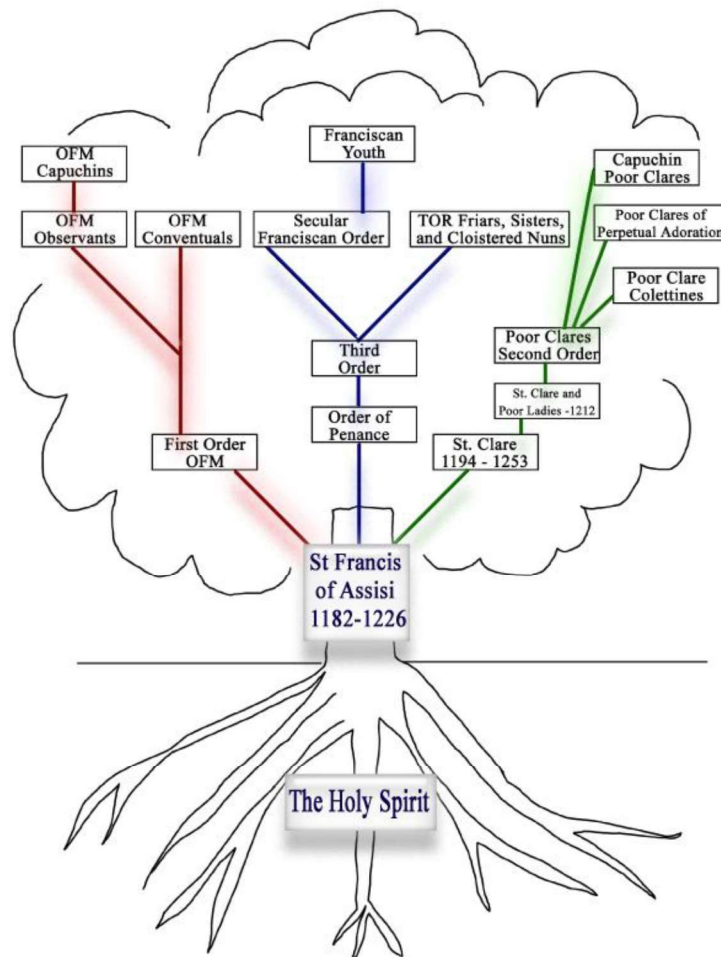


# The Franciscan Family,

a

## Brief Introduction

Robert Fitzsimmons, SFO



## Contents

Introduction and suggested format .....	3
Opening Prayer (two suggested Franciscan Prayers).....	5
Brief overview of the Franciscan Movement .....	7
The First Order.....	7
The Second Order.....	8
The Third Order.....	8
Some Franciscan Symbols.....	9
Tau.....	9
San Damiano Cross .....	10
Discussion of The Digests readings .....	11
Closing Prayer .....	12
Take Home Materials .....	12

# The Franciscan Family

## Introduction and suggested format

- Opening Prayer: “Praises of God” or “The Praises to be said at All the Hours” (Ritual of the SFO, page 99)
- Scripture reflection. (John 1:38-51) Like Francis and Clare we are attracted to a person, the person of Jesus.
- Brief overview of Franciscan Spirituality

Franciscan Spirituality points us to the amazing truth that the Son of God was born among us from the 'womb of a Virgin-Mother in order to share our human condition [humanity of Christ], to live simply and humbly among the poor, and then, taking on our sins, to suffer the injustice of a cruel death. By imitating His style of life and His servant-role as revealed in the Gospel, respond to each other's needs as brothers and sisters of Jesus in joyful praise of God's goodness. Franciscans are called to remind the Church that she must always image the poor and humble Son of God.

We are called to:

Prayers of praise to the all holy and all good God  
simple prayer; no special formulas  
imitation of a very human Christ  
joy in all life's circumstances

Franciscans:

- are optimistic and joyful
- see the beauty, goodness and love of God everywhere
- understand the whole of creation is filled with a loving God,
- realize God speaks to them through their senses
- love the Gospels, they have a special appeal for our spirituality
- are more about being (evangelical/gospel people) than just doing (apostolic mission people). These two aspects need balance.
- understand Jesus' Incarnation is the visible, audible, tangible presence of God upon earth; the center around which our spirituality revolves
- see Jesus as our brother and the beloved Son of God.

- not concerned with past or future, live for the day
- An overview of the Franciscan Family<sup>1</sup>
  - The Franciscan family Tree
    - Three Orders
      - First Order, the friars: OFM, OFM Cap., and OFM Conv.
      - Second Order, the Poor Clare Sisters
      - Third Order
        - The Seculars, SFO
        - The Regulars, friars and sisters TOR
  - Our symbols, the TAU and the San Damiano Cross
  - Discussion of the Digests<sup>2</sup> readings
    - Francis of Assisi,
    - Clare of Assisi,
    - Prayer,
    - Franciscan Image of Jesus
- Period of Question and Answers
- Closing Prayer: The Prayer before the Crucifix<sup>3</sup> or other prayer of St. Francis.
- Take Home reading materials:
  - Basic information form<sup>4</sup> and materials for those discerning to request entry into the Inquiry phase of Initial Formation.

---

<sup>1</sup> Guidelines for Initial Formation 1985 page 23

<sup>2</sup> Available at Smoky Valley Printing, see order form in the TAU-USA

<sup>3</sup> Ritual of the SFO, page 100

<sup>4</sup> SFO Resource Manual page 79-81

## Opening Prayer (two suggested Franciscan Prayers)

### **The Praises of God by St. Francis of Assisi**

You are holy, Lord, the only God,  
And your deeds are wonderful.  
You are strong. You are great.

You are the Most High, You are almighty.  
You, holy Father, are King of heaven and earth.  
You are Three and One,  
Lord God, all good.

You are Good, all Good, supreme Good,  
Lord God, living and true.

You are love, You are wisdom.  
You are humility, You are endurance.

You are rest, You are peace.  
You are joy and gladness.  
You are justice and moderation.

You are all our riches, and You suffice for us.

You are beauty, You are gentleness.  
You are our protector, our guardian and defender.  
You are courage.

You are our haven and our hope,  
our faith, our great consolation.

You are our eternal life, great and wonderful Lord,  
God Almighty, Wonderful Savior.

**Praises to be Said at the Hours of the Liturgy of the Hours  
by St. Francis of Assisi**

Holy, holy, holy Lord God Almighty,  
who is, who was and who is to come,  
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

O Lord our God,  
You are worthy to receive praise and glory and honor, and blessing.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

The Lamb who was slain is worthy to receive power and divinity,  
wisdom and strength, honor and glory and blessing.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let us bless the Father and the Son with the Holy Spirit:  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.  
All you works of the Lord, bless the Lord,  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Sing praise to God all you His servants and you who fear God,  
the small and the great.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Let heaven and earth praise Him who is glorious.  
And let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Every creature: in heaven,  
on earth and under the earth, and in the sea.  
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever.  
Let us praise and glorify Him forever.

All-powerful, Most Holy, Most High, Supreme God,  
all good, highest good, totally good,  
You who alone are good, may we give You all praise,  
all glory, all thanks, all honor, all blessing and all good.  
So be it. So be it.  
Amen.

## Brief overview of the Franciscan Movement

From the early accounts and writings of Francis, he began his conversion in earnest around 1206 as a lay penitent. For several years Francis took to heart the word heard in his heart to repair the Church, and he spent his time in physically repairing various Churches around the countryside of Assisi.

In roughly 1208, inspired by what they observed in a changed Francis, several other men from Assisi joined him in what became the “Penitents of Assisi”, part of a broader lay penitential movement already approved years earlier by various popes, including the then reigning Pope Innocent III.

Wanting his group to remain faithful to the Church and not fall into heresy as did many of the other lay movements, Francis and his group from Assisi journeyed to Rome in 1209 to seek official direction and approval of the Holy Father.

Although it would be many years before this fledgling “order” would receive written approval of a rule of life, Innocent III did give verbal to this Gospel oriented way of life, the “Propositum Vitae” of Francis.

This approval began the formation of the Franciscan Movement, a Gospel way of life based on imitation of the poor, humble Jesus, a way of life grounded in faithful loving relationships and service modeled after the life and action of Jesus, the beloved Son of God.

From these early days of spirit filled fervor, three distinct yet interrelated orders would emerge, a Franciscan Trilogy.

## The First Order

When Pope Innocent III approved the Franciscan Rule in 1209, he made them a structured religious order. This became the First Order, known as the Friars Minor (Little Brothers). Over the centuries, the Friars Minor experienced many distinctions and reorganizations based on their understanding of the Franciscan way of life.

Today, there are three branches:

- Friars Minor
- Friars Minor Conventual
- Friars Minor Capuchin

## The Second Order

The Second Order of St. Francis, the Poor Ladies of Assisi, today commonly known as Poor Clares, was founded in 1212 in Assisi when St. Francis received Clare Offreduccio as a follower of his way of life.

The Poor Clares are a religious community of women. They observe a cloistered, contemplative life based on the Gospel, a life of prayer and penance in the Franciscan tradition of joy and simplicity

## The Third Order

The origins of the Third Order may be found in the movement known as the Penitents, going back to the sixth century. The original Penitents were people who sought to grow in holiness through their daily lives and work

This desire for holiness assumed many forms, such as pilgrimages to holy sites; constructing, repairing and rebuilding churches; and caring for the poor and sick.

The first Franciscans were, in fact, known as "penitents of Assisi." Men and women who were attracted by Francis' way of life, but could not leave their homes and families to become wandering preachers or cloistered nuns, banded together. Thus the Third Order was born.

This original Third Order had several names, from the Brothers and Sisters of Penitence to Third Order of St Francis, originally both lay orders. Today the Third Order exists in two forms, the original lay order, now the Secular Franciscan Order and it also exists as the Third Order Regular, (the friars, both priests and brothers TOR and 400+ communities of religious sisters that follow the regular rule for vowed religious).

Early on, small groups in the Third Order formed more structured communities, publicly professing the Church's traditional religious vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and often uniting around specific works of charity or common prayer. Since then, numerous congregations of lay people and religious have developed throughout the world.

In each instance, the call to conversion and simplicity of life animates the members: In the Secular Franciscan Order, men and women follow the way of Francis, but are not vowed religious living in community.

The Secular Franciscan Order was recognized to exist as early as 1210-1215, and received official recognition by Pope Honorius III, in “**Memoriale Propositi**” 1221, where a rule is offered for the way of life of the Brothers and Sisters of the Order of Penitents of St. Francis.

Our milestone occurred in 1289 in the Papal Bull “**Supra Montem**” where the Holy Father, Pope Nicholas IV give written approval for the Secular Franciscan Order. The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order has been modified twice to adapt to the changing needs of the Church, first by “**Misericors Dei Filius**”, Pope Leo XIII in 1883 and again in 1978 (our current Rule) “**Seraphicus Patriarca**” by Pope Paul VI. Since that time the Secular Franciscan Order has been recognized as an Order within the Catholic Church.

The Third Order Regular, Franciscan Friars, TOR, officially founded in 1447 by papal decree, is an international community of priests and brothers who emphasize works of mercy and on-going conversion to the Gospel.

One thing that is important to understand is that all branches of the Franciscan Family, in their respective Rules of Life, are charged to “observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ”. Three parts of the whole, like a 3 ply cord, are stronger when united together as equal partners to share and spread the vision of Francis. We all live out our Franciscan life in a unique way, yet we are all guided by the same vision to proclaim the Gospel, using words only when necessary.

## Some Franciscan Symbols



### Tau

TAU, as a symbol of sanctity, comes from Ezekiel 9:4, "Go through the city of Jerusalem and put a TAU on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." It is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet and looks very much like the letter "T".

Pope Innocent III opened the Council on November 11, 1215, with these words: "I have desired with great desire to eat this Passover with you." (Luke 22-15.) Innocent announced that for him, for the Church, and for every Catholic at the time, the symbol they were to take as the sign of their Passover was the TAU Cross.

He incorporated into his homily the statement from Ezekiel (9:4) that the elect, the chosen, those who are concerned will be marked with the sign of the TAU.

Much Franciscan scholarship points to St. Francis as being present at the Fourth Lateran Council and that he heard the words of Pope Innocent III when he said, "The TAU has exactly the same form as the Cross on which our Lord was crucified on Calvary, and only those will be marked with this sign and who have mortified their flesh and conformed their life to that of the Crucified Savior will obtain mercy.

From then on, the TAU became Francis' own coat of arms and he often used it as his writings as his personal signature.

St. Bonaventure said, "This TAU symbol had all the veneration and all the devotion of the saint: he spoke of it often in order to recommend it, and he traced it on himself before beginning each of his actions."

Thomas of Celano, another Franciscan historian and biographer of Francis, writes, "Francis preferred the Tau above all other symbols: he utilized it as his only signature for his letters, and he painted the image of it on the walls of all the places in which he stayed."

In the famous blessing of Brother Leo, Francis wrote on parchment, "May the Lord bless you and keep you! May the Lord show His face to you and be merciful to you! May the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace! God bless you Brother Leo!" Francis sketched a head (of Brother Leo) and then drew the TAU over this portrait.



Due, no doubt, in large part to Francis' own affection for and devotion to the TAU, it has been a well recognized and accepted Franciscan symbol among Franciscans of various denominations and of all orders within those denominations for centuries. It remains so today. The TAU carries with it all of the symbolism of the Cross of Christ as well as Francis' ideal of life and dream for himself and his followers.

The TAU is the designated as the distinctive sign of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States.

### San Damiano Cross

Francis of Assisi did not start out life as a fiercely devout and pious man. His early years were spent indulging in the extravagances available to those born to money and privilege. As he approached adulthood, however, he found himself in crisis, searching for deeper meaning in his life.



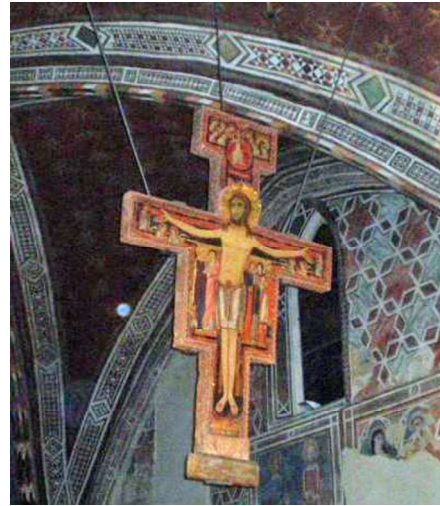
This inner conflict led him to the deserted church of San Damiano in his hometown of Assisi. It was here, praying before the San Damiano Crucifix, that Francis first heard the Word of God. "Francis, go and rebuild my house, which is falling into ruins."

When Francis heard these words, he responded by quickly taking up a collection to restore the churches of Assisi, which were in disrepair. Through his efforts, many chapels and churches were rebuilt.

Francis eventually realized that God was not merely asking him to restore chapels, but to rebuild His Church around the world as a community. Francis responded with decisive action. He embraced a life of poverty, prayer and service, and began to preach the Word of God.

The San Damiano Cross is an "icon cross," meaning it contains not just a depiction of Christ, but icons of various people and scenes relevant to the story of the Crucifixion and Resurrection. The Cross is in the Eastern style and was crafted in Umbria, Italy (the region where Assisi is located) in the 12th century. It is made of painted walnut and measures 75 inches high, 47 inches wide, and slightly less than 5 inches thick.

The original Cross is now located in the Basilica of St. Clare in Assisi.



### Discussion of *The Digests*<sup>5</sup> readings

- Francis of Assisi,
- Clare of Assisi,
- Prayer,
- Franciscan Image of Jesus

Pay attention as you read and reflect on these brief snapshots into our founder and into our vision that has become the Franciscan Journey of faith. As you pray and discern if this “Way of Life” speaks to you, does it resonate with your own experiences of a loving God, one who shows Himself to be a Father and who desires us to enter into a relationship with Him as lover and beloved?

If these themes, developed briefly in *The Digest* readings do speak to you in the deepest recesses of your heart and soul, then speak to the fraternity’s formation director, spiritual assistant, and minister, for you indeed may be called to a Franciscan Vocation.

---

<sup>5</sup> Available at Smoky Valley Printing, see order form in the TAU-USA

## Closing Prayer

### **Prayer before the Crucifix**

Most High,  
glorious God,  
enlighten the shadows of my heart,

and grant me a right faith,  
a certain hope  
and a perfect charity,  
and sense and understanding,

Lord, so that I may accomplish  
Your holy and true command.

## Take Home Materials

- Basic information forms and materials for those who feel called to continue.
- Selected reading materials to be discussed in beginning the Inquiry phase of Initial Formation.