



More than 800 years after he was born, St. Francis of Assisi remains one of the most popular personalities in history. Well known for his care for animals, an advocate for peace, and his simple life-style, St. Francis, above all, gave himself completely to God because he realized God's total love for him. His dream to achieve fame and glory in battle was transformed into a desire to radically follow his Savior, our Lord, Jesus Christ. He stood naked before the bishop, kissed the leper, opened the Book of the Gospels, rebuilt the tiny church of San Damiano, contemplated the Crucified Christ, gazed upon the Creche at Greccio, sang in the streets of Assisi, met with the Muslim sultan, pledged obedience to the Pope, gathered the brothers in the Portiuncula, received the sacred stigmata, prayed at all times, immersed himself among the poor...because he declared with all his soul, strength, heart and mind, "My God and my all!"

Deus meus et Omnia

An Introduction to the Capuchin Friars



Exactly 257 years before anyone knew about capuchin monkeys (so named in 1785), there were Capuchin friars. It was more than 400 years after Capuchin friars came into existence in 1528 that anyone ever tasted a cup of cappuccino (first served in 1948). As for friars, no, they are not fryers! Although some prefer their food fried rather than baked. The Hood? It's all in the name. The *brotherhood* is found in all kinds of neighborhoods, hoods and all.

Even if you have known Capuchin friars for a long time, it wouldn't be surprising if you found them somewhat mysterious.

The Catholic Church has many religious Orders and communities of men. So what makes Capuchins different? Are they Franciscans? How are they different from diocesan priests? It can all be confusing even for those well-versed in Catholic life.

Maybe you can recognize a Capuchin because of the curious, medieval clothing he wears, but you might wonder what makes him tick on the inside. Come to think about it, why do they wear that robe? And you might ask, why anyone would want to be a Capuchin friar in this day and age? Is there a point to a bunch of men living together? Why don't they get married like normal people? And then there's the money thing. Like everyone else they need it, but they take a vow of poverty. How does that work?

You may ask whom these guys follow? Anyway, what's so great about a man called St. Francis of Assisi? And what does he have to do with Jesus Christ? You might suspect that an organization founded in the Middle Ages should be dying out because it couldn't possibly have any meaning for people today. Guess again!!

If you've wondered, this may be the place for you to learn just what a Capuchin is.



What is a Capuchin friar? What do friars do? Are Capuchins Monks? How do friars live? Are Capuchins diocesan priests?



Three centuries after St. Francis, a number of Franciscan friars wanted to live as the founder envisioned; they wanted to observe his original Rule and ideals. Devoting themselves to prayer, penance and preaching, the friars also heroically served the poor, sick and dying. In 1528 Pope Clement VII gave them permission to form a new community of Franciscan friars. They soon became known as "Capuchins" because many Italian children nicknamed them *cappuccino* for the large hoods of their habits. Overcoming stiff opposition from some of their former superiors and enduring great trials, the Capuchins soon won the hearts of the people. "They were alive with a spiritual life which was in touch with the fundamental needs of the human spirit of their time."

Are Capuchins priests or brothers? What vows do they take? How can they live in Poverty today? Where do friars work?

The Capuchins began as a “revolt against the secularism and conventionalism” which permeated society and even the Church. The Capuchins recaptured the fervor and original vision of the *Poverello, the Poor Little Man, St. Francis of Assisi*, even wearing the same, simple habit he wore. These friars and all who followed had a reputation for austerity, holiness and a solidarity with the poor and common people of Italy, and soon demand for their presence elsewhere could not be ignored. With missionary zeal, the Order grew into an international community. Today, there are 11,000 friars world-wide.

Prayer Preaching Teaching Community Brotherhood Solidarity Catholic Austerity Simplicity



Capuchins from Paris arrived in the colony of Virginia in 1650 to minister to the settlers; they were the first Capuchin friars in what would become the United States; their mission ended with the bloody death of Capuchin friar Christopher Plunkett at the hands of the English. In 1722



French Capuchins were entrusted with missions in the Louisiana Territory, and until 1829 missionary friars of many nationalities ministered throughout the eastern half

of the continent, working among Native Americans, enslaved Africans and immigrants. It was not until 1857 that the first province, St. Joseph, was founded by two Swiss diocesan priests and eventually stretched from New England to the Upper Midwest. In 1873 a second province, St. Augustine, was established by Bavarian and German friars and over time included territory from the Chesapeake Bay to the Rocky Mountains. Italian friars established friaries in New Jersey, Irish friars in California and along the west coast. Spanish friars established friaries in Texas; Polish friars took up ministry in Oklahoma. Today there are 6 provinces and 1 vice-province (Hawaii) of Capuchin friars in the United States.



Living the Gospel Life in truth, simplicity and joy Today

Love one another as I have loved you John 13:34



FAQ - Frequently asked Questions

What is the difference between a friar and a monk?

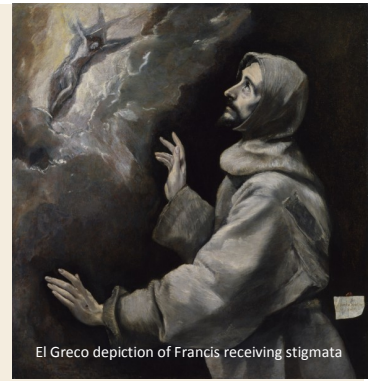
A monk is called to the contemplative life within a monastery or abbey. Normally, a monk lives his entire religious life on the grounds of the monastery and does not undertake ministries outside the monastery. A friar lives with other friars but is usually involved in ministry among people outside the friary. Friars are called to be both contemplative and active in the world.

What is the difference between a Capuchin friar and a diocesan priest?

A diocesan priest is ordained for the service of his diocese (usually several counties within a state) and is obedient to its bishop. Many friars are not ordained, but a friar who is also a priest is ordained for priestly ministry. He lives in a community of friars, both lay brothers and priest brothers, to live the Capuchin life. A friar is not bound to a specific diocese. The superiors of friars are other friars and the Holy Father. Of course, all friars are obedient to the bishop of the diocese in which they live and work.

Is a friar “Brother” or “Father”?

The Capuchin Order is a community of lay and ordained members; all are “friars” professing the same Capuchin vows. They are brothers to each other and try to be brotherly to all people. Friars who are also priests may be called “Father.” Recently, however, the General Minister of the Capuchins asked friars to prefer the title “Brother” to “Father” even if they are ordained priests.



El Greco depiction of Francis receiving stigmata



Do friars pray together?

Yes. They pray the Liturgy of the Hours (Divine Office), especially Morning Prayer and Evening Prayer. They also participate in daily Mass and are obliged to meditate each day. Of course, their studies of Scripture and other spiritual writings guide their prayer. Friars also pray the same devotions that all Catholics frequently use, e.g., Stations of the Cross, Eucharistic adoration, the Rosary, etc. Friars must also pray privately to persevere in their vocation.

How are friars assigned to a friary and a ministry?

Taking into consideration the friar's needs, abilities and desires, as well as the needs of the Church and the Order, the Provincial Minister assigns the friar to a friary and a ministry. The friar's vow of obedience obliges him to go where he is sent.

Can friars be missionaries?

Of course! Friars are encouraged to become missionaries in foreign countries. From the earliest days of the Order, Capuchins have always had a great tradition of sending missionaries and supporting the missions with prayer and material resources. The friars missionary labors throughout the centuries and many lands have resulted in the blessing of many brothers all around the world.



Our mission in Papua New Guinea

What do friars do about money?

Most friars receive a minimum salary for their ministries. All salaries are turned over to the Guardian to pay bills for the friary; what remains is sent to the Provincial to support retired friars, pay for the training of new brothers and help with other obligations of the province. Friars may request money from the Guardian for their personal needs. Because the salaries of the friars are not adequate for the ordinary expenditures of the community they are grateful for the generosity of benefactors and pray for them daily.

What do friars personally own?

Friars may not personally own land or buildings or other assets. Most use cars, but they are owned by the Order. Friars use computers and cell phones; they may acquire such items with permission and are ultimately the common property of the community. Friars are not permitted to make wills. Because they have taken the vow of poverty, they do not legally own anything personally.



Order of Friars Minor—Capuchin - O.F.M. Cap.

From the call of his first disciples, God continues to invite us to follow His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Every friar knows that he has been called and that his entire life is a response to God's invitation. The friar knows that he follows our Savior on the way of the cross, of being the least rather than the greatest, the last rather than the first, to serve rather than be served, to give rather than receive. Imitating Christ and Saint Francis, the friar trusts in God's promise that His love will never fail.

The Rule and Life of the friars minor is to observe the Holy Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ.



For among all the unhappy spectacles of the world, Francis naturally abhorred lepers; but one day he met a leper while riding near Assisi. Though the leper caused him great disgust and horror, nevertheless, he got off the horse and prepared to **kiss the leper.** When the leper put out his hand as though to receive something,

he received money along with a kiss. Filled with wonder and joy, Francis, after a few days, took care to do the same thing again with other lepers, and after he had given each leper some money he kissed his hand and his face. Thus did he exchange the bitter for the sweet. *From Celano's Second Life of Francis, V*



He was walking one day near the little church of San Damiano; it was crumbling, and no one seemed to have a care for it. Francis went to the altar. Suddenly he heard a voice speaking from the crucifix, "**Francis, go and repair my church, which you can see is in ruin.**" In astonishment he replied, "Gladly, Lord, I will repair it." Then he felt a marvelous love for the crucified Christ take possession of him. Such a love he had never felt before.

From Cuthbert's Life of St. Francis, p 32



The book of the Gospels was near the

altar that all might read who cared. Francis knelt before the altar and prayed to God to show his will in the opening of the book. He came upon St. Matthew's Gospel at these words: If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Francis exclaimed: "**This is our life and rule!**" *From First Celano, IX, 22*

The Pope had a dream that the church of St. John Lateran, the mother church of Christianity, was about to fall, and a religious man, small in stature and of lowly appearance was holding it up. It seemed to the Pope that Francis was the man of his dream. He approved the **Rule** which Francis presented to him. *Cuthbert's Life of St. Francis, p 100*

MINISTRY

The principle apostolate of a lesser brother is to live a gospel life in truth, simplicity and joy. We should willingly assume any apostolic activity as long as it is in harmony with our form of life and responds to the needs of the Church. Aware of our minority, let us generously undertake those ministries that are regarded as especially difficult. Let the brothers show special care to those who are deprived of ordinary pastoral care because of the conditions of their life: the young, immigrants, laborers, those burdened with financial pressures, or those harassed by hostility or racial prejudice. *From the Capuchin Constitutions, chapter 9*



BROTHERHOOD

Inspired by God, St. Francis initiated a gospel form of life that he called a "brotherhood" according to the example of the life of Christ and his disciples. We who profess this form of life truly constitute an Order of Brothers. United by faith in God our Father and nourished at the table of the divine word and the Eucharist, we love one another that the world may know we are disciples of Jesus Christ...Wherever we may be gathered in the name of Jesus, let us be of one heart and one mind, always striving to advance to greater perfection. *From the Capuchin Constitutions, Chapter 6*

VOWS

Christ proposes the evangelical counsels to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to religious life, the obligation of practicing Chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience. This is one way of experiencing a more intimate consecration, rooted in Baptism and dedicated totally to God. ...to follow Christ more nearly...to give themselves to God, who is love. *From Catechism of the Catholic Church #915 & #916*



I am Father Tom Betz , the Vocation Director for the Province of Saint Augustine. I welcome all inquiries.

If you are contemplating a religious vocation, contact me for information and materials concerning discernment retreats and friary visits which are scheduled regularly:

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