



FRANCISCANS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

A Canonical religious Order of Men and Women of the
TRINITARIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

Autocephalous ~ Independent Catholic ~ Inclusive ~ LGBTI affirming

Dear Friend in Christ,

Thank you for your interest in our Order. Initially, it would be helpful if you could write to us with some detailed information about yourself including your age and where you live. We can be of more help to you in directing your vocational needs once we have a better understanding of your background and intentions. We are a Canonical, Independent Catholic Religious Order of The Trinitarian Catholic Church. We are not in union with the Roman Church. The requirements for admission or affiliation to our Order for Lay Associates, lay Brother and Lay Sister candidates are similar to that of candidates who wish to go on to Holy Orders. One difference is that Associates, Brothers and Sisters may maintain dual Church membership, while our ordained Priests and Deacons, according to our Canon Law, must be full members of our Episcopal Jurisdiction. Please note that we permit both men and women to enter into Holy Orders. We exercise some flexibility regarding admissions requirements based upon the specifics of each candidate. If you live within a reasonable distance of Rocky Hill, Connecticut, we prefer to arrange a meeting so that we can interview you and answer your questions in person. Our web site should answer most of your questions. In the meantime, I can tell you that we are an Order "in formation", which means that we are still growing. Unlike mainline Orders, we do not have a formation house and do not live in monastic settings. We are all working Priests, Deacons, Brothers and Sisters who are self-sufficient and self-supporting. A number of people who write to us are seeking particular aspects of religious life, which often include the many external trappings of traditional, larger religious Orders. We sometimes encounter people who grew up with the notion that the Church is a building or a "place" and so, if we do not have such a physical place then we cannot be "real" or "valid". We do our very best to not mislead or misrepresent who we are. What we are is a contemporary, "back-to-basics" Apostolic, Franciscan Order that lives and works within a "Church without physical walls". Instead of living apart from society, we live and work in the general community along side the laity. Our members do not have to leave their homes in order to join us.

Rather, we want you to remain where you are and be an instrument of the Franciscan spirit where you happen to live. Instead of moving to a seminary or a house of formation, we have a course of self-studies, which you can accomplish at your own pace from your home. Our Order also requires all of our candidates to complete a basic course of study related to the Gospels and to St. Francis of Assisi, his teachings and spirituality. Books from the Study List can be purchased online at Amazon.com. You will find many of the titles there or may also find them at your local bookstore or a public library. If you happen to live close enough to other members of our Order, we expect you to join with them for weekly Mass and prayer and to be active in a personal or common ministry. Your ministry may be one that you perform on your own, within an existing organization or with other Friars and Sisters from the Order. In the event that you live somewhere where you don't have members of our Order or Church nearby, we'd want you to develop a daily and weekly prayer time and, if possible, some level of regular attendance at Mass or Sunday worship with a Catholic Rite church. You would also be encouraged to form a prayer group where you live so that you might have others to pray with and minister to. Quite often, these prayer groups are a source from which new candidates to the Order emerge.

We do require at least one year of contact with any candidate before we would admit that person to profess simple vows. This year is called a Canonical Year and is a time for study and personal discernment and preparation. There is no requirement that a person profess simple vows after that first year. If you need more time for discernment, that is allowed. When you are ready to profess vows for the first time, you will profess simple vows for a period of one year. You may renew simple vows each year for up to 3 years. Any time after your first year in simple vows, up to the third year, you may request to make a solemn profession of vows for life. We profess vows of Poverty, Chastity and Obedience, as defined by our Rule, and make a promise to be Self-Sufficient. The vows we profess are defined in our Rule. Poverty is at the heart of everything in our lives. The essence of Poverty is our self-examination of our stewardship of many gifts that God has bestowed upon each of us. To be poor like Christ requires that we are good stewards of the gifts that God has given us. Poverty demands that we make good use of things, but maintain a sense of detachment from the things of the world. Everything that God brings into our lives is a gift to be experienced in a responsible way and shared with others but not to be possessed. Chastity calls us to a deeper sense of loving which always respects the Christ in ourselves and in others. Chastity is closely related to Poverty in that it reminds us that our sexuality is a gift, which we are intended to enjoy, but which must be used wisely, responsibly and within the context of a loving relationship. Obedience is a call to listen to the will of the Holy Spirit and to live lives of holiness according to the lessons revealed in Holy Scripture and through the lives of the Saints, and in particular, the life of St. Francis of Assisi. We promise to be obedient to Christ, the Gospels, the Church, our Bishop and Guardians, the spirit of our Rule and to those appointed over us who have been chosen to lead within our Episcopal jurisdiction and our Order. We do not require a vow of Celibacy. A candidate may choose to profess such a vow if he/she wishes to do so. We accept single and married people and those who are in committed relationships to enter our Order. We welcome candidates regardless of age, gender, racial, ethnic or national origin, physical challenges, marital status, sexual orientation, previous religious life experience, profession or ordination, work or professional background, socio-economic status, education, or place of residence. See the statement on our FAQ page on our web site. We were originally founded as the Franciscan Friars of Divine Providence. In 2003, we changed our name to the Franciscans of Divine Providence when we voted to include women into the Order. The Franciscans of Divine Providence is our official name. We are a Canonical Religious Order of the TRINTARIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH, which is an Autocephalous, Independent Catholic Jurisdiction under the protection of a Presiding Bishop who has valid Apostolic Succession through both the Latin and Orthodox Rites.

Here's a brief history of our Order.

We were officially founded as an Independent Franciscan religious Order on March 15, 1995 in Providence, Rhode Island. We celebrated our first ten years together as an Order on March 15, 2005. We were briefly affiliated with another Independent Catholic church, but then decided that this move was not in our best interest. On July 1, 2003, we returned to being an Independent Catholic religious Order.

By way of our friendship with Bishop Michael Steinhardt and Bishop Raphael DeFord of the Free Catholic Christian Orthodox Church (Costa Rica), we were extended temporary Episcopal protection through them so as to maintain our canonical status. These Bishops officially recognized our Holy Orders as valid. They also granted us recognition as a Canonical Religious Order with Independent status. Both of these Bishops were co-ordinators of our Founder at his 1997 ordination to the Catholic priesthood in Chicago, Illinois (U.S.A).

As for us, we are contemporary followers of Jesus Christ, St. Francis and Saint Clare. We hold in deepest respect the mission of the Universal Church which continues from the first Apostles through to our time. We respect all Catholic Rites and traditions. We respect the Bishop of Rome as a successor to Peter and as the spiritual leader of the Roman Church. We regard the Roman tradition with the same respect accorded to all other Catholic Rites, traditions and churches that have preceded it and all those that have proceeded from

it. We are, however, not in union with, nor are we under the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Church. We like to be clear with others that we are not Roman Catholics.

We are baptized Christians who claim our birth right as Catholics of the Apostolic tradition who practice our faith according to the Gospels and in keeping with the accepted Creeds, Councils, Traditions and teachings of the Catholic faith. We are at heart an inclusive, ecumenical "experiment" in the simple practice of Gospel living in the secular world. As Independent Catholics, we desire to have the freedom to express our faith with our fear of repression, bigotry or intolerance.

We are still very much a small but growing group. We started out as a men's Order but decided to change that rule in order to accept women members as well. We do not have or use corporate funds or resources to support our member's ministries. We are very much a "grassroots" religious Order that is still in the "becoming" stages of it's journey. We trust in the guidance of the Gospels and the Holy Spirit to lead us and to keep us on our course.

Every Religious Order probably began as a small group of dedicated people of faith, and in that regard, we are no different. We each work for a living in various ordinary jobs in order to be self-sufficient and self-supporting. The idea of self-sufficiency is actually an old Franciscan tradition which seems to have been lost somewhere along the way. Among other things, it means that we are called to earn our daily bread through various ordinary labors just as other poor people must do in the world.

We live among God's people as opposed to living in cloistered, monastic settings. In every way, we have to experience the same day-to-day challenges faced by the people whom we serve but with one special difference in that we do it with Christ and for Christ and to witness Christ's presence in the secular world. Before you can truly understand what we are about and what we do, you must put aside your preconceived notions of the "religious life" as you may know it. You'd then need to contemplate the manner in which the first apostles set about to establish the Early Church. You'd also need to contemplate how St. Francis and his small rag-tag band of Little Brothers and Poor Clares set out on their mission to repair God's House. If you can comprehend not only what they did, but also the obstacles they overcame and the length of time it took them to begin to see the fruits of their labors, you'd begin to understand where we are heading with our call to the religious life in today's world.

In our own small way, we're seeking some spiritual direction from what they did on behalf of Christ and the Church so that we might bring it forward into our contemporary world today. What we are attempting to do is not really new. We know of others in the U.S. and other places around the world who are working in a similar manner. We're each approaching the "ministry" as well as the living mission of St. Francis in slightly different ways, but the goal is the same. We're each doing what we can in our small way to help repair God's House. We do this not as servants of the original "builders", but rather as servants of the original "occupant" of God's House. And when we speak of "God's House", we don't mean a church building or even a particular denomination, Rite or tradition, but rather the Universal Church, which encompasses all of God's people. We want to mend the fabric which binds all of God's people to our loving Creator. This is why our ministry is ecumenical and why we insist on embracing an unambiguous anti-discrimination policy not only regarding our members but also regarding those whom we serve. We not only make ourselves available to work in the traditional ministries that Franciscans have been performing for many years, but go a step further by actively working in social justice ministries that are often shied away from by some traditional Orders and denominations. We focus our time and talents in service to ministries which are concerned with issues of civil/human rights, diversity, equality, reconciliation, peace, human dignity, ecumenism and social justice. We do not attempt to "re-invent the wheel" in our work, but willingly work with existing organizations that could use our assistance.

We are sometimes mistaken as either a "lay" or a "tertiary" Order because we are independent and also because we live and work separately in the world. However, we are in fact a "First" Order Community comprised of men and women who are priests, Deacons, Brothers and Sisters who live and work in the secular world in a manner that is a contemporary extension of the early vision of the first Franciscans.

Bishop Steinhardt and Bishop DeFord announced the election our Founder to the full priesthood in the Fall of 2003 so that he would have Episcopal authority. This was to ensure that our Order has a Franciscan Bishop and that he has valid, Episcopal authority to ordain qualified men and women to Holy Orders and also incardinate priests and Deacons from other denominations who may wish to join us in the future. His consecration ensures that we will be able to expand our presence in our various communities with viable ministries that will include bringing the Sacraments to God's people.

Their Excellencies, The Most Reverend Michael R. Steinhardt and The Most Reverend Raphael B. DeFord came to the United States and on Sunday, May 23, 2004, consecrated The Most Reverend Russell F. Coates, Jr., FDP as the first Metropolitan Bishop of Rocky Hill. Bishop Russell was installed as the Presiding Bishop of the Trinitarian Catholic Church, which is his Ecclesial Jurisdiction. He is the first Franciscan Bishop to our Order.

Please visit our Official FDP Web Site:
<http://www.FranciscansOfDivineProvidence.org/>

If you are interested in joining our Order, we first ask that you visit our web site and read it thoroughly. The application for admission can be downloaded from our web site which has a further explanation of the admission requirements. Please read the instructions carefully before submitting your application, a recent photo and other pertinent documentation. We believe that most of the questions you may have about us are explained on our web site, however, if you have specific vocations questions, just write to us and ask at: Franciscans@saintly.com

I hope that this provides you with some additional helpful information. If you visit the Links page on our web site, you can join our E-group. I thank you once again for visiting our web site and for considering joining us. We look forward to hearing from you again.

God bless you!
Sincerely yours, in Christ,

+ *Bishop Russell F. Coates, Jr. FDP*

+The Most Reverend Russell F. Coates, Jr., FDP, M.Div.
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Repairing God's House, One Stone at a Time