



TAU-USA

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A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

WE ARE LOVE





Mission to Share the Vision

The TAU-USA, a publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States, is a vital communication link between the OFS-USA leadership and all candidates and all professed Secular Franciscans throughout the United States. The articles within the publication, while sharing the Secular Franciscan charism and vision, are intended to inform, inspire, and challenge.

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“You Are Love:” Fraternity is our Workshop

by Diane F. Menditto, OFS
National Vice Minister

“Let them love one another, as the Lord says: This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. Let them express the love they have for one another by their deeds, as the Apostle says: Let us not love in word or speech, but in deed and truth.” (Earlier Rule FA:ED 1, 72)

In April, I was privileged to attend a meeting of the Consilium Internationale Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis (CIOFS) Formation Secretariat in Rome. Upon my return, I wrote about the experience in a blog post that is now on our national website.

In that post, I spoke about how grateful I am for the gift of fraternity: “What is truly special and emotional for me, though, is to see how people of different backgrounds, languages, and cultures are so much alike in our love for one another, for God, and for our Franciscan vocation. The Holy Spirit has given each one of us the exact gifts and talents we need to allow us to get along and to be productive. It’s a bit of a miracle to see what even a tiny “temporary” fraternity can accomplish if we are open to the Spirit and to one another.”

The Instrumentum Laboris, written in preparation for the General Chapter to be held in November, announces that “You are love.” (See link below.) It asks us “to restore meaning and significance to our way of living the Rule;” “to allow ourselves to be touched by the suffering of others;” and to use our Rule and General Constitutions as guidelines to help us be love as Secular Franciscans.

How do we learn to put our Rule and Constitutions to use? Where do we learn to be touched by the sufferings of others and to be patient with them? Where do we learn to live the Gospel and seek the daily conversion that we all need? Where do we practice loving one another?


In the many years I have spent as a formator and a servant leader, I have come to the conclusion that

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Instrumentum-Laboris-2020.pdf>

the best workshop for learning to “be love” is the fraternity. It is the first place where we are guided to put the Rule into practice by interacting with those who, though different than ourselves, are on the “same road” following Jesus in the footsteps of St. Francis. It is where we learn the essential ingredients that not only help us in fraternity life but in all we do in our family life, professional life, and social life.

In fraternity we learn about collaboration, communication, community, commitment, and conversion. Each of these essential elements requires that we be less self-centered and desire the “good of the other.” This is one of the definitions of love, “to desire the good of the other.” We learn exactly what we will need in order to “be love” both in and out of fraternity. We learn that if we are love we will be...

- ...quick to listen and slow to speak.
- ...quick to praise and slow to criticize.
- ...quick to collaborate and slow to go it alone.
- ...quick to counsel and slow to condemn.
- ...quick to step up and slow to sit back.
- ...quick to share and slow to withhold.
- ...quick to comply and slow to put off.
- ...quick to respond and slow to ignore.
- ...quick to ask questions and slow to assume.
- ...quick to seek peace and slow to disrupt.
- ...quick to embrace and slow to judge.
- ...quick to unite and slow to divide.
- ...quick to forgive and slow to hold a grudge.
- ...quick to welcome and slow to shun.
- ...quick to empty ourselves in service and slow to be full of ourselves.
- ...quick to call on the Holy Spirit and slow to rely on ourselves.
- ...quick to pray and slow to lose heart.

In the workshop of fraternity, we learn to love and to **be love.** 

A Mutual Embrace

by Fr. John De La Riva, OFM Cap.

President-in-turn, National Conference of Spiritual Assistants

I write to you as I am gazing on a nicely framed picture depicting the familiar portrayal of St. Francis embracing our crucified Lord Jesus. In an irresistible bond of loving gaze and opened arms embrace, the “little poor man” is drawn into the love of the “God-man.” This mystical encounter is set within the imagery of Calvary. It is a setting that calls to mind the exclamation of St. Paul when he says, “as for me life is Christ and him Crucified.” This statement expresses an understanding of the means and purpose, that St. Paul, St. Francis, and each Christian must embrace if we are to “live on” in the love of the Savior.

A general focal point of theme for the articles of this TAU-USA issue is “WE ARE LOVE.” As for myself (and perhaps for you), this declaration is exhilarating, and at the same time, intimidating as it draws us to recall that we are “earthen vessels” that God providentially designs to be the home of His indwelling love. “WE ARE LOVE” draws me to identify qualities of God’s love that transform and perfect our love to a higher love. I see our Christian love being incarnational - an indwelling, sacrificial, and life-giving oblation.

It is in the truth of Christ’s divine initiative, like the figurative arm (unrestrained by the nail of cross) that Jesus extends to St. Francis, that we all find our ability to persevere in hope and love beyond any burden of our imperfections. The first letter of John reminds and encourages us when it states: “We love because He loved us first.” Yes, this gift of Divine love not only defuses any debilitating scrutiny of unworthiness, but ignites a bold

confidence of self-donation in love. And so, like St. Francis, we can increasingly open wide our hearts in mutual embrace with Christ.

How often do we take time to ponder and to relish the action of Christ’s love engaging and embracing us? It is in this ever-clearer self-awareness that is born of the Spirit that we are set afire with a love that is fruitful whether we are in stillness of presence or obvious in action.

The Franciscan family is easily inspired to new heights of devotion by the fiery exclamation of St. Francis when he said: “My God and My All!” To strive to be whole and holy is the most natural and supernatural of desires and strivings for the follower of Christ. The freedom of sanctifying grace, time and again, will enable us to be unimpeded by moment of fault so to continually arise in greater integrity and generosity of love.

As I reflected on the theme statement: “WE ARE LOVE,” I thought it necessitates an on-going choice of will – NOW, in the present moment, to conform to the Will of God who is love. This declaration demands by its integrity, that we do not “rest on the laurels” of what we were in love nor rest content with the presumption of what we will be in love. On the contrary, we plant our feet so to speak in an intentional present moment of commitment to set our gaze on what stands before us in person and circumstance and say “yes” to love as we are loved by God. Let us remember that what we want to be, we should do (now), and what we do, we will become.

What is the scope for this “Being” love? We know well the fundamental call to “love God with your whole mind, heart, and soul, and to love your neighbor as yourself.” The Letter of St. James warns us to remember that “to say we love God yet to hate our neighbor makes us liars.” There is no true love of God if it betrays a love of neighbor. Oh, the challenge we can find in our brother or sister (and ourselves). We can easily recall our Lord instructing us that we are called to **a greater love**: A love that reaches beyond that of family and friend (“for even the pagan loves those who love them”) on toward the enemy and persecutor. The sacrifice and cross of **true love** await us all to beckon and encourage us to trust the many means and ways of its presence - to open our hearts, with a bold abandon, to the dictates of the Holy Spirit.

Considering the necessity of our love being freely sacrificial, in an oblation of self for the “other,” I recalled a spiritual counsel from a Franciscan Tertiary of the 18th century, named St. Benedict Joseph Labre. St. Benedict was of noble birth but chose an itinerant life of voluntary poverty – a beggar who made the streets of Rome, Italy, his pilgrim way of silent prayer, fasting, and penance. Although known to seldom speak, when he did, it was worth the hearing.

He was asked one day how our love should be to achieve sanctity and his reply was: “To properly love, one must have **three hearts**. The first must be a **heart of fire** toward God so as to think and speak only of God, accepting hardships with resignation, and to submit in everything to His holy will. The second must be a heart of flesh, toward our neighbor, that will move us to help him in all his needs by instruction, advice and prayer; to have

compassion for the poor sinners and for the souls in purgatory so that the Lord will grant them eternal rest. The third must be a **heart of bronze** toward oneself, that will make us hate all kinds of sensuality, resist self-love without rest, mortify the body, and subdue the wicked tendencies of perverted nature. With these three hearts love makes us deserving of the reward of the life to come.”

**To love God,
you need three hearts in one
— a heart of fire for him,
a heart of flesh
for your neighbor,
and a heart of
bronze for yourself.**

— St. Benedict Joseph Labre

Looking once again upon the devotional picture of St. Francis and our Crucified Lord, both with arms outstretched in mutual embrace, I am comforted and encouraged to answer the call to be love. For this Calvary setting which the world associates with humiliation, suffering, weakness and defeat, rather reminds the Christian of the power of love for the other, a love that can sow the seeds of new life from the blood of selfless sacrifice and self-donation. This greater love is not the stuff of dream or fantasy. This love is the light that casts out the darkness of our imperfect and broken world. It is here and now at the crossroads of our life with each other that our Lord seeks to dwell in love.

Reflecting on Mary, Our Mother and Model

By Layna Maher, OFS
National Formation Commission Chair

Think back to your profession and recall the words that you said as the Minister held your hands and you made your profession promise.

I, by the grace of God, renew my baptismal promises and consecrate myself to the service of his Kingdom. Therefore, in my secular state I promise to live all the days of my life the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ in the Secular Franciscan Order by observing its rule of life. May the grace of the Holy Spirit, the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and our holy father St. Francis, and the fraternal bonds of community always be my help, so that I may reach the goal of perfect Christian love.

Our OFS Rule provides guidance for how we are to live each day and act in every situation. Article 9 tells us how we are to appreciate and respect Mary, our mother and model in life.

The Virgin Mary, humble servant of the Lord, was open to His every word and call. She was embraced by Francis with indescribable love and declared the protectress and advocate of his family. The Secular Franciscans should express their ardent love for her by imitating her complete self-giving and by praying earnestly and confidently. OFS Rule Article 9

St. Francis' love and devotion to the Blessed Mother is evident from the earliest days.

Thomas of Celano, the first to write a life of Saint Francis, describes how St. Francis rebuilt the church of Saint Mary of the Portiuncula in Chapter IX of the First Book.

"When the holy man of God saw it SO ruined, he was moved by piety because he had a warm devotion to the Mother of all good and he began to stay there continually." (FA:ED vol.1, 201)

Saint Bonaventure shares with us that Saint Francis "...embraced the mother of the Lord Jesus with an inexpressible love since she made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us and, through her, we have obtained mercy." (FA:ED vol. 2, 598)

We can turn to the early documents to read the words of St. Francis himself in his Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Hail, O Lady,
Holy Queen,
Mary, holy Mother of God,
Who are the Virgin made Church,
chosen by the most Holy Father in heaven
whom he consecrated with His most holy
beloved Son
and with the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,
in whom there was and is
all fullness of grace and every good.

Hail His Palace!
Hail His Tabernacle!
Hail His Dwelling!
Hail His Robe!
Hail His Servant!
Hail His Mother!

And hail all You holy virtues
which are poured into the hearts of the faithful
through the grace and enlightenment of the
Holy Spirit,
that from being unbelievers,
You may make them faithful to God.
(FA:ED, vol. 1, 163)

Take time to ponder the words of this beautiful salutation and pray with gratitude for Mary, our mother and model, that gave us Jesus as our brother.

What qualities or attributes of Mary most move you? How do you imitate those qualities and attributes in your daily life? How are you saying yes?



Apostolate: Love in Living Deeds

by Joe Makley, OFS
National JPIC Animator



"If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well," but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it?" (James 2: 15,16.)

It could also be said, if we see a river of people wandering without protection, all their savings stolen, preyed upon by criminals and officials alike, huddled against our national border, and we say to them, "peace and all good," and do nothing to help them obtain food, shelter, and safety, what good is that?

Every Secular Franciscan wants to do more of course. We want our love to have an effect. The model of Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) helps to remind us of the challenges and rewards of authentic love, which is made visible in actions of solidarity. Secular Franciscans get together collectively, in their fraternities and regions, and ask themselves, what are the needs in this community? And they form an organized effort to meet the need. A collective apostolate is not a requirement of every fraternity, but it's helpful. The members each bring their gifts and in turn experience fraternity, connection, and community. Our efforts are maximized when we find ways to connect them with others.

In many areas of the USA, we can show solidarity with the marginalized and the destitute, including immigrants, by getting involved with Catholic Charities USA or one of its affiliates. This picture is of San Felipe de Jesus Fraternity in Laredo, Texas, participating in a Catholic Charities food drive as a Lenten apostolate. Thanks to Chris Kolb, JPIC animator for the Los Tres Compañeros Region, for sending it in.

Recently at the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region's annual retreat in Kennebunkport, Father Sam Fuller, OFM Cap, described the work of Capuchin Mobile Ministries, a street ministry in Boston. "Get out of the buildings," he said. "Meet people on the streets. Don't proselytize, don't try to make them Christian, instead, let them lead the conversation, empty yourself in service to them." Roberta, an OFS volunteer, added, "What happens is different than just sandwiches and coffee. It's all about the spiritual gifts."

Another benefit of a regular apostolate is a sense of unity. Father Sam brought our attention to Pope Francis' encyclical, Fratelli Tutti, and how he used the story of the Good Samaritan in a long passage that emphasized the unity of love and service. These are beautiful examples of love in action.

There is much work to be done on the public policy front, to help change unjust conditions. Our US Bishops Office has straightforward positions on public issues. They encourage advocacy and provide assistance that is important to know about and share. But direct service to the poor is not controversial. Some folks still try to make it so. Remember, "God is love and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God in him." (1 Jn 4:16). My mother taught our family to sing that as a spiritual. I've got it in my brain stem, way down deep. If we are troubled when someone sows discord by demonizing immigrants or other groups, we can remember that passage. As we give ourselves in service together, we will truly abide in love. We will be one in God's mercy and feel ourselves lifted up on those eagles' wings.



Be Love to Young People

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS
National FY/YA Animator

“Love isn’t something we feel, it’s something we do.” We’ve all heard this quote time and time again, but what does it really mean? It simply means we can’t just talk about loving one another. Our actions, words, and intentions need to express love genuinely and concretely.

That’s not easy to do when we speak of loving our younger generation. Not because we don’t have hearts for young people, but because it’s difficult to love them if they’re not in our presence. If there aren’t younger Catholics in our midst—how can we show them we love them?

Jesus ministered to many people. Some approached him on their own volition. They had heard rumors of his healing power. They were inspired by his words when he preached, or curious about this man who was gaining so much attention. Young people won’t hear about Franciscan spirituality or a gospel life if we are hidden away in our fraternities. We need to be visible witnesses of God’s love which will inspire them to follow our lead.

However, Jesus also sought people out. He approached the woman at the well. He spotted Zacheus in the tree and approached him. He walked with his disciples on their way to Emmaus. In imitating Jesus, we’re encouraged to seek young people. There are creative and life-giving ways to meet them where they are and immerse ourselves into their lives.

Once we’ve found them (or they’ve found us), how can we “be love?” Paul tells the Church in Ephesus, “Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.” (Eph.5 1-2)

God loves everyone. He doesn’t pick and choose whom to love. He chooses us all, even when we are unlovable. We must make a conscious choice to live our Rule by “trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.” (OFS Rule, Art. 19)

As Francis grew in his spirituality, he recognized the need to embrace the leper. The story reminds us that when considering youth, we need to look past the clothing, piercings, or behavior we don’t approve of.

As the commission’s previous Spiritual Assistant, Brother Scott Slattum, OFM, used to say, “Just love them into new life.” Remember, our young people are on a journey. In a non-judgmental and loving way, we can support them and encourage them to strive for holiness.

We “give ourselves up,” not in the drastic way Jesus did on the cross, but every time we step out of our own needs and respond to the needs of others. What is it the young people in your midst need from you? That might take a while to determine, but in the meantime, you can at least give them some attention, even if it’s simply a few moments to listen to their story.

Finally, and probably most importantly, be love out in the world. Our young people are watching. When we love unconditionally with joy and holy purpose, we emanate a radiance that is enticing. Our example serves as an invitation to consider a gospel life, which of course is our ultimate goal.

WE GET LOVE, TO GIVE LOVE, AND RETURN TO LOVE

by Francine Gikow, OFS

*I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me.
Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the
fields...there I will give you my love
(Song 7:10-12).*

All scripture is a love story between God and humankind. It is a story of how God has and continues to love us. God IS love and God's love is always fruitful, expressive, expansive, and wishes an "other" to love. With this desire for an "other" to love, God created! He created to share His love with His creatures and thereby manifest Himself. This culminates in creating living persons who are made in His image and likeness. (Gen 1:26).

We love, because he first loved us (Jn :19). In fact, God wants to lavishly expend His love upon us. God wants to live within us as we live in love with Him: God is love and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him (1Jn4:16). The love between the persons of the blessed Trinity is to be our model in this love. As St. Francis said, Praise Him and bless Him, thank and adore Him, the Lord Almighty, in Trinity and Unity. (ER XXI: 2).

God loves us so much that He incarnated Himself in human form - Jesus. God, through the apostles, planned for us to know Him - through Jesus' physical presence, words, and deeds. In the incarnation, the love of God was made manifest among us. God sent his only-begotten Son into the world so that we might live with Him.

We often try to understand God's love within our experiences of brokenness and sinfulness, but we can never fully understand this pure love of God that only wishes the best for us - no matter how much we turn away from Him. God's love knows no boundaries, limits, or exclusions. However, in our finite minds and experiences, we find this type of agape (self-sacrificing) love, hard to believe. We doubt that God desires and loves us while we are so unworthy. We tend to measure God's love by how we love. God's agape love does not count the cost of loving but loves us anyway - all we need is to acknowledge our sins and ask for forgiveness in humility. As scripture states: There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear (1Jn 4:18).

When we are filled with God's love, we cannot help but share it with others. With gratitude, His love takes over our souls and our spirit erupts into praise, glory, and the sharing of our experience of God's love: Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1Jn 4:11). We become a practical, concrete example of LOVE to others, by His LOVE dwelling within us: He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me, you can do nothing (Jn 15:5).

We cannot help but be joyful and smile because we are the beloved of God. One of the best ways to reveal his love to others, is to smile! A simple smile ministry reveals the joy of God's impact on your life!

A wise person once said:

*we get LOVE, to give LOVE, and
to return to LOVE.*

St. Francis, the Stigmata, and La Verna

by Bret Thoman, OFS

On Friday, January 5, 2024, at the Tuscan Sanctuary of La Verna, the Franciscan Family officially opened the VIII Centenary of the Stigmata of St. Francis, with an event entitled “From the wounds to new life.” Eight centuries ago this year, up on the same mountain, on September 17, 1224, he received the stigmata; that is, the wounds of Christ were revealed on his hands, feet, and side.

Some years earlier, while preaching at a castle in San Leo, a nobleman named Count Orlando of Chiusi was so enflamed by Francis’s words that he felt inspired to offer him part of the mountain towering over his own castle in Chiusi. Francis went to La Verna and was immediately drawn to the mountain’s biting cold, rugged harshness, and austere beauty. It was the perfect site for penance, prayer, and contemplation.

Francis returned to La Verna five more times. The last time, two years before his death, the pivotal moment took place. He was on retreat, fasting and praying a forty-day lent in honor of the feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross (September 14) and St. Michael the Archangel (September 29).

According to the Third Consideration on the Stigmata, within the Little Flowers of St. Francis (the Fioretti), Francis prayed for two graces: to feel in his body the pain which Jesus felt during his Passion and to know in his heart the love which Jesus felt for all humanity.

St. Bonaventure described the event in detail. *On a certain morning about the feast of the Exaltation of the Cross, while Francis was praying on the mountainside, he saw a Seraph having six*

wings, fiery as well as brilliant, descend from the grandeur of heaven. And when in swift flight, it had arrived at a spot in the air near the man of God, there appeared between the wings the likeness of a man crucified, with his hands and feet extended in the form of a cross and fastened to a cross.... As the vision was disappearing, it left in his heart a marvelous fire and imprinted in his flesh a likeness of signs no less marvelous. For immediately the marks of nails began to appear in his hands and feet just as he had seen a little before in the figure of the man crucified. (Major Life, 13)

For the last two years of his life, Francis was marked by Christ’s wounds. He was united to the cross of Christ. The Incarnation of Christ, the “masterpiece” of God’s creation, indeed, the whole purpose of creation (in the words of later theologian, John Duns Scotus) culminated in the Passion and crucifixion as the highest expression of God’s love, charity, and mission.

The mystery of what happened on Mt. La Verna is something for us to reflect and meditate on. Ultimately, there is something greater than the wounds of Christ, which St. Francis shared in; for the cross is merely the pathway to the Resurrection. Without the cross there is no Resurrection; unless Christ comes down in the world, there is no way for us to go up to Heaven.

In the end, then, suffering does not have the final word: the Resurrection does. By embracing the cross, Christ shows us the way. And Francis, in receiving Christ’s wounds, gives us an example to follow.

Member Highlight-June Carpenter, OFS A Treasure to the Order

by Patricia Reynolds, OFS

There is basic information found in our national database. For example, if you look up June Carpenter, you'll see that she is a member of Rosa Mystica Fraternity in South Woodbury, CT, which is within the Bl. Solanus Casey Region and was established in 1992. Her listing includes her contact information, and her profession date. But there is a lot more to know about June, for she has accomplished a lot in her almost 92 years.

The Franciscan journey for June started in 1963 at St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity in Darien, CT. June really fell in love with St. Francis and the Franciscans. The example of Francis and his first followers and a new grace that she received led her to strive to live the Gospel in her daily life. Service in various positions and levels of fraternity over the years led to June's spiritual growth and to a path of ongoing conversion as a way of life. She professed to live the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order on December 19, 1965. From then on, she served the Order diligently.

June served as Minister of a Byzantine Rite Fraternity, representing the fraternity for 11 years up to the time of regionalization. She served on the National Executive Council, helped to write *The Guide to Servant Leadership*, and was involved with the national publication before it was the *TAU-USA*. And she did all of this while raising three sons and a daughter with her husband, Roger, who professed in 1976.

Several years ago, June's advanced age caused her to transfer to a fraternity that is closer to where she lives – Rosa Mystica Fraternity in South Woodbury, CT. Now, as she approaches 92 years of age, she is not able to attend gatherings at all due to physical limitations. Fortunately, the physical issues do not interfere with her spiritual life or mental state.

For the last nine or ten years that I have been privileged to know June, she has been my own personal cheerleader. She will write notes, send emails, and keep up with all the newsletters. Initially I thought it was just me that she was encouraging. (Silly me!) I've since learned that this is how June treats people in general which paints a picture of a really great person!

At this point in her life, June is happy to sit back as the younger followers of St. Francis lead us onward. As she herself says: *I am eternally grateful for having Franciscans in my life - ever grateful and still on the ongoing conversion route...by God's mercy and grace. Our God brought me to my salvation through His Son's leading me to the Franciscans. Amen. He gave me the mission of the Cross, by the saving LOVE through and of His Son. Nothing else covers it better; I gratefully accept the fact that I was given a community of faith-filled souls I never would have known otherwise and needed very much!*

May we all learn from June's example as she continues to spread Franciscan Joy to others.

[Editor's note: June had requested that her fraternity Minister reach out to correct an error that was published when her husband, Roger, passed away. The wrong death date was printed. The correct date is May 10th, 1987. The current NEC and TAU-USA editor regret that the error was made and wanted to correct it as well as highlight one of our Order's treasures.]

Calling All Artists!



Are you an “artsy-craftsy” Franciscan?
YOUR Q COMMITTEE NEEDS YOU

This is our Logo for the 21st Quinquennial Congress!
If the Spirit moves you to design and create an artistic piece
of your choice using the Q Theme Logo below,
consider using your gift for the good of our Order.
The item you donate will benefit the Silent Auction and/or raffle at the Congress.
Thank you for your consideration.

Easter of St. Francis *Rekindle the Flame*



Guidelines:

- Artistic skills include but are not limited to: quilting, embroidery, ceramics, glassware, painting, jewelry-making, etc.
- **Logo cannot be used without Q Core Committee authorization.**
- Please submit idea for approval to Q Committee by sending an email with the description of the article/piece you plan on creating to: ofsusa.qcongress@gmail.com

The Story of the White Bird

by Stan Sisson, OFS

A good friend shared this experience-and it's one to be shared - not only because it's a true story but because of its uplifting and reaffirming message. To protect identity, I'll refer to my friend as a female although you need to understand "she" could be anyone.

My good friend was going through a "dark" time. If you've ever had someone discuss the pain and feeling of hopelessness with having thoughts of "ending it all," then you know the feeling of helplessness and sorrow that you experience on their behalf. All you can think about is "what can I do to help?" After my friend revealed that suicide was actually attempted - and thank goodness it was a failure - the gravity of the situation was intense, to say the least.

As with many people dealing with depression, my friend was able to mask all the pain and carry out day-to-day activities with the dark thoughts hidden away. Oftentimes, pain is hidden behind humor that keeps the darkness at bay. Although going to work was difficult, it helped to hide the pain for a few hours. She was able to do just that.

Coming home from work and arriving at that dark place again, my friend pulled into the driveway and noticed a white bird - just sitting in the front yard. Thinking nothing of it, she went into the house and dealt with her darkness. This same scenario carried on for a couple of days and she began to be concerned that perhaps this white bird was ill and needed attention from professionals. What bird remains in place for days without flying away? One day, upon finding the bird sitting on the edge of the bird bath, she decided to try to approach it and see what the situation was. As she slowly drew near, suddenly she had to stop as intense and unstoppable feelings came over her. She heard these words: "**YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**" And as soon as those words were received, the bird immediately flew away.

Imagine! That little white bird carried such a powerful message to someone in need of hope. To this day, whenever she feels a bit of "darkness" creeping in on her, believe it or not - a white bird shows up somewhere near her. She finds comfort with her little white bird and knows that she is surely never alone. Her story is a true spiritual revelation - everything is one in love.

**This true story reveals to us that God is present
in all things and the Holy Spirit is our helper.
"YOU ARE NOT ALONE."**

REGIONAL ROUNDUP

In this issue, five of the 30 regions are highlighted.

Queen of Peace

Queen of Peace Region is located in the Midwest: Minnesota, Iowa, Eastern Nebraska, North Dakota and most of South Dakota, and Western Wisconsin. Within the region there are 23 established fraternities, one emerging fraternity, two newly forming groups, and one brand new group that started in January of this year.

Something interesting about Queen of Peace: Kathy Taormina, OFS, who is the Regional Spiritual Assistant, saw the H2O Project at a booth at the National Catholic Youth Conference in the late 1990s and brought the project back to the OFS-USA to begin during Lent. We collected almost \$100,000 in the following years and even built a well in Central America which bears the FYYA name. She loved the solidarity with the poor as opposed to just donating money.

Five Franciscan Martyrs

Five Franciscan Martyrs Region includes all of Florida as well as the southern tip of Alabama and the southernmost part of Georgia.

There are 31 fraternities within the region including one new fraternity established last September. They extend from Fairhope, Alabama, east and then south to Miami Beach, Florida – which is a distance of over 700 miles.

Find out more here:

<https://maryourqueen.com/beatification-cause-of-the-five-georgia-martyrs/>

<https://www.churchpop.com/incredible-story-behind-montanas-90-ft-statue-mary/>

The region is named after the five Franciscan martyrs who were killed by Native Americans in Georgia. They are also known as the Five Georgia Martyrs. (See first link below.)

Something unique about Five Franciscan Martyrs: The Regional Executive Council has recently completed the monumental task of rewriting their Regional Guidelines.

Our Lady of the Rockies

Our Lady of the Rockies covers all of Montana and a bit of Wyoming.

The region includes six fraternities, with one that meets in two locations. Two fraternities were walking in Fraternal Accompaniment before we knew it had a name. Each fraternity has either a Franciscan friar or Poor Clare Sister as their Spiritual Assistant. Three fraternities have an abundance of inquirers and candidates and three vibrant fraternities struggle to gain new members. Each fraternity has a unique charism.

The region is named after the statue of the same name and was established 10 years after the statue was erected.

More about Our Lady of the Rockies: Montana is the fourth largest state in the Union, and Our Lady of the Rockies is the fourth largest statue in the US. Montana boasts the largest Madonna statue in the country. It was planned, orchestrated and placed on a mountain amidst many miracles and an economic crisis in Butte, Montana. (See second link below.)

Holy Trinity Region

Holy Trinity Region includes all of Kentucky, Mid and Southern Ohio, and the southern tip of Indiana.

The region includes 12 established fraternities and one emerging fraternity.

Something unique about Holy Trinity Region: They are fortunate to have a Franciscan Bishop, Bishop John Stowe, OFM, Conv., in the diocese of Lexington. AND they are happy to be the host region for the 2026 Quinquennial!

The Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis

The Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region covers North and South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, and most of Alabama.

Within the region there are 27 fraternities, one emerging fraternity, and one newly forming group.

The name for the region came from a quote by Jennye Taylor Johnson, OFS, who was a member of the transition team when we went from provinces to regions which read in part: "lay brothers and sisters seeking to follow our Franciscan way of life with each other."

Something interesting about Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region:

They are blessed with their 29 fraternities/groups, the roughly 600 sisters and brothers, and the diversity they bring to the Order. In looking at the size of the region and the number of states it includes, if you were to travel the perimeter, it would be approximately 2000 miles and take 36 hours of straight driving to visit the outer cities.

OFS-USA at the 10th Eucharistic Congress!

So, what is the Eucharistic Congress? "The Tenth National Eucharistic Congress is an invitation to experience profound personal revival so that we can be sent out to share Christ's Love with the world that so desperately needs it."

www.eucharisticcongress.org

Hopefully, your local parish or diocese has done a great job promoting one of the most important events in the history of the Catholic Church in America, and you're really wishing you could attend...along with 50,000 + other Catholics living in the USA!

The OFS-USA has been diligently working over the past year to present our Secular Franciscan branch of the Family to the attendees at this monumental event. Booth #312 will be staffed by our brothers and sisters from Our Lady of Indiana Region and many other regions throughout the USA. Cyndi Pilot, OFS, Minister of Our Lady of Indiana Region, dedicated local ministers, and many Secular Franciscan volunteers have been working tirelessly to ensure our Order will be well represented.

Pray for us as we welcome the Congress attendees to our booth. Perhaps you can plan your vacation around a stop in Indianapolis between July 17-21. Cyndi, Helen, Margaret, Susan, Ulma and our other volunteer brothers and sisters would love to see you!

**Have a most blessed and safe
Stigmata Summer 2024!**

Susan Ronan, OFS
National Secretary

CONGRATULATIONS BISHOP JAMES RUGGIERI, OFS

Bishop Ruggieri, who was previously a pastor in Providence, Rhode Island, was ordained a bishop on May 7, 2024, soon after being professed into our Order on April 13, 2024. He has been assigned to the Diocese of Portland which encompasses all of Maine.

This is a link to an article written about Fr. James Ruggieri's food truck:

<https://www.wpri.com/news/street-stories/bishop-elects-beloved-food-truck-leaves-lasting-legacy-in-ri/>

To read the article about Bishop Ruggieri's ordination, go to:

<https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2024/05/10/new-bishop-ordained-in-portland-maine-a-franciscan-shepherd-for-the-people/>

Save the Date! Zoom Event for the Centenary of the Stigmata

The Secular Franciscan Order will celebrate the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' receiving the Stigmata at a national Zoom webinar this fall.

Mark your calendars now:

Date: Sunday, October 6, 2024

Time: 3PM Eastern/2PM Central/1PM Mountain/Noon Pacific

Duration: 75 minutes

Our plans include a talk on the Stigmata by Dr. Darlene Pryds, Associate Professor of Christian Spirituality and History at the Franciscan School of Theology, and a panel discussion featuring members of our national leadership. This will provide us with multiple perspectives on how Francis' experience connects to our lives as Secular Franciscans today.

The invitation to register for the Zoom event will be sent out about a month beforehand via our regional ministers and regional formation directors. If you would like the registration information to be sent directly to you, please go to groups.google.com and request to be added to: **"NAFRACentenaryContacts."**

We hope to see you there!

Vickie Klick, OFS
Chair, Centenary Task Force

Word Search

Secular Franciscan Saints

Y	A	J	X	H	E	J	L	M	A	R	I	A	N	A
X	W	N	B	E	N	E	D	I	C	T	C	N	K	L
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ALBERT Chmielowski
ANGELA of Foligno & Angela Merici
BENEDICT Joseph Labre
BRIDGET of Sweden
CONRAD of Piacenza
ELIZABETH of Hungary & Elizabeth of Portugal
ELZEAR of Sabran
FERDINAND of Leon
JOAN of Arc
JOHN Vianney, (Pope) John XXIII & John Bosco
JUTTA of Kulmsee

LOUIS, King of France
MARGARET of Cortona
MARIANA of Quito
MARY Joseph Rossello
MICHAEL Garicoits
(Pope) PIUS X
ROCH of Montpellier
ROSE of Viterbo
THOMAS More
VINCENT Pallotti
ZITA of Lucca

CALENDAR

MONTH	DAY	EVENT/MEETING
July	12	NEC/CNSA/RM Zoom Quarterly Meeting
	17-21	Eucharistic Congress, Indianapolis, IN
August	2-4	Divine Mercy Region Election
	9-11	Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region Visitation
	9-10	Santa Maria de las Montanas Region Election
	20-23	CNSA/RSA/RFD Workshop - Villa Maria, PA
September	17-22	Annual Chapter - Franciscan Renewal Center – Scottsdale, AZ
	26-29	Korean OFS Chapter – Scottsdale, AZ
October	6	Stigmata Centenary Event - 3pm ET - Zoom
November	8-9	Bl. Solanus Casey Region Election
	9-10	Our Lady of the Angels Region Election
	9-17	XVII General Chapter of OFS - Rome
December	6-7	NEC/CNSA Meeting - Zoom

NEC – National Executive Council

CNSA – Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

RM – Regional Ministers

RSA – Regional Spiritual Assistants

RFD – Regional Formation Directors



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https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Bookstore-Order-Form_June20_2024_fillable.pdf

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Description	Quantity	Price Each	Amount
Brown Rule Book – Presentation Copy – English		7.50	0.00
Brown Rule Book – Presentation Copy – Spanish		7.50	0.00
Gospel to Life - Rule with Commentary - English		5.00	0.00
Gospel to Life- Rule with Commentary - Spanish		5.00	0.00
National Fraternity Banner Journal		10.00	0.00
Adventures in Assisi (Child’s book)		10.00	0.00
Fraternity Register – Portrait – English		40.00	0.00
Fraternity Register – Landscape – English		40.00	0.00
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OFS - History - Vol 1 - 1917-1942		14.00	0.00
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OFS - History - Vol 2 B - 1943-1978		14.00	0.00
OFS - History - Vol III - 1979-2007		14.00	0.00
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Check Payable to National Fraternity Secular Franciscan Order-USA		Total	
Email form to claudiakauz.sfo@gmail.com or mail to: National Fraternity-OFS-USA, 2007 Maverick Trl, Harrisonville, MO 64701-1545			

Prices effective March 15, 2024

For Additional formation materials - see Smoky Valley order form.

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Smoky-Valley-update-Dec2023.pdf>