



A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE
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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A Dog Bite and Matthew 5:44

by Jane De-Rose Bamman, OFS
National Minister

Recently, a dog bit me. At our initial encounter, he seemed friendly but as he was passing me, he turned around to bite my leg. Not a nip – a real bite! I did nothing to provoke it. But who really knows ... the dog didn't give me a reason for the action.

That experience made me ponder our relationships, especially with our enemies. Although we don't always recognize them at first, people who can harm us do exist.

Daily we pray: "... he promised of old that he would save us from our enemies, from the hands of all who hate us." (Lk 1:70-71). Then in Matt 5:44, Jesus said "... love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

These scripture passages challenge us to consider what an enemy is and who our enemies are. According to The American Heritage Dictionary, enemy comes from the Latin word *inimicus* which means "bad friend."

Do I have any human enemies? Is there anyone in my family, fraternity, community or in the world, I view as an enemy or a bad friend? No one comes to mind. But I do avoid those whose actions irritate me or who are arrogant or rude. Enemies? Sort of.

Does an enemy need to know that they are considered an enemy to truly be one? Does it have to be mutual with each person hating the other? If it is just in my mind, does it meet the definition of an enemy?

Matt 5:44 calls us to love our enemies. In one case, I considered a former coworker, now a competitor, as an enemy. I harbored ill feelings because I felt the coworker had badmouthed my husband, Brian, and me. I did not want to be around that person at all. Instead of killing the relationship, it was time for me to apply Matt 5:44 – a work in progress.

People of various cultures may be viewed as enemies because of differences or their impact on the environment. Neighbors may be considered enemies because of noise levels or unkept yards, harming your sense of peace and quiet or property value. Fraternity brothers or sisters may be thought of as enemies because they ask us to do something we don't agree with, or we don't feel we are treated with the respect we deserve. Am I willing to love my enemies and pray for those who persecute me – including family members? I am willing to try.

I have been guilty of assuming something about a perceived enemy and come to find out the person had no intent of harm at all. I just needed to get to know the person or the full story behind the circumstances.

The wisdom of the Gospel call to love our enemies is a prompt to be in relationship with these persons. Sometimes when coexisting you can see the benefits of another. Having a relationship with an enemy may actually turn that person into a friend.

Although I choose to try to apply Matt 5:44 instead of harboring ill will towards a "bad friend," I will still be cautious with stray dogs in the neighborhood.



Formation: The Heart of Secular Franciscan Life

by Layna Maher, OFS
National Formation Commission Chair

Formation is more than a requirement for becoming a Secular Franciscan; it is the very heart of our vocation. It is a lifelong journey of conversion and transformation, shaping us into true Gospel people in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare.

Initial formation is the first step in a lifelong journey of learning, growing and discerning our vocations. It allows us to experience life in fraternity along with the privileges and responsibilities of the brothers and sisters. Initial formation gives the individuals and the fraternity tools to discern if they have a Franciscan vocation and if this is the path they will take and promise to live for the rest of their life.

Ongoing formation provides continuous opportunities for conversion and transformation as we strive to live our Rule. Good formation changes us and challenges us to question how we're doing on that journey. It gives us opportunities to reflect on our lives, the choices we make, the interactions that we have, and if we truly are living life to gospel and gospel to life. Formation supports us to continue growing in our vocation as we study the lives of St. Francis and St. Clare, the OFS Rule, and the gospels.

The lives and writings of St. Francis and St. Clare inspire and ground us. Their radical love, humility, and faithfulness light our path, reminding us that formation is not simply intellectual study but a call to interior conversion and outward witness.

Our OFS Rule gives us clear guidance on how we are to live our lives, calling us to simplicity, peace, justice, and care for creation. Living our Rule shapes how we relate to God, others, and the world. According to Article 4 of the OFS Rule, "Secular Franciscan should devote themselves to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel." Reading and reflecting on the gospels will help us to walk in the footsteps of Francis as he followed in the footsteps of Jesus.

As we become more and more familiar with the gospels, the Word of God becomes more and more alive in us, guiding our choices and actions.

Article 15 of the OFS Rule calls Franciscans to "... individually and collectively be in the forefront of promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives. Especially in the field of public life, they should make definite choices in harmony with their faith." It's often in the difficult choices about what we're willing to share of our lives, our time, and our resources.



Photo By: ATC Comm Photo from Pexels

Living our Rule shapes how we relate to God, others, and the world.

In the gospels, Jesus gives us clear direction on how we are to live, love and forgive. For example, we can read and reflect on "The Judgment of the Nations" in Matthew 25 and ask "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or ill or in prison, and not minister to your needs?" Who are the marginalized in our communities? Do we see them? Do we help them? Do we love them? There are many people, including the young, old, homeless, sick, imprisoned, immigrants, and poor around us in need. We are called to be Christ to them. The actions and choices we make in our life tell the world who we are and what we value. Living the tenets of the gospel help us to shine the love and light of Christ into the world.

Formation gives us the opportunity for conversion, transformation, and to discern if we are truly living our OFS Rule and fulfilling our profession promise. Formation guides us as we figure out how we are called to be joyful, humble followers of Christ and to bring God's love and light into the world.

Our Relationship with CIOFS

by Mary Frances Charsky, OFS
International Councilor

Our relationship with the International Fraternity, CIOFS, begins with all of us being brothers and sisters of Secular Franciscans around the world. I recall former National Minister, Tom Bello, OFS, telling us that we are members of four fraternities: the local, Regional, National and International Fraternities. We are connected to all Franciscans around the world.

The International Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order is guided and animated by the International Council of the Secular Franciscan Order (CIOFS). It is organized and functions in conformity with the *OFS Rule, the General Constitutions, the Ritual and the Statutes*.

The International Council is made up of seventy International Councilors elected by the National Fraternities in the world, the CIOFS Presidency (of elected officers and Councilors), representatives of Franciscan Youth (YouFra) and the four General Spiritual Assistants.

The objective of every level of the Order is to help each brother and sister attain holiness according to one's own personal Secular Franciscan vocation. We live in fraternity, always striving for unity with one another.

It is my joy to serve as the International Councilor for OFS-USA! Being together with sisters and brothers throughout the world is both enlightening and heartwarming! It is my responsibility to participate in the General Chapters which are scheduled every three years. Communication between CIOFS and the National Fraternity is expected as well as speaking/voting at the General Chapters in the name of the National Fraternity that I represent.

Here is a new logo and brand design for CIOFS. "A circle of rays bursting out from the Tau, like the sun shining on the secular world" is the description according to their website <https://www.ciofs.info>.



Ordo Franciscanus Saecularis
Consilium Internationale

The logo can be used with or without words and you will see it on the letters that Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, writes to us.

We are blessed to have the current Vice-Minister General, Mary Stronach, OFS, from the United States serving on the Presidency. Mary is the first member from the USA to serve on the Presidency during a six-year term. Every six years there is a General Chapter for elections. The interim three-year Chapter meets to address the theme, priorities, budget and statutes of the International Fraternity.

We are fortunate to have Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS, from Peru, as the CIOFS contact for the OFS-USA. Ana Maria and Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM Cap., General Spiritual Assistant, are coming to preside and witness the OFS-USA national elections in September 2025.

Secular Franciscans worldwide are encouraged to be compelling witnesses to build God's Kingdom through their everyday lives in a spirit of charity following the Gospel. We realize that our vocation is not just for ourselves. We are called to bring Christ into the world by following in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi.

Please read **Vox Franciscana**, the international OFS newsletter in digital form found at <https://ciofs.info/news/vox-franciscana/>

It is edited by Bob Stronach, OFS, from the USA. You will see photographs of national fraternities around the world during elections, visitations and YouFra gatherings. We truly are a global Franciscan family!



Building Relationships with Young People

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS
National FY/YA Commission Chair

As Catholics, we believe that one way God loves us is through other people. Jesus commands us to love one another. “This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples: If you love one another.” (John 13:34)

In her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*, Dorothy Day emphasized this truth: “We cannot love God unless we love each other, and to love we must know each other.” The YouFra commission has long advised that the first step in bringing the gospel to young people is to build relationships with them. But the question arises, “How can we do that?” Although there are many ways, there are three necessary attributes to develop.

Practice Virtues

What virtues will help us build relationships? St. Paul tells us, “Put on ... heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another.” (Colossians 3:12) When interacting with young people, these virtues give them a glimpse of the depth of God’s love. The way you connect and respond to a younger person is essential.

Be Authentic

Young people are tired of fake news, fake online profiles, AI rather than humans, and people whose actions do not match their words. An article in the online publication, *The Conversation*, states “this generation has grown up in a digital age where social media and online personas are part of everyday life – as are misinformation, disinformation,” and I would add, outright dishonesty.

<https://theconversation.com/topics/relationships>

As a result, young people have had to develop an acute ability to discern what is genuine from what is artificial.

Dorothy Day also wrote in her autobiography:

In a good relationship, two people strive to be their most authentic selves. It is in relationships that we find out who we really are, if we embrace the vulnerability of exposing more and more of ourselves to another person.

Young people need to know we’re not perfect and are searching for answers and striving for purpose just as they are. That truthfulness allows them to connect with you in trust, openness, and confidence.

Courageously Encounter

The word “encounter” is a buzz word lately, and rightly so. Don’t we all crave community? The presence of others? A real and honest connection between ourselves and the world? We can’t build relationships from a distance. Pope Francis urged us to be like Christ and become a culture of encounter. He explained, “when we go into the street, every man thinks of himself: he sees, but does not look; he hears, but does not listen.” In short, everyone goes their own way. And consequently, “people pass each other, but they do not encounter each other.” (Pope Francis: Morning Meditation, *For a Culture of Encounter*, Sept. 13, 2016)

Don’t just pass by a young person. Be creative and courageous. Just as Francis learned when he tried to avoid lepers, we need to see them, hear them, engage with them, and love them as Jesus would.



Kathleen joined the St. Francis YouFra in Phoenix for an evening outreach they’d planned for new students. She asked individuals, “Why did you decide to come tonight?” The conversation revealed their thirst for community and

faith sharing opportunities, and helped deepen their relationships with the YouFra leaders.

Multicultural Relationships

by Willie Guadalupe, OFS
Multicultural Coordinator

Multicultural relationships involve partners from different cultural backgrounds and can present challenges and opportunities. Effective communication is very important, as language barriers and different cultural expressions can complicate relations. You need to be able to understand the differences. Partners may face differences in standards, beliefs, and behaviors, which require time, patience and effort. These relationships can lead to a rich exchange of ideas and cultural norms, fostering personal growth for those involved. Overall multicultural relationships can be rewarding but as stated they require patience, understanding, and open communication to be successful.

Multicultural relationships are justice issues that seek the good of the other person(s). As Franciscans, we are known for our dedication to justice. We strive to bring people together in a society that is fair (or just). Each person needs to feel welcomed to create a diverse OFS community. Each person needs to know that their culture is important to others. When we take the time to connect with people from other cultures, we break down barriers and challenges that may exist.

The link between justice and relationships moves us to develop personal viewpoints and actions that build on relationships. We cannot tolerate actions that deny basic human dignity to anyone involved. Problems become opportunities when the right people work together.

OFS Rule, Article #15

Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives.

Especially in the field of public life, we should make definite choices in harmony with our faith. Immigrants or minority groups who speak a different language may

face challenges in communicating their ideas, needs, or concerns. This can create feelings of isolation and marginalization, preventing individuals from fully participating in society.

We need to address the language challenges inherent in relating to other cultures. Some may speak English, may read English, may write English, but many may not. We need to be considerate of that and know that many times they will need to receive opportunities in their preparation and instruction in formation in their native language. Even for those who may be bilingual, their native language may be their preferred language for worship, or for prayer, because it is their love language.

***Almighty God, through your Holy Spirit you
created unity in the midst of diversity.***

***We acknowledge that human diversity is an
expression of your manifold love for your creation.***

***We confess that in our brokenness as human
beings we turn diversity into a source of
alienation, injustice, oppression, and wounding.***

***Empower us to recognize and celebrate
differences as your great gift to the human family.***

***Enable us to be the architects of understanding,
of respect and love.***

***Please fill our hearts with your Love so that your
light may shine through each one of us.***

AMEN

From jesuitresource.org

Author Unknown; modified by Willie Guadalupe

Relationships and the Church Universal

by Bret Thoman, OFS

*“See what love the Father has bestowed on us
that we may be called the children of God.”
(1 John 3:1)*

What does it mean to be a child of God? It means relating to God, to ourselves, and to others in a deeply sacred manner. It is a mature identity we assume when we become utterly convinced that we are sons or daughters of God the Father through adoption in Jesus Christ. We reach this new identity when we accept that we were created by God the Father, he loves us passionately, knows us intimately, and will provide for us in every circumstance.

This way of relating to others is especially dear to us as Secular Franciscans, in the example of our Seraphic Father. St. Francis, as we know, related to all people and all created things in a way that was fraternal. Believing in faith that all people (and all creation) were created by a loving Father, he could not help but see other people and created things as his brother or sister, that is, fraternally.

When we relate to God and others in this way, it changes everything. Because we have accepted that only God is omnipotent, we admit our limits. In the words of St. Francis, we recognize that “what we are before God, that we are, nothing more” – and I would add, “and nothing less.”

Consequently, we become gentler with ourselves. Moreover, we see others differently. We respond to them with more grace. We do not judge. We recognize that they, too, are fragile like us. It is easier to forgive, as we acknowledge that we are all wounded at some level.

When we recognize our sonship in God, we become aware of our place – the place he has provided for us. We are part of something much greater than ourselves.

This is certainly true regarding the Church universal. Since I was led to convert to Catholicism some thirty years ago, I have been deeply grateful for this gift.

So, when the recent papal conclave was underway, I deeply desired to be present. By chance (providentially?), the day I went to Rome was May 8th, the day the first US born pope was chosen.

We arrived a little after noon just after having missed the first wisp of black smoke rise from the chimney above the Sistine Chapel. While we waited for the next ballot, we entered St. Peter’s and walked down the right aisle, pausing at the tombs of Sts. John Paul II and John XXIII. My eyes welled with emotion as I considered the great pontiffs we have been blessed with in our lifetimes.

I continued past the magnificent Bernini canopy over the *confessio* and tomb of St. Peter, recalling St. Peter’s “confession” that Jesus is the Messiah. Then we continued along the left aisle, among more tombs of earlier popes and pontiffs. As I walked out of the Basilica, I felt so grateful to be part of our Roman Church, with so many diverse popes.

Finally, in the late afternoon, just as we were considering leaving St. Peter’s (it was getting late, and we had a 3-hour drive home) white smoke came out of the chimney. Just over an hour later, a pope born in the U.S. stepped out onto the balcony.



Leo PP. XIV

Pope Leo XIV

There are some days we will never forget. That was one of them. I couldn’t have been more proud and grateful for the gift of our Church.

What Is a Spiritual Assistant?

by Jerome Wolbert, OFM
National Spiritual Assistant

How would you describe spiritual assistance to someone who is not a Secular Franciscan? I have to answer this even for a lot of the friars that I try to recruit to serve. To help someone understand quickly, we have to be nearly complete, very concise, and entirely correct. Think of a priest you know who has never served as a spiritual assistant – what would you say to try to recruit him?

What

You might start with the things you see a spiritual assistant do – attend meetings of the fraternity, its council, and initial formation sessions; serve on the council but not voting in elections or financial issues; provide spiritual input and oversee formation and the spiritual/liturgical life of the fraternity. But the most important role is to “guarantee” the Franciscan charism of the fraternity, which speaks to **how** we serve as much as what we do.

How

Spiritual assistants are not supposed to be directive, although sometimes they must direct. They should support the fraternity, but they also have to challenge its members. Spiritual and pastoral assistance has to be kind, but there are times when the lost sheep has to be found, and there are times they don’t want to be told they are wandering away, especially when they drag or push others.

Listening is an important part of spiritual and pastoral assistance. Therefore, the assistant listens and helps others to listen – and to voice their messages in a way that they are more likely to be heard.

Who

Part of the role of the spiritual assistant is the relationship. We think immediately of someone to make sure the fraternity is connected with the friars, but this relationship is more than facilitating a connection. Canon Law (CIC 303) requires the friars to provide an *altius moderamen* for each

fraternity, a “higher moderation” or outside perspective.

Have you ever been part of a group that got waylaid by one charismatic member? I know this never happens in our fraternities (smile), but maybe in a different type of group. The Church insists that every association of the faithful needs this outside moderation, someone to come in from outside to provide a check to “guarantee the Franciscan charism.” Just as a referee can’t be part of a team on the field, the assistant is someone outside the fraternity who walks with the fraternity. The shepherd is not a sheep but walks with them. This is part of our answer to “who” can be a spiritual assistant.

Accountability

The “outside” part of this requirement shows that this is a kind of accountability – checks and balances. Where only one group is “ruling,” there is less chance to catch mistakes or make sure that different voices are heard. We not only see this in government, but in the Church, as well. We have checks and balances – or outside moderation.

Relationships

In March, the CNSA set forth instructions for the implementation of one of the international statutes that has implications for around three dozen local fraternities and half of our regional fraternities: *A Secular Franciscan cannot be appointed Spiritual Assistant to his/her own Fraternity at any level* (IS 78.2).

While some people have argued this disrespects the service of many OFS members, I hope you see in this article that the question of “who” and the relationships we have are important and should not be set aside just because we lack a friar. In fact, IS 78.1 sets in law that it *is* permissible for an OFS member to serve as a spiritual assistant – something which the General Spiritual Assistants were hesitant to allow ten years ago.



Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Retreat

by Joe Makley, OFS
JPIC Animator



Last May, JPIC animators from around the US gathered at Holy Cross Retreat Center near Las Cruces, NM, to pray, to learn, to build, and to renew connections and commitment. Fr. Ignatius Harding, OFM, (who prefers to be called Br. Iggy) served as our spiritual assistant. On May 9, after morning prayer and a hasty breakfast, we boarded vans to El Paso for an interview with Ruben Garcia at *Annunciation House*. Ruben, the founder of this ministry, gave an impassioned talk about the realities of border life. He explained that it is one thing to say, “they should not come,” and another to hear a young mothers’ story of a desperate attempt to save her child from violence and see the cuts of the razor wire on her hands and feet. Ruben also decried the latest government actions, in particular the cancellations for people who had already been approved for entry. “We broke our word.” He asked for help with advocacy.

Next, we drove to San Martin de Porres Church in Sunland Park, New Mexico, where we met three local OFS fraternities for a beautiful Mass, and a bilingual gathering with flautas and guacamole. Marco Raposo, Director of Peace and Justice for the diocese of El Paso, shared the challenges of serving immigrants, and holding the annual cross-border mass under increasing restrictions. Robust discussion followed. Many thanks to Sofia and Arturo Villarreal, OFS, Louis Galvan, OFS and Br. Iggy, for joining the dialogue.

We then drove to the border wall for a prayer service, to honor the dignity of the many who lost their lives in the desert crossing, and those affected on both sides.

The next day began with a panel discussion, including Fr. Tom Smith, OFM Conv., director of Holy Cross RC, which has offered hospitality to immigrants for years, Bob Kee, from Tucson Samaritans, a desert rescue organization, Donna

Hollis, OFS, who spoke about the children who arrived at Holy Cross, and Br. Iggy, who worked in a shelter in El Paso and with the Network for Migrants.

All the panelists described good people, families and individuals who bear no likeness to the horrific, dehumanized picture that has become normalized in our public discourse. We can help hold the line against this hurtful rhetoric.

The second session focused on JPIC leadership, with veteran animators Patricia Grace, Mike Huck, Jim Andreano, Susan Tabor, and Lynn Freeman sharing ideas, knowledge, wisdom, concerns, and affirmation for the difficult but rewarding work of JPIC. Mike and Susan demonstrated a Sister Water formation resource from the Care for Creation focus group.

In the afternoon, we were lifted up by Fr. Henry Beck, OFM, from Holy Cross RC, speaking on the Franciscan Spirituality of Beauty. Br. Iggy concluded the program connecting immigration justice to the integral ecology of *Laudato Si*. After mass, dinner and reflection, Donna Hollis, OFS, national councilor, spoke earnestly about choosing a life of service, both at Holy Cross RC, and in the OFS, inspiring all of us.

Holy Cross RC is an oasis of pecan groves and bird song in the Chihuahuan Desert. It is Franciscan, visually and in the heart, where friars and staff offer the warmest hospitality. We could not have picked a spot more conducive to the prayer and reflection that accompanied these visits and discussions.

Special thanks to Br. Iggy Harding, OFM, Donna Hollis at Holy Cross RC, Gigi Gregory in El Paso, and Brother David Buer, OFM, who were indispensable to the planning and the success of this retreat. Thanks also for the help of OFS members Mike Huck, Susan Tabor, Elenita Lesperance, Patricia Makley, and Ed and Noreen Ringlein.



Holy Cross entrance gate



JPIC Animators at Annunciation House



Br. Iggy and Donna Hollis
on the immigration panel



Linda Loes, Patricia
Makley, & Dee Gibbs



Fr. Tom and Br. Iggy



At the border wall



Ed Ringlein leading
morning prayer

Justice, Peace and Integrity
of Creation Retreat
May 8 - 11, 2025
Holy Cross Retreat Center
Mesilla Park, NM



Retreat center chapel



Br. Iggy - Kiva Chapel



St. Martin de Porres Church, Sunland Park, NM



Jim Anderano as lector at
San Martin de Porres Church



The labyrinth

Praised be You, my Lord, through those who give pardon for Your love, and bear infirmity and tribulation

Finding Meaning in Suffering
by Sharon Winzeler, OFS
Communications Committee Chair

What do St. Francis of Assisi and Viktor Frankl, famous psychologist and survivor of four World War II concentration camps, have in common?

They both realized that suffering could provide purpose and meaning in our lives.

As Francis said in the Canticle and Frankl said in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, when we approach suffering with a meaningful response, we affirm our humanity and our capacity for spiritual growth.

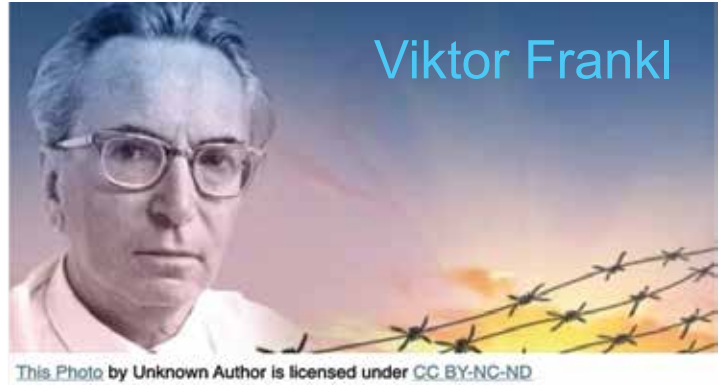
Both men knew that avoidance of suffering was futile. Francis shows us that it brings us closer to Jesus. Frankl reveals that suffering brings us closer to what matters in life. Both men testify that suffering brings growth in our spirituality.

Jesus acknowledges that given the choice, we would avoid suffering, as recorded in Matthew 26:39. "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not as I will, but as you will."

St. Francis reveals that those who forgive and suffer with love and patience are followers of Jesus and witnesses of God's grace. Their actions – especially in painful or unjust situations – are powerful forms of worship and testimony to divine love. Jesus shows us the path to forgiveness in Luke 23:34: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Our Franciscan values of humility, compassion, and joyful acceptance of suffering as a path to union with God help us understand difficult times in life.

Frankl said that when faced with adversity, we have two choices. We can despair or we can create. When we create love, endurance and forgiveness, we create meaning on a spiritual level, which is how Frankl identifies man's search for meaning in life. It reflects Francis's quest for closeness to God.



In his studies, Frankl found the most profound reaction to adversity is doing the next best thing – forgiving or bearing trials and tribulations with acceptance and joy.

We don't get to skip the hard parts of life, but we do have a choice on how we react to them. When we hurt, we can open ourselves to people and beauty. In other words, according to Frankl, we choose our attitude.

This choice is an extension of Francis's definition of perfect joy. As Francis and Brother Leo were once walking in the cold, Francis said, "If we arrive at our friary and the porter refuses to let us in—calls us thieves, beats us, and leaves us out in the freezing night—and we bear this injustice patiently and with love, that is perfect joy." Francis chose the attitude of perfect joy.

Frankl endured three years of unimaginable suffering and the loss of his family in the concentration camps and emerged with a profound sense of empathy and a mission to help others find meaning in their lives. He chose an attitude of compassion and purpose.

In his canticle, Francis shows us that pain and suffering present us with the ability to create a beauty that touches others and brings us closer to God and find purpose and meaning in our lives that Frankl's studies say we need.

Blessed are those who endure in peace for by You, Most High, they will be crowned.

Enduring in Peace
by Joe Makley, OFS
JPIC Animator

The first time I heard about Father Louis Vitale, OFM, was when he had joined the protests at Fort Benning's infamous School of the Americas. As a fairly new Secular Franciscan I was studying the Rule: "Let them individually and collectively be in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and their courageous initiatives..." Father Louie spent six months in jail on two occasions for stepping past those gates at Fort Benning. A year in jail is something to be endured in peace.

Fort Benning did not have the School of the Americas when I first visited there in December 1969. It was a major training area for Vietnam-bound soldiers. I was in the car when my mother drove through those gates to take my older brother, Philip, back to the base after Christmas leave. I saw troops marching along the roads and heard their songs of bravado. I was a senior in high school with my own choices to make soon, and my mother, Elroyce, had to find a way to endure her son's deployment in peace.

Father Louie had been busy long before the protests at SOA. He had led an impactful movement to stop nuclear testing for years and had co-founded Pace e Bene, an organization that provides training in non-violence. As an air force veteran, he felt a special responsibility to bring his love in action to military installations. In 2006, he was at Fort Huachuca, in Sierra Vista, Arizona,



This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CCBY

protesting the torture training manuals being produced there after 9/11. He was arrested, along with two others.

At the same time, down the road in Tombstone, my brother Philip, who had survived the war, was playing Doc Holiday in the gunfight recreations at the OK corral. He was never the same after the war, but he had supported himself driving deliveries for the Jacksonville school system. This was his retirement dream, to be a cowboy. He had serious health issues, but he always endured what came, in peace. In August 2008, I travelled back to Tombstone to be with Philip, who was finally succumbing to the effects of his exposure to Agent Orange on the docks at Long Binh port. We celebrated his 60th Birthday and he died that fall. It's like Faulkner said, "The past is never dead; it's not even past." We all bear the wounds of every war that was ever fought. And Pope Francis never let us forget, "No more war. Never again war!"

Father Louie worked for justice and human dignity, which are both necessary for peace. He emptied himself for peace and for the movement of active non-violence. He endured long periods of incarceration in deep love and peace. Reading something he wrote gave me a clearer picture of how he experienced jail time: *"These days [in jail] are a journey into a new freedom and a slow transformation of being and identity: an invitation to enter one's truest self, and to follow the road of prayer and nonviolent witness wherever it will lead."*¹

So, enduring in peace doesn't mean just to wait out periods of tribulation. It means to grow through them, to love through them, to continue to reach out toward all people of goodwill for the chance to establish a just peace in this temporal world.

¹ Ken Butigan (2023, Sept. 6) Nonviolence in Action: Remembering Louie Vitale. Pace e Bene Nonviolence Service. Paceebene.org

**Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whom no one living can escape.
Woe to those who die in mortal sin.
Blessed are those whom death will find in Your most holy will,
for the second death shall do them no harm.**

Sister Bodily Death
by Justin Carisio, OFS

In *Francis of Assisi, Writer and Spiritual Master*, Thaddée Matura, OFM, observes that St. Francis “loved to write or have others write for him. He insisted on the preservation of what he wrote, and he called for the transmission, knowledge and putting into practice of his writings.”¹ Murray Bodo, OFM, reminds us that Francis’ “whole being was that of a poet...he walked and praised as a poet would as he followed Jesus.”²

In this calendar year 2025, we acknowledge Francis as writer and poet by celebrating the 8th centenary of his magnificent poem of praise, “The Cantic of the Creatures.” Because of our contemporary focus on care for creation and the designation of St. Francis as patron of ecology, much attention will be given to the first nine verses of the Cantic. These deal with inanimate creatures of the natural world. Brought into existence by our heavenly Father, each is called brother or sister by Francis. He announces their beauty and attributes. He proclaims that through the creatures, God is to be praised.

But the Cantic is about more than nature. It is “a poem of St. Francis’ soul.”³ We see this nowhere more poignantly than in the final verses. Francis wrote verse 12 as he lay dying: “Praised be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, / from whom no one living can escape.”⁴

Franciscans have a long-established custom of referring to “Sister Death.” Yet Francis did not speak of Sister Death in the Cantic. Writing in his Umbrian vernacular, he was quite intentional in naming this sister he was soon to meet: “Laudato si, mi Signore, per sora nostra Morte corporale.” He speaks of Sister Bodily Death.

Why belabor what appears to be an inconsequential point? Precisely because it is consequential.

Poets measure every word, and Francis wrote “Sister Bodily Death.” Nevertheless, Franciscans have often chosen to express this otherwise. Indeed, in the text of the Cantic in the English Omnibus of Sources – a mainstay reference for many years – the verse does read “All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister Death.”⁵ No mention of the body.

There may be other reasons why usage has favored the truncated Sister Death. Some of the early documents speak of the dying Francis welcoming Sister Death. In English at least, it comes more readily off the tongue when spoken. It is also less graphic than “Sister Bodily Death,” and thus less discomfiting.

Yet, it is likely Francis intended to be graphic. His images in the Cantic favor the bold and the descriptive. When he added this verse in his last days, he was blind and suffering physically. We must conclude he chose his words with care, saying exactly what he meant to say. Fortunately, the editors of *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* chose an English translation that conveys the saint’s original words. That text now appears to be predominant, assuming online presentations of the Cantic are representative.

If we want to honor St. Francis’ great hymn of praise these 800 years later, perhaps we can make a resolution: Let us say consciously “Sister Bodily Death” henceforth. In so doing, we can lend renewed power to his poetic voice and show deep respect for the actual words he chose and which he intended us to know and repeat.

¹ Thaddée Matura, OFM, *Francis of Assisi Writer and Spiritual Master*, trans. by Paul Lachance, OFM (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2005), xiii. ² Murray Bodo, OFM, *Poetry as Prayer Saint Francis of Assisi*, (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2003), 56. ³ *Ibid.*, 70 ⁴ St. Francis of Assisi, “The Cantic of the Creatures” in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (FA:ED I), edited by Regis Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York, London, and Manila: New City Press, 1999), 114. ⁵ St. Francis of Assisi, “The Cantic of Brother Sun,” *St. Francis of Assisi Writings and Early Biographies* English Omnibus of the Sources for the Life of St. Francis, Marion A Habig, ed (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1983), 131.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks and serve Him with great humility.

What is Ours To Do?

by Vickie Klick, OFS

Chair, NAFRA Centenary Task Force

When I think of Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures*, I most often think of the stanzas about the world around us. Less often, I think of the stanzas composed to encourage reconciliation and to honor Sister Bodily Death. However, until now I have largely overlooked the *final* stanza:

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve Him with great humility.

This final exhortation brings us back to the opening lines of the *Canticle*:

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.

In the end, despite our unworthiness, Francis recognizes that we, like all the other creatures he mentions, must praise and bless the Lord – but we humans must go further. We need to give thanks, and we need to serve Him humbly.

Our praise and blessing are not just from our nature, as they are for other creatures, but they arise from our free will with the help of the Holy Spirit. (No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. [1 Corinthians 12:3]) Our thanks and service are also freely chosen.

At one level, then, our response to this final stanza is obvious. How can we take it further and embed it more thoroughly into our daily lives – the way we live our Rule?

Our commitment to daily prayer helps ensure we praise and bless the Lord regularly. After I started writing this article, I added more thanksgiving to my daily prayer, starting (some days at least) before I get out of bed, and ending with some reflection on what I am thankful for during Evening Prayer. One of the beauties of our way of life, though, is that we can each adapt this exhortation to the rhythm and needs of our own lives.

In our humble service of the Lord, we emulate our Mother Mary. Mary's first action after the Annunciation was to go in haste to serve her cousin, Elizabeth, in her miraculous pregnancy. It's hard to imagine a more humble response to the momentous event that had just taken place in Mary's life!

Taking the Visitation as an example, how can our actions each day help others become aware of Christ's presence? (Art. 13 of the Rule points out that part of doing that is to be aware of "all people as a gift of the Lord and an image of Christ.") This is a tall order, requiring that "great humility" that Francis mentioned.

In summary, this last stanza of the *Canticle* invites us to accept the challenge to join in with all of creation in our uniquely human response to the Lord's goodness. Let us all take this challenge seriously as we strive to live the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis.



St. Francis of Assisi statue at
The Franciscan Renewal Center, Arizona

National Executive Council Election Slate

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Mary Francis Charsky, OFS
Frank Miller, OFS
Candelaria Pinaula, OFS
Dirk Wohlauf, OFS

Prayer for the National Executive Council Election 2025

by Theresa Pratt, OFS

*We pray that the Holy Spirit will give us leaders who will show us the way to move our
Secular Franciscan Order to a closer walk with Jesus Christ.*

*Give us the wisdom to choose and follow leaders
who will work with other leaders to accomplish your will for our order.*

*May we choose our next National Executive Council
so that they have the skills and the will to accomplish all that is theirs to do.*

Leaders who will serve us faithfully and with great humility.

Leaders who will have vision and wisdom.

*Leaders who will be mindful of the dignity of all people
and be able to dialogue respectfully through difficult situations.*

*We ask this through Jesus Christ,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever. Amen*

Regional Roundup

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



St. Margaret of Cortona Region

The St. Margaret of Cortona Region covers all of Maryland and Virginia, Washington D.C., part of southeast Pennsylvania, southern Delaware, and the eastern portion of West Virginia. It includes 33 fraternities and one emerging fraternity.

Back in the early to mid-1990's when the regions were being established in the United States, a friar suggested to the establishment team that a Secular Franciscan be chosen as the patron for this region and St. Margaret of Cortona was recommended and chosen based on her compelling life story.

The region is home to our Nation's capital, along with many famous monuments, museums, and historical sites resulting from the early history of our country during the Revolutionary and Civil War periods.



St. Clare Region

All of Missouri, except for the Kansas City area, southwest Illinois, Northern Arkansas, Southeast Indiana, and Memphis, Tennessee, are within St. Clare region, which has eight established fraternities and two emerging fraternities.

On October 13, 1995, the region was the 24th to be established under the regionalization efforts and was named after St. Clare of Assisi.

The St. Clare Region is very diverse, spanning from the Ozark Mountains, the Mississippi River Valley to the plains of Northern Missouri and Illinois. Centrally located in the USA, the St. Clare Region's largest city, St. Louis, is a convenient destination for hosting National Chapters, Quinquennials, National Committee events and CNSA gatherings. The Region welcomes all these events and looks forward to hosting many more in the future.

Website: www.stclareregionofs.org



Divine Mercy Region

Lower Michigan ("the Mitten") and Toledo, Ohio make up the Divine Mercy Region. It has 20 established fraternities, one emerging group, one cell, and one region sponsored group.

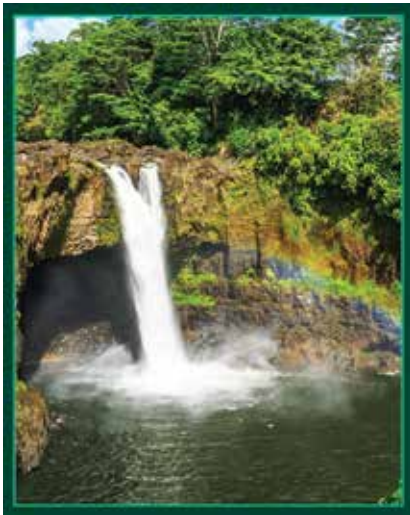
In October of 1993, they became the 13th established region. When the first council was formed, Divine Mercy was suggested for its name along with other suggestions, including St. Thomas More. During this time, OFS members were inspired from attending Medjugorje pilgrimages. Hence, approval for the name Divine Mercy Region was made.

Some interesting facts about the region:

Geographically, lower Michigan is a peninsula, surrounded by three Great Lakes: Lake Michigan, Lake Huron, and Lake Erie.

Michigan has a long history of Franciscan presence. In the 18th century, French missionaries who accompanied explorers and settlers included Recollect Franciscans, from a reform movement within the Franciscan Order in France. In the 19th century, Capuchin friars established a more permanent presence in Michigan. The Midwest Capuchin Province of St. Joseph, based in Detroit, became a central hub for their activities. And Conventual friars have been involved in various ministries helping to spread the Franciscan ideals of simplicity, poverty, and care for creation.

Members from the region have been recognized for their participation at multiple levels within the Order, including Marie Amore, OFS, who was instrumental in the development of regionalization and multiple OFS resources, and two recipients of the National JPIC Award.



Ohana 'O Ke Anuenue Region

Not surprisingly, the Ohana 'O Ke Anuenue Region, which means Family of the Rainbow, covers both the Hawaiian Islands and Guam. It includes six established fraternities: two on the island of Oahu, one on Maui, two on the Big Island of Hawaii, and one on Guam. There is also an emerging fraternity on the island of Kauai.

The region is one of the most diverse, made up of members of different ethnicities. Also, because the

fraternities are on different islands, it is impossible to drive to a regional gathering. Members would need to fly with costs ranging from \$200 to \$1500. Thus, only the Chapter of Elections and Visitations are held in person. All other Chapters are via Zoom. Members do come together when a formation mini-series is offered inviting all to learn more about our Order.



St. Francis Region

The St. Francis Region covers the southern third of California and includes 22 fraternities and one newly forming group.

When regionalization was occurring, the members involved were not sure if St. Francis would be allowed for a region's name, or if it had already been taken. Since the first reply was "yes" – that St. Francis could be used, and the answer to the second concern was "no" – no one else requested it, St. Francis became the region's name.

The region is blessed to have many cultures represented in its fraternities. Half of the fraternities are made up of members who speak languages other than English as their first language. There are seven Korean speaking fraternities, two Spanish speaking, and two Vietnamese speaking. There is also a fraternity with a majority of members who are from the Philippines and speak Tagalog.

Nine of the 21 Spanish Missions in California that were established by Franciscan friars are in St. Francis Region. Fraternities meet at three of them, and the newly forming group does, also. All four of these missions still have Franciscan friars in residence, although many others do not.

21ST QUINQUENNIAL CONGRESS OF THE OFS-USA

REGISTRATION OPENS AUGUST 15, 2025



Easter of St. Francis
Rekindle the Flame

Your Q Committee is hard at work planning our Congress. Registration will open August 15, 2025.

The following are the anticipated costs of attending the Q:

- Early bird registration fee is \$550/person
- Hotel accommodations \$196/night incl. tax (4 nights - \$784)
- \$98/person - double occupancy (4 nights \$392)
- Plus travel expenses

Prices have increased considerably since the last Quinquennial. Members needing financial assistance to attend should start planning now. Check with local or regional fraternities to see if scholarships are available. Also, information about applying for potential scholarships will be reviewed on the National level and will be available early in 2026. With the congress only a year away, it is time to finalize plans so that you can attend this special gathering.

Members can donate to the national Q scholarship fund through the online registration form or through the Gospel to Life Bookstore.

Another way for you to contribute financially is for Regional or Local Fraternities and individual members to share a message in the Q 2026 Program Booklet which will be included in all registrants' packets. Ask your Regional Minister for the form to fill out.

The Q Committee secured sponsors to underwrite parts of the event:

VisitLEX (the local convention and Visitors bureau) granted us \$10,000 to have the convention in Lexington. Also, two Catholic healthcare companies, CHI Saint Joseph Health and Saint Claire Healthcare and the Sisters of Notre Dame in Kentucky have pledged to donate a total of \$20,000 to subsidize some of our costs and to help sponsor our service project which will benefit the people of Appalachia.

Together, we can make the 2026 Q a wonderful experience for everyone.

OFS-USA
20 Q 26
29 July - 02 August
Lexington, KY

Announcements

SAVE THE DATE! ZOOM EVENT FOR THE CENTENARY OF THE CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES

The National Fraternity will celebrate the 800th anniversary of St. Francis' creating the Canticle of the Creatures at a Zoom webinar this fall. Mark your calendars now:

- **Date: Sunday, October 5, 2025**
- **Time: 3PM Eastern/2PM Central/1PM Mountain/Noon Pacific**
- **Duration: 60 - 75 minutes**

Our plans include a talk on the writing of the Canticle by Justin Carisio, OFS, and a panel discussion on living the Canticle. Justin is a professional writer with a particular interest in the Early Documents, especially the writings of Francis.

Our panelists include the current National Vice Minister, Diane Menditto, the current International Councilor, Mary Frances Charsky, and previous Regional Vice Minister and JPIC councilor for Mother Cabrini Regional Fraternity, Mike Huck.

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". If you are already on our mailing list, you will get the information automatically.

We hope to see you there!

Vickie Klick, OFS
Chair, NAFRA Centenary Task Force

INTERNATIONAL CHAPTER OF MATS CANCELLATION

Due to unforeseen challenges with the venue, fees, and Italian regulations, the Chapter of Mats event in Rome, Italy (2026) has been cancelled.

ADDRESS CHANGE

The National Fraternity's legal mailing address has been changed from 1615 Vine Street Cincinnati, OH

TO:

National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order - USA
c/o St. Anthony Shrine
5000 Colerain Ave.
Cincinnati, OH 45223

Please make sure this information is shared in the event that a member has used this address in a will or other document that would require that the National Fraternity be contacted.

GOSPEL TO LIFE BOOKSTORE

We have received a supply of 1" Tau Crosses made of olive wood and on 24" cord that are for sale at <https://gospel-to-life-bookstore.square.site.com>. Coming in August is a beautiful Franciscan Christmas card. Keep watching the Gospel to Life Bookstore online store for other offerings as they are added.



CALENDAR

MONTH	DAY	EVENT/MEETING
August	8-10	Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Election
	15	2026 “Q” Registration Opens
	28-31	Juan de Padilla Visitation and Election
September	2	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	6-8	NEC Meeting – Bon Secours, MD
	9-14	2025 Elective Chapter – Bon Secours, MD
October	5	Canticle of the Creatures Centenary Seminar
	6-9	CNSA Meeting, San Leandro, CA
	7	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	11	Holy Trinity Region Election
	17-18	Our Lady of Guadalupe Region Visitation
	31-11/3	NEC Meeting – Mercy Center, St. Louis, MO
November	4	2026 “Q” Core Meeting
	7-8	Bl. Solanus Casey Region Visitation
	7-8	Our Lady of the Angels Region Visitation
	7-9	St. Clare Region Visitation
	7-9	St. Margaret of Cortona Region Visitation

NEC – National Executive Council CNSA – Conference of National Spiritual Assistants

Please pray for the success of the events.



Gospel to Life Bookstore

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

SECULAR FRANCISCAN BOOKS

IMPORTANT NOTICE: PAYMENT MUST ACCOMPANY ORDER.

Our policies have changed

Please send check or money order; we do not take any cards.

If assistance is needed on payment, please contact

OFS-USA Treasurer Claudia Kauzlarich

at ofsusatreasurer@gmail.com

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