



# TAU-USA

Spring 2025 Issue 115

A PUBLICATION OF THE  
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SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER





# 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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# Are You Listening?

by Diane Menditto, OFS  
National Vice Minister

## Listen! ¡Escuchen!

If I have said that word once, I probably said it thousands of times during my thirty-five-year career as a Spanish teacher. The results varied each time the word was uttered in either language.

When I was asked to write an article on communication for this issue of the TAU-USA, I looked back at the many articles (most recently, a 2023 issue) and presentations I've given on the topic. An integral part of those sharings has been **listening**, which will be the main focus here. How we listen—not only with our ears, but with our eyes, our hearts, and our souls—affects who we are as Secular Franciscans, as family members, and as professionals in whatever field we find ourselves.

What kinds of listening require more than just ears? I'm glad you asked. I consulted Microsoft CoPilot to provide a list of the types of listening in both secular and religious settings. Interestingly, it came up with many of the same terms that I have spoken and written about over the years.

We have active listening, empathic listening, critical listening, and reflective listening. These show up in a classroom, business, medical office, repair shop, coffee shop, or supermarket. Active listening requires us to focus our eyes and ears on the speaker. We lean forward to look at and engage the other person. We need to concentrate on what is being said, and our body language (head nods, smiles) will tell the speaker that we hear and understand what is being said.

Empathic listening requires that our minds and hearts help us to feel what the speaker is saying whether we agree or not. Its cousin, reflective listening, often requires paraphrasing what the speaker is saying without injecting an opinion. These kinds of listening help us to build trust if our

empathy and understanding are genuine. Critical listening puts the heart aside and keeps the brain well-engaged. We want to hear everything said, putting our emotions and opinions aside, to make the best decision for our family or our fraternity. This very often takes patience and humility.

Other types of listening that we find more often in fraternal and religious settings are contemplative, pastoral, communal, and discernment listening. Obviously, contemplative listening requires us to sit silently, listening for the Holy Spirit's whisper. We listen to homilies, spiritual direction, and guidance given during reconciliation. In fraternity, we practice communal listening where the goal is the well-being of the fraternity and our spiritual growth. With discernment, we listen to what God is asking of us by asking the Holy Spirit to guide us, perhaps by listening to a trusted individual or spiritual director, reading our Rule, or reading the writings of our founder.

There are some other key things about listening that Artificial Intelligence forgot to list because it is not human! While listening to each other, we must listen to **ourselves**. Sometimes we stop paying attention to how we sound when we speak or write. We need to hear what our listeners' body language tells us. The expression "read the room" is good advice. Knowing our audience, whether giving a talk, having a one-on-one conversation, or writing an email, is key to how our message will be received. Listening internally to how we say something is sometimes all that is necessary to avoid having a simple statement or comment become a contentious issue that can destroy the peace of the family or fraternity.

Listening well often means giving up control. It takes wisdom, patience, and humility to listen well. The Holy Spirit has given us these gifts, but it is up to us to use them.

# Communications

by Sharon Winzeler, OFS  
Communications Committee Chair

Does the fraternity meeting begin at 2 or 2:30 p.m. this Sunday? What is the date of the next Come & See?

In the 20th century, these questions would have been answered person-to-person or by a phone call. Now we depend on local, regional and national websites and/or emails and digital newsletters for this type of information and communication. Good online communication also allows us to share our vocation with those who may be interested in learning more about the OFS and discerning whether they are called to pursue a vocation.

Communicating with each other is so important that the National Fraternity Council (NAFRA) designated it as one of its three-year priorities in 2022 and has worked on it ever since.

NAFRA members thought it was essential not only to articulate our values but also the joy that comes from living a life of service, simplicity, prayer and humility.

Improvements to communications over the past three years include:

- Updates to the national website to make it easier to find materials.
- Increased translations of written materials into Spanish and Korean.
- A new database with the ability to generate OFS-USA-wide emails.
- Improvement to communications to all members, including those who do not use social media and email.
- Modifications to publications so they are more readily accessible to members with visual and hearing challenges.
- Updates to materials on the website so they are easier to read, print and customize for local fraternities.

One of the more recent communication changes has been an email list created through the database so that emails can be sent to all members. Chances are you received notice of this edition of the TAU-USA through an email.

The TAU-USA remains one of the order's primary means of communication. When printing and mailing costs skyrocketed a couple years ago, NAFRA limited the publication schedule to one print issue per year and the rest as digital-only issues. The TAU is also offered online in a simpler version that is easy to print at home for members who do not have internet access. Spanish editions of the TAU-USA continue to be offered along with selected articles in Korean.



The national website is a vital tool for connecting members across regions and sharing important information. Whether it is updates on events, spiritual resources or formation materials, checking the website regularly ensures that members remain informed about the activities within the fraternity.

**OFS-USA Website**  
[www.secularfranciscansusa.org](http://www.secularfranciscansusa.org)

In addition, many local and regional fraternities use social media platforms, websites and newsletters to stay connected. One of the goals of the Communications Committee is to offer best practices for operating a website and publishing a newsletter. A manual outlining those tips will be published this year.

Effective communication is essential to maintain strong, supportive relationships among members and to share the transformative nature of our vocations.

# Achieving Clear and Equitable Communication

by Susan Tabor, OFS, and Janice Benton, OFS  
National Accessibility Committee

When we encounter situations involving communication between non-disabled people and those with disabilities, either within or outside our fraternities, it can be helpful within that interaction to consider ways to facilitate its clarity and ensure the equitable treatment of differences. It can also be useful to remember a fundamental aspect of Franciscanism at these times as well: We are all brothers and sisters, and God lives in each of us.



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1. Seek guidance from the individual asking for needed accommodations, whether a member or a person wishing to enter the fraternity. They know their needs best.
2. Extend the courtesy of asking people if they would appreciate assistance rather than automatically providing it. If they say no, it is not a personal reflection on you.
3. When communicating with blind people, feel free to use words like “see” and “watch.” Those terms are part of every-day speech and blind people use them as well.
4. If you have trouble understanding a person’s speech or the communication of their ideas, don’t hesitate to ask them to repeat or to clarify. In some cases, it may be as simple as asking the person to slow down their speech so that it is clearer. Be aware that regional accents may also affect the clarity of speech.
5. There is no need to shout at a person – just use your typical voice and cadence.
6. At times a fraternity may perceive a person’s behavior as disruptive or otherwise inappropriate and be uncertain how to respond. Speak with the individual to express observations about the behavior and to inquire as to what the person is thinking or feeling, and what might help on the part of the individual and fraternity members to remedy the situation.
7. Getting the attention of a Deaf/Hard of Hearing person can include letting them see you approach, switching the room or lamp light on and off, and waving from a side angle.
8. When a sign-language interpreter is present, speak directly to the Deaf individual. Also, speak clearly and slowly enough so that the interpreter can keep up with your message.
9. Some individuals who are unable to communicate verbally due to conditions such as a stroke or cerebral palsy may interact via technology containing graphics and synthesized speech. Such interaction is not complicated, but patience is needed because the individual may take time to express their thoughts.
10. If you are on Zoom, you can have your session captioned at no cost. Go into settings and look for accessibility settings and turn on Captioning (CC). This has the added benefit of giving you a transcription of your meeting if you save it at the time your meeting is over.
11. If you put any text on the screen, please read it aloud for anyone with no vision, poor vision, or a learning disability such as dyslexia. Hearing it read is also beneficial if you are away from your screen while something is being shown.

The Accessibility Committee is working on several tools and plans to hold a webinar on this topic later in 2025. Check in on the Accessibility Committee webpage for updates.

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/accessibility-committee/>

You may email the Accessibility Committee with questions or for assistance at [OFS.USA.accessibility@gmail.com](mailto:OFS.USA.accessibility@gmail.com).

# Inclusive Multilingual Communication

by Caroline Yandell, OFS  
Minister, St. Francis Region

A common statement that we have all probably heard is, “The United States is a melting pot.” But that doesn’t really seem right if you think of what a melting pot does and what its contents looks like. A melting pot melts down everything in it into one single entity. I picture a glutinous unicolored mass. Not an attractive site at all.

A salad bowl seems to be a more appropriate visual for the composition of our nation. A salad has a variety of colors, textures and flavors that come together to make something attractive and beneficial, which is much more like our combination of various cultures, backgrounds and skin tones.

People who reside in the United States come from all over the world, including many of the members of our National Fraternity who come from different cultures and speak many languages other than English. Some were born and raised in the U.S., and others immigrated as children or adults. Some have learned to speak and understand English, and some have not.



In the St. Francis Region in Southern California, almost 40% of the members speak Korean. There are two fraternities of Vietnamese speakers, and two Spanish-speaking fraternities. There is also a fraternity that has a majority of members who speak Tagalog.

This has a great impact on how the region communicates and functions. It impacts how plans are made for such events as regional gatherings, fraternal and pastoral visits, and Chapter.

The current Regional Executive Council (REC) includes members who speak Spanish and Korean. The previous REC also had a Vietnamese speaker. Three regional members act as translators for the region, translating important documents. These include part of the quarterly regional newsletter, documents that are distributed at Chapter, and other regional documents.

At Chapters, translated notes are provided so all attendees are aware of what is being covered in the presentations. All the liturgies include parts spoken, and sometimes sung, in all four languages.



Attendees at the 2025 Regional Chapter

It is evident at the regional picnics that language differences are no barrier to eating, playing and laughing together – especially with all the delicious international food that is shared. Members assist in translating prayers as well as activities when needed. One highlight is when each culture group shares their own version of grace before lunch.

At last year’s regional gathering, the topic was the Stigmata of St. Francis. There were two OFM presenters – one English speaker and one Korean. Everyone gathered for an international potluck lunch, followed by a PowerPoint presentation of various Stigmata pictures set to music. There were pre-translated questions for members to discuss after the PowerPoint.

Working in and with a multicultural, multilingual region takes special planning and translation work. It means getting some tasks done sooner so that the translators have time to get their work completed. These are all challenges that are worth addressing, for it states in our Rule, Art. 19:

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.

Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others.

**Most high, all powerful, good Lord,  
Yours are the praises, the glory, and the honor, and all blessing.  
To You alone, Most High, do they belong,  
and no human is worthy to mention Your Name.**

“All Creation Sings”  
by Fr. John De La Riva, OFM Cap.  
Conference of National Spiritual Assistants



The first time I was introduced to the “Canticle of the Creatures,” I was easily captivated by its seemingly all-encompassing spirit of joy and praise of our good God. Without knowing Francis’ story well nor the context of this canticle’s writing, I imagined him frolicking through a vast field of flowers on a

bright summer’s day, without a care in the world. Yes, a moment when the true blessings of the Lord can be so obvious, even to the most tepid of believers. What was this setting of inspiration? What treasure could so captivate St. Francis?

At the writing of the Canticle, St. Francis is about twenty years along his journey as the “Troubadour” of Christ. After a forty-night vigil in the solitude of Mount La Verna, at which time St. Francis received the stigmata, he descended the mountain fatigued from long periods of fasting and penances, all the while burdened with illness and the sting of near blindness.

Coming down from Mount La Verna, he arrived at the dwellings of San Damiano, finding welcome and care from St. Clare and her sisters. Like St. Peter at the Transfiguration, St. Francis came down the mountain transformed with a clearer awareness of his life in Christ – an epiphany, so to speak, that sealed a union with his crucified Lord and with all creation.

There was no longer a divide between the agony and ecstasy of life. Soon, his tired body could not restrain the ecstatic force of his spirit, which felt an overwhelming desire to praise, honor, and glorify God in all his goodness. Touching upon every

creature and element of the earth and sky, as if extending a hand of invitation, St. Francis called upon all creation to join in one chorus of praise.

“A voice crying out:” St. Francis, like a true Troubadour, extends a hand of invitation to us to join in dancing and singing praise in all that is precious and unique and universal in our “Pilgrim” experience of life, and to realize in whom we live, breathe, and have our being.

The witness of St. Francis encourages us, in the midst of our own times of trial, dryness, doubt and hesitation, to humbly entrust our lives to Christ. He is our light of Hope. In the timing of God’s Providence, we will find the assurance of Christ, lovingly sustaining and guiding us in all circumstances of life. No longer will the weight of trial or prospect of death have the ability to silence our joy or disrupt our peace.

At the beginning of the Covid shutdown in my neighborhood, there began to arise the sound of a flute. I saw a young man walking pensively down our block playing his simple instrument. He paused, at one point, and looking up, he gave a nod of his head and a smile of encouragement as he continued his stroll on to the streets beyond. He, like Francis, like John the Baptist, was “a voice crying out” with a sign of hope in a desert of testing. In this Jubilee Year of Hope, Pope Francis calls us to be renewed in the hope that is the Risen Christ. Christian hope not only enables us to give due thanksgiving in the abundance of good fortune but to also persevere (and thrive) in praise of God amidst trial and suffering.

Let us, each in our own way, “cry out” and give voice to praise of God in faith, hope and love for our neighbor. Perhaps our “song” of Praise in life will be a melody of encouragement and hope to others along our way.

**Praised be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures,  
especially Sir Brother Sun,  
Who is the day and through whom You give us light.  
And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor;  
and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.**

Sir Brother Sun  
by Vickie Klick, OFS  
Chair, NAFRA Centenary Task Force

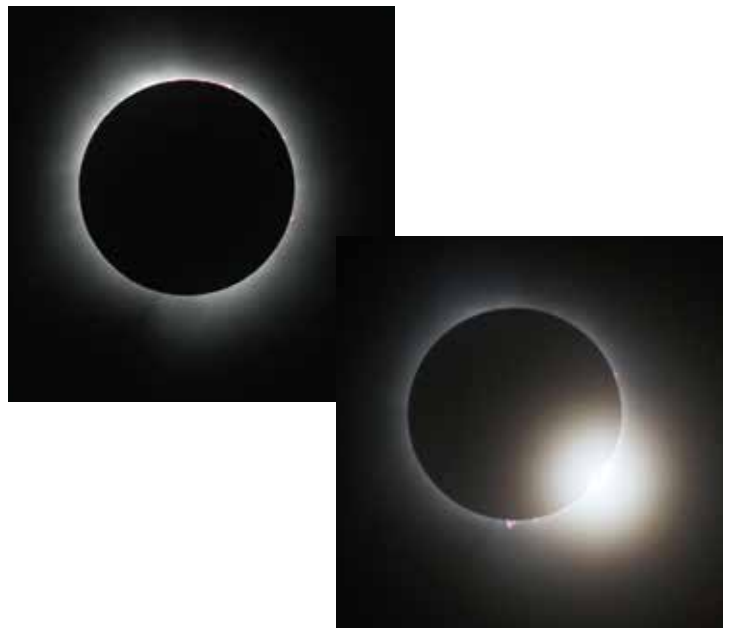
I have been blessed to be present for three total solar eclipses. The first, in 1970 when I was about twelve, was underwhelming, as it was overcast in Valdosta, GA, where my family and many others went to, from Florida, to see the eclipse. I remember the darkness of totality shooting up rapidly from the horizon, but that was the extent of it.

In 2017, I had a commitment on the day of the eclipse, but my husband encouraged me to change my plans and go. My brother's home was in the path of totality, so at the last minute I drove down and couch-surfed at their home. We watched the eclipse from their driveway. It got darker...and cooler...and then we saw the corona. Amazing!

While my husband was kind enough to encourage me to see that eclipse, he couldn't go himself, as it was the first day of the fall semester. I was determined that it would be different in 2024. This was no last-minute adventure! I got photography advice and practiced with the nearly opaque solar filter. Through the generosity of a college friend, we had a place to stay in the totality zone in Indiana. We were also blessed with beautiful weather.



When I think about these events, I remember the amazing natural wonder of the eclipse and seeing the sun's corona, but each one of these events was a time of human togetherness and shared experience. That first eclipse at the rest area on I-75 was shared with my parents and brother as well as many others crowded there. The second was a great time with my brother's family. The trip home in 2017 was another shared experience, with bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-57 once I got back into Illinois, and restaurants that had basically been picked clean of food. It was impressive that so many people had come to see this natural wonder.



We did learn from those past experiences for 2024 (including staying over until the next day). It was special to share it with my husband AND with our close friend from college. I think St. Francis would approve the idea of praising the glory of God's creation with family, friends, and anyone else in the vicinity!



# Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars, in heaven You formed them clear and precious and beautiful.

Sister Moon and the Stars Say to Dance  
by Joe Makley, OFS  
National JPIC Animator

I got to see a lot of the night sky as a boy scout in Florida. Our troop made its tents out of clear plastic off the roll, and we would lay there and watch Sister moon and the constellation Orion tread the great dance as we shared stories before drifting off.



Orion

When I was seventeen, I was sleeping outside again, looking up with a good friend who had left home and school with me to try our luck on the road. He said he felt crushed by the night sky, that its vastness and majesty told him he was insignificant, that it made him feel “like a bug.” To be fair, it was a difficult time in the world for sensitive people, as it is today.

I never lost my amazement at the universe, but I spent far more time worrying about problems on Earth. At age twenty-three I was living in a small backpacking tent on a pond in Maine, when the primeval call of a loon was interrupted by jovial laughter coming down the trail. A friend from the South named Albert appeared, a very welcome representative of the life I was leaving behind.

I drove him around Acadia National Park, showing animated pride that an A-list nature preserve was my back yard. We had lobsters on a harbor wharf, and then he asked me if I needed to borrow some money. I realized that he was thinking his friend had fallen on hard times. I reassured him that I was living this way by choice, and I was fine, but I could see he was doubtful.

We met a talkative young man and invited him to join our excursion. He said his name was Josete, and he was Jewish, and was traveling the country searching various places. He had recently come from the northwest, which he felt was beautiful, but diminishing for humans as “the scale is so totally humbling.” He seemed to still be looking for the right place.

After dark we stopped at Asticou Terraces, a garden trail that follows a cliff with steps to a series of overlooks above Northeast Harbor, toniest of the Island’s coastal villages. In the soft moonlight, the well-manicured stones were easy going, and bathed in a heavy scent of balsam fir, arbor vitae, and sea air. Below, the stars were reflected in wavelets and the sloops slip-slopped at their moorings.

Conversation diminished, and stopped altogether as we entered a high, moss-covered granite patio. As we gazed outward, the largest meteor I’ve ever seen streaked across the sky, broke into several pieces, each with their own trail, and left us breathless. For that moment, we were all in the right place, and we knew we were. I felt a deep gratitude, and perhaps an inkling of what Saint Francis meant in those words: “Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Moon and the stars...”



In my life up to that point, I had not really internalized what appeared so obvious to St. Francis. When we gaze at the night sky and marvel at the self-evident hand of an amazing God, we are more than spectators. As we work in the name of Jesus, His co-eternal Son, to bring peace and justice and human dignity to this temporal world, we take our place in the great dance.

**Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Wind,  
and through the air, cloudy and serene, and every kind of weather,  
through whom You give sustenance to Your creatures.**

**Brother Wind**  
by Francesco Jim Doyle, OFS, and Miriam Mangrobang, OFS  
Marianne Cope Fraternity in Oahu, Hawaii

We live in Hawaii, so the stanza on Brother Wind is particularly meaningful for us here. We are blessed to have the trade winds, which Hawaii is well-known for and which we experience very often in profound and beautiful ways.

Since we are one of the most isolated island groups in the world, Brother Wind blows across thousands of miles of open ocean, many in the form of trade winds, that encompass the Hawaiian Islands. These winds, which used to facilitate westward sailing and trade routes, help to bring moisture, cool temperatures, and rainfall. These moderate our climate, so that seasonal differences are minor and contribute to our lush tropical environment.

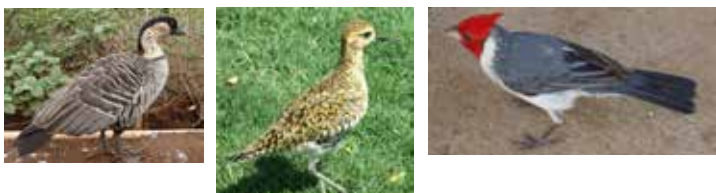


Brother Wind brings life itself and what a life it is!

The trade winds bring clouds, which hit the barrier of our volcanic mountains and release the water that we drink, grow our food, and cleanse ourselves and our environment.



Birds of every color imaginable, many of which only live in Hawaii, fly through the air on these gentle winds.



Flowers of every color and scent grace our land, which we use to make lei to greet and show love for one another. One can often smell the flowers just by walking around and then Brother Wind carries the scents to every corner and space on the islands and even inside our homes. Each flower has a unique scent and a different meaning in our Hawaiian culture and life.



Some leaves and ferns even have scents ranging from subtle to overwhelming, which take one's breath away and transport us closer to God.



One can smell the scent of the ocean even in the mountains with the wind, as well as the scent of the rain there and even on the beaches.

We are truly and deeply blessed by Brother Wind.

**Praised be You, my Lord, through Sister Water,  
who is very useful and humble and precious and chaste.**

Sister Water and the H2O Project  
by Cathy Roszhart, OFS  
Vice-Minister, St. Thomas More Region

***“Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water.”***

Pope Francis

You may be familiar with and donate to the H2O Project, the international project that helps promote Christian solidarity, advocacy and financial support for poor communities who have no access to clean drinking water.

Last year our national fraternity donated a total of \$10,400 for the H2O project to three separate entities including the Well4Africa social initiative. Out of that total amount, \$4,400 went to Well4Africa alone.

The H2O Project is usually promoted during Lent; however, contributions are welcome all year. With that in mind, during the summer of 2024, an objective to raise money was developed in St. Thomas More region. Members were offered a way to participate in a collective action to help bring clean drinking water to our brothers and sisters all over the world.

***“... I was thirsty and you gave me a drink...”***

(Matthew 25:35)

My husband Steve and I were preparing to walk the Camino de Santiago in the fall from Lisbon, Portugal, to Santiago de Compostella, Spain (400 miles). Inspired with the idea to raise money for the H2O Project, we asked all members in our region to consider sponsoring our pilgrimage by pledging a dollar amount for the miles we planned to walk.



The connection between our Camino trek and the water project seemed obvious. When pilgrims set out to walk on the Way to Santiago, it is imperative to constantly keep hydrated throughout the day. Conversely, it is essential to be mindful of the amount of water you need to carry with you. You want to have



enough water until you reach the next opportunity to fill up your bottle without weighing yourself down unnecessarily with too much water. Also, as you pass by public fountains, you need to ensure that the water is potable and safe to drink.

With this great awareness of the need for water during our walk, we truly appreciated various acts of kindness like when a young woman offered to fill our water bottles with ice cubes or when the woman at a café refilled our bottles with tap water instead of charging us for another bottle of water. These were great blessings! In the end, our Camino experience increased our empathy for all who thirst in this world.



Once we returned from our pilgrimage, we collected the donations. A total of 24 individuals and 3 fraternity councils generously contributed. At the beginning of this year, the members of St. Thomas More Region presented a check to our National fraternity in the amount of \$ 3,270 to contribute to the H2O Project.

**Praised be You, my Lord, through Brother Fire,  
through whom You light the night,  
and he is beautiful and playful and robust and strong.**

Brother Fire  
by Kathleen Molaro, OFS  
National FY/YA Commission Chair

Many of us can relate to the image of fire as a “brother” as St. Francis did. There is something special about sitting around a campfire and sharing stories; huddling in front of a woodstove on a cold night; lighting candles to add ambiance; cooking over an open fire.

Francis used to say “At dawn, when the sun rises, everyone should praise God, who created it, because through it the eyes are lighted by day. And in the evening, when it becomes night, everyone should praise God for another creature, Brother Fire, because through it the eyes are lighted at night.” (Assisi Compilation #83)



Fire is beautiful, merry, and powerful when it dances in a campfire, cooks our meals, warms our bodies, or lights our way. But we here in California also experience our greatest fear when that dance crosses a boundary of safety or the power rages into a full-blown catastrophe, destroying everything in its path.



More than six years ago, the deadliest fire in the state’s history destroyed over 150,000 acres, killed 85 people and completely wiped out the town of Paradise. The community gathered on their recent anniversary, not to dwell on that horrific time, but to celebrate the hopeful future of the town. A mural was unveiled made of ceramic tiles of the handprints of local school children. The colorful handprints, arranged to depict a sunset, emphasized the power of a community united. The Rebuild Paradise Foundation explained that after the fire, the town experienced a dramatic landscape change. With the removal of trees came the emergence of new views, including the previously hidden sunsets and sunrises. The beauty of these sunsets has become a symbol of hope!

Not to diminish the tragic event, but to witness the good that has come as a result, it is evident that out of the ashes has come a stronger community, built on resilience, joy, determination, and courage. It has been a united effort.



In the recent Palisades Fire, there has been a similar response. Folks seeking solace amid the devastating loss have also found a sense of hope. One young person told me, “My neighborhood is stronger than ever now. We didn’t lose our houses, but most of the neighborhoods around us are gone. We come together often to discuss ways we can offer support to those who have suffered greatly.”

In the Palisades Fire, a blue VW van found intact in the midst of a completely destroyed background has become their symbol of hope. The van, only partially affected by the fire, stood in defiance and encouraged citizens to see that it is possible to rebuild their lives despite hardships.



Francis wasn’t immune to Brother Fire’s dangerous qualities. There are many stories of his respect for fire. He never wanted to extinguish any fire, even when his cloak was burning! He insisted Brother Fire be allowed to die on his own rather than being purposefully extinguished. And when he faced the trauma of cauterization of his eyes, he praised Brother Fire and reminded him that he had loved him all his life. He then said, “I pray our Creator who made you, to temper your heat now, so that I may bear it.” (Assisi Comp. #86)

So, even though fire can be devastating, it can also be an opportunity to light our way and guide us on our quest for holiness. Isaiah tells us, “You will emerge from the ashes as a new phoenix; you will be fully restored; you will be reestablished and you will roar.” (Isaiah 14:24) Let us praise the Lord through Brother Fire!

**Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Mother Earth,  
who sustains and governs us,  
and who produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.**

Sister Mother Earth  
by Bret Thoman, OFS

St. Francis composed his masterful prayer-poem, *Canticle of the Creatures*, in the Umbrian dialect 800 years ago. He was staying alongside the church of San Damiano to be close to St. Clare. Aged and infirm and nearly blind, he dictated it to one of his friars, “seeing” through the inner eye of his mind.

As anyone who has ever been to Assisi will undoubtedly agree, there, in the seraphic city, it feels natural to praise God for his wondrous creation. It appears that God had something particularly special in mind when he created the majestic Umbrian Mountains and the vast Spoleto Valley.

Hence, we may assume it was easy for St. Francis to gaze at God’s beautiful creation, feel a kinship with all created things, and pine to praise the Lord for Sister Mother Earth. Yet, the *Canticle* is rich in meaning. Indeed, St. Francis is more than the “birdbath saint.”

Francis never praises God’s works of creation; rather, he praises God the Creator *per*, or through, his works. When Francis looked at creation, he saw the Creator. Thomas of Celano emphasized this point: “In art he praises the Artist; whatever he discovers in creatures he guides to the Creator. He rejoices in all the works of the Lord’s hands, and through their delightful display he gazes on their life-giving reason and cause.” (*Second Life*, Chapter 124, 165).

Francis believed that all creation was good. For those of us informed by the Genesis creation narrative, this seems evident. (See Genesis 1:31). Yet, Francis’ era was rife with dualistic worldviews. Many groups in that milieu, such as the Cathars, asserted that only the “Spirit” was good, while the “material world” was corrupt.

Moreover, Francis’ relationship toward the created world differed from that of many who adhered to the Catholic faith. Yes, God confers dominion to man over all animals (see Genesis 1:26; 28). However, many have misunderstood this word as “domination.” They used it as an excuse to lord themselves over creation as masters and not safeguard it as stewards.

St. Francis, instead, perceived his relationship with the created world as fraternal. St. Bonaventure described it in this way: “From a reflection on the primary source of all things, filled with even more abundant piety, he would call creatures, no matter how small, by the name of ‘brother’ or ‘sister,’ because he knew they shared with him the same beginning” (*Major Legend*, Chapter 8, 6).

Thus, these words flowed easily from his heart and mind. This stanza is the last of those dedicated to the “elements,” that is, fire, air, water, and earth. Since antiquity, these four elements were believed to comprise the fundamental building blocks of all matter. In a sense, this stanza is the most notable, since the earth represents solidity and stability.

Indeed, Francis sees the earth not just as “sister”—in Italian, a gendered language, the word for earth is *terra*, which is feminine—he sees the land as his “mother.” For it is the land that “sustains and governs.”

These few words reveal how Francis trusted in the Providence of God working through the earth. It suggests a docile, fraternal, and filial trust in God. St. Francis—ever the poet and troubadour—recognizes the beauty of creation. Indeed, the earth “produces various fruit with colored flowers and herbs.”

Alas, the *Canticle of Creatures* is a prayer more from the heart than the head. St. Francis’ theology was, first and foremost, lived—and lived with the love of Christ profoundly immersed in his heart.

May we, too, like St. Francis and the Psalmist, sing out to God, “Let [all creation] praise the Lord’s name, for his name alone is exalted, His majesty above earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148:13)



# Ministry to My Family? What Does It Look Like?

by Francine Gikow, OFS

Remember the King in scripture who invited many guests to a wedding banquet for his son, but they would not come? (Matt: 22) The guests were “too busy, had to take care of business, or were away on a trip.” Remember all the excuses? Sound familiar? This occurs in families even now.

I know a young woman with a similar experience. She had a small wedding due to limited finances (since both parents had died), and only two relatives attended her wedding along with the hosting aunt. Similar excuses were made - the “wedding was too far away,” “I can’t come,” and “I forgot!” There was no wedding shower since everyone assumed someone else was giving it, and no one saw it as their responsibility. As a result, it did not happen. The young woman was heartbroken.

Do we also give excuses for not “being there” for our family members? Do we assume others will be available and not get involved? In this example, no one did anything and only a few came to the wedding. The young woman, mourning the deaths of her parents, was left unsupported on her wedding day by her extended family.

For me, the first question is: do I see myself as a “minister” to my family, or am I taking my family for granted? Ministering to your family can be hard. It can open areas of historical hurt, wounds, and miscommunication. It may force you to change in ways you do not prefer. It takes courage to witness to God’s love in family relationships that are already broken, but “being there” is the first step!

How many times have we promised an elderly relative that we’ll visit them in a nursing home? Time passes and six months have elapsed between visits. Visiting a shut in, bringing a mercy meal, staying with a sick family member, picking up a child from school; all are ministries.

In addition, how we accompany family members is extremely important. Are we ready to support and be present to our family members, not by instructing them on what to do, but just being present and listening? The ministry of our “presence” speaks louder than any word we could utter.

Sharing a person’s suffering is an invitation for growth, relationship and love for each other. It is relationship building at its best. Although distressing and uncomfortable at times, sharing in someone’s joys and sufferings means that we also share in Christ’s suffering and His resurrection.

Our presence for a family member can be an example of Christ being present to them as we stand in Jesus’ stead. Providing a small unrequested service brings hope and consolation to families in distress and lets them know they are not alone. It can provide an opening for forgiveness and reconciliation, and it is those small unidentified tasks given in love that bind up the wounds of a broken world.



Forgiveness is essential in any family and especially when we minister to our own. Perhaps we have seen families who hold grudges, do not forgive, and isolate certain family members due to past issues. However, this should not be the way for a Secular Franciscan. As our Rule states: Mindful that they are bearers of peace...they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony with dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. (Article 19)

We should readily forgive and ask forgiveness for our own wrongful behavior. Is this easy? No, because it reveals our vulnerability, pride, flaws, and self-centeredness. However, as Paul wrote, “Be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.” (Eph. 4:32)

# The Family Apostolate: JPIC for Secular Franciscans

by Francine Gikow, OFS  
National Formation Commission

A JPIC apostolate for Secular Franciscans, essential and unique to our order, is our ministry to our families. Pope St. John Paul II, in his Letter to Families (FC), stated: "...a person normally comes into the world within a family and can be said to owe to the family the very fact of his existing as an individual." (p.6) From the United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: The family is essential and a prerequisite for a healthy society due to the authority, stability, and loving relationships that are found in families in order to sustain freedom, security, and community responsibility. (USCC-A, p.383)

Our families are not just biological or relational connections. In *Lumen Gentium*, Family is described as "the domestic church" (LG, 11) because we share common beliefs, purpose, and life, in a family. "...[It] has been a treasure for the Church...[and] grows out of the rich tradition of the old covenant, is completed in the new and finds its fullest symbolic expression in the mystery of the Holy Family in which the divine bridegroom brings about the redemption of all families." (FC, p. 92)

If married, "...in virtue of the sacrament of Matrimony by which they signify and share the mystery of the unity and faithful love between Christ and the Church, the Christian married couples help one another to attain holiness in their married state and in the rearing of children." (LG,11) Pope St. John Paul II expands this thought: "[Even] if someone chooses to remain single, the family continues to be, as it were, his existential horizon, that fundamental community in which the whole network of social relations is grounded....Do we not often speak of the "human family" when referring to all people living in the world?" (FC, p.6)

In our Rule, Article 17 states: "In their family they should cultivate the Franciscan spirit of peace, fidelity, and respect for life, striving to make of it a sign of a world already renewed in Christ." However, the Church is realistic when she adds:

"They need to remember that a family is holy not because it is perfect, but because God's grace is at work in it." (USCC-A p. 376)

Our General Constitutions expand this emphasis on the importance of family by saying, "Secular Franciscans should consider their own family to be the first place in which to live their Christian commitment and Franciscan vocation. They should make space within it for prayer, the Word of God, and Christian catechesis. They should concern themselves with respect for all life in every situation from conception until death." (GC:24)

Article 17 of our Rule continues: "By living the grace of matrimony, husbands and wives in particular, should bear witness in the world to the love of Christ for his Church." We can be this witness when we joyfully accompany our children on their human and spiritual journey by providing a simple and open Christian education and being attentive to the vocation of each child.

Our Constitution summarizes our family apostolate when it describes the importance of this ministry to our families and its effect on the world: "Participation in the service and sanctification, which the Church exercises through the liturgy, prayer, and works of penance and charity, is put into practice by the brothers and sisters above all in their own family, then in the fraternity and, finally through their active presence in the local church and in society." (GC:17.4)

Pray silently for 10 minutes and consider:

- Have you seen ministry to your own family as important for your Secular Franciscan vocation in the past?
- How has this information changed your understanding of the importance of family ministry?
- What changes can you make for your family?

# Regional Roundup

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



## Los Tres Compañeros Region

The Los Tres Compañeros Region covers the central swath of Texas from the southern tip in the south to Dallas and Fort Worth in the north and has 18 established fraternities.

When the region was formed, many names were suggested by the members. To “walk with Francis,” the name “Los Tres Compañeros” was decided upon to express the diversity within the great state of Texas. The three portions within the region are Leo, Angelo, and Rufino.

It is a diverse region where members respond to the cultural blessings provided by the various members. They assist with migrant issues and have members that help with many of those needs within their local parishes. Everything they do - they do as Franciscans.



## Mother Cabrini Region

The Dioceses of Joliet, Rockford and Chicago are in the northeast corner of Illinois and are within the Mother Cabrini Region. It has 19 established fraternities and one emerging community.

The shrine of Mother Frances Xavier Cabrini is in Chicago. Local lore is that Benet Fonck, OFM, was the Spiritual Assistant, and that he attributed his own medical cure to her intercession. So, her name was chosen for the region.

The fraternities within Mother Cabrini Region are geographically close, allowing members to drive to be together. The usual gathering place for the region is Mayslake Village, which was founded as a retirement home in 1965 by the Franciscans under the direction of Fr. Mark Hegener, OFM, one of the earliest advocates for the needs and rights of the elderly. Over 75% of its residents are in HUD Section 8 housing.

The oldest fraternity in the region was founded in the 1870's. Mother Cabrini Region is blessed that over 100 people attend their regional formation events.



## St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region

The region of St. Elizabeth of Hungary covers all of Northern New England – Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont, as well as eastern Massachusetts - the Boston area and Cape Cod, and one fraternity in easternmost New York. Within the region are 24 established fraternities and two emerging communities.

After members in the region were asked to submit names, St. Elizabeth of Hungary was selected by the vote of the regionalization committee, and the NEC approved it. St. Elizabeth is the co-patroness of our Order.

The region has over 400 members and is made up of six districts. In the Boston area there is a Cape Verdean fraternity, a Spanish-speaking fraternity, and a Korean fraternity. Multiple members from the region have served and continue to serve at the national level.



## St. Katherine Drexel Region



St. Katherine Drexel Region covers southern New Jersey, eastern Pennsylvania (Reading to Philadelphia) and one fraternity in Delaware. It has 23 fraternities and three emerging groups.

When the region was established, Katherine Drexel had been beatified. She was a Philadelphia native, and was the daughter of Francis Drexel. Her mother, Hannah, died five weeks after giving birth to Katherine, who was canonized in 2001.

The region is blessed with a strong Franciscan presence of life-giving union: The motherhouse of the Franciscan Sisters of Philadelphia is in Aston, PA; the Franciscan Bernardine Sisters are in Reading, PA; the OFM friars share their ministry to the poor and homeless in Kensington, PA; there are two Franciscan universities nearby (Neumann and Alvernia); there are Poor Clares in Langhorne, PA, Chesterfield, NJ, and Wilmington, DE; and there are Capuchin friars in Wilmington and Center City Philadelphia.

The oldest fraternity dates back to the late 1800's. Within the region, the Franciscan spirit illuminates six dioceses.



## Juan de Padilla Region

The Juan de Padilla Region covers all of Oklahoma and Kansas, and the Kansas City (KS and MO) metro area. There are 14 fraternities within the region.

Fr. Juan de Padilla was a priest and the first Franciscan who came to spread the Gospel and establish the Church in a new area. In 1540 he accompanied Coronado's expedition to New Mexico. The next year Juan went with the expedition to Kansas, going up through Oklahoma. He met the Quivira Indians and remained to work among them after the explorers returned to Mexico. He was killed by several of the Quivira as he was making his way to the Kaw Indians, traditional enemies of the Quivira. He is the first Christian martyr in what is now the USA.

Juan de Padilla was the last region to be formed. Within the region are the following: a marker at Fort Dodge in Kansas recognizing Coronado's journey to look for the "Seven Cities of Gold" – Cibola; the Blessed Stanley Rother Shrine in Oklahoma City; the World Center of Prayer for Peace in Beloit, KS; and, until it was removed, there was a marker in Herington, KS, noting Fr. Juan de Padilla's activities in the area.

There are fraternities in the region that have been established for more than 100 years. Brother Jacoba Fraternity has outreach to First Nations People and members travel hours to Indian Reservations four times each year to deliver goods that have been collected for the tribal people using a large moving van.

Juan de Padilla Region also has an excellent website. Check it out: [www.jdpofs.org](http://www.jdpofs.org)

# REGISTRATION OPENS AUGUST 1

Look for the registration link in the next issue of TAU-USA!



\$550 - Early Registration	August 1- December 31, 2025
\$650 - Regular Registration	January 1- May 31, 2026
\$725 - Late Registration	June 1- June 30, 2026
\$200 - Single Day Registration	August 1, 2025 - June 30, 2026

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Registrations subject to a \$100 non-refundable deposit.

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***Easter of St. Francis  
Rekindle the Flame***

Questions: Please send email to: [ofsusa.qcongress@gmail.com](mailto:ofsusa.qcongress@gmail.com)

# CALENDAR

MONTH	DAY	EVENT/MEETING
May	6	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	<b>8-11</b>	<b>JPIC Retreat – Mesilla Park, NM</b>
	16-18	Five Franciscan Martyrs Region Visitation
	28-6/1	Ohana ‘O Ke Anuenue Region Visitation and Election
	29-31	Queen of Peace Region Visitation
	30-6/1	Lady Poverty Region Election
June	1	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	6-8	Troubadours of Peace Region Election
	<b>11</b>	<b>2025 Chapter Registration Opens</b>
	13-15	Our Lady of Indiana Region Election
	13-15	Los Tres Companeros Region Election
	27-29	La Verna Region Visitation
July	1	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	11-13	Franciscans of the Prairie Region Visitation and Election
	<b>15</b>	<b>NEC Nominations Slate to NAFRA</b>
	18-19	St. Maximilian Kolbe Region Visitation and Election
	<b>24</b>	<b>NAFRA Summer Meeting via Zoom</b>
	<b>26</b>	<b>2025 Chapter Registration Closes</b>
August	<b>1</b>	<b>2026 “Q” Registration Opens</b>

NAFRA – National Fraternity

NEC – National Executive Council

JPIC – Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation



The revised Ritual of the Secular Franciscan Order is available for order from the National Fraternity's online bookstore.

Access the bookstore for the Ritual, Rule and other offerings at:

<https://gospel-to-life-bookstore.square.site/>

Email questions to: [GospelToLifeBookstore@gmail.com](mailto:GospelToLifeBookstore@gmail.com)

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