

# Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

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# Beginning Reference

## SFO – A True Order

**Nicholas IV**, *Bishop servant of the servants of God to Our beloved sons the brothers, and to Our beloved daughters, the sisters of the Order of Brothers of Penance, both present and future, health and apostolic benediction.*

Supra Montem 1289

# SFO – A True Order

- “..., (Francis) founded a true Order, that of the **Tertiaries**, not restricted by religious vows, as the two preceding (Orders), but similarly conformed to simplicity of customs and to a spirit of penitence. So, he was the first to conceive and happily carry out, with the help of God, what no founder of regulars (religious Orders) had previously contrived, to have the religious life practiced by all.”

(Benedict XV, Encyclical  
“Sacra Propediem” June 6, 1921)

- **“You are an Order: a lay Order, but a real Order.** *Ordo veri nominis*, as our predecessor of holy memory, Benedict XV (*Sacra propediem*, June 6, 1921) called it. You will not, as is obvious, be an assembly of the perfect; but you must be a **school of Christian perfection.** Without this resolute will one cannot suitably be a part of such a chosen and glorious militia.”

**Pius XII, July 1, 1956,  
Speech to the Tertiaries in Rome**

- “...you are also an „Order,“ as the Pope said (Pius XII): **A Lay Order, but a Real Order;**” and after all, Benedict XV had already spoken of “*Ordo veri nominis*”. This ancient term – we can say medieval – “Order” means nothing more than your intimate belonging to the large Franciscan family. The word “Order” means the participation in the discipline and actual austerity of that spirituality, while remaining in the autonomy typical of your lay and secular **condition**, which, moreover, often entails sacrifices which are not lesser than those experienced in the religious and priestly life.”

**(John Paul II, June 14, 1988,  
General Chapter, SFO)**

. This is that, which prepares the path of salvation, and which promises the rewards and joys of eternal felicity. **And for that reason the glorious confessor of Christ, Bl. Francis, the institutor of this order,** showing the way to ascend to the Lord both in word and example, instructed his own sons in the sincerity of his own faith, and he wanted them also to acknowledge it themselves, to hold it constantly, and to fulfill it similarly with work, so that walking soberly by means of its path, they may, after the workhouse of the present life, merit to be possessors of eternal beatitude.

*Supra Montem The Approbation of the Third Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order instituted by Bl. Francis, for seculars living in their own homes, called Tertiaries, by Pope Nicholas IV Rieti, August 17, 1289 A.D.*

# Order

- Francis based his fraternity (later to become an “order”) on the foundation of his idea of the Trinity translated to human economy [Divine Economy] so that it is understood:
  1. **All are equal**, created in the divine image (Jesus)
  2. God has entered into **mutual relationship** with each one (as well as all creation)
  3. Resources are to meet the needs of all so that all realize their dignity and the resources insure all have the **fullest potential of solidarity, mutuality, & participation possible**

# Fraternity or Order ?

- Francis vision was a classless structure, a **fraternity (brotherhood)** of equals centered on Gospel/Christ, charged to meet the needs of each other without exercising authority over anyone. **(examine the Rule of Hermitages)**
- Order (and clericalization) via a vertical hierarchical structure was the eventual structure given by the Church. The structure while providing an easier form of governance was not the initial vision of Francis because it imposes a non-equal (non-fraternal) reality.



1. The nature of the SFO is determined by 3 characteristics,
  - a. **its birth** as specific intention of its founder, Francis of Assisi based on inspiration he received from God.
  - b. **through its historical evolution** as an order/movement approved by the Holy See
  - c. **through legislation** (Rule & General Constitution) which is approved by the Holy See and by the acceptance expressed by the Supreme Pontiffs & Magisterium of the Church throughout history.

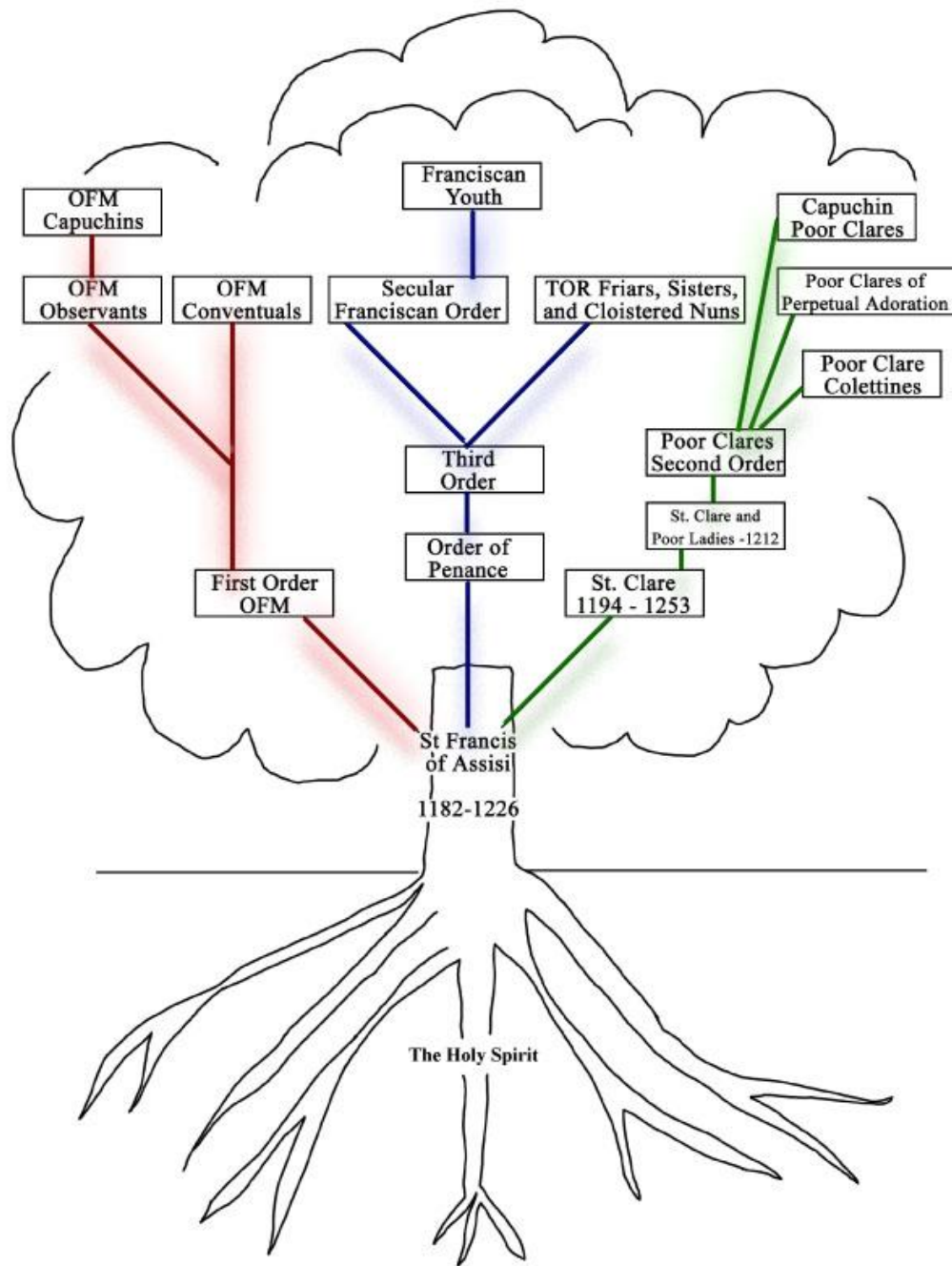
# Franciscan Triology

The **FRANCISCAN TRILOGY** is the first (and only) religious experience, preordained to apostolic life, including three Orders, born simultaneously, designed to include all states of life.

1. The First Order (friars)
2. The Second Order (The Clares)
3. The Third Order (Secular & Regular)

# The Family Franciscan and the Nature of the Secular Franciscan Order

The diagram on the next slide is a good representation of the formation of the Franciscan Family, noting in particular that the Third Order, (the Order of Penance, or the original branch of the Seculars) shares with our brother and sister “religious” a common Seraphic Father and founder, from the very beginning, Francis of Assisi.



2. We are all united by a common founder, common charisms, common spirituality and apostolic mission on behalf of the Church.
  - Despite this foundational unity we remain fully independent of the other Franciscan Orders, but intimately connected by privilege and reciprocity.

3. We (SFO) are a group of Christian faithful, evangelically (**Gospel**) called, (vocation) to observe the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the method of Francis and still living in our secular condition.
  - We are as deeply called and committed, as the entire Franciscan Family, to God's call to continually rebuild the Church calling her and ourselves to live in greater fidelity to the Gospels.

4. Though the SFO is not “religious” in the strict sense of the word (making evangelical vows),
  - we do commit ourselves through a true and proper “religious” profession to give witness to the Good News along with and beside our other Franciscan Family Members.
  - Profession is our response to God’s call/choosing us - vocation

## So what is the Secular Franciscan Order within the Church?

- ▶ The SFO is a public association of the Church, as specified in article 1.5 of our General Constitution and under the Code of Canon Law 301 § 3; 312; 313.
- ▶ We do however have several differences with a public association or even a basic third order.
- ▶ We have a distinct ecclesial nature in that we are International and we are connected by a special bond to the Roman Pontiff, who confirms our rule and directs our apostolic mission in the Church and the world.



- ▶ the SFO exists by a deliberate act of will of the whole Church, erected by the Holy See and generically connected to the evangelical mission of the Church in the world. **Thus our juridic (legal under Canon Law) personality is derived directly from the Holy Father.**
- ▶ The Hierarchy of the Church does not intervene into the life of the SFO and its governance nor in its electoral or civil identity.
- ▶ The SFO by privilege (*altius moderamen*) of the Holy See has freely bound itself to the brothers of the First Order and TOR in a relationship of equal vital reciprocity (Life-giving union) for the support and life of both.

# The Nature of the SFO

- Not a simple third order or public association.
  - ▶ We are both one and autonomous (having our own laws), united by a common founder, charism and mission and by our chosen privilege to the Franciscan Family, living out our vocation in the secular state.
  - ▶ Though we have subdivided into the SFO and TOR, we, the SFO, remain the original Third Order directly founded by Francis.

# Comparison between a “Third Order” & the Secular Franciscan Order

## Third Order

(defined by current Code of Canon Law)

1. Affiliated, associated to a religious house (e.g. Benedictine, Dominican, Carmelite)
2. Participates in the spirit of the religious house to which it is associated
3. It exists under the authority of a religious house

## SFO

1. Not affiliated or associated to the Franciscan First Order or the Third Order Regular (TOR). The SFO is born autonomous and is equal and complementary to the other Orders of the Franciscan Order.
2. The SFO is part of the religious family founded by Francis of Assisi, in its 3-fold articulation, and participates in the spirit of the entire Family, and not simply a single part of it, as the SFO is a direct depository of the common charism of our common Seraphic Father. It is equally and directly Franciscan at its inception as are the other orders within the Franciscan Family.
3. The SFO is born autonomous and remains such, under the authority of the Holy See, who has entrusted assistance to the SFO and vigilance to the First Order & TOR

4. The same individual may belong to the third orders of several different religious houses without any special authorization

5. Any religious institute/house may have its own third order without requesting any privilege of the Holy See

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4. SFO General Constitutions contemplates the exact opposite i.e. exclusive via perpetual profession (Gen Const Art. 2.1) -- *The vocation to the SFO is a specific vocation . Those who are bound by a perpetual commitment to another religious family or institute of consecrated life cannot belong to the SFO.*

5. Contradicts Gen Const Art 2.1 cited above

6. The SFO is erected and granted its juridic person by the Supreme Pontiff and not by any religious house. None of the Franciscan First Orders nor the TOR hold the SFO as its own third order. The single SFO is its own entity and has the privilege of being assisted collegially by its own brother religious rather than by local bishops

# The bottom line

Like all members of the Franciscan  
Family we are called:

To observe the Gospel of Jesus Christ

&

Live in fraternal relationship with all  
God's creation