

# An Irreversible Change: Profession

By Francine Gikow, SFO

*“I, by the grace of God, renew my baptismal promises and consecrate myself to the service of the Kingdom. Therefore, in my secular state I promise to live all the days of my life the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order by observing its rule of life.”<sup>3</sup>*

With this statement, we have made a permanent commitment - an irreversible change in our lives. We have chosen to hold fast to Jesus Christ, the Church and each other through the example of St. Francis.

The evidence of this change is not readily apparent early on in our life as Secular Franciscans. However, after many years, this change is revealed by the depth of our commitment and by the direction of our lives, our values, our subsequent decisions and even how we have lived our lives. Have you met an older Secular Franciscan who has been an inspiration for you in fidelity and Franciscan love? Well, that is the result of this change.

When we originally commit ourselves to God, we take the initial first steps in responding to the call of God in our lives. We might pray more, join a prayer group, or become more active in our parish. However, at some point we realize that it is not enough for us. We want more.

In time, we might realize that we cannot live without God in our life, nor do we want to. He becomes so integrated into what we do and who we are that we become inseparable. God lives in us and we live in God. We are changed.

So we search for ways to become closer to God, his people and the Church. We seek the radical Christian lifestyle which we find in Francis. We find that the charism of St. Francis of Assisi calls us as a way to deepen our spiritual life and share it among His people. St. Francis' way of life has spoken to us and we find real value in his methods.

Eventually, we want to unite ourselves to God and His Church even more closely and we want to join others in this journey. We find that we *need* a community of like minded people to keep us going on the journey we have

chosen. The decision to make our spiritual life a priority for the rest of our lives is not an easy one to make. In fact, we are continuously making that decision, again and again, as we renew ourselves and keep that commitment in fidelity and truth.

In essence there are really only two choices in our journey as a Secular Franciscan: either decide to constantly pick yourself up and keep trying to live the Rule, or become complacent and give up.

We have all seen those of our brothers and sisters who start out strong as Secular Franciscans, but slowly start drifting away. They start coming sporadically to the fraternity reunions and have other priorities in life. Sometimes they experience darkness of the soul and, instead of sharing this with their other brothers and sisters, they keep to themselves and therefore miss the wealth of knowledge and experience, which others might have to offer. They might find that community life is hard and would rather retreat than address issues. It is so easy to give up and forget about the promises we made when the honeymoon period is over and the real work of being a Secular Franciscan begins.

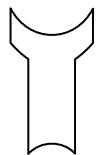
In contrast, you might see other Secular Franciscans, who although they are not especially gifted or graced, continue to persist and decide over and over and over again to be faithful. They keep trying, stumbling sometimes, but always going back to what they have promised. They work things out lovingly and realistically and meet the challenges, some times more perfectly than at others, but they never give up.

Those little decisions do add up! Eventually, they accumulate to a critical point where in hindsight the person has changed! Their life path has changed. Those seemingly unimportant choices to remain faithful have, unconsciously, changed the Secular Franciscan irreversibly! You find loving, joyful and faithful Secular Franciscans alive in the love of God!

Our life is not measured by big decisions but by the nitty gritty every day choices we make. That is the deceptive reality of Secular Franciscan life. Our small decisions make a big difference!

*“Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.”*

Robert Frost<sup>4</sup>



<sup>3</sup> International Franciscan Liturgical Commission, Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order. St. Anthony Messenger Press: 1985, p. 24.

<sup>4</sup> “The Road Less Traveled” by Robert Frost