

Discerning a Vocation

For the Newcomer

Discernment is ongoing throughout the time of initial formation but as the Candidate nears the time for Profession it becomes more focused.

- The Candidate is highly encouraged to:
 - participate with the fraternity on a Day of Recollection or Retreat
 - spend time in Prayer and Scripture reflection
 - speak with the Spiritual Assistant and other members of the fraternity for spiritual direction to aid in their discernment.
 - Prayerfully review the Rule of the SFO, as profession is a permanent commitment.
 - Prayerful reading from the Preface of the Ritual 3.3 on the Rite of Profession.

- The Candidate should consider questions such as:
 - Is there a desire to make a lifetime commitment to live as a Secular Franciscan?
 - Where is, the desire rooted?
 - Where did it come from?
 - How has it manifested itself?
 - What is the evidence of that commitment?

- Discerning a vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order is a two-way street. Both the fraternity and the individual discern the presence or absence of a vocation. It is best to discern a vocation as early as possible, yet we must wait for the leading of the Holy Spirit.
- Discernment is not easy and the path is not straight. Everyone concerned must have faith that when a determination is made, it is God's Spirit we are following.
- The General Constitutions provide the basic eligibility conditions for becoming a Secular Franciscan.
- Discernment is a process. It is a clear and conscious decision to hear and respond to God's call. To hear God, we must pray. *Prayer is essential and our primary tool of discernment.* Rather than giving you many words to sort through, I will try to explain the elusive concept of discernment in simple, concrete terms.

To Discern a Vocation to the Secular Franciscan Order, Both the Prospective Member and the Fraternity Discerning Body Must:

- Pray—this is our primary tool
- Listen for the still, small voice of the Spirit or the loud rushing wind of the Spirit
- Empty your hearts and minds of preconceived ideas and biases
- Discern the source of the call
 - o You may be surprised to learn that a person may be avoiding the call
 - o Discernment is cooperation with grace
 - o We hear many voices—those of culture, career, social pressure, self-interest, etc.
 - o Your primary objective is to distinguish between God's voice and the other voices

- Tolerate uncertainty for a time because there are no simple rules to follow
 - o All must be completely dependent on God to determine and fulfill God's will

For the Formator

While I cannot give you a perfect set of rules to follow, here are some essential elements to look for in a prospective member:

- Evidence of growth in Franciscan spirituality and the ability to make choices in harmony with the Gospels
- Evidence of spiritual maturity and the ability to move beyond the need for certainty—not fully understanding but asking, “God, what is my next step?”
- Evidence of conversion—when hearts turn to God, values change and we change.

Again, becoming more specific, there are some attitudes that help us discern God’s invitation to a Secular Franciscan vocation.

The primary attitudes are:

- **Trust:** The book of Proverbs tells us to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and not lean on our understanding because God will direct our paths. To trust we must believe that:
 - God is present • God speaks to us • God is loving and merciful • “All things work together for good for those who love God” (Romans 8:28).
- **Listening:** God speaks to us through everything—pain and pleasure, emotions, and senses. We must listen with open hearts and open minds, especially to what we do not wish to hear. Listening requires silence. Elijah heard God in a still, small voice—not a rushing wind (1 Kings 19:11-13).
- **Prayer and Waiting:** Samuel prayed, “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam. 3:10). Samuel waited for an answer. The prayer for discernment involves listening with total attention to God. The will of God is found in everything, and if we believe this, our whole life becomes a prayer.
- **Knowledge of Sacred Scripture:** Scripture contains a multitude of relationships between God and His people. The more familiar we are with these relationships, the more the Word of God speaks to us and leads us in the right direction.
- **Humility:** Humility is based on self-knowledge. A humble person is neither too self-confidence nor too modest. Humility is one of the foundation stones for discernment because a humble heart accepts the limits of human knowledge and is willing to depend on God and others for help. What is Formation 3-23-2011 Page 16 of 22
- **Discipline, Perseverance, Patience, Perspective:** These four attributes are essential in discerning a vocation.
 - Impulse is controlled by discipline
 - Uncertainty is mastered by perseverance
 - Patience replaces irritation
 - Perspective reminds us it is God’s call to which we are responding

*taken from the FUN Manual
discerning a Vocation*