

# society of saint francis

**Society of Saint Francis** is a religious community rooted in the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, one of Christianity's most beloved saints. Founded in the early 20th century, the Society of Saint Francis is a part of the Anglican Communion and emphasizes a life of simplicity, humility, and service to others. This article delves into the origins, mission, practices, and impact of the Society of Saint Francis, providing a comprehensive overview of this unique religious community.

## Historical Background

### Origins of the Society

The Society of Saint Francis (SSF) was established in 1910 in England by Father Richard Meux Benson and a small group of like-minded individuals inspired by the life and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi. The community sought to embody Franciscan values in a modern context, focusing on the principles of poverty, humility, and care for creation.

### Development Through the Years

Since its inception, the Society of Saint Francis has expanded its reach and influence. The following key milestones highlight its development:

1. 1910: Foundation of the Society in England.
2. 1920s: Expansion to the United States, where the SSF established its first American house.
3. 1960s-1970s: Growth into other countries and a commitment to social justice issues.
4. 21st Century: Continued focus on environmental justice, interfaith dialogue, and serving marginalized communities.

## Mission and Values

### Core Mission

The mission of the Society of Saint Francis is to follow the example of Saint Francis by living a life of love, service, and simplicity. This involves:

- Embracing Poverty: Members live a life of voluntary simplicity, often choosing to live without excess material possessions.
- Promoting Peace: The SSF is dedicated to fostering peace in a world filled with conflict and division.
- Caring for Creation: Inspired by Francis's love for nature, the Society emphasizes

environmental stewardship and sustainability.

## **Values of the Community**

The Society upholds several core values that guide its members:

- Community: Living in fellowship and supporting one another in prayer and service.
- Service: Actively engaging in outreach and mission work to serve those in need.
- Joy: Finding joy in service and community, reflecting the joy that Saint Francis found in his life.

## **Structure and Organization**

### **Religious Life**

Members of the Society of Saint Francis typically commit to a religious life that includes vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The community is divided into different orders:

1. Friars: Male members who take the vows and live in community.
2. Sisters: Female members who also commit to the Franciscan way of life.
3. Secular Members: Individuals who live out Franciscan values in their everyday lives without formal vows.

### **Governance**

The Society is governed by a General Minister and a council, which oversees the various houses and ministries within the community. Each house operates semi-autonomously, with local leadership supporting the mission of the Society in their respective areas.

## **Spiritual Practices**

### **Prayer and Worship**

Prayer is central to the life of the Society of Saint Francis. Members engage in various spiritual practices, including:

- Daily Prayer: Community prayers, including the Liturgy of the Hours, are integral to their daily routine.
- Retreats: Regular retreats are organized for spiritual renewal and reflection.
- Sacraments: Participation in the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, is central to their communal worship.

## **Service and Outreach**

Service is a hallmark of the Society's mission, and members are involved in various outreach programs, including:

- Food Banks: Providing meals and support to those facing food insecurity.
- Homeless Shelters: Offering shelter and support services to homeless individuals and families.
- Environmental Initiatives: Leading efforts in environmental conservation and education.

## **Community Life**

### **Living in Community**

Members of the Society of Saint Francis live together in community houses, where they support one another in their spiritual and practical lives. Community life involves:

- Shared Meals: Regular communal meals help to foster fellowship and strengthen bonds among members.
- Work and Ministry: Members contribute to the community through their skills and talents, participating in shared ministries.
- Recreation and Fellowship: Time is set aside for relaxation and socializing, allowing members to build friendships and support each other.

## **Interfaith Dialogue**

The Society of Saint Francis is committed to promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding. Members engage with individuals from different faith traditions through:

- Community Events: Hosting discussions and events that encourage cooperation and mutual respect among various religious groups.
- Educational Initiatives: Offering programs that educate about the beliefs and practices of different faiths, fostering a spirit of understanding.

## **Impact and Legacy**

### **Social Justice and Advocacy**

The Society of Saint Francis has been an advocate for social justice, focusing on issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. Their impact includes:

- Local Initiatives: Supporting grassroots movements and local organizations that address social issues.
- Global Advocacy: Engaging in international efforts to address systemic injustices and

promote peace.

## **Environmental Stewardship**

In line with Francis's teachings, the Society emphasizes the importance of caring for creation. Their initiatives include:

- Sustainable Practices: Implementing eco-friendly practices in their communities and ministries.
- Education and Awareness: Raising awareness about environmental issues and advocating for sustainable policies.

## **Conclusion**

The Society of Saint Francis embodies the spirit and teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi, focusing on a life of service, simplicity, and community. Through their commitment to social justice, interfaith dialogue, and environmental stewardship, the SSF continues to make a significant impact in the lives of individuals and communities around the world. As they move forward, the Society remains dedicated to living out the values of love, peace, and joy, fostering a world that reflects the inclusive and compassionate nature of their patron saint.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the Society of Saint Francis?**

The Society of Saint Francis is a religious order within the Anglican Communion, founded in the early 20th century, dedicated to living a life of simplicity, service, and community, inspired by the teachings of Saint Francis of Assisi.

### **What are the main values upheld by the Society of Saint Francis?**

The Society emphasizes values such as humility, compassion for the poor, stewardship of creation, and living a life of prayer and service, reflecting the Franciscan spirit of love and care for all living beings.

### **How does the Society of Saint Francis engage with the community?**

Members of the Society actively engage with local communities through various outreach programs, including food banks, shelters, and environmental initiatives, aimed at addressing social justice issues and promoting sustainability.

## **What role does spirituality play in the Society of Saint Francis?**

Spirituality is central to the Society's mission, with members participating in communal prayer, worship, and retreats, fostering a deep connection with God and encouraging a lifestyle that reflects their spiritual commitments.

## **How can individuals get involved with the Society of Saint Francis?**

Individuals can get involved with the Society by attending local events, volunteering for outreach programs, joining in communal worship, or exploring membership options to live out their faith in a Franciscan manner.

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