

Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone was born in late summer or fall, 1181, in Assisi, Italy. Renamed Francesco by his father, he became Saint Francis to the rest of the world.

Francis was reared in a well-to-do household, imitated the troubadours and knights of his time, became a prisoner of war at 21; and soon after, before the crucifix in the chapel of San Damiano, began a lifetime of spiritual transformation. He began nursing lepers and repairing broken churches. He vowed to live a life "in obedience, in chastity and without property; and to follow the teaching and footsteps of Christ."

His first followers were brothers, or friars, and later became officially recognized as a religious order known as the Friars Minor ('Little Brothers'). One of his early followers was a wealthy and beautiful young woman named Clare. She left all comfort for a life of hardship and prayer. Her devout life attracted other women. They became known as the "Poor Ladies," and later as "Poor Clares". This was the "Second Order" of St. Francis.

Francis soon recognized that there were people who could not give up their spouses, children, or jobs who desired to follow him in a spirit of renunciation, prayer and service. He responded by establishing the "Brothers and Sisters of Penance". This "Third Order" is known in several forms, often referred to as "Secular Franciscans." The Anglican TSSF identifies itself in this tradition, while the Anglican SSF and CSF are "First Order" men and women, respectively. Members of the Third Order (known as "Tertiaries") take a Rule of Life for themselves which includes prayer, meditation, active service and renewed commitment to the Church.

Though our form of life is most generally that of a secular order, the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans has resisted identifying itself as a "Third Order" for several reasons. One is the simple fact that we have members whose lives more nearly reflect that of the "First Order" brothers and sisters. Another is that through the years, the designations "First", "Second", and "Third" have mistakenly been seen as a ranking of status, rather than as the chronological designations which they were originally. As an *ecumenical* Order, bearing witness to the wholeness of the household (Greek:

*oikos*

) of God, we seek to model that wholeness within our own community. The OEF remains a single Order, with no aim to separate into separate institutions according to the various expressions of Franciscan vocation within our membership.