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Monks find marketing inspiration

With a view to attracting new members, Swiss Capuchin friars have come up with some clever ways of marketing themselves.

They placed a 'help-wanted' ad in a gazette that lists management jobs. Scheduled to run through spring 2011, the ad calls for bankers, journalists, teachers, theologians, merchants, lawyers and communications specialists.

"The ideal candidates are unmarried Roman Catholic males between 22 and 35, with a university degree or similar training. They should be curious initiative-takers who are able to cope with life and live in a community, plus have social skills and sensitivity for religion," continues the job description.

There's no pay, but the compensation includes "spirituality, prayer, contemplation, an egalitarian way of life as well as freedom from personal material wealth and the standard two-person relationship model".

Brother Willi Anderau, spokesman for the Capuchin friars in the German-speaking part of Switzerland, has been busy fielding phone calls ever since the ad was published. So far, 15 men have sent in their applications to join the order. After training to become a brother, it would be possible to continue pursuing a career outside of monastic life." But it's clear that some professions are closer to us than others," said 67-year-old Anderau, who took his vows about 45 years ago.

Anderau said he could imagine a bank employee joining, and pointed out that it would be good to have a religious brother spreading the word of Jesus among the unscrupulous. Yet he couldn't see a speculator returning to the job after his ordination as a monk. As the former abbot of the Capuchin friars in German-speaking Switzerland, he now lives in a community of just three brothers in a simple apartment building. The other two monks serve as pastors in parishes around Zurich.

In addition to advertising for new blood, the Capuchin friars have launched an online shop selling souvenirs. Items include cappuccino cups, brown hooded sweatshirts and polo shirts with the order's logo.

"The shop is a big hit - we're already experiencing some shortages," Anderau said. He doesn't see the "brand" promotion as inconsistent with the order founded by Francis of Assisi, who shunned capitalism and lived a life of poverty, obedience and chastity.

Capuchin friars are becoming rare in Switzerland. Fifteen years ago, there were 400. Now there are just 200, and the average age is over 70. They've had to give up some of their settlements, such as the monastery in Stans, canton Nidwalden.

Whether the Swiss campaign will actually convince people to adopt a new lifestyle remains to be seen.

Trudi's favourite biscuits (or: Mandeldinger)

300 g sugar
2 eggs
225 g butter, melted
500 g ordinary white flour
200 g peeled, whole almonds



Beat the sugar with the eggs, add the melted butter and the flour, knead in the almonds, then form rolls of about 3 cm diameter (or smaller, to make more biscuits..), refrigerate for a few hours or overnight, so the rolls are really hard, then cut them into slices of about 3 mm and bake the biscuits at 180° for about 8 minutes.

I like them a healthy golden, but you might prefer them paler or darker.

very addictive!

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