

1-800-FRANCIS

“Who ya gonna call?”

Who do you call when you need information about the Secular Franciscan Order? How about calling a toll free number answered by a nationally appointed Secular Franciscan? For the past 19 years our Order has publicized the use of 1-800-FRANCIS as a way to help those who feel a call to the Franciscan life. For these many years those calling 1-800-FRANCIS have been greeted by the gracious voice of Marie Amore.

This past March our National Minister Tom Bello sent a letter to the National Fraternity with news about our 1-800-FRANCIS number. A day later our former National Minister Dick Morton shared the story of how 1-800-FRANCIS came to be *the* information line for the OFS. Their letters follow.

March 26, 2014

To: National OFS Fraternity

From: Tom Bello, National Minister

Beloved National Family,

May the Lord give us Peace!

One of the best people in the world is passing responsibilities for the 1-800-FRANCIS Vocations "Hotline" over to one of the best people in the world, and this is a cause for rejoicing, prayers and thanks all around!

Since 1995, I think, Marie has answered the calls on the 1-800-FRANCIS line, an amazing service to our need for Vocations. In her 2013 Report to our NAFRA Chapter, Marie wrote, "the total inquiries for the year (was) about 900, bringing the grand total from 1995 to 2013 to 18,223 as of this writing." Wow!

As we pray for you, I want to thank you, Marie, on behalf of the whole National Family, for all the phone calls answered and for all the people sent in the right direction.

And thank you, Carol Gentile, our former National Minister, for stepping forward to give Marie a well-earned respite. I really feel that the best way to "recruit" new members into our aging Order is by personal invitation. I also know that for more than a few people that personal invitation began by calling the 1-800-FRANCIS number, and I cannot think, Carol, of anyone better than you to be that first person they meet to find out about our Secular Franciscan life.

Marie and Carol, you both have been heroes of mine practically since I've known there was a National Fraternity. May God always bless you for your love of and service to our great Franciscan family.

Carol, you are now "officially" a member of our Vocations Committee, which includes, among others, Jeff Ramirez as Chair and Jane DeRose Bamman as a member, two special people you might possibly remember from glorious All-Commission days. I hope you can do whatever you can, with the Holy Spirit, to help us keep our Order going for another few years, God willing! Thanks to all of you.

Permit me to close with our prayer for Vocations:

NATIONAL PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS to the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

O, Good and Gracious God,
God of mercy, compassion, generosity, and love,
As we live our lives today in the model of St. Francis,
choosing daily to live the Gospel life,
Help us to help others hear Your call.

Help us to help others to recognize
their vocation as a Secular Franciscan
that You have already planted in their heart.
Help us, so that together we all may work
to bring the Gospel to life.
Amen!

*Prayer composed by Marian R. Crosby, OFS
NAFRA Chapter 2010 / Scottsdale AZ*

March 27, 2014

To: National OFS Fraternity

From: Dick Morton, Former National Minister

As an era passes, so a new era begins. A summary of life itself as well as the passing of the 1-800-Francis phone number from Marie to Carol. Here is, "The Beginning of the Story."

Several months before Marie began answering the 1-800-Francis phone line, I started to follow through on an idea that came to mind one night. I thought, "Why not set up a 1-800-Francis phone number for the Secular Franciscans so anyone could be given authentic information on the Order from an authorized person from the National Fraternity."

I made contact with the AT&T 1-800 number people and found that the number, 1-800-Francis, had been abandoned earlier by a business and also learned that before an 1-800 number can be transferred to a new owner, the number must lay dormant for at least six months.

During the wait time, I called ATT every once in a while to make sure the number was still available. One time, when I explained to the operator why I wanted the number, I suddenly gained an advocate who gave me her AT&T direct line phone number so I could call her directly. That turned out to be critical in the success of getting the number.

I called that operator on the Friday afternoon, the day before the number was to be released. She said she would set the number transfer up so that it would automatically go to my office number at midnight, Friday, effective Saturday, the transfer date. She stated that this was definitely not the normal process but would do it "for your organization."

Early the Saturday morning, I called 1-800-Francis and my office phone rang to verify that the transfer was successful.

Around ten o'clock that morning, my office phone rang again and it was a member of the Board of Directors of the Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH. He was very upset because he had been given the objective by the board to get the 1-800-Francis number for the university. He said that he was very embarrassed to return to the board meeting to tell the entire board that he had failed in his assignment to get the number because the Secular Franciscans got it before he did. He wanted to know what it would take for us to give the number to the university. I definitely remember saying a million dollars might be considered.

I answered the 1-800 number for several months and found the experience rather interesting, to say the least. Many of calls were in the middle of the night by people playing "Russian Roulette" with the 1-800 number. I think they dialed 1-800 and just randomly dialed in last seven digits with their eyes closed, not caring what numbers they hit. I was propositioned more than once.

I kept the number for the short time to get a feel for how it might work best for the Order. I soon concluded that there was no one better prepared to take over the responsibility for the number than Marie Amore. Fortunately, she agreed and I transferred the number to her home, and the rest is history.

And now you know "The Beginning of the story."

Marie, thank you so much for being such a dedicated guiding light for our National Fraternity, not only for answering 1-800-Francis for those many years, but also for all the wisdom, leadership, and energy you have so graciously given from your initial entrance into the Order as a Franciscan Youth and continue to give today. May the Lord bless you!

Peace,

Dick Morton, ofs