

Discernment Overview

The term discernment is used to describe the process of discerning God's will for one's life. When an individual comes to a fraternity, the Holy Spirit has led them to us to help them grow spiritually. During this period of initial formation, they may come to realize the Secular Franciscan Order is not right for them. That's fine. They have learned something about their journey by being with us for whatever period they spend.

At the first meeting with the individual besides getting their basic information (name, address, phone number), you might want to ask them "what brought you to this point?" Teresa Baker suggests that you give them a copy of the first chapter of St. Bonaventure's Book on St. Francis (Francis to his conversion experience).

The agent of discernment is the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the individual and the formation team along with all the fraternity should pray that the individual and the fraternity discerns correctly whether they should be a member of the S.F.O.

During the initial formation period, the individual should consider the following:

- Pros and cons of the decision to be a Secular Franciscan
- What are the consequences of their choice? They should look at the positive and negative sides of their decision.
- They should clarify their options.

The individual must discern but the formation team, spiritual assistant, sponsor, and the fraternity at large must discern also. The formation team/individual must understand the individual's spiritual life. They must spend time with the individual and help them discern whether the S.F.O is the right place for them to make a life long commitment. At every council meeting, the council needs to talk about their people in initial formation and what they know about them and what they need from the fraternity. They are coming to the fraternity for something and it might not end with them being a Secular Franciscan. It is very important the council knows the individuals since the decision on acceptance into the fraternity rests with them.

The list of Signs that a person MAY have a call to the S.F.O (section 2.7 and Signs that a person MAY NOT have a call to the S.F.O. (section 2.8) are resources to help all involved with the discernment.

In "Come and See" by Fr. Lester Bach, OFM, Cap lists Criteria for Validity of Your Choice:

1. Is your decision in accord with Scripture
2. Is your decision in accord with the basic teachings of the Church?
3. Is your decision in accord with your vocation in life? If it causes havoc to your vocation (married, single, priest, deacon, etc), you need to review your decision
4. Does your decision bring you peace? This should be persistent and lasting peace. Even poor decisions can bring temporary peace.

During Candidacy, the formation team or individual must meet one on one with the individual to challenge the candidate to meet the leper within, to discern whether the individual can commit to the SFO for life. The following are sample questions to discuss with the candidate:

- How's it going? What do you think of us?
- How has your time with us affected you?
- How did St. Francis' intimate relationship with Christ affect you?
- How is your intimate relationship with Christ?
- The formation director must be willing to have the "BUT clause" discussion with the individual:
- You are doing good but..... (FILL IN THE BLANK...give the challenge)

In all cases, the decision is made through dialogue. The decision is best when it is a mutual one between the individual and the fraternity. The individual should talk to their sponsor, other members of the fraternity, and their spiritual director (if available) to determine if they believe they are being called to the S.F.O. The more the fraternity council members and the fraternity members at large know about the individual by spending time with them and talking to them, the easier the mutual discernment will be.