



Vocations Handbook

St Elizabeth of Hungary Region, OFS

May 30, 2023

The subject of vocations inspires a lot of conversation among OFS members at every level. It is common to hear on the one hand of the need for ambitious “recruiting,” with numerical quotas, goals, etc., and on the other that vocations come from God, and all we need to do is “be who we say we are,” people will come. This handbook assumes that fraternities are somewhere between these extremes and are willing to look at their responsibilities and are also interested in what other OFS fraternities are doing. At the national level, it’s been reported that we are professing people, but the average age of newly professed is similar to our current make-up, which means there is a need and a potential for reaching out to younger adult Catholics. Our region is shrinking. In 2015 we had 583 professed, and 40 candidates. In 2022, we had 480 professed, and 24 candidates. The order isn’t going to disappear next week, but several of our fraternities are not gaining members. Perhaps we can agree that “the Church’s best kept secret” is not our most desirable nickname, and there really are many things we can be doing to improve the awareness of this vocation.

Once a person has the idea of a Secular Franciscan Vocation, there are a number of ways he/she can get information and assistance. National and Region web sites have an “are you called” page, which recommends attending a meeting. Most link to the new OFS-USA online map of fraternities. There is also a national phone number, 1-800-FRANCIS. Once a person has taken that step, there is much to say about the welcome they should receive, the interactions they should observe, the example of professed seculars in their native environment. Will they see an alternative, lived experience of love and peace? We can always challenge ourselves with that question. This handbook is intended to address a simpler question: what happens *before* they decide to go to that first meeting? How do they know we are here? How do they know that a Franciscan vocation is available to them in the lay state?

I should start by describing how I found out about the order. I attended a church where there was a recently formed fraternity, and I knew some of the members through CCD teaching and other Church functions. One day, they announced a chicken dinner would be served by the Franciscans after the 11AM mass. It was publicized well, and a good crowd attended. After we were settled and having seconds, a couple of members got up to the microphone and gave emotional testimonials of what it meant to them, the privilege of becoming Franciscans. That was the first time I thought of it, and a few years later I was inside the door, professed amid waves of gratitude for the opportunity. That is one example of a successful “come and see” event.

“OFS General Constitutions, Article 45:

The promotion of vocations to the Order is a duty of all the brothers and sisters and is a sign of the vitality of the fraternities themselves.

The brothers and sisters, convinced of the validity of the Franciscan way of life, should pray that God may give the grace of the Franciscan vocation to new members.

Although nothing can substitute for the witness of each member and of the fraternity, the councils must adopt appropriate means to promote the Secular Franciscan vocation.”

First Obligation: Personal Witness

OFS members should all be willing to provide a personal witness of their vocation, to share their stories, and invite other Catholics to a fraternity meeting. Most people who come into the order do so as a result of hearing about it from a friend or an acquaintance.

What steps can I take as an individual to promote vocations?

- *Attend diocesan or other larger area events, share your vocation, make connections.*
- *Carry business cards with your OFS fraternity name and contact info.*
- *Wear the Tau consistently, be ready to speak when asked about it.*
- *When meeting with someone who might be interested, invite them to a fraternity meeting.*
- *Given the temperament to participate in social media, do so as an OFS. In tone and demeanor, be recognizable as a Franciscan! (OFS Rule, Paragraph 19)*
- *Include vocations in prayer intentions*

*“Praise and bless my Lord
And give him thanks,
And serve him with great humility”*



St Francis by Giotto (Public Domain)

Second Obligation: Fraternity Council

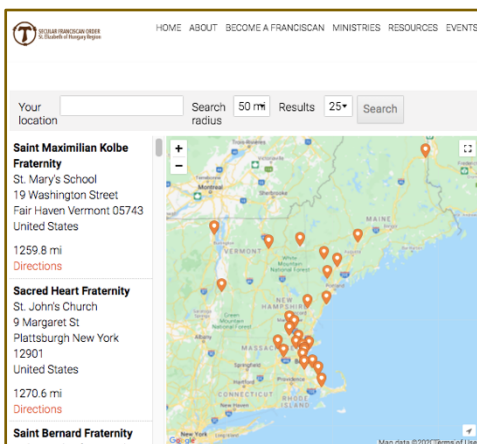
It is the council's job to propose decisions and activities that animate a collective witness, bringing the members beyond the church basement.

How can a fraternity council animate a collective public witness?

- *Organize a Come and See event (samples and info are available from OFS-USA, see below.)*
- *Develop contacts with pastors at surrounding parishes, arrange to send speakers to talk to the congregations (3 minutes after mass or at another event.)*
- *Propose activities to increase visibility in the home parish (Franciscan celebrations, Transitus services, animal blessings, anniversaries of profession, shared ministries, volunteering as a group, etc.)*
- *Propose activities to take the fraternity outside the parish hall: (public good works, social action, diocesan events etc. (Be the public face of the Church in the marketplace.)*
- *Publicize the monthly meeting in the bulletin "Do you have a Franciscan heart? Join us for prayer, lunch, and teaching."*
- *Maintain a Fraternity Web site.*

Regional Resources for Fraternities

The Elizabeth of Hungary Regional Executive Council has, like the OFS-USA, had *improved communications* as a goal for a number of visitation cycles. A lot has been done in recent years to improve the visibility of the order in our region, including press releases, web site improvements, new content, etc. Many fraternities have appointed public relations contact persons and contributed stories to the web site, and there is an email vocationstelizabethofs@yahoo.com, that has seen some activity. The new OFS-USA fraternity map is an outstanding resource for regional leaders and individuals. Like most other regions in the US, our focus is to support local fraternities, because that is where the action, and the responsibility, and the potential for transformation lies.



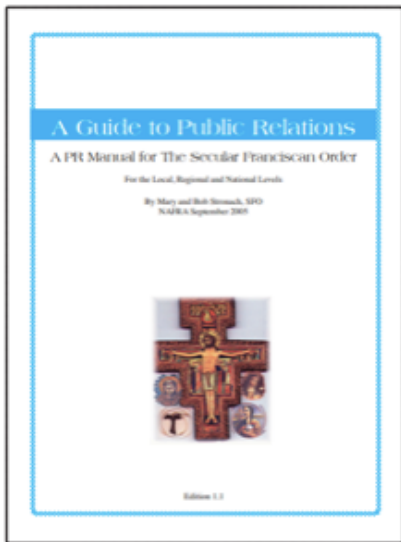
<https://stelizabethofs.org/fraternity-map/>



<https://stelizabethofs.org/>

OFS-USA (NAFRA) Vocation Resources for fraternities

The National Fraternity, OFS-USA, has an online [Vocations Tool Kit](#) that every secular leader should be familiar with. It contains advice, sample documents for “come and see” events in several languages, prayer resources, and a variety of suggestions for local councils.



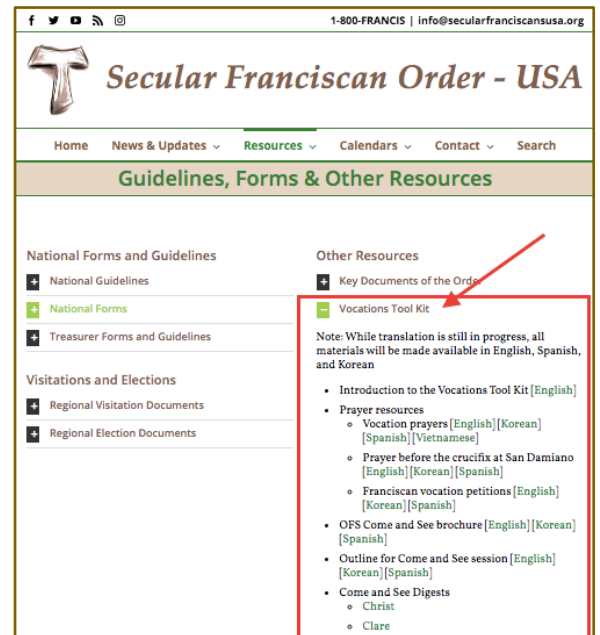
The [2005 Public Relations guide](#) by Mary and Bob Stronach, is a professional PR Manual for fraternities and regions. If your fraternity is looking to kick it up a notch with PR, this is your first stop.

https://www.nafra-sfo.org/pressroom/nafra_pr_manual-1-1.pdf

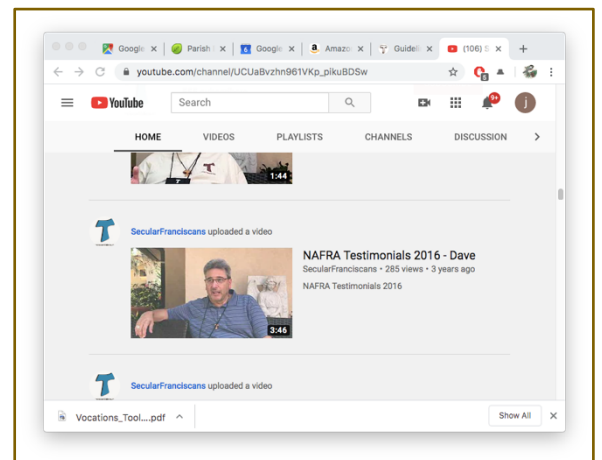
Video Testimonials

The National Fraternity’s Vocations Committee hosts a series of video testimonials, short pieces on a NAFRA YouTube channel, where individual OFS members briefly share their journeys to profession. They invite the rest of us to submit these stories.

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCUaBvzhn961VKp_pikuBDSw



<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/guidelines-other-resources/#6111d4a7af3d4b84b>



Do some practices work better than others?

In conversations at the 2019 national chapter, I heard strong support for doing a talk after mass at surrounding parishes. Not every fraternity can get access to this precious time on Sunday. One of the barriers is a lack of knowledge and or trust in the order by pastors who are not familiar with it. It can take time and work to build trust and knowledge with pastors. St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity in St Johnsbury, Vermont, has some experience and success with these talks. Additionally, a poster or flyer in a good location, with current info, meeting dates, location, time, etc. is better than a stack of pamphlets with only a contact. The following guidelines are by Michael Morely, OFS:

St Mary of the Angels Guidelines for Giving Vocational Talks (updated)

We started giving talks in area churches in April 2017. To date (April 2018), we have given talks in 4 parishes that consisted of 11 different churches. In some churches, we gave the talks up to 4 times (depending on the Mass schedule). We've had about 12 new visitors so far.

Of these, one couple was not eligible due to belonging to a support group for a local convent that was considered a public association. Another couple had issues with an annulment. It's difficult to tell such things until a "visitor" actually talks with you.

In parishes where we did not have a member (2 of the 4), we found that there could be some pastoral resistance, questioning our legitimacy. Apparently, they get requests from quasi legitimate organizations all the time.

We got around this by having our pastor (where our fraternity is located) call the pastor where we wanted to give the talk. An easier way may be to have him write a letter that can be given out when requesting permission for giving the talks.

We also found that going to the parish and meeting the pastor in person was a better idea than just sending a letter (we tried that at first – but this didn't include our pastor's letter).

There are times in the liturgical year that we avoided - Lent and Advent, for example. However, this was at the pastor's request (they're too busy). Different pastors may feel differently about it.

Also, it's a very good idea to schedule the talks so that at least one (or two) gatherings will take place in the months immediately following. We didn't think of this one time and gave the talks when we were having a retreat in Maine the following month.

It would be best to give the talks 2 to 4 weeks before a gathering in order to give people enough time to schedule attending. There can be a lag of months before someone acts on what

they've heard. We had three people come to our April (2018) gathering who had heard the talk a year before. We had two more come in June 2018 who had also heard the talk over a year prior.

Invite anyone who has shown an interest after the talks to come to a gathering, but do not keep repeating the invitation every time you do run into them. Let the Holy Spirit work.

Not every visitor comes back for additional gatherings. Don't be disappointed.

We alter our message to suit the parish where we give the talk. Another good intro for parishes within driving distance that we used went something like, "You don't have to travel to Boston or Montreal. There is a Franciscan community right here in nearby St Johnsbury Vermont (in our case).

When I give the talk, I include that statement about the fraternity being comprised of men and women. When a female member gives the talk that's more optional. It's just to clarify that we are not just an "old boys club" that the word "fraternity" might imply.

Be careful with Visitors. Initially, I tried to give out a slip that asked if they want to receive our newsletter, but that didn't work. I think they felt that if they signed up, they would keep receiving stuff (like most organizations do) and are understandably hesitant. Also, they don't want any commitments at this stage. It's best to just leave them be and just be ourselves. People who do keep coming back will eventually ask to be put on the mailing list.

Some information must be available after giving a talk – particularly in a parish that doesn't have a member. In addition to a "hand out" after the talk, I feel being allowed to put a poster up that will stay in place for a prolonged period provides anyone with a latent impulse the necessary contact information.

Later on: I feel it is very important not to overwhelm new people - with the Liturgy of the hours, for example. I feel that new people, especially those who are familiar with smartphones and PCs, should use them to say the LOH (at first) rather than using the "book". Most apps automatically default to today's readings (no flipping of pages). I like the "Divine Office" and IBreviary apps. Michael Morley, OFS

Video Testimonials from other sources:

[Kurt Keidl, OFS Interviewed by Franciscan Sister Cecilia Joy, \(April 2021\)](#)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=75btCwYIUXQ&ab_channel=CalledToBeFranciscan


National Prayer for Vocations to the Secular Franciscan Order



O good and gracious God, God of mercy, compassion, generosity, and love, as we live our lives today in the model of St. Francis, choosing daily to live the Gospel life, help us to help others hear your call. Help us to help others recognize their vocation as a Secular Franciscan that You have already planted in their heart. Help us, so that together we all may work to bring the Gospel to life. Amen!

Composed by Marian R. Crosby, OFS, 2010 National Fraternity gathering in Scottsdale, AZ

Sample Poster:



THE SECULAR FRANCISCANS
(Third Order Franciscans)
St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity

Fresco of Saint Francis of Assisi (1180 - 1226)
Sacro Speco, Mount Subasio, Italy
Painted by a Benedictine Monk before 1224.
The earliest known depiction of Saint Francis (no stigmata)

Members of our fraternity come from a wide area including Burlington, northern NH from Pittsburg to Lebanon, and all of the northeast kingdom of Vermont.

Anyone interested in finding out more about us is welcome to “listen in” to one of our “Gatherings” (meetings) online (Zoom) or to attend any in-person.

To join a Zoom gathering, email any member listed below and ask to be included in the list of “invites. You can simply “listen in” but you are welcome to join us.


Anita at 802-751-5318 spikew@charter.net
 Anne at 802-751-8074 amcsfo@myfairpoint.net
 Michael at 603-616-4721 northern@together.net


Physical gatherings will take place at the Fr Lively Center located just north of St John the Evangelist Church in **St Johnsbury, VT** starting at noon. Most are on the 3rd Sunday of the month. Please feel free to contact any one of us to determine the time and date. You’ll be glad you did.

Questions? Call Anita at 802-751-5318 or Michael at 603-616-4721
<http://stelizabethofs.org> (general information about our Order)

Sample Bulletin Advertisement (Available as a .ppt template)

Gospel to Life, Life to Gospel
 Consider Embracing the Gospel Life More Fully
 Come and See the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS)






[Insert Fraternity Name Here]
 [Insert Gathering Date and Time Here]
 [Gathering Location]
 Contact [Insert Minister Name]
 [Insert Minister Phone Number]
 [Minister Email]

<http://stelizabethofs.org>

Sample Announcement for Parish Talk:

A sample announcement to be put in the Parish Bulletin the weekend before the Vocational Talk is scheduled.



Next weekend there will be a short talk about the Secular Franciscans (Third Order) given at each mass. Secular Franciscans in the NEK meet (gather) once a month, at the Fr Lively Center in St Johnsbury. See our regional website - <http://stelizabethofs.org/> A fact sheet will be available. This is a lay order open to all: married or single, men and women.

Make me a channel of your Peace

Any questions please call or email me at:

Michael Morley [OFSS - northern@together.net](mailto:northern@together.net) cell ph # 603-616-4721