

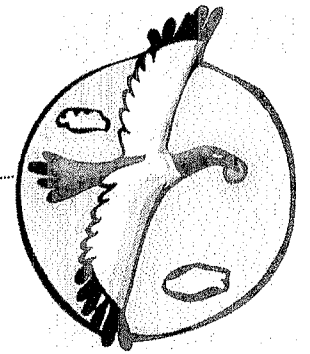
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# The Third Order Society of St Francis

Chasing the Small  
Bird



## Grey Warbler

When Francis preached to the birds  
and told them to praise our Heavenly Father  
for all they had been so freely given,  
Were you there, little bird, in that feathered congregation  
already practising your sweet melody in a minor key?  
Did Francis know that your song, wandering, rising, and falling,  
haunting and elusive, as you darted from branch to branch,  
would speak to the yearning in my heart?  
Always beckoning me to follow,  
leading me in praise to our Creator,  
and onwards to my heart's true home,  
Oh sweet Spirit of God.

*The New Zealand Grey Warbler is a small native bird that lives in the bush. It weighs just 6.5g, and has pale grey feathers. It has a very distinctive wavering trill that rises and falls in a minor key. It builds unusual, pear-shaped nests that are suspended from twigs.*

Gospel as our guide. We need to ask God to forgive us every day. There is always an opportunity to visit a priest to take part in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (confession). Every Tertiary has a Spiritual Director who helps us in our life with Christ and helps us with our journey with God. We need to meet our director regularly, at least once a year, but it is recommended that it is more often.

- R **Prayer:** we need to spend time in prayer and listening to God every day.
- R **Denial:** we need to think of things that separate us from God and talk to our spiritual director about them.
- R **Retreat:** we need to go away on a retreat at least once a year. It is good to go on retreat with other Tertiaries.
- R **Study:** we need to study the Bible and other books that help us to understand God and the way of St Francis.
- R **Simplicity:** we need to be careful not to be wasteful, and to live simply.
- R **Work:** we have to see how, in our everyday life, we can work for Christ. We must be careful not to forget our families, where God has put us. Remember, God has put us where he wants us to be.
- R **Obedience:** this means being open to God and to ourselves—to not use excuses and to try to follow the way of Francis in all our decisions.

Every Tertiary has a spiritual director who helps us in our life with Christ. We need to meet our director regularly, at least three times a year.

We renew our vows every year at St Francistide, and meet with other Tertiaries where we live. This may mean we have to travel to meetings.

## Conclusion

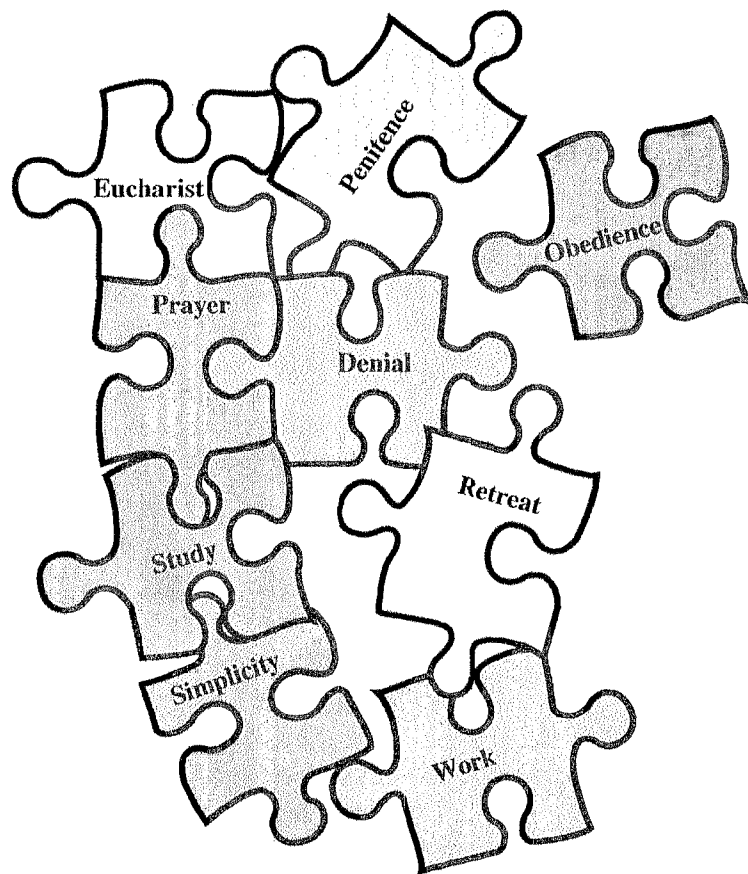
Our Rule of Life is to help us keep our eyes on walking in the footprints of Christ as St Francis did. It is so easy to slip away from the path.

Once we have set out on this journey of the spirit we come to realise that we are indeed on our way to God's kingdom.



## Personal Rule of Life

Our Personal Rule of Life has nine parts, which are all linked together like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Each Tertiary writes their own Rule of Life, covering each of the following elements:



### Elements of the Rule of Life

- ☞ **Eucharist:** the Eucharist is at the heart of our calling, so therefore it is important that we receive it as often as we can.
- ☞ **Penitence:** this section asks us to look at the way we live, with the

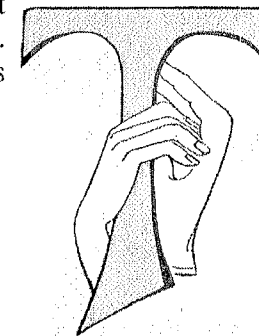


## Chasing the Small Bird

This little booklet is about going on a journey of the spirit.

We in the Third Order of the Society of St Francis are going on a spiritual journey for the rest of our lives, and St Francis of Assisi shows us how to go on that journey.

Sometimes we may feel that our journey is not very spiritual, but if we look to Jesus we can carry on. We find sooner or later that we are travelling towards our real home, which is the Kingdom of Heaven.



A Tertiary is a member of the Third Order Society of St Francis

In the Society of St Francis there are three Orders:

- ☞ **The Brothers and Sisters of the First Order** live in a Friary or a special house under vows, and because they love their Lord they work in the world to help people who need them.
- ☞ **The Sisters of the Second Order (the Poor Clares)** live under vows in a "closed" house. They spend their lives in prayer.
- ☞ **The Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order (Tertiaries)** can be lay people or ordained people, who live in their own homes and work at ordinary work. They make a life vow to tell of the Gospels and to live the life of love that embraces all.

The three Orders make up the Society of St Francis and are joined by the insight of St Francis; by prayer, study, and thinking of God and our Lord Jesus.

Before we tell you about how we follow the Spirit of Christ in our daily lives, we will tell you about the Aim of the Third Order.



## The Aim

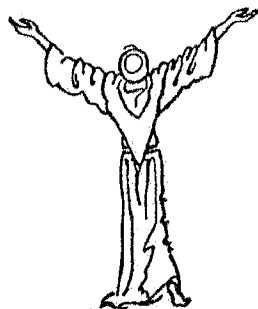
*The Aim of Tertiary Franciscans is to make our Lord known and loved everywhere as St Francis did, and to live simply as brothers and sisters in Christ.*

## Openness

This is the special order which the Gospel has given us, and which helps us to shape our lives in the way of St Francis. We take the Gospels into our hearts like St Francis did, and live them in the life of the church and the world. The word of God is calling us to let his Spirit work in us, so that people who live near us may see a little bit of his kingdom.

Every year Professed Tertiaries renew their life vows, and place a copy of their Personal Rule of Life on the altar. When we do this, we offer ourselves to be open to the Holy Spirit, just as St Francis did. This means letting the Holy Spirit use us so that we live our lives daily. Openness is more than reading the Bible and praying. It is more like asking ourselves, "Would Jesus like me to do that?" before we act, or "Where is Jesus in this situation?"

We offer to God all that we are and all that we have. We know that, to Christ, all people are equal. We are all children of God, even those who do not follow Jesus.



## Prayer

Jesus said, 'Where two or three people are gathered in my name, I am there too,' (Matthew 18:20).

The very centre of our prayer life is in the Holy Eucharist.

We need to confess our sins, and see how far away from God's goodness we can sometimes be. We need to ask God to help us be the person he wants us to be.

We need to take time each day to pray and to think about the greatness of God.

## Study

We need to spend time thinking of what the Bible says to us; so when we read a little bit of the Bible, we stop and think about it.

Daily devotions may help you to understand what you are reading.

## Work

We care for the sick and those who are poor and who have no freedom. We care lovingly for our families.

When we care for the people no-one else wants to help, we need to be brave and stick up for them. Our work is to stand by people who need us.

Our Personal Rule of Life helps us to do this.



## Chastity

Jesus said, 'You must love God with everything you have.' (Matthew 22:37): that means with all your heart and soul. It means putting God first in our lives; to love and help people, and not mind if they do not say thank you. We need to be a loving and caring family in the world, and to stay with people that others don't like because of who they are.

It means taking chances like Jesus did.



## To obey

Jesus said, 'If you love me, you will do as I say.' (John 5:15). To do this, we have to be ready to be lovers of God and of all people. It means helping God make the world a place of love.

We help anyone who needs help.

We can do our best to lead people when we are asked to.

To obey God is to be gentle and peaceful, and to try to live the love of God. This what the first disciples did. Like them, we know that Jesus was born the only Son of God. He lived a life of ministry, died, and rose again, and was taken up to heaven. He did this to make the love of God known to everyone. When we are happy to show God's wonderful love day by day, we are helping to make him known and loved everywhere.

How do we do this? We need to pray, to study God's word, and to work for God.



## How do Franciscans live?

The Gospel calls us to forget ourselves and to live a new life putting other people first. We are asked to take up our cross and follow Jesus, even when we don't feel safe. If we do this, the Holy Spirit can work in us and give us strength.

We wonder if, when Jesus calls us to take up our cross, he is asking us to do the things that he would like us to do but that we don't want to do. When we do the things in life that Jesus has taught us that he wants us to do, we find our lives changing. For Francis, his life started to change when he put his arms around the leper. We are all asked to love those people whom most people don't love. We have to ask God to help us do these things all the time.

We have to obey God and spend time with him, to read a little of the Bible (especially the New Testament) every day, and to pray and think about his word to us.

We need to be humble, to be joyful, and to love. This is what made St Francis special, and this is how we should be as his followers.

## Humility

Jesus said, 'Accept my teachings and learn from me, because I am gentle and humble in spirit, and you will find rest for your souls.' (Matthew 11:29)

In John's Gospel, Jesus says, 'I tell you the truth: a grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die to make many seeds.' (John 12:24)

Jesus was talking about how his death would bring many followers. Francis tried to follow Jesus, and think only of God and not of himself. We too need to put God first in our lives and listen to his teachings.

Humility means to forget about yourself and do God's will. When we do this as St Francis did, we become full of love.



## Love

Love comes from God. The Christian message is love. In St John's first letter, he writes, 'We love, because God loved us first. If someone says, "I love God but I hate my brother," he is telling lies.' (1 John 4:19) We must see everyone as our brother or sister. Francis went further and saw every living creature as his brother or sister. He spoke of "Brother Wolf". Can we go this far?

Another side of love is in the mystery of the cross. Christ showed real love in his life and death, in giving himself freely and humbly with no thought for himself. He knew where this would lead him.

This type of love that God calls us to is not a sexual love; it is one of giving and can be frightening because it leads to the cross. Franciscan love starts with our brothers and sisters and goes out to everyone we meet.

## Joy

The love we have been talking about brings with it a special type of joy. In John's Gospel, Jesus said, 'I have told you about these things so that you can have the same joy that I have, and that it will be the best possible joy.' (John 15:11)

This type of joy comes from our love of God, putting God first, and in the goodness of all things God made.



We can still have this joy even when we are hurting very badly. It is a kind of peace, and knowing that God is with us sharing our trouble. It is the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Francis was in terrible pain from when he received the stigmata until he died two years later, yet his joy was wonderful to see.

Our Third Order Rule is to live a life of simplicity in a spirit of brotherhood, and to be obedient to our vocation to make the Lord known and loved everywhere.



## Tertiaries make three vows

To live simply  
To live in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood  
To make our Lord known and loved everywhere

Tertiaries renew these vows every year at St Franciside (4 October). They are life vows. These vows help us stay on the path in our walk with God.

## What do these vows mean?

To live simply

Those people who know they have great spiritual needs are happy, because the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. (Matthew 5:3)

Here are some Franciscan ideas about living simply and being poor:

- R We are not talking about money; we are talking about our need for God, and having a deep respect for all of God's creation
- R It is not taking more than we should from the natural world
- R It is seeing the good and beauty in all things
- R It is knowing that all we have belongs to God
- R It is not having power over other people's lives—remember Jesus said, 'The leader shall be like the servant.' (Luke 22:26)
- R It is being humble and putting others first

