STEP BY STEP:

A Guide to Becoming a FRANCISCAN FRIAR

“I have done what is mine to do; may Christ teach you what is yours to do.”

- ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

FRANCISCAN VOCATION MINISTRY • HOLY NAME PROVINCE
The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province are a diverse, faithful and vibrant community. We are welcoming growing numbers of Catholic men mostly in their 20s, 30s and 40s, who come from a wide variety of ethnic, educational and occupational backgrounds. Yet all of our candidates have certain qualities in common: a strong desire to make a difference in the world; a love for Christ and for all people; a ready willingness to befriend and serve those who are poor and marginalized; a growing prayer life and a thirst for spiritual community. Perhaps the most essential ingredient in becoming a Franciscan is simply an open heart.

Ultimately you are the only one who, with God’s help, can discern the correct path for your life — not your parents, your friends, your parish priest or our friars, although all of these people may be helpful to you in your search. You are in the proverbial “driver’s seat,” learning to let God take the wheel.

Let us help you! The Franciscans of Holy Name Province offer opportunities for you to spend quality time with our friars, discover what makes our fraternal life and ministries so unique, and find out if pursuing the Franciscan life seems right for you. The journey begins with just one step…

“Dear young people, do not be afraid of making decisive choices in life. Have faith; the Lord will not abandon you!”
— POPE FRANCIS

“If you believe that God has answered you in your time of distress, and you believe that God is capable of working through you to aid others in theirs, our world needs you. I’ve answered God’s call to be his steward on earth, to love his people for him, and I couldn’t be happier with my life.”
— FR. CASEY COLE, OFM
BREAKINGINTHEHABIT.ORG
Discernment Prayer

Most high, glorious God,
Enlighten the darkness of my heart.
Give me, Lord, a correct faith, a certain hope, a perfect charity, insight and wisdom, so that I may carry out your holy and true command.

– ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

First Steps –
Getting to Know the Franciscans

ORGANIC DISCERNMENT COMMUNITIES

Men who are curious about religious life are invited to get to know us by participating in one of our Organic Discernment Communities, located throughout Holy Name Province, where guests and discerners have the opportunity to immerse themselves in Franciscan life. They share community with the friars by praying together and enjoying meals and informal conversation. There are also opportunities to visit Franciscan programs and services, such as a breadline or homeless shelter, with a hands-on ministerial experience.

Organic Discernment Communities are located at parishes and urban ministry centers throughout the province. These communities provide a great way to get a feel for what Franciscan life and service are like with no further commitments or obligations.
FRANCISCAN DISCERNMENT WEEKENDS

After spending some time with the friars in a discernment community, men who are ready to move forward may be invited to a Discernment Weekend. **During the weekend, each guest has the opportunity to discuss his calling in more depth with our vocation team.** And because Discernment Weekends take place in Boston, MA, St. Petersburg, FL, and throughout the Province, guests can meet the many and diverse friars who make up Holy Name Province and get an “insider’s view” of the life of the Province.

The Discernment Weekend is important in helping potential candidates decide whether to take the next step of formal application to the Province’s formation program, if invited to do so. The application simply invites men to continue their discernment with Holy Name Province without taking any vows.

The Franciscan Interprovincial Novitiate is where men from countries throughout the English-speaking world come to further their discernment process in becoming a Franciscan friar, in the service of the people of God.

**In Their Own Words: Men in Formation Reflect on the Franciscans**

“What most attracted me to the friars are their welcoming hearts, especially for those in need and not accounted for in our society. All are welcomed with a merciful hug – no exceptions. We are all brothers and sisters in Christ.”

– BR. ADOLFO NAVARRO, OFM

“The Franciscans have shown to be a community that accepts the brokenness of the world without judgement. My comfortable assumptions have already been challenged in a good way. Franciscans seem to reflect both our human diversity and unity.”

– BR. JOHN NEUFFER, OFM

“What I love the most about the Friars is their authentic way of living the Gospel: their genuine love of God and love of neighbor, especially the outcast, which feels very heartfelt. They witness their faith through love.”
The Three Steps of Initial Formation:

1. Postulancy

Formation begins when a candidate is accepted into Holy Name Province as a postulant. During the welcoming ceremony, each postulant receives a blessed Tau cross to wear — a favorite symbol of St. Francis, who used it as his signature.

Postulants are not yet friars and take no vows; instead, postulancy gives men time to ease into the rhythm of Franciscan fraternal life with daily prayer, Eucharist, common meals, recreation and ministerial activities. The men live in community at Holy Name College in Silver Spring, MD creating a strong Franciscan peer support network.

During the year, postulants attend workshops and retreats, and travel throughout the province to meet our friars and learn about our varied ministries.

Each man is assigned a formation director to help guide him through this beginning stage and aid in the process of discernment. The postulancy lasts one to two years.

“If you are considering life as a Franciscan friar, I can’t think of a better way to discern God’s call than to spend a year as a postulant with Holy Name Province. Don’t be worried about the ‘big commitment’ or ‘a need to discern and see the world.’ You’ll see more of the world as a postulant than you would on your own, and the door is always open if it’s not for you. The better question people might ask is ‘What have you got to lose?’”

— FR. CASEY COLE, OFM
2. Novitiate

After Postulancy, men spend their next year as novices. This is the year when they receive the Franciscan habit to wear as an outward expression of their faith and values. Novices deepen their relationship with God, enrich their prayer life and learn about Franciscan spirituality. They also spend two days each week in different ministries. The novitiate year, which takes place at the Old Mission Santa Barbara in Santa Barbara, CA, provides an interprovincial experience by bringing together men from English-speaking countries throughout the world.

A key milestone comes at the end of the novitiate year, when novices profess their simple (temporary) vows for the very first time. They also receive a cord with three knots symbolizing the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, to which they commit themselves for one year at a time. These simple vows are renewed annually throughout the rest of initial formation, until a friar is ready to make permanent vows.

Q: Why do Franciscans wear the brown habit?

A: St. Francis, son of a wealthy cloth merchant, sought to clothe himself in the simplest rags available as a sign of his humility. Over 800 years later, Franciscans wear the habit for the same reason—not to separate us from the public or to signify authority, but quite the opposite—as a sign to all people that we are their humble friends in Christ. From the Latin word habitus meaning “to put on a new way of life,” the habit is an outward symbol of an inward commitment.
After a novice has made his simple vows, he enters the post-novitiate stage of formation, which lasts a number of additional years. Student friars renew their temporary vows each year, as they engage in academic study along with regular ministerial work. It is a busy time filled with a wide range of experiences. The men live communally at one of the Franciscan communities at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago and benefit from the numerous educational opportunities that the Chicago metropolitan area has to offer. Some choose to study at Catholic Theological Union in preparation for priestly work, while others prepare for vocations as non-ordained brothers engaged in teaching, social work, counseling, administration, and other ministries.

Toward the end of the post-novitiate stage, student friars spend an internship year working at a ministry of interest. This gives them an opportunity to apply their years of study in a real-life setting.

The post-novitiate period concludes with another major milestone: final (solemn) profession of vows.

Q: Some Franciscans call themselves “Father” and others “Brother”. What is the difference?

A: As Franciscans, we see ourselves as brothers to one another, living in community. In this sense, all friars are “brothers” first and foremost. Some friars are called to the ordained ministry of priesthood and use the title “Father”. Other friars who do not feel called to ordained ministry use the title “Brother”. Many people are not aware that St. Francis himself was not a priest. Francis’ focus was always on “the brotherhood”.

One of our New York City-based friars suggested...

“Being a brother is not simply understood in terms of what a priest is not. Being a brother is a life in and of itself that puts me in the midst of my brothers and sisters with whom I share my time and presence. I can be a teacher, an artist, a social worker, a student, a carpenter, a doctor or a lawyer – all of which puts me in a position to give my time and presence to something bigger than my own reality.”
Summer Activities for Student Friars

Summer affords student friars a change of pace from their usual schedules. This is a time of year for learning new skills and languages, or taking an extra course of interest.

Student friars also spend summertime at parishes and ministry sites throughout the province to hone their ministerial skills. Activities include working with youth or young adults, visiting individuals who are home-bound or hospitalized, volunteering at a food pantry or homeless shelter, and providing immigrants with needed services.

Those interested in teaching — whether at the elementary, high school or college level — have an opportunity to do so during the summer.

“In deciding upon a ministry site for the summer, I immediately felt drawn to St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia. Having volunteered at the Inn once a week as a novice serving meals to homeless guests, I wanted the full experience of living and serving there for an extended period of time. This, I thought, would be a unique opportunity to discern more clearly how God is calling me to minister as a Franciscan friar. I was not disappointed!”

— Fr. Jeffrey Jordan, OFM

“When the friars asked for volunteers to spend the summer in rural Kenya, no one was more surprised than I when my hand went up. But that’s the beauty of summer assignments: they give you a chance to do things that you never thought you’d do; they give you the opportunity to stretch yourself as a person and minister. They help you realize that the possibilities of life as a friar are greater than you ever imagined.”

— Fr. John Aherne, OFM
Even after initial formation has been completed, all Franciscan friars continue in ongoing formation throughout the rest of their lives.

During each stage of friar life, there are opportunities to attend workshops and retreats, learn new skills and transition to new ministries. We are continually renewed as we re-discover Christ in the world around us, inspired by the enduring spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.

**PRAYER OF SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI**

*Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.*
*Where there is hatred, let me sow love;*
*where there is injury, pardon;*
*where there is doubt, faith;*
*where there is despair, hope;*
*where there is darkness, light;*
*and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;*
*to be understood as to understand;*
*to be loved as to love.*

For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

The Franciscan Friars of Holy Name Province joyfully minister according to the Rule of St. Francis of Assisi and our General Constitutions which state:

“As followers of St. Francis, the brothers are held to live the Gospel vision completely in the spirit of prayer and devotion and brotherly sharing. They are to give witness to a life of penance and lowliness and, with love for all, they are to bring the Gospel message to the whole world, proclaiming reconciliation, peace, and justice by their works.”

– GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS, ORDER OF FRIARS MINOR (OFM), 1.2.
Prayer to Discern a Vocation

Lord, there are so many things in my life that I do not understand,
so many questions about the future that I need to ask.

What is your plan for me?
What is the work you want me to do?

All I really know is that you love me.
Show me the road you want me to walk –
to fulfillment, to happiness, to holiness.

And if you are calling me to
priesthood or to the religious life,
give me the strength to say “yes”
and the grace to begin even now
to prepare myself for the challenge
of a life spent in your service and
in the care of your people.

I ask you this in Jesus’ name.
Amen.

- ANONYMOUS
“Lord, teach us to step outside ourselves. Teach us to go out into the streets and manifest your love.”
- POPE FRANCIS

Visit us online, where you will find vocation resources and upcoming events:

BeAFranciscan.org
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Get in touch! We’d love to hear from you:

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