

THE THIRD ORDER OF THE SOCIETY OF ST FRANCIS.

EUROPEAN PROVINCE.

Questionnaire (March, 2009).

*This questionnaire (with permission of the Provincial Chapter of TSSF) was addressed to **182 professed Tertiaries and Novices** in 4 Areas of the European Province. It was confidential and anonymous.*

The results are entered on the form itself, a short version of the full Report. The statistics are recorded in full. The 'comment' boxes contain a brief summary of representative opinions.

GENERAL INFORMATION

1. There were 110 respondents, (60.44% of the sample):

(a) Novices: **10 respondents.**

(b) Professed: **100 respondents.** Year of Profession: **between 1951 & 2008.**

2. Area: numbers of respondents:

East Anglia: **37** / London South: **22** / London West: **24** / Oxford: **22**

Unknown: **5**

PARTICIPATION IN TSSF

3. I feel part of a national and worldwide Third Order community.

Strongly Disagree / Disagree / Neither / Agree / Strongly agree

2%

5%

3%

58%

32%

Comment (3): The majority of respondents agreed with this statement through their experiences in the Order, especially attendance at the York Chapter in 2006, meeting other Tertiaries from across the world, being Provincial or Area Officers (which gave a broader view), or through praying with the intercession lists for SSF as a whole. A minority did not feel so widely connected

4. What is it that brought you into the Order?

Comment 4: A number of respondents felt a clear sense of vocation to the Order. Others were searching for a Christian community which might nurture and inspire them more than their local church. Others looked to the Order to help them be more regular or systematic in their spiritual lives. Others wished to be part of the Franciscan movement, and very many were inspired by meeting with First Order Brothers in earlier years, or had Franciscan friends already in TSSF.

5. What is your level of participation in the Order, bearing in mind those obligations particularly related to personal formation?

(a) Making or renewal of pledge during the last 12 months:

Yes: **92%** / No: **5%** / no response: **3%**

Those who had not renewed were sick, disabled or very elderly.

(b).Rule of Life.

How important to you is your Rule of Life?

Essential / a part of life routine / needs revision / other / no response.

41%

47%

8%

1%

3%

Comment 5(b): 88% of respondents wrote about the significant importance of the personal Rule of Life in providing a structure for their religious lives. A small number of Tertiaries, (8%), mainly disabled or ill, were awaiting the opportunity to revise their Rule. Some Tertiaries revise their Rule with their Spiritual Director frequently; others have found that it is simple enough to stand the test of time, and is rarely altered. Novices may be still working on their Rule; one wrote: 'This has been fundamental to my personal spiritual journey and has given me a completely different understanding/perspective on Christianity.' A very elderly Solitary in a Care Home wrote: 'My Rule has changed from a Rule to a prayer.'

(c) Attendance at Local Group:

Regular / occasional / rare / not at all .
82% 9% 8% 1%

(d) Attendance at Area Meetings:

regular / occasional / rare / not at all / no response
67% 12% 10% 2% 9%

(e) During the last 12 months, have you:

- **attended the Eucharist weekly or more often? Yes: 98% / No: 2%**
- **seen your Spiritual director? Yes: 95% / No: 4% no response: 1%**
- **attended a Retreat? Yes: 74% / No: 25% / No response: 1%**

(f) Private prayer:

Perhaps you would be willing to share something about the pattern of your private prayer below:

Comment 5(f): Almost all respondents provided a detailed response on prayer. Many rise early to pray and often have a second prayer time later in the day. The SSF Daily Office is very important, especially Morning and Evening prayer. Frequently a period of silent reflection/meditation is included – ‘waiting on God.’ Some struggle with this; for others it is the core of their prayer life. Some experienced their prayer, (although they were alone), as ‘part of Franciscan prayer,’ alongside other members of SSF. A few respondents were struggling – often as a result of illness.

(g) Do you include the Community Obedience prayers in your private prayers?

Daily / weekly / occasionally / not at all / no response
44% 10% 28% 17% 1%

(h) Do you reflect upon the Principles of the Third Order?

Daily / weekly / occasionally / not at all
51% 6% 37% 6%

(i) Have you undertaken any work for TSSF during the last 12 months?

- **office holder at Area or Provincial level:** Yes: **28%**
- **other tasks for TSSF** (eg. leading a retreat or acting as Novice Guardian). Yes: **29%**
- **comment on the work (inside the Order or otherwise) which is most important in your religious vocation.**

Comment 5(i): 57% of respondents were either Officers at Area or Provincial level within the Order, or involved as Novice Guardians, members of TSSF special interest Networks, leading retreats or training events for the Order. Twenty one respondents were priests, including Parish priests; also, there are a number of Readers in Parish ministry; plus many others who are heavily involved in work for their church. Some Tertiaries were involved in the voluntary sector, either employed or as volunteers: for example working with the homeless or with asylum seekers. Yet others had pressing family commitments: caring for an autistic child or a very disabled elderly person, where ‘commitment is total.’

(j) Have you undertaken any religious study during the last 12 months?

Yes: **78%** / No: **15%** / No response: **7%**

Did this include anything relating to the tradition, documents, teaching or spirituality of the Franciscan way?

Yes: **53%** / No: **34%** / No response: **13%**

Comment 5(j): The comments on Study were rather thin in comparison with those on prayer and work. However, most Tertiaries are involved in regular Bible study. Fewer, but still more than 50%, said they were studying Franciscan material, either in their Local Groups, or by reading or attending university courses. A minority were very engaged in study and writing on a regular basis, some through the Study and Prayer network. A few mentioned problems, such as poor sight or illness, which interfere with study. Others would like to be more involved but need the help of their Group to initiate the process.

(6) Please indicate what ‘community’ in the Order means to you.

Comment 6: Respondents took a lot of trouble thinking about this question. The importance of Local Groups, which certainly would not have featured so large in answers 10 years ago, was striking. An example illustrates this: ‘Community, in the local sense, means a given group of people with whom I try to work out what it means to be a Franciscan – a group with loving inter-dependence; in the wider sense, it means belonging to an International Order, which attempts to live in accordance with Franciscan ideals, based on our Principles.’ Another answer concluded: ‘It is important to feel part of a community rather than try to follow the Franciscan life on one’s own.’ The importance of communal prayer, close fellowship and a shared vision were stressed

SYSTEMS FOR SUPPORT IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

(7) (Novices : 10 responses)

Do you consider that the Order is providing you with the support you need in learning about TSSF, and guiding your vocation and spiritual development?

Yes / in part

8

2

Comment 7:

The Review of 1998/9 had praised the system of formation for postulants and novices. Novices, responding to this questionnaire, were generally positive in their comments about their experience in the novitiate. I record three comments. ‘My Novice Guardian has years of Third Order experience. I have learned more in the time I have been in the Order – just over a year – than I did in four years in a convent,’ ‘I have regular contact with my Novice Guardian. The Area also has Novice Study days, where one is able to meet other novices and those involved in formation.’ ‘It is a new beginning for me, I feel included and supported by the Small Group and the Novice Guardian.’

(8) (*Tertiary priests: 21 responses*)

What do you look for from the Third Order in relation to emotional support and spiritual formation? As a priest, are you finding what you need?

Comment 8(a):

Tertiary priests, who responded to the questionnaire, were somewhat split in their views about the Order, but they seemed to be agreed on one thing. They wanted to be, as one put it, 'a member of the Laos', a regular member, one of the group, not the one to whom people automatically turn as the leader *because* of being a priest. One wrote: 'There appears to be a tendency/expectation that as a priest you must automatically want to lead the discussion or worship. Personally, I learn a lot from being alongside the laity and being treated as an equal.' Another, whose group seemed to be aware of this dilemma, wrote: 'In all my years as a parish priest, the endless round of meetings became wearing. The Local Group did not add to this, but provided relief, even nurture.'

However, there was not a high expectation of either support or formation from the Order by some priests: 'I get more support from friends, and formation from my Spiritual Director.' There were some critical comments about the quality of meetings: 'Local Group meetings often bore me; Area Meetings I find badly planned and run.' On the other hand, there were some very positive comments about the Order: 'It is my scaffold; I cannot operate without it.'

Comment 8(b): How do you rate the Third Order among your priorities?

In terms of priority, a number of priests felt that 'church work comes first, especially pastoral work.' However, probably half the respondents gave the Order high priority in their lives, with particular emphasis on its spiritual importance to them.

(9) (*Tertiaries with particular needs: 16 responses*).

Does the Order meet your *individual* needs in relation to support and formation in the spiritual life?

Comment 9: Members who answered this question were mainly affected by isolation, disability or illness, old age or were from families with children. Comments varied between those who had been wonderfully supported by the members of their Group, to others whose experience was much less supportive. Travel to meetings appears to be a big problem for some older people, especially, but not only, in rural areas. Two comments stressed the difficulties Tertiaries with children face. One writes: 'I don't think TSSF relates very well to members with family commitments. I worry this will result in TSSF being led by those who are 55+ , family left home and middle class, and not reflecting the values of all members.'

(10) **Local Groups**

Does your Local Group support your on-going nurture and formation?

Yes / In part / No / Not applicable (overseas/solitary)

54% 41% 3% 2%

Comment 10(a): If Yes, how? There were many very positive comments about the Local Groups, and probably half the respondents experienced their groups as extremely valuable: 'Meeting others is where "community" really happens, where TSSF becomes a reality.' 'The Local Group is the bedrock of the Order.' 'Essential - living in community.' However, some members did not fit well with their group: one missed the stimulus of her previous group; others felt that meetings need a better format, could be better managed. One wrote 'Local Group thinking needs further revision;'; another wrote: 'It is something that I feel needs further research and attention. Advances made during the novitiate are not always followed up after profession.' In relation to formation, one Tertiary raised an important issue: 'Fellow members of my Small Group are most supportive and caring, but I do not think this amounts to "formation" in the spiritual life.'

Comment 10(b): If not, can you suggest how the Group could help you more? One Tertiary wrote: 'I would like more contact and involvement with other Small Groups, in order to get more input and learn a variety of approaches to meeting.' Another suggested that there should be a clearer role definition for Convenors and special training and support for them. A respondent raised the general issue of study of the process of small groups, which might help in the resolution of difficulties as they arise. There are also some imponderables, for example: where members of groups are collectively getting older and frailer; where groups are now too small, but geographically distant from others with which they might merge.

11(a) How useful are Area Meetings in terms of your nurture and formation?

Very useful / useful / not useful

32% 51% 17%

Comment 11(a): Area Meetings have perhaps been less central since the Review of 1998/9 and the re-organisation round Local Groups as the 'spiritual cell.' There have also been geographical changes, which some regret - in S. London, for example. One Tertiary described a clear role for the Area Meetings: 'They link us into the Order, and can provide a different kind of stimulus from the Group. I particularly value the shared Renewal each year as a sign of our common membership of the whole Order. The existence of the Area is a safeguard against groups getting too inward looking.' Another writes: 'Ours is quite a large Area; it is helpful to come together as one larger group – to pray together, to make new friends and get to know each other. The study time is helpful.' Some had more mixed views, especially about the quality of planning: 'Usually not enough thought into input, and/or poor presentation.' A respondent writes: 'I think Area Meetings lack focus – more attention to formation/nurture would be good.' In rural Areas and where transport connections are poor, travel to meetings can be difficult and may lead to low attendance

11(b) **Would you like to know more about your Area Team’s work within the Area?**

Yes / maybe / know enough / no response

15% 19% 46% 20%

11(c) **Is there anything your Area Team could do to be more supportive of the nurture and formation of novices and/or professed members of the Order in your Area?**

Yes / No / Don’t know / No response

22% 19% 40% 19%

Comment 11(c): Many respondents could not answer this question. Those who did probably had experience at Area Team level, so suggestions were practical. For example: ‘Change the shape of the Area Team meetings from business meetings with chat, to focusing on formation for Groups, Areas and individuals, with advice to back that up;’ or: ‘Formation Guardians, Area Novice Guardians and Novice Guardians could benefit from more Provincial training facilities.’ Other comments suggested that some Tertiaries are: ‘not really clear how the Area Team is constituted and how it works.’ Others do not want to be closely involved: ‘More paper is not welcome.’

12) How much influence have the **First and/or Second Orders of St Francis** had on your spiritual formation?

A great deal / some influence / none at all / no response

42% 46% 6% 6%

Comment 12: The love and admiration for the First and Second Order Brothers and Sisters is very clear from responses. Longer-professed Tertiaries often joined the Order through the influence of First Order missions, camps and retreats. Many in TSSF have long standing friendships with members of the other Orders. They are also Spiritual Directors to many Tertiaries. One respondent wrote sadly: ‘In the 1950s to 1970s we were always linked (attached) to a First Order Brother. This was invaluable and made a great difference to me. I was

influenced by a number of them – today, sadly, I do not meet or know any.’ This is perhaps the down side of the change in leadership in TSSF over the last 30-40 years from Friars to Tertiaries, which in general has been welcomed as a ‘coming of age.’ A complicating factor is the reduction in membership of the other Orders. Some newer Tertiaries have never had contact with First or Second Order members, and may even be confused about the difference between the Orders.

THE THREE AIMS

The First Aim: To make Our Lord known and loved everywhere.

The Second Aim: To spread the spirit of love and harmony.

The Third Aim: To live simply.

(13)(a) What are the most challenging aspects of the Three Aims for you?

Comment 13(a) One respondent writes: ‘All are very challenging and it is only with God’s grace that the Three Aims can be *partially* achieved.’ Others concurred with this view.

Many saw the **First Aim** as difficult because evangelism is not welcome in our society: ‘I have never been one for evangelising, standing on soap boxes, so I follow the First Aim by just being me, and hope that people can see Christ in who I am and how I live.’ Others were concerned about the multi-faith aspect: ‘I am not keen on pressing the Christian proclamation on other faiths.’ Many were struggling with the **Third Aim**: ‘I am currently grappling with what it means to me (and the Order) to live simply. Nothing we do remotely resembles Francis’s poverty. How do I recognise living in the spirit of Francis in relation to Lady Poverty? Am I just opting out of the challenge of Francis?’ Many respondents compared their privileged lifestyles with the poverty of others and were afflicted with guilt. However, one wrote: ‘Living simply for us is an attitude of mind and aimed to set us free rather than literally embracing poverty. Francis experienced it as joy and so should we.’ The **Second Aim** seemed to be less hard to interpret for our times, although still challenging, especially speaking out against injustice on the one hand and living with one’s nearest and dearest on the other!

(b) Do you interpret some aspects of the Three Aims in a specifically Franciscan way?

Yes	/	No	/	Did not understand question	/	no response
56%		26%		6%		12%

Comment 13(b) One point of view was that: 'These should be the Aims of every committed Christian.' Another wrote: 'Although these are Christian aims, I do not believe I would have thought about them so much had I not joined the Third Order.' Some Tertiaries thought particular aspects of the Aims were distinctively Franciscan, especially Francis's approach to poverty. One respondent mentioned the difficult tension between the 13th century context and that of the 21st century: 'It is a constant challenge to apply insights Francis and Clare had to modern life.'

(c) The nurture and formation I receive as a Member of the Order enables me to grapple very seriously with these Aims in my life.

Strongly disagree	/	Disagree	/	Neither	/	Agree	/	Agree strongly	/	No response
0%		7%		16%		49%		15%		13%

Comment 13(c): There were mixed responses to this question, some positive, others much less so. One respondent wrote: 'Membership of the Order provides a focus and brings us back to Franciscan Aims. It also requires a measure of discipline to remain faithful. Renewal time is the Franciscan highlight of the year, helping me to reflect on my Rule as a guideline to my nurture and formation as a Tertiary.' Another writes: 'I think this happens most through my Group and my discussions with my Director who is a Tertiary.' Novices wrote positively, for example: 'My Novice counsellor was excellent – very disciplined – and I was able to mould my life on these Aims.' Others felt the Order had work to do: 'Formation could be more systematic and developed.' Some were disappointed: 'Membership of the Order has not helped me much.'

**THE THREE NOTES.
Humility, Joy and Love**

14. How does this section of the Rule help you in understanding the charism - the graced gift of God - which should mark a Franciscan Order and its members?

Comment 14: One respondent wrote: 'The brevity and simple explanations of these Principles is exemplary, and encourages reflection without being dogmatic.' Another writes: 'I like the clear recognition that these are gifts of the Spirit, offered if we will accept them. And I like the way that they are inter-dependent and closely linked – humility happens if we forget ourselves and love our neighbour, and joy is the fruit of the other two.'

(15) To sum up, how does membership of the Order most influence you: give examples from your daily life.

Comment 15: Below are a few examples of the many positive comments:

- It is a perpetual reminder of the need to suspend the desires of my ego, and to make way for the desire for and the desires of God.
- It gives me an identity and a way of living with the tension between a busy active life and a contemplative, prayerful, quiet life.
- It helps me to be disciplined in my life, reminds me of what is really important, rather than what society around me thinks.
- It is a sort of rock on which I can rest throughout all the ups and downs of life.

Denise Mumford, TSSF,
denise.mumford@zen.co.uk
phone: (020 8946 5343.)

20th March, 2009.