

# THE FRANCISCANS

June 5, 2009  
St. Boniface

Dear Friends,

May the Lord give you peace!

What does it take to make a good friar? A good priest? A good brother? It's wonderfully different for each man, but one aspect is consistent: it's much more than just a series of classes! It requires the guidance and support of many different people. You and I, for example, as unique as each of us is in life experience, can strive together to help new friars in a process of education, training, guidance and mentoring—"formation"—that's both internal and external, tradition-steeped and urgently contemporary.

When early followers of St. Francis asked St. Anthony of Padua to teach them theology, Anthony wrote to Francis for permission, and Francis's reply has influenced Franciscan formation for 800 years: *"I am pleased that you teach sacred theology to the brothers providing that, as is contained in the Rule, you 'do not extinguish the Spirit of prayer and devotion' during study of this kind."*



Each summer, the friars gather to witness new brothers make their first profession of vows (poverty, chastity and obedience) at the end of the year of novitiate. Friars may ask permission to make solemn, or lifetime, vows after at least three years in temporary vows.

Today I'm asking you to help our newest friars pursue their spiritual, theological and pastoral education and training. The Franciscan manner of teaching is committed to contemplation and action, academic competence and practical experience, private prayer and life in community. These gradually shape the life of the student-friar and provide the tools to flourish in ministry. The mind is surely fed, and fed in a spirit of prayer, with real-world experiences and with the guidance and examples of elder friar mentors. Please support this vital Franciscan training, first of all with your own prayers, and then with the most generous financial gift you can offer at this time.

We friars alone can't provide all that's needed to nourish a new friar's vocation. Families, friends, parishes, schools and other communities initially supported these men, raising them, teaching them, and providing a witness to them of God's grace and goodness. And they continue to need these varied sources of support. Having the initial desire and passion for a vocation is only part of what's needed to make it a reality. Once they enter the Order, the Franciscan vow of poverty prohibits individual student-friars from receiving direct financial help from families and friends. Instead, contributions are used to finance the formation of all the friars in common. This allows for fraternal unity within the diversity of cultural and economic backgrounds among the men who join us.

Francis always envisioned ministry that made full and active use of each brother's gifts. In obedience to the Franciscan tradition, friars work while they are in studies. Our student-friars provide valuable service in communities, parishes and retreat centers

where they can learn first-hand about ministries to which they might have a special calling. They learn much about ministry from observing and hearing about the real-life know-how of friars with more experience in ministry—preachers, pastors, missionaries, musicians, craftsmen, chaplains, counselors,



Our newest friar-priest, Joe Schwab, receives a blessing from Friar Larry Dolan during his ordination ceremony at St. Mary Basilica in Phoenix, Arizona.

community organizers, scholars, teachers, therapists, social workers, retreat masters ...the list goes on and on. We're sure that Francis would be pleased to see his modern brothers in action.

The formation of a Franciscan friar is necessarily a process of total immersion, carried out in "the Spirit of prayer and devotion." This is only possible with the generous support of our friends in faith. Your charitable donation can help our friars during this critically important period. Your gift to the Franciscans is an investment in the future—the future in ministry, the making of a good friar, a good priest, a good brother.

Yours in Christ and St. Francis,

Brother John Summers, OFM

P.S. You can give secure online donations to The Franciscans at [www.sbfranciscans.org](http://www.sbfranciscans.org). And please consider including the Franciscans in your will and estate plans.



Michael, Ryan and Philip (pictured above) are finishing up a nine-month program of preparation for formal acceptance into the Order. The nine months are filled with an intense orientation to Franciscan community life, prayer, an opportunity for ministry in an urban setting, and an introduction to Franciscan spirituality.

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## Why do we Join? Why do we Stay?

Before I tell you why I became a friar I want to say that I believe the reasons we enter into a commitment to religious life—or any commitment—may be different from the ones that make us stay. I became a friar initially in search of a family. I was forty-five, living in a condo and working at a job I enjoyed very much as an occupational therapist in east L.A. I had bought my condo three years before. Up until that time, I had always lived in shared housing—renting rooms in homes with people from a wide cross-section of humanity—and each of these experiences had been life-giving.

My sister and her family had moved a couple of hours out of town the previous year. I had been very close to them. I decided that living alone wasn't for me. I had dated some but had no strong attraction to marriage. I had considered religious life since I was a teenager but had always put it off. I didn't want joining religious life to be a running away from life but a running to God. Financially, I had done pretty well. I had careers in horticulture and health care that I felt good about. I also had been an involved uncle for my sisters' families for many years. My life so far had been meaningful. I didn't feel the need to help raise more children. I had good relationships with my family and with friends. The fact that I'd felt drawn to religious life for so long made me feel that I may have a calling to it. So I needed an opportunity to try it out.

I participated in a “come and see” retreat in Santa Barbara, and then I applied to join this province. Becoming a friar had an aspect of taking refuge from being alone. I do find the friars to be like a family in some ways. The atmosphere in our community is a joyful one. But I also realize that I find myself alone at times, too, and this is not a bad thing. The friars try to live lives based on the Gospels. Life in formation has been both a comfort and a challenge. It's not easy to look at yourself honestly or to meet challenges posed to you by your directors or peers in community. We live a life of ongoing conversion—metanoia. You need to welcome the challenges as well as the fraternity. I feel I've grown a lot by being with the friars and I've met many good and generous people who laugh with me, encourage me, and love me along the way.

**Becoming a friar is life-giving.** There have been opportunities to do a variety of ministries. And I live with other men who have a commitment to prayer and to God. This was a huge attraction after living in a place like L.A. During my formation, I have been able to explore hospice ministry, teaching, hospital chaplaincy, and missions among the Native Americans. It has also been a time to serve our senior friars in their need, to help other student friars in their studies and to walk with my brothers in good times and bad. The friars are good men trying to do good things. But we are more than that. We try to live as a witness to the Kingdom of God that is both here and still to come.

Our witness consists of our ministries and how we live in community. It is also a lifelong opportunity to grow in faith, which becomes the basis for how and why we do what we do. We laugh and we have fun as we pray, work, play, and live together. With a commitment to community as well as to ministry, we become brothers.

~Brother Chris Best, OFM

