

The Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) is a branch of the worldwide Franciscan family. St. Francis of Assisi is a beloved saint who established the Order of Friars Minor, then the Poor Clares with St. Clare of Assisi and finally the third order, the Secular Franciscans in 1221. The Secular Franciscan Order is an official order of the Roman Catholic Church. Our purpose is to bring the Gospel to life where we live and where we work. We are men and women, single and married and we work, worship and play in the community where we live. Local groups are called fraternities and meet throughout the world.

With a rich history going back 800 years, the early fraternities in the United States were established in the 17th century by French and Spanish Franciscan missionaries in the South and Southwest. In fact, the earliest fraternities are thought to have been in Santa Fe, San Antonio and St. Augustine. In 1705 one of the early martyrs in St. Augustine was Franciscan Friar Agustin Ponce de Leon. In 1919 a gathering of friar provincials led to a decision to form a national organization in the US. Years passed, and in 1964 Fr. Elias Koppert, OFM from Sacred Heart Province, began meeting with interested parties and three years later the St. Bonaventure Fraternity was established in 1967. St. Bonaventure Fraternity is a part of the Five Martyrs Region in the State of Florida and one of over 1,200 fraternities in the United States.

In over 60 years in the Diocese of St. Augustine, the fraternity met at Our Lady of the Angels parish, St. Patrick's parish, Immaculate Conception parish, St. Vincent's Hospital, St. Paul's Parish and Sacred Heart Parish in Fleming Island. The fraternity currently meets at Sacred Heart Mission Parish in Green Cove Springs.

Individuals who have a Franciscan vocation have a calling – a desire to do something more, to act on our faith, and to grow spiritually in community. There may be an affinity for St. Francis and his humble, simple, vibrant way of being. Nevertheless, the call to vocation beckons. Secular Franciscans do not take vows. Instead, we make a pledge to observe the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order for life. There are monthly gatherings to spend time in community with our Franciscan brothers and sisters. We pray together, have formation and fellowship, and share in ministries and social justice opportunities. Our Rule mandates us to be involved in apostolate ministries – we are called to action and we embrace the call joyfully.

The process to join the Secular Franciscans begins with a Holy Spirit stirring. The website has loads of helpful information and an annual Come & See event is offered as well as informal discussions with Secular Franciscans in your parishes. There is a three-step process of ongoing discernment and formation consisting of Initiation, Formation, and Profession. Profession is an ecclesial act by which the candidate publicly affirms their personal commitment to the fraternity and the OFS way of life. Formation and ongoing conversion continue in the life of the Secular Franciscan.

For more information on the Secular Franciscan Order and the St. Bonaventure Fraternity go to www.stbonaventureofs.org. We welcome you to join us! Peace and all good!