



TAU-USA

Summer 2025 Issue 116

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Peruvian Nativity retablo

A gift to NAFRA from
Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS
CIOFS Councilor and presider at Chapter of Elections





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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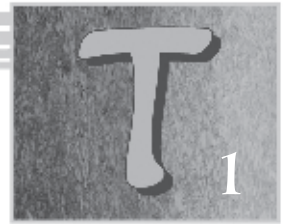
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A New Term and Looking to Make a Difference

By Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS • National Minister



The prayers of the Order produced a Spirit-filled Chapter. We have a National Executive Council (NEC) to serve the National Fraternity for the next three years. I have the honor of serving as National Minister for another term. Outgoing members are Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS; Donna Hollis, OFS; Joshua Molidor, OFS; and Cherryle Fruge, OFS. I give praise and thanks to God for their years of service to the Order. These four brought many wonderful gifts to the NEC. We owe them much thanks for their countless hours of service. Let us pray for them as they discern where God wants them to serve next.

For the 2025-2028 term I continue to serve with National Vice Minister Diane Menditto, OFS; National Secretary Susan Ronan, OFS; and International Councilor Mary Frances Charsky, OFS. We welcome four new members: National Treasurer Steve Roszhart, OFS; and National Councilors Christine Blood, OFS, Christopher Leone, OFS, and Corinne Lorenzet, OFS. These new members have served on local and regional Councils and thus know the ins and outs of serving. I look forward to seeing how the Order will be blessed by their “yes.”

Upon re-election, I texted Brian (my spouse and “co-minister” of the OFS-USA) to let him know he was “re-elected.” Of course, Brian Bamman was not a name on the ballot. He’s not a Secular Franciscan. But by virtue of being married to me, he has taken on the responsibility of serving the Order. We work together – the Bamman Team. Although he doesn’t routinely attend the gatherings of the OFS, he is a supporter. I would not be able to serve without him taking care of things at the office and at home while I am away. At times when I’ve shared details of situations with him, he has offered insights, often very helpful in moving the decision along.

During the last term, I learned a lot about myself. I juggled marriage, work and serving the Order. My attempts at multitasking had limited success. I didn’t always navigate my responsibilities well. Often, I would conduct the business of the Order in the evenings or late at night, responding to emails, etc. Brian wondered if I would get enough sleep. When I traveled for the Order, I focused on the meetings and sometimes missed a chance to connect with Brian. I didn’t take the time for my first vocation, sending the wrong message to Brian. This was not the outcome I intended.

“When Jane asked if it was ok if she put her name on the ballot again, I said that I was open and that I am not going to say no, because I do not want to have a conversation with Jesus as to why I didn’t let Jane run for national minister”

Brian Bamman

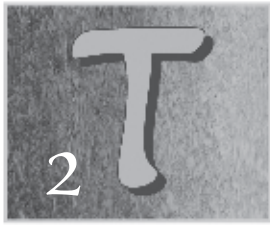
This term, I’m beginning again and implementing a few changes. I plan to stay focused on Brian, work, and service of the Order. I will choose to say “no” to other distractions to protect my time.

God gave me good administrative skills, so I naturally gravitate to those responsibilities. But I professed to make, and want to make, a difference – not just administratively. Our profession to live the Rule calls us to be present in society. It doesn’t give me a pass because I am National Minister.

Is it obvious through my actions, writings, Facebook posts, etc. that I am a Christian? Is it evident that I love the Gospel and love the OFS Rule? I’ve been playing it very safe in my 30 years of being a Secular Franciscan. I challenge myself to put urgency in my words and actions, to spread the Good News about the Gospel, our Faith, and our Order. I challenge myself to engage in dialogue with others about injustices in our communities and world. I pray for myself, the new NEC, and each member of the OFS-USA:

“...may you be filled with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding to live in a manner worthy of the Lord, so as to be fully pleasing, in every good work bearing fruit and growing in the knowledge of God, strengthened with every power, in accord with his glorious might, for all endurance and patience, with joy giving thanks to the Father...” (Col 1:9-11)

Life is too short not to share the good news about Jesus and our Order with others. This term, with God’s grace, I will make a difference. Perhaps you too will make a difference by striving to accomplish good works to bear much fruit and grow in the knowledge of God. With this knowledge, let us enthusiastically live the 2025-2028 OFS-USA theme together: Go into the world and spread the Good News!



Chapter Highlights: Budget, Committee Reports and Other Business

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

The National Chapter of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States met September 9 - 14, 2025, at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Marriottsville, Maryland. Over the course of five days, the regional ministers, national leaders, and spiritual assistants, elected a new National Executive Council, adopted a budget, and prayerfully conducted the business of fraternity. There were 75 attendees in all, including those mentioned above, the international representatives, host region volunteers, election nominees, members of other Franciscan organizations, and other observers.

Budget Discussions and Approvals

Outgoing treasurer Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS, presented the proposed budget, which prompted thoughtful discussion both in the large assembly and within councilor groups. After deliberation, the chapter approved the 2026 budget, with a total projected income of \$309,504 and expenses of \$351,219. Although expenses exceed income by \$41,715, this is not considered deficit spending, as previous years' surpluses will cover the difference.

To strengthen governance, the National Fraternity Council (NAFRA) voted to add an additional in-person meeting of the new National Executive Council (NEC). This adjustment allows for two NEC gatherings annually, plus a third meeting prior to the 2026 Chapter. It was also decided that committee chairs may be invited to the 2026 Chapter, pending available space at the Spiritual Life Center.

NAFRA voted against rejoining the Franciscan Action Network as an institutional member. Local and regional fraternities and individuals may choose to support the organization.

2026 National Budget Snapshot

Income: \$309,504

- Fair Share from Regions: \$218,504
- Formation Book Sales: \$73,000
- Interest & Miscellaneous: \$18,000

Expenses: \$351,219

- CIOFS Fair Share: \$45,000
- 2026 Chapter: \$61,520
- NEC + CNSA: \$62,970
- Commissions, Committees & Task Forces: \$56,729
- TAU-USA: \$40,000

- Formation Book Printing & Sales: \$64,000
- Insurance & Other: \$21,000

Projected Shortfall: \$41,715

(Covered by surplus funds from previous years— no deficit spending.)

Renewed Commitment to printing TAU-USA

Members across the country have expressed concern about not receiving printed issues of TAU-USA, the national newsletter. Two years ago, printing and mailing of the TAU was reduced from three or four to one issue a year because of increasing costs, with the remaining issues available only digitally.

Editor Caroline Yandell, OFS, presented research on ways to reduce publishing costs while maintaining quality. She is committed to producing more print issues within the approved budget of \$40,000, ensuring that all members who would like a printed issue receive one.

She suggested the best way to reduce costs is to ask fraternity members if they would like to receive their issues digitally instead of by mail. That would reduce printing and postage costs and allow those who need the printed version to receive theirs in the mail.

Caroline said a request sent to members in her region resulted in the majority opting out of the print edition. She encouraged regional ministers to ask local ministers to poll their fraternities and adjust the TAU delivery preferences in the database.

Rite of Remembrance

One of the most moving moments of the Chapter was the Rite of Remembrance, a solemn prayer service honoring the 379 Secular Franciscans who met Sister Death in the past year. Paul Gonzalez, OFS, led the service.

Regional ministers read aloud the names of their departed brothers and sisters and placed roses in vases while everyone recited the Crown Rosary. These vases were later carried into the chapel where daily Mass was celebrated, recognizing our continued prayers for our beloved deceased within the Franciscan family.

Formation Highlights and Goals

Layna Maher, OFS, reported significant progress by the National Formation Commission and others in 2025, including:

- Piloting of the new Initial Formation Book #1: *Let Us Begin*
- Writing Book #2: *For This You Were Called*
- Offering workshops for regional and local fraternities
- Sharing weekly Formation Fridays
- Providing guidance and resources upon request
- Writing the “Sowing the Seeds” Guide for Formators (being drafted by Jan Parker, OFS, and Mary Bittner, OFS)
- Supporting ongoing formation for the NEC
Looking ahead to 2026, the Commission aims to:
- Develop a companion guide for completed chapters of the Candidacy formation program
- Continue writing additional chapters of *For This You Were Called*
- Offer workshops and presentations at local and regional levels
- Host a Regional Formation Directors Zoom gathering (date TBD)

Youth and Young Adult Ministry

Kathleen Molara, OFS, highlighted outreach to young people by the Franciscan Youth and Young Adult (FY/YA) Commission. She said that research shows there are five basic desires expressed by today’s young adults:

1. A deeper prayer life and connection with God and the Church
2. A sense of belonging in community
3. Opportunities for service
4. Discovering and strengthening vocations
5. Learning peaceful ways of resolving conflicts

The National FY/YA Commission continues to offer online training to support these efforts. Members were encouraged to help youth by calling them into both service and community, echoing the Franciscan call to live the Gospel. Training for fraternity members is offered through Canvas. Contact Kathleen for more details.

Franciscan Call to Love

Ana María Raffo Laos, OFS, of Peru, presider at the election, offered an inspiring talk on the “Urgency of Love” at Chapter. You can read it in English or Spanish on the website at

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/THE-URGENCY-OF-LOVE-EN-and-SP.pdf>

Guidelines Adopted

Two sets of guidelines were adopted. One is the Guidelines for Affiliates for those who want to participate in the life and activities of a local fraternity without becoming professed. The guidelines address the conditions and process of obtaining affiliate status.

The other guidelines address local and regional fraternities in need of Fraternal Accompaniment. “Occasionally the members of a fraternity struggle with attaining or maintaining [listed] goals. Situations occur when help, support or interventions are necessary and requested by members of the Order,” the guidelines state.

The guidelines outline examples of struggling fraternities. Some of those examples include:

- A fraternity has fewer than five members and is no longer growing.
- Fraternities struggle to meet due to age and illness of members.
- Fraternity council members do not get along, and their personality and internal issues are affecting their ability to function.
- Fraternity council members are not fulfilling their duties.
- The fraternity is unable to elect a new council due to unavailability of nominees or lack of quorum present.
- Members of the fraternity consistently quarrel and are divisive. An unwelcome atmosphere dominates gatherings, and the council has been unable to restore serenity.

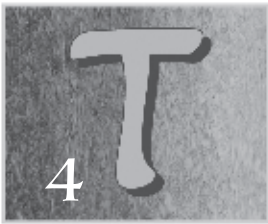
“Fraternal accompaniment is a process of supporting, encouraging, sharing, mentoring, and ‘walking with’ brothers and sisters in another fraternity for the purpose of:

- assisting them in becoming ‘whole’ again as a vibrant fraternity or
- if after an appropriate length of time, determining if deactivating the fraternity is appropriate.”

Quinquennial Update

Cathy Roszhart, OFS, announced the availability of a scholarship for members attending the Quinquennial July 29 - Aug. 2 in Lexington, KY. Application deadline for the scholarship is May 30, 2026. You can access the application online. Members are encouraged to reach out to their local and regional fraternities for financial assistance before applying.





Chapter 2025
Bon Secours Retreat Center
Marriottsville, Maryland

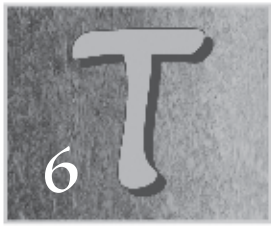
photos by Vickie Klick



Chapter 2025
Bon Secours Retreat Center
Marriottsville, Maryland

photos by Vickie Klick





State of the Order

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

Jane DeRose-Bamman, minister of the Secular Franciscan Order-USA, began her State of the Order at the National Chapter on Sept. 10, 2025, with words of inspiration taken from a 2018 letter by Tibor Kauser, minister general:

“Our goal is to become holy, to show God’s love to the world, to make the life of others better, to get closer to God and to bring others closer to God.”

These words, Jane said, remain the heart of the Secular Franciscan vocation.

The Secular Franciscan Order has experienced a steady decline in membership over the past 15 years. A polished database, along with deaths and departures of members, shows that national active, professed membership has dropped from 14,000 in 2010 to just under 10,000 today.

The nation’s oldest fraternity founded 166 years ago in Utica, NY, proudly counted Sister Marianne Cope among its members. Today, the Order includes 534 fraternities, with new ones still forming. “That means there is a spark there,” Jane said.

Twenty fraternities have deactivated in the past few months, reflecting the shifting landscape of vocations.

The age of active members highlights both vitality and challenge:

- 9% are 60 years old and younger
- 43% are between 61 and 79 years old
- 21% are 80 years old and over
- 7 members are 100 years old or older
- 27% remain unaccounted for due to incomplete age data in the database

Having complete data about our members helps the NEC to serve them better.

The bottom line, Jane summarized:

- Membership is declining.
- Members are aging.
- The number of fraternities has remained steady over the last 50 years.
- Strong, dynamic fraternities remain key to attracting new vocations.
- Outreach must be tailored to reach different generations effectively.

Despite these challenges, Jane emphasized the vibrant life of service that defines Secular Franciscans:

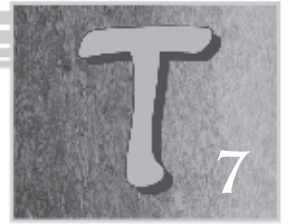
“Who are we? We are servants who are building homes, caring for people in need, supplying food pantries, and otherwise ministering to the poor,” Jane said.

Most recently, regions contributed \$23,000 to a leprosy center in Zimbabwe, responding to a request from General Minister Tibor Kauser, OFS. This reflects the Franciscan mission of compassion and global solidarity. Regions also responded with financial contributions to the floods in Texas.

The past three years have been a time of meaningful activity

- Fraternal Visitations: 7 since the last Chapter; 26 over three years.
- Regional Elections: 15 since the last Chapter; 32 over three years.
- Virtual connections with the National Fraternity Council, including online meet-and-greets.

These efforts have strengthened relationships and provided continuity despite the challenges of distance and changing demographics.



Jane outlined a forward-looking agenda for the National Executive Council over the next three years:

- Revision of the National Statutes
- Rollout of a Communications Manual
- New branding and vocational materials
- Updated guidelines and translations
- Continued publication of TAU-USA
- Preparations for the 2026 and 2031 Quinquennials
- An Action Plan for new priorities and leadership transitions
 - Planning for the 50th Anniversary of the OFS Rule in 2028

- Focus on youth and young adult vocations
- Stewardship of a major bequest

While Jane acknowledged realities, she also pointed to signs of hope: the spark of new fraternities, the witness of faithful service, and the enduring Franciscan call to holiness and mission.

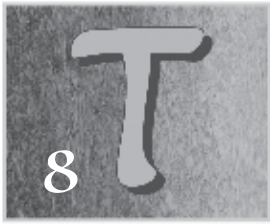
The State of the Order reminds Secular Franciscans that renewal is not only possible but already happening in communities across the country. In Jane's words, the future depends on building strong, dynamic fraternities where God's love is alive and visible in service to the world.

A PowerPoint illustrating Jane's State of the Order Address can be found on the national website.

Corrections:

In the summer issue the caption for this picture on page 14 stated that it is St. Francis, which is not correct. It is a statue of St. Junipero Serra. Thank you to Pat and Judith Tyrrell of St. Margaret of Cortona Region for their eagle eyes.

Also in the summer issue, on page 18, the Regional Roundup information about Divine Mercy Region stated that there are two members who have received the National JPIC Award. However, there are actually four members from the region who have received it: Jim Flickinger (2000); Ona Harris (2002); Kathleen Carsten (2018); and Steve Wasko (2023). Thank you to Mary Bittner, OFS, for sharing the historical details.



Secular Franciscans Elect New National Executive Council, Set Priorities for 2025–2028

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

The National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States (NAFRA) concluded its 2025 Chapter with the election of a new National Executive Council (NEC) on Saturday, September 13, at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Marriottsville, MD.

Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, was re-elected as national minister for a second term. Also returning to office are Vice Minister Diane Menditto, OFS; Secretary Susan Ronan, OFS; and International Councilor Mary Frances Charsky, OFS.

Newly elected officers include Treasurer Steve Roszhart, OFS, and Councilors Christine Blood, OFS; Chris Leone, OFS; and Corinne Lorenzet, OFS. Diane Menditto was also elected alternate international councilor.

The fraternity expressed gratitude to the outgoing NEC members: Treasurer Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS, and Councilors Josh Molidor, OFS; Donna Hollis, OFS; and Cherry Fruge, OFS.

The election was overseen by international visitors Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM Cap., of Rome, general spiritual assistant to the OFS, and Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS, of Peru, who served as election presider.

The election marked the conclusion of a five-day meeting that gathered the elected NEC officers, committee chairs, ministers of the 30 regional fraternities or their delegates, the CNSA – the four national spiritual assistants who represent the Franciscan friars: OFM, OFM Conventual, OFM Capuchin, and Third Order Regular (TOR), and observers.

The new national priority developed by a task force is “Living the Gospel.” This priority emphasizes building relationships, inspiring others to seek God, forming ourselves in the Franciscan way of life, attracting vocations, and working to rebuild the Church.

“When we are living the Gospel, we are involved in the activities and challenges of the world, integrating faith and action in our daily lives, nurturing hope, sowing seeds, and transforming hearts and minds,” Chris Leone, OFS, task force member said. “These actions represent what Christ would be to sdathe world.”

In addition to Chris, other task force members were Janet Angelillo, OFS; Pamela Boespflug, OFS; Ellen Ferrone, OFS; and Jeffrey Wilson, OFS.

**The new national theme for 2025–2028
is drawn from the Gospel of Mark:
“Go into the world
and proclaim the good news.”
(Mk 16:15)**

Chapter Formation: Celebrating 800 Years of the *Canticle of the Creatures*

By Layna Maher, OFS • National Formation Commission Chair



"For His praise, I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures, of which we make daily use, without which we cannot live, and with which the human race greatly offends its Creator."

St. Francis of Assisi, 1225

This year marks the eighth centenary of St. Francis' beloved *Canticle of the Creatures*, a hymn of praise that has inspired generations to see all of creation as a reflection of God's goodness. At our recent National Chapter, the formation session was dedicated to reflecting on this beautiful song of praise.

We began by listening to a recording of the *Canticle* sung in Italian by the Choir of the Diocese of Rome. The beauty of the prayerful music drew us into a place of peace and openness to the Spirit. Together, we then joined our voices in English, reading and praying the words of the *Canticle* in unison. The shared prayerful reading reminded us that we are truly brothers and sisters, united in the family of creation and in fraternity with one another.

Our session explored the three stages in which the *Canticle* took shape, each offering insight into how Francis viewed God, humanity, and the created world:

Verses 1–9 lift up the elements of creation - sun, moon, wind, water, fire, and earth - praising God through them. These verses were written during a time of deep suffering in Francis' life, when illness and physical pain weighed heavily on him. Yet his heart overflowed in praise: *"I wish to compose a new hymn about the Lord's creatures..."* (The Assisi Compilation, 83).

Verses 10–11 followed soon after, written to inspire reconciliation and peace between the civil and religious leaders of Assisi. The *Canticle* became not only a hymn of creation but also a call to healing and harmony among people.

Verses 12–13, composed near the end of Francis' earthly journey, welcome "Sister Bodily Death" with reverence and trust, completing the hymn with a profound acceptance of life's final passage into God.

Each participant was invited to reflect on which verse spoke most deeply to them. In small groups, we shared our experiences of how the *Canticle* inspires or challenges us today.

As part of the centenary celebration, Vicki Klick, Centenary Taskforce Chair, shared a video meditation created by Taskforce member Carolyn Townes: *Reflective Meditation on the Canticle of the Creatures*. This prayerful video combined Francis' words with images of creation submitted by our Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters from across the country.

The session closed with a copy of the *Canticle* being distributed, along with guiding reflection questions. We were encouraged to carry these into the quiet of Eucharistic Adoration, letting the words of Francis lead us more deeply into prayer, gratitude, and praise.

Eight hundred years later, St. Francis' *Canticle of the Creatures* continues to remind us of the intimate bond we share with all creation. It calls us to see every element of the natural world as a brother or sister - gifts given by the Creator, meant for our care, reverence, and joy.

Reflection Questions

Kinship with Creation

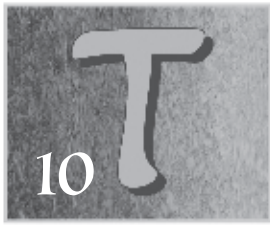
- Identify ways in which Saint Francis emphasizes human kind's kinship with creation.
- How might this view of our relationship with creation affect how we live and how we treat nature?

Pardon and Peace

- When and how have you received the gift of forgiveness in your life?
- What relationships or situations in your life are calling out for forgiveness?

Sister Bodily Death

- How do we die as a Franciscan person?
- How and in what ways do you give your life away?



Voices of the Friars Call Secular Franciscans to Praise, Kindness, Peace, and the Cross

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

From daily Mass to Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, prayer was an essential element at the 2025 National Chapter at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Marriottsville, Maryland, and was led by several friars, three of whom are members of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA).

Chapter opened with a Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit, Tuesday, September 9. The celebrant was Fr. Gary Johnson, OFM Conv., vicar provincial and director of the Shrine of St. Anthony near Baltimore. Gathered for the liturgy were the National Executive Council, regional ministers, committee and commission chairs, and observers.

Fr. Gary Johnson, OFM Conv.: Franciscans are Called to Lead Through Praise, Humility, and Service

Fr. Gary began by reminding those present that being together as Franciscans is about much more than “getting along” or “learning to lead.” At the center of our vocation, he said, is praise.

“I have a sense we have it figured out when it comes to praise,” Fr. Gary reflected. “Praise is how we publicly proclaim our love of God.”

Drawing from the Letter of St. Paul to the Colossians, Fr. Gary invited the listeners to reflect deeply on what it means to walk in Christ: *“As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, walk in him, rooted in him, and built upon him and established in the faith as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”* (Col 2:6-7)

He noted that the Franciscan tradition is rooted and built upon Jesus Christ. When we remain grounded in Him, our lives are nourished in ways that allow us to proclaim the Gospel with joy and integrity.

Fr. Gary said praise is never private or isolated. “We can’t praise God without each other,” he said.

For Secular Franciscans, this means that every act of daily life can become a song of praise: caring for family, serving the poor, fulfilling professional duties with integrity, and giving time and energy to the work of the Order. Praise draws us deeper into relationship with God and strengthens our bond with one another.

“We recognize the call to leadership is grounded in the prayer and praise of Jesus. In today’s Gospel reading, Jesus chose the leaders from among the disciples and commissioned them to go out with him and witness the faith. They knew that involved compassion, charity, sacrifice, and praise,” Fr. Gary said.

He added, “The Holy Spirit helps us to live it out in the everyday experience of our lives. Welcome the Holy Spirit into our Chapter and ask the Lord to help you be grounded in the ways our readings today ask us to lead.”

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, Calls for Authentic Kindness Rooted in Christ

At another liturgy, Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, reflected on the difference between being “nice” and being truly “kind,” urging Secular Franciscans to let their hearts be formed by Christ.

“Sometimes there is a hole in our heart that we try to cover over with nice,” he said. “But the medicine that fills the hole is Jesus Christ. To be Christian is to be Christlike. God heals us.”

Fr. Jerome warned against false humility, noting that at times people take a low place, not out of humility, but to avoid being noticed. Likewise, when called to leadership, the desire to serve can be mingled with a hidden desire for authority. True Christian leadership, he said, is rooted in service.

Drawing on the life of St. Francis of Assisi, Fr. Jerome said that real compassion requires stepping beyond comfort and appearances

“The Franciscan heart is formed by embracing the leper,” he said.

Voices of the Friars Call Secular Franciscans to Praise, Kindness, Peace, and the Cross

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair



He also cautioned against relying too heavily on niceness and surface gestures, but instead, offering our neighbors true compassion. "You don't need to be smiling all the time," he said. "Smiles have their place, but sometimes others need not a smile but an embrace."

Fr. Jerome's message underscored that authentic kindness grounded in Christ's healing love goes deeper than politeness, calling Franciscans to embody humility, compassion, and courage in daily life.

Fr. John De La Riva, OFM Cap., Urges Franciscans to Be Instruments of Peace

In his homily, Fr. John De La Riva, OFM Cap., reflected on the hymn "Let There Be Peace on Earth and Let It Begin with Me," calling upon Secular Franciscans to embrace their vocation as peacemakers in a world scarred by violence, division, and suffering.

He acknowledged that justice is not always immediate, yet the Christian response must be to seek peace through humility, sacrifice, and love. "We must sacrifice our pride to clear the air and appreciate someone in their humanity," he said, reminding listeners that true unity comes from trusting in the Lord and showing genuine love for others.

Fr. John urged Franciscans to "train for the spiritual mission" with the same discipline the military shows in preparing for battle. This training, he said, should form habits of radical love, compassion, and forgiveness - even toward those who oppose us.

"Let yourself be pliable and let the Lord form you," he said. By embracing the Franciscan charism, Christians can share God's love and joy, accompany the suffering, and lift the broken.

Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv.: Embrace the Cross, Welcome God's Surprises

On the closing night of our chapter, Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv., CNSA president-in-turn, offered us a homily filled with both challenge and encouragement. He reminded us that we are not the same people we once were - we have been shaped by the life and witness of St. Francis of Assisi. Our true "habit," he said, is the Tau cross, the sign of Christ's love and sacrifice.

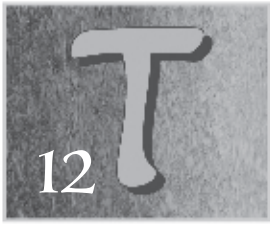
Fr. Marek invited us to embrace the cross in our own lives, to touch the wounds of Jesus, and to accept and even welcome our own weaknesses.

"Let yourself be a loser," he urged with Franciscan boldness, "because in embracing brokenness we also begin to see the hidden beauty of the world. There is power in that vision." He challenged us not to cling to our hurts or celebrate our wounds, "but instead to forgive, to move forward, and to give God permission to act in surprising ways."

With his characteristic humor, Fr. Marek shared a story about a woman who won a million dollars in the lottery. Fearing the news might overwhelm her husband, she asked her parish priest to help break it to him gently.

When the priest asked the husband what he would do if he won such a fortune, he replied, "Why, I'd give it to the church." At that, it was the priest who was overcome by surprise, and who collapsed from a heart attack.

The story drew laughter, but it carried a deeper point: God is over-generous, and His surprises often exceed our imagination. As Secular Franciscans, we are called to live with open hands and open hearts, ready to receive both the cross and the joy that come from following Christ



Carolyn Townes, OFS: Peacemaker and Circle Keeper

By Joe Makley, OFS • JPIC Animator



Our JPIC Award recipient for 2025 is Carolyn Townes, OFS. Carolyn has had a long and impactful history as the National JPIC Animator for over ten years, and currently serves on the boards of several Franciscan organizations. What follows is a brief interview with Carolyn:

Carolyn, how did you become aware of your Franciscan vocation?

“The Franciscan Holy Spirit met me at a time in my life when I was unknowingly searching. My Baptist preacher mother would buy these candles to bring good luck to our home. She would always get St. Michael the Archangel, St. Jude, St. Clare, and St. Anthony. I knew who Michael and Jude were, but who were these two in the brown robes? I Googled, even before there was Google, and found out they followed this guy named Francis. So, I went down a rabbit hole to discover who this Francis was. I joined the Catholic Church in 1997, began formation in 1998, and was professed in 2000. So, Francis found me at a time when I needed to be found but had no idea I was lost.”

You’ve described yourself as a circle keeper. Can you explain?

“A circle keeper is one who keeps what goes on in the circle – the stories, the tears, the anger, the uncertainty, the long-held family secrets. As well as making sure those within the circle feels safe, heard, and held. Being a circle keeper embraces the spirituality of “with-ness” – not fixing or having the answers, just being with and listening. Two very difficult things to do sometimes. Circle keeping is in my Cherokee roots and I have had many opportunities to fully embrace it.”

You have worked with Franciscans International, Franciscan Action Network, and other Franciscan organizations. How do we build the bridges with a wider Franciscan Family?

“As Franciscans, we are all one family – friars,

sisters, and laity. We all profess the same Gospel written specifically into our own rules of life. We all take the same aspect of Jesus our Brother – as the poor Christ, the Incarnational Christ – and weave that charism into our lives. We are all woven from that same cloth. How can we not stand on the same foundation with one another? When you are standing shoulder to shoulder next to someone, how can you not turn to them and ask, “So, what’s your story? Tell me what breaks your heart!” We have learned to live and move in our own individual silos and that has not been good for building bridges. To build bridges we need to step outside of those silos, turn to one another and get over the fears that separate us. Several of the organizations I work with have never had a Secular Franciscan on their board, team, or committee; let alone a Secular who is a woman of color.”

Can you share any future plans?

“Broken hearts usually dictate my future. As long as there are hearts that are broken, I will always have something to do. I also work to train the trainers for circle processes. Circles are our past, our present, and our future. Circles are what will shift us from fear to love, if we only get out of the way.”

What keeps you going?

“What keeps me going is knowing there are still hearts that are broken and people that are suffering. Those people and hearts need to be tenderly held and allowed the space and the grace to heal. Today’s society is hurting. We live in a world of uncertainty and that uncertainty causes fear. People are living out of their fears and hurts with very few who will listen and hold space for them. I hold space by creating circles. Those circles are spaces for being heard and for the Holy Spirit to begin the healing process.”



YouFra Reflection NAFRA Chapter 2025

By Kathleen Molaro, OFS • National YouFra Commission Chair



A story by Anthony De Mello, Jesuit priest, spiritual writer, and teacher, seems to define where we are in the process of introducing YouFra to the United States

The explorer returned to his people, who were eager to know about the Amazon. But how could he ever put into words the feeling that flooded his heart when he saw exotic flowers and heard the night-sounds of the forest; when he sensed the danger of wild beasts or paddled his canoe over treacherous rapids?

He said, "Go and find out for yourselves."

To guide them, he drew a map of the river.

They pounced upon the map. They framed it in their town hall. They made copies of it for themselves.

And all who had a copy considered themselves experts on the river, for did they not know its every turn and bend, how broad it was and how deep, where the rapids were and where the falls?

It is said the Buddha obdurately refused to be drawn into talking about God.

He was probably familiar with the dangers of drawing maps for armchair explorers.

Anthony De Mello, from "The Song of the Bird."

I shared this story at the NAFRA Chapter this year, congratulating us all in our determination to become experts in the challenge to reach out to our younger generations. Many regions have attended the Core Four training sessions - or used the on-line presentations to learn the why and how of this task. Seventy individuals have signed up for our new CANVAS platform and are taking advantage of the reflections received every Monday. I spoke to folks all over the country who are just beginning and are asking questions and discovering the resources available.

The story, however, illustrates how people can become intellectually "experts" of something, like a river, by studying maps and secondhand

information. But they never take the journey themselves. They don't want to get into a raft or a canoe to actually go on the adventure. The story serves as a parable about the difference between knowing about something and truly experiencing it. There are a number of animators and ministers who have done the preparation work but haven't tested the waters yet. We're here to help. We have an abundance of life jackets!

Last year we shared the five basic desires of young people: Young people have a desire to develop their prayer life; to belong to a community; to serve; to discover and strengthen their vocations; and to develop peaceful methods of dialogue. On the CANVAS platform we are making our way through these five desires by providing a reflection every Monday. These reflections can serve as your own personal growth or be used with young people. The commission has provided a Google file on each topic for specific ideas. A Zoom gathering at the conclusion of each theme invites us to share what we've learned, celebrate our successes, and support one another.

Encounter—Presence—Prayer—Inspiration—
Witness

That's all our younger generations ask of us!

We've mapped the river for you.

Are you willing to experience the journey now?

To register for CANVAS:

<https://canvas.instructure.com/login/canvas>

- Choose "YouFra" class, sign up as a "Student" (code, GGBDK3)
- Arrange for notifications when we post
- See message every Monday in "Announcements"

Practical Ideas for each of the five basic desires:

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1wj5MLikXSp_xIAQDj3A717pGFQy99PIC?usp=sharing

(simply copy and paste the above into the search bar if the link doesn't work)



A Pilgrimage into Creation and Conversion

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

As part of their National Chapter, on Friday, September 12th, members of the Secular Franciscan Order set aside time for a half-day pilgrimage to St. Anthony Shrine in Ellicott City, MD. The site has long stood as a place of prayer, reflection, and Franciscan witness. Operated by the Conventual Franciscan Friars, the shrine rests on 236 wooded acres, offering both spiritual and natural beauty.

Founded in 1928 as a novitiate, the shrine's architecture was inspired by the sacred convent of the Poor Clares in Assisi. Its very foundations connect it to local history, incorporating small pieces of marble left over from the construction of the U.S. Capitol and the Washington Monument.

Within its chapels are relics of St. Anthony of Padua as well as the Polish saints St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Faustina, and St. Pope John Paul II. Winding walking trails throughout the grounds invite pilgrims to encounter creation in prayerful stillness.

The visit also highlighted the friars' environmental ministry, Little Portion Farm, a living sign of Franciscan care for both the poor and the earth. This three-acre farm operates as an agro-ecosystem, with a diversity of plants and habitats that sustain the land while producing healthy food. Since the farm's founding in 2019, more than 100,000 pounds of produce have been harvested and donated to those in need.

Little Portion Farm's reach extends beyond its fields. The ministry supports a 13-week culinary program at the Franciscan Center in Baltimore, where students learn valuable skills while preparing meals for those experiencing hunger as well as catering outside meals. During the Chapter visit, participants were treated to a dinner prepared by the Center - salmon accompanied by fresh salad, vegetables, and dessert - a taste of the Farm's mission in action.

At the center of the day was the celebration of Mass, where Fr. Jude Winkler, OFM Conv., offered a homily that connected the pilgrimage experience to the daily rhythm of Secular Franciscan life. Fr. Jude began with a central question: "How can we

convert other people?" His answer was both simple and challenging: "By our own conversion." Transformation, he reminded the Secular Franciscans, is not imposed but inspired. When others see the Gospel alive in us, they are naturally drawn toward God.

On the subject of prayer, he emphasized sincerity over rigidity. "Decide which prayers work for you and pray them," he said, even suggesting an "Early Bird Special" for evening prayer: "It's okay to pray your evening prayer at 4:30 p.m." What matters most, he reminded them, is faithfulness of heart.

He then turned to the delicate practice of fraternal correction, urging discernment and humility. Before offering correction, one must ask: Why am I doing this? Pointing to Mary's visitation to Elizabeth, he explained that Mary went not to escape but to lovingly share the joy of God's work. Correction, he said, should likewise spring from love, guided by the Holy Spirit, and offered at the right time.

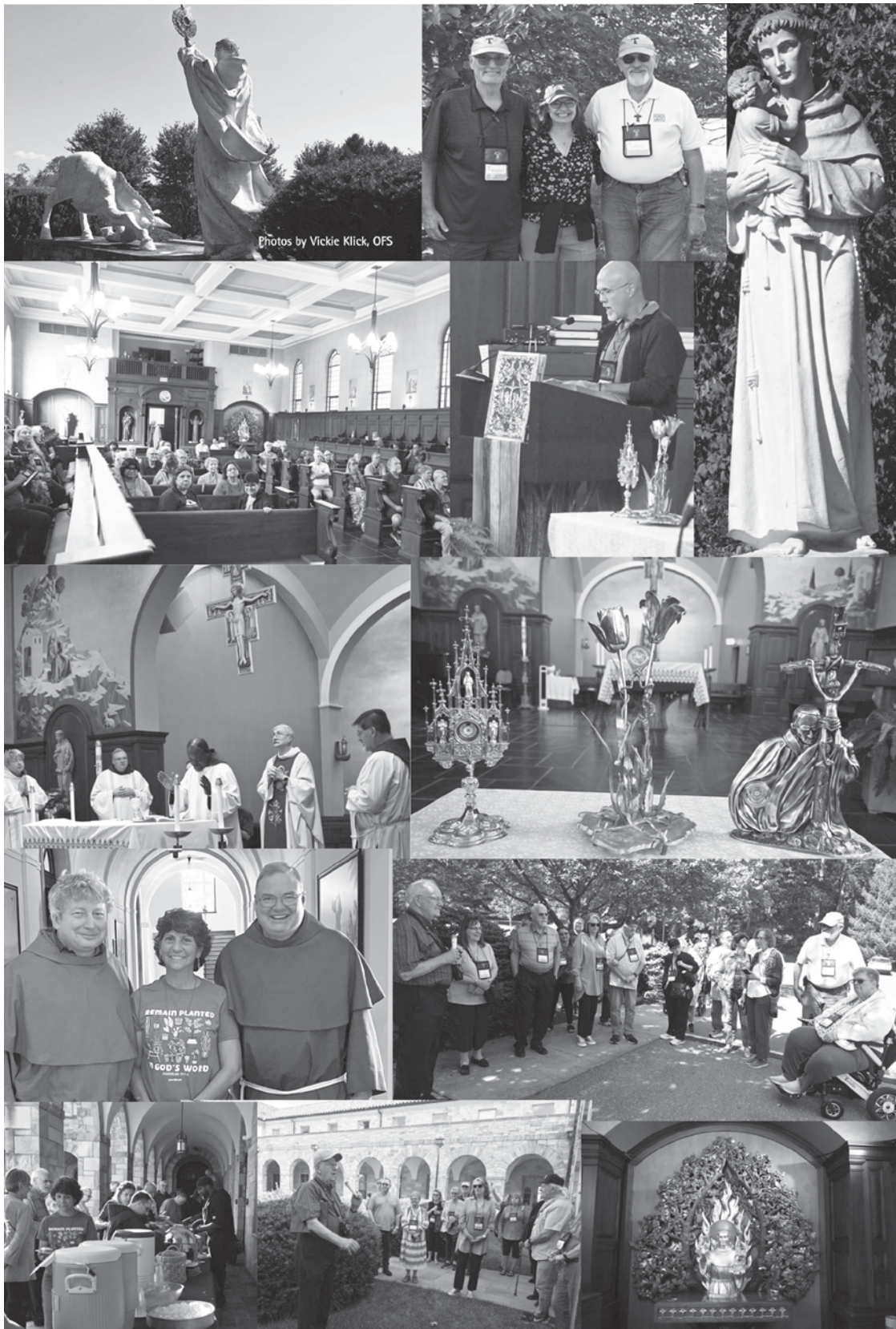
Fr. Jude encouraged listeners to examine their own expectations when considering fraternal correction. "Is what they are doing really wrong, or do you have different or unrealistic expectations?" he asked. Even the uncertainty of whether to be gentle or firm can itself be turned into prayer. "It's good to be confused. Offer the confusion as a prayer."

Returning to his central theme, Fr. Jude underscored that holiness is not perfection but honesty before God. "You might not be perfect, but you are considering God's call. Consider it humility and resolve. We are what we are, and we'll be the best we can."

The half-day away became more than an excursion. The pilgrimage deepened respect for the Franciscan vocation by calling attention to reverence for creation, solidarity with the poor, and a continuing call to personal conversion. From the witness of Little Portion Farm to the inspiration of Fr. Jude's homily, the day wove together earth and prayer, fraternity and mission, reminding all present that God's grace is found both in the soil beneath our feet and the conversion of our hearts.

Half-Day Away Shrine of St. Anthony Ellicot City, Maryland

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15





WHY SHOULD I ATTEND THE 21ST QUINQUENNIAL CONGRESS?

Meet your 2026 Q Planning Committee.

(Pictured from left to right)

Br. Bob Brady, OFM; Cathy Roszhart, OFS
Joe Edwards, OFS; Susan Ronan, OFS
Jim Graczyk, OFS; Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS
Diane Menditto, OFS; Jane DeRose-Bamman,
OFS

What does it take to put on a Quinquennial?

Your Q planning committee has been meeting monthly for the past 3 years and performed 2 site visits. Many subcommittees are being formed and many talents and gifts are being put forth to help make our 21st Congress, a meaningful experience for all who attend.

Why should you attend the Q?

This National gathering, by its very name, Quinquennial Congress, refers to the fact that it happens only every 5 years. Ask anyone who has attended a Q in the past, and they will tell you that it was an amazing experience and an awesome opportunity to “rekindle the flame of their vocation” as we come together with members of our National fraternity family.

Please note: Some of you may have been planning to attend the Chapter of Mats in Rome which ultimately didn’t materialize and was cancelled. Although this is disappointing, it gives us the chance to focus on our National gathering.

Addressing concerns about the cost.

Register before December 31, 2025 and save. Early birds will pay \$550/person. A \$100 non-refundable deposit will secure your registration and you can make payments until May 30, 2026.

Since our congress this time is centrally located, many of our members will be able to drive to Lexington, KY and won’t incur the cost of flying. Plan to carpool and share the cost for gas.

Lastly, we secured a group rate at the Marriott Griffin Gate. Sharing a room with another person will significantly help reduce the expense.

Remember to reach out to your local fraternity and ask if your common fund can subsidize some of the cost. Your Regional Executive Council may also have reserved a certain amount to help you cover your registration, hotel and/or travel expenses. Finally, your Q Committee has set aside some money to offer scholarships (See application on Website at

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026-Q-Scholarship-Application.pdf>)

Please contact your Regional Minister or email Chris Leone, OFS at cleoneofs@gmail.com for more information. It is our goal to ensure that everyone who wants to, is able to attend the Q!

Your Q planning committee is looking forward to seeing you at the Q.

We would like to recognize the sponsors
who have agreed to support our Quinquennial Congress
with a generous donation to help defray some of the cost
of attending our gathering as well as
contributing to the Service project expenses.

These organizations have pledged to contribute to the
My God and My All! Sponsorship Level
In the amount of \$10,000 each



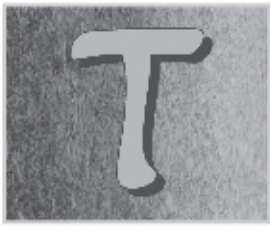
A member of CommonSpirit

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IMPORTANT MESSAGE:

**PLEASE DO NOT CALL THE HOTEL DIRECTLY
TO MAKE HOTEL RESERVATIONS.**

USE THE LINK AT THE BOTTOM OF YOUR CONFIRMATION EMAIL.



Lady Poverty Region

Lady Poverty is a region that covers parts of multiple states: the western half of Pennsylvania, an eastern sliver of Ohio, part of northern Maryland, and parts of West Virginia. It has 18 established fraternities.

When the region was established, the name was decided with a vote by the fraternity ministers. The suggested names were first narrowed down to five, and then to two. The fraternities bonded to the TORs proposed "Instruments of Peace" while those bonded to the Capuchin friars proposed "Lady Poverty," which got the most votes.

Like Franciscans of the Prairie Region, Lady Poverty Region has chosen Blessed Contardo Ferrini as their patron not only because he was a Secular Franciscan, but also because his feast day is October 20, and the date of the region's establishment is October 20, 1994.

Long before the establishment of the region, the first fraternity was established by recently immigrated Capuchin friars on May 17, 1874. Anticipating their expulsion from Germany, provincial leaders of the Capuchin Franciscans in Bavaria sought refuge and help from Abbott Boniface Wimmer, OSB, founder of Saint Vincent Archabbey in Latrobe, Pennsylvania, the country's first Benedictine Abbey. Abbott Wimmer helped to entrust St. Augustine Church in Pittsburgh to the pastoral care of three missionary Capuchins who could serve the growing German population of the city. The fraternity was named St. Augustine fraternity at St. Augustine Parish. The first profession was made by 24-year-old Anna Devlin on May 16, 1875. The fraternity just celebrated its 150th Anniversary in 2024 and boasts over 8,000 professed members since its establishment. St. Augustinefraternity is the largest fraternity in the region.

St. Maximilian Kolbe Region

St. Maximilian Kolbe Region is in the northern part of Ohio, mostly in and around Cleveland, and includes 13 fraternities.

This is one region that is blessed to have many Franciscans from all three orders. Within the region there are two Poor Clare of Perpetual Adoration convents, and Franciscan friaries for both Conventual and Capuchin friars. There are also OFM and TOR friars residing and working in the region.

Blessed Solanus Casey Region

This is another region that covers parts of multiple states: New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. It has 30 fraternities and two emerging communities.

Bl. Solanus Casey was a Capuchin friar originally assigned to Our Lady of the Angels Parish in East Harlem, in New York City. His next assignment was to Sacred Heart Parish in Yonkers, NY. Although Solanus was ordained, he functioned as a "simplex priest" and was not allowed to hear confessions or preach. Many miracles occurred as a result of his prayers, and people lined up for blocks to see him and ask for his prayers. Solanus Casey was chosen as the name of the region because he lived, worked and prayed in New York, and he is a model of humility and constant prayer. After he was beatified, the region's name was changed to Blessed Solanus Casey.

For several years, the region has held Zoom sessions that are either discussions on a topic or conversations about a book. Not only is it great ongoing formation with many members participating, but it has also created a sense of closeness and communication for all in the region.

Franciscans of the Prairie Region

The central diagonal swath of Illinois is where you'll find the Franciscans of the Prairie Region, covering a lot of rural communities. With only five fraternities and one cell, they fall within four different dioceses with members residing within six different dioceses.

The region's name was chosen for the geographic location within the Prairie State. Their mission statement refers to the prairie fires from past history, encouraging members to spread the good news like the spread of those prairie fires. Blessed Contardo Ferrini, a member of the Third Order, is the region's patron saint.

Several of the fraternities within Franciscans of the Prairie Region were established prior to 1865! Although the region's numbers are getting smaller and the fraternities are far apart, the members are developing closer relationships.

Our Lady of Indiana Region

Not surprisingly, the Our Lady of Indiana Region covers the northern two-thirds of Indiana, with one fraternity just across the border in Ohio. It includes 14 fraternities and one emerging community.

When it was time to choose the region's name, there was a meeting of the local ministers who submitted suggestions. Our Lady of Indiana was the winner of the vote. Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, who wrote formation materials for the OFS, was present at the meeting.

Our Lady of Indiana Region hosts a Unity Day on the second Saturday of August each year with all 14 fraternities represented. In 2025, approximately 100 brothers and sisters came together for prayer, Mass, inspiration, and fellowship.



"It is in Giving That We Receive" - A Testament of Grace

By Mary Frances Charsky, OFS • International Councilor

Among the many treasures of our Franciscan heritage, few words echo more deeply than the closing line of the Peace Prayer attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: *"It is in giving that we receive."* These words are not merely poetic; they are a spiritual truth lived out in the quiet generosity of countless souls who embody Gospel love. Today, we reflect on one such soul: Christine Gmeiner, whose final act of giving has blessed the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States in a profound and humbling way.

Christine's bequest came without fanfare, without stipulation, and without expectation. Her estate offered a generous gift to the National Fraternity with no strings attached, no instructions, and no conditions. It was a pure offering, given in the spirit of trust and love. In receiving it, we are reminded that the most powerful gifts are often those that flow freely from the heart, echoing the selfless love of Christ.

This act of generosity invites us to pause and consider the deeper meaning of giving. In our Franciscan way of life, giving is not transactional, it is transformational. When we offer kindness, compassion, and resources to others without seeking recognition or reward we open ourselves to the grace of spiritual fulfillment. We receive not material compensation but something far greater: inner peace, joy, and a deeper connection with God's love.

Christine's gift is more than a financial blessing; it is a spiritual invitation. It calls us to reflect on how we, as brothers and sisters in the Secular Franciscan Order, might embody the same spirit of generosity. How might we use this gift to further the mission of our Order? How might we honor Christine's legacy by becoming instruments of peace, channels of love, and bearers of hope?

The absence of specific instructions with this bequest invites us to listen to the Holy Spirit, to one another, and to the needs of our communities. Whether we use it to support vocations, outreach, youth, or the strengthening of fraternal bonds, may every decision be rooted in prayer and guidance by the values we hold dear.

Let us receive Christine's gift with gratitude and reverence. Let it inspire us to give more freely, to love more deeply, and to serve more joyfully. Let us honor her memory not only with words, but with action. May her gift bear fruit in the lives of many, and may we too, be inspired to give without counting the cost, trusting that in giving, we truly receive.

For those who feel moved to continue a legacy of generosity, donations to support the work of the OFS in the United States are warmly welcome.

To learn more or to make a contribution or bequest in support of the Secular Franciscan Order for a Local, Regional, National or International Fraternity please contact:

Secular Franciscan Order-USA
5000 Colerain Ave
Cincinnati, Ohio 45223-1213

Email: info@secularfranciscansusa.org
Website: www.secularfranciscansusa.org

1-800-FRANCIS

Let us continue to give with open hearts, trusting that in every act of love, we receive the grace of God. **Let us pray for Christine and for the Gmeiner Bequest Task Force established in her honor. May Christine rest eternally in peace.**

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



At the 2023 and 2024 National Chapters, it was decided to have only one issue of the TAU-USA made available in printed form in 2024 and 2025 with the remaining issues available only digitally. NEC members and I have received numerous communications from members who are not able to access the digital version, or who have difficulty reading it, especially on their phones. This has especially affected our older members.

As a result, it has been my goal since taking on the editor position to determine how to make the printed and mailed version of all of the TAU issues available to all those who need or want it and still stay at or under budget. Starting with this issue, we are using lighter weight paper. And starting next year, there may be fewer pages on average.

But what will make the greatest difference will be for the database to reflect every member's preference for TAU delivery. A few regions have completed this process already. Now we need all the other regions to do the same.

Last fall's issue had the following on the back cover:

We want to know **HOW**
you want your **TAU!**

Delivered via email link **OR** by US Mail?

Inform your fraternity minister
of your preference.

Ministers will pass the information
to their regional minister.

The database managers (fraternity or region) will need to enter the preferences into the database. Members who do not read English or Spanish, may want to opt out of both email and US mail.

It is our hope that all regions will have updated member preferences for TAU-USA delivery entered into the database by the end of this year.

Together we can make it possible for everyone to have access to the TAU-USA in their preferred version.

CALENDAR

MONTH	DAY	EVENT/MEETING
November	4	2026 "Q" Core Meeting
	4	2026 "Q" Registration Opens
	7-9	St. Clare Region Visitation
	7-9	St. Margaret of Cortona Region Visitation
	17	International Day of Secular Franciscan Solidarity
December	2	Canticle of the Creatures Centenary Seminar
January	6	2026 "Q" Core Meeting
	26-30	CNSA Meeting, San Leandro, CA
February	3	2026 "Q" Core Meeting
	12-15	St. Junipero Serra Region Visitation / Election
	16-15	St. Francis Region Visitation

JPIC – Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation 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