *General Constitutions of the SFO* and the *SFO Ritual*
- introduction to Sacred Scripture and how it impacts the life of a Secular Franciscan (the practice of *Lectio Divina* as contained in, for example, *Too Deep For Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* by Hall)
- the Catholic Church in light of the Second Vatican Council (especially the documents *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes*)
- the *SFO Rule* in light of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*
- an understanding of spirituality which is both secular and (for most aspirants) lay
 - the family (*SFO Rule*, article 17; *Constitutions*, article 24)
 - work (*SFO Rule*, article 16; *Constitutions*, article 21.1-2)
 - social and political involvement (*SFO Rule*, article 14; *Constitutions*, article 22)
- introduction to praying the *Liturgy of the Hours*
- other Franciscan prayer experiences

Rite: Rite of Admission (see *SFO Ritual*, pages 11-17)

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