TAU-USA

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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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What a Year!

By Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS • National Minister



A year has passed since our last National Chapter and what a year it has been. The Holy Father declared a Jubilee Year of St. Francis as we recognize 800 years since our Seraphic Father's death. Pope Leo XIV penned a beautiful prayer to St. Francis for Peace. It is now a staple in my daily prayers.

We celebrated a stupendous Quinquennial Congress (or "Q") with 500 family members to remember the impact of St. Francis' life. Members, Candidates, Aspirants, Spiritual Assistants, and friends of the Franciscan family gathered in Lexington for our 21st Q. It is such a privilege to share this newsletter with articles and pictures to continue our quest to "rekindle the flame" of our vocations. We could not have held an event for all 9000 of our members. For those unable to attend, videos of the keynote presentations are posted to the website: https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/21st-quinquennial-congress-q2026/

In addition to our gifted presenters, we experienced many special moments with the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, and with Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., of Lexington, Kentucky as well as our international guests: Minister General Tibor Kauser, OFS, and his wife, Agnes; Vice Minister General Mary Stronach, OFS; Presidency Councilor Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS; and General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFM Conv.



What a grace filled time.

Thanks to all those who served on the planning committees! For this TAU-USA issue, I give thanks to Sharon Winzeler, OFS, who has so beautifully captured in words the events of the Congress, and Vickie Klick who captured the event in pictures.

We continue to savor the time and experience and share it with others as we reflect on the impact of St. Francis' life and death on ours.

Keep rekindling the flame of your vocation so you can make a difference in bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the world.

Your sister,

Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS

Overview of the Q

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS
Communications Committee Chair



More than 500 Secular Franciscans from across the United States gathered in Lexington, Kentucky, July 29 - August 1 for the 21st Quinquennial Congress. National Minister Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, welcomed attendees to several days of prayer, fellowship, and renewal centered on the theme, “The Easter of St. Francis: Rekindle the Flame.”

The Congress opened with the celebration of the Eucharist by the Most Rev. Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., Bishop of the Diocese of Lexington. In his homily, Bishop Stowe challenged those gathered to embrace their Franciscan vocation as witnesses of hope. “We live in a divided nation and world,” he said, “where people are more aggressive and less hospitable to others, and we often see one another in the worst possible light.” Amid that reality, he reminded Secular Franciscans of their calling: “We are professed to live the Gospel as shining lights for others.”

Reflecting on the joy of the gathering, Bishop Stowe added, “How beautiful that we gather in fraternity and form a family as missionaries of peace and heralds of the Gospel.” Drawing from the Scriptures, Bishop Stowe cautioned against allowing discouragement or self-pity to define our lives. “Living the faith is meant to spread an abiding joy and commit ourselves to something greater,” he said.

Bishop Stowe drew on the Gospel stories of Martha, Mary, and their brother Lazarus. The sisters faced the grief of Lazarus’ death yet continued to place their faith in Jesus. Their example also shows two dimensions of discipleship. Mary listens to Jesus and draws strength from prayer; Martha puts faith into action through service. Franciscans need both. Prayer deepens their relationship with Christ, and that relationship sends them out to feed the hungry, welcome others, work for justice, and build peace. “Let us proclaim the Resurrection,” he said.

Each day began with a keynote talk by nationally known speakers Br. Bill Short, OFM, Dr. Darleen Pryds, and Fr. Wayne Hellman, OFM Conv. Attendees met in small groups or “little fraternities” to discuss the presentations, guided by questions written by each of the speakers. After lunch, everyone reconvened for Q&A sessions with the keynote speakers.

Comparing the Quinquennial to a family reunion, Franciscans from all over the globe shared their favorite parts of the experience in evaluations submitted at the end of the event. Many said the small gatherings helped make a large national event feel personal. Attendees valued hearing about life in other fraternities and sharing their own experiences. One first-time participant wrote that the little fraternities were the best part of the Quinquennial because of the meaningful conversations.

In their evaluations, attendees described the joy of reconnecting with Franciscan brothers and sisters, meeting people from across the country, and forming new friendships. The keynote presentations also left a strong impression. Others appreciated the panel discussions and the opportunity to hear different perspectives on living the Gospel.

Prayer and worship gave the gathering its spiritual center. Attendees praised the ability to attend daily Mass, the Friday Holy Hour, and the chance to pray alongside Franciscans from many places as experiences that deepened and renewed their own spirituality. One attendee described the Quinquennial as having “positive spiritual energy,” while another called it an “awesome experience.”

The event concluded on a note of fun with a talent show featuring song, dance and a magic show. Attendees left in high spirits, with one remarking in the elevator after the show, “This was an amazing experience. I’m so glad I came.”

Q Logo – Holy Spirit Inspired

By Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS • National Minister



Quinquennials inspire me. I've been able to attend five so far. I enjoy meeting our members from all over the United States. Many brothers and sisters I would not have been able to meet if I hadn't met them at a Q.

I remember at my first Q in 2002 in New Orleans, I met an OFS from Michigan - where I am originally from. She was from Fowlerville, Michigan. It turns out she was a childhood friend of my mother's. She was a convert to Catholicism later in life and eventually found the OFS. Such a small world.

In 2016, I visited with several OFS members from St. Louis, the "host" Region. One member was Howard Schroeder, OFS, who I later found out was an artist. When the Q committee decided on the theme, they asked about a potential artist. I remembered Howard and gave him a call. So imagine, the National Minister is calling you – kind of out of the blue. How would you react? I reintroduced myself and said, "I remember meeting you in St. Louis at the Q." I asked a few questions about Howard and his background. Then I told him we need a logo for the next Q, explained that the theme would be the Easter of St. Francis, and asked him if he would be willing to design it. He prayed about it, and a few months later the logo was shared. In Howard's words, here is the meaning of the logo:

At the intersections of eternity
sister death delivers us to eternal life.
He who gave himself totally to us,
receives us totally
as we are born into eternal newness.
Yet eternity begins here
where, like the wolf of Gubbio,
the Gospel changes our very nature
to take on a higher way.
We transform from a self-enclosed
chrysalis, to taking wing in a dazzling
display of color.
Every flutter of our wings
a ripple in the lives of others.

We break the hard shell of our egg
to emerge and soar in understanding
and lift others up in compassion.
We start as seeds and become
verdant green, continually branching out
to others, bringing peace.
Like the moon, which appears the same
size as the sun, this life can fool us from
reaching for the Son who is vastly
infinite.
And the tombstone is rolled back
and every obstacle in this life,
as our Lord shouts
"Come Out!"

The logo is not only beautiful, but it is inspiring. The meaning behind each aspect elevates our prayer. May we use it for prayer so the Holy Spirit can inspire us for years to come. Thanks be to God for Howard's prayerful "yes" to a request from the National Minister.

Howard shares his other works on Facebook at: Franciscan Psalms.

Keynote Presentations

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS
Communications Committee Chair



From Wounds to Glory: The Passing Over of St. Francis

Keynote by Br. Bill Short, OFM

Watch the presentation

Br. Bill Short described Francis's transitus as a journey through suffering and death into glory.

He began the account at Mt. Laverna in 1224, where Francis spent a retreat in prayer where he repeatedly opened the Gospel to passages about Christ's Passion. He understood that trials lay ahead, though he struggled to interpret the vision of a crucified seraph that followed, Br. Bill said.

The marks of Christ's wounds appeared on Francis' body sometime after that vision. Br. Bill drew attention to this interval because later art and writing often show the vision and the stigmata occurring at the same instant.

"We are told that Francis hid very carefully these marks so that even the brothers and his most devoted followers for a long time did not know about them. Brother Leo's inscription on a parchment Francis gave him at La Verna is one piece of evidence. Other accounts describe glimpses and suspicions during Francis' lifetime. The detailed descriptions emerged as people examined and honored his body after death," Br. Bill stated.

Francis' remaining years brought increasing illness, pain, and concern about the direction of the growing order.

As death approached in October 1226, Francis chose to leave the bishop's residence in Assisi for the Portiuncula, where the friars could sing freely.

"Because the brothers were singing and carrying on as he was adding verses to the Canticle of the Creatures welcoming Sister Death, people in the town of Assisi were scandalized. That is not the way for a saint to die. You should be serious, reflecting on your sins, the approach of death and judgment, and no more of this singing praise to the Lord."

So, Francis says "Well, we don't want to disturb these good people. Take me away. Take me down to the Portiuncula where we can sing and carry on as much as we want. So, this is how I want to die," Br. Bill shared.

Francis asked to lie on the bare ground, hear the Gospel account beginning "Six days before the Passover," share bread with the brothers, and bless those present and absent. He died after sunset on October 3.

One of most moving figures in this episode was the widow Lady Jacoba, Francis' friend from Rome. A later account by Thomas of Celano says she arrived with cloth, candles, and the almond cookies Francis loved. Though a rule ordinarily barred women from the friars' enclosure, Francis welcomed "Brother Jacoba." After his death, she held his body and, according to that account, urged the friars to let others see the marks they had hidden.

The funeral procession stopped at San Damiano so Clare and her sisters could see and venerate Francis. Reports of healings, the testimony of those who saw his wounds, and the devotion of the people of Assisi contributed to his growing reputation. Pope Gregory IX canonized Francis on July 16, 1228, less than two years after his death.

Br. Bill then turned to the stories that grew around Francis' burial. His body was moved secretly into the new basilica in 1230, apparently because Brother Elias feared it could be stolen or damaged by crowds seeking relics. For centuries, its exact location was unknown. Later stories claimed that popes had found Francis's body miraculously preserved. Br. Bill treated these as legends rather than established events. The tomb was located through excavation in 1818.

What remains is Francis' example of following Christ through hardship and trusting death opened onto life with God.

Keynote Presentations

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

The Spirituality of Presence: What Lady Jacoba Teaches Us About Care

Keynote by Dr. Darleen Pryds

Watch the presentation

Who tells the stories of our Franciscan tradition and whose lives do those stories leave out?

Dr. Darleen Pryds raised these questions at the 2026 Secular Franciscan Quinquennial Congress in her presentation, “The Spirituality of Presence: Lady Jacoba and the Franciscan Tradition of Caregiving and Care Receiving.” She invited listeners to see the final days of St. Francis through the friendship and care of Lady Jacoba.

Jacoba is often remembered for bringing Francis the almond sweets he enjoyed. Dr. Pryds asked us to look beyond the cookies. A widowed Roman woman of wealth and influence, Jacoba welcomed Francis and the friars, supported their work, and, according to Dr. Pryds, served alongside Francis in caring for people in need.

“It was around 1212 in Rome that she probably met Francis. Francis and the friars, as you know, were out and about preaching, and she was probably intrigued to hear who these dirty guys were, who were walking around preaching gospel. What's this gospel about? She was so intrigued that she invited them over for dinner, not just once, but many times. She had founded a hospital, and she and Francis served side by side in that hospital,” Dr. Pryds said.

“If you've done ministry with someone, especially in among people who are deeply needing your service, you tend to grow together. Serving other people creates bonds,” she said.

Accounts of Francis’ final days say she traveled from Rome to Assisi with cloth, candles, and other things needed to comfort him and prepare for his burial. Their bond was rooted in friendship and shared service.

Yet Jacoba is absent from some of the best-known accounts of Francis’ death. Dr. Pryds explained that stories change according to their authors and audiences. Some early accounts focus on the friars gathered around Francis. Others bring Jacoba into the room. By remembering her, we gain a fuller picture of the Franciscan family and the contributions of lay people, especially women whose everyday work of care often went unrecorded.

Care also asks something of the person receiving it. Dr. Pryds, who has spent years as a hospice caregiver, noted how vulnerable it can feel to accept help. Francis, who had spent his life serving others, needed the presence and care of friends at the end of his life. His example invites us to give care attentively and to receive it with openness, she stated.

In a moving portion of the talk, Dr. Pryds imagined Jacoba comforting Francis, listening to his breathing, and helping prepare his body after death. She presented these details as a reflection on what caregiving may have been like, rather than as a documented account. Presence can mean listening, noticing what someone needs, and staying beside that person when there is nothing to fix, she said.

“By fixing we see the world as broken but by serving we see the world as whole,” Dr. Pryds said.

As we commemorate the 800th anniversary of Francis’s passing, Dr. Pryds invites us to tell the fuller story, and to ask how we can be present to one another today. Caregiving and care receiving are ordinary parts of life. In the Franciscan tradition, they can also become expressions of love, mutual trust, and grace.



Keynote Presentations



By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair

The Jubilee Prayer on Peacemaking

Keynote by Fr. Wayne Hellman, OFM Conv.

Watch the presentation

"May the Lord give you peace." St. Francis offered this greeting to others, and Fr. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv., started with it and returned to it at the close of his presentation on the Jubilee Prayer of St. Francis as one of Francis' central messages.

He spoke on the Jubilee prayer written by Pope Leo XIV to mark the 800th anniversary of the transitus of St. Francis of Assisi. Fr. Wayne encouraged listeners to do more than recite the prayer. He showed them how to reflect on it and let it inspire them to be peacemakers.

"I will argue namely [that] behind this prayer we find the voice of St. Francis, and we find the voice of Pope Leo," Fr. Wayne said.

"But as we move forward, I want you to listen to a third voice. And which voice is that? It's your voice. Your secular Franciscan rule is within this prayer. And I want to help unpack that for you so that we might appreciate more this wonderful gift that Pope Leo has given to all of us," said Fr. Wayne.

He explored the prayer in four parts. The first recalls Francis meeting "Sister Death" as a man of peace. For Francis, calling death a sister expressed a deep sense of kinship with all creation.

"Francis called death sister. Why? Because sister death is a member of our family. And so, as he lived in peace, peace was his sister, especially in death," Fr. Wayne noted.

Fr. Wayne linked that peaceful acceptance to a life spent learning to see others as brothers and sisters. He asked a searching question of his listeners: Who remains a stranger to me?

The prayer then turns to the crucifix of San Damiano. Francis first understood Christ's call to rebuild the church in terms of repairing a building. In time, he recognized a wider calling.

Fr. Wayne suggested that reconciliation also required Francis to face a wall within himself. Francis' encounter with the leper transformed what he had once found bitter into an experience of grace. Peace begins in the heart, then takes shape in how we meet another person, Fr. Wayne explained.

In its third movement, the prayer remembers Francis crossing the lines of war to meet the sultan of Egypt, a purported enemy of Christians, as a fellow human being. The challenge for us may be closer to home. We can examine and try to improve a strained family relationship, calmly converse with a neighbor who has different views, or reach out to someone that others disdain as Francis did with the sultan. Crossing such lines begins with presence, listening, and dialogue.

The final part of the prayer turns from Francis to us. Fr. Wayne connected its call to be "unarmed and disarming" peacemakers with Article 19 of the Secular Franciscan Rule, which calls members to build peace unceasingly and seek harmony through dialogue. He also pointed to Francis' Admonition 15: peacemakers preserve peace in soul and body even amid suffering.

Prayer must move into action, Fr. Wayne said. He recalled how Francis sent friars to sing a verse of the *Canticle of the Creatures* to the feuding bishop and mayor of Assisi. The song became a means of reconciliation. We may never cross a battlefield, but each of us can choose a word of peace, take a step toward someone, and help bring down a wall.

As we remember the 800th anniversary of Francis' passing, the Jubilee Prayer offers both reflection and a task. Fr. Wayne's invitation is to let its words work within us until they become deeds: "May the Lord give you peace."

Pope Leo's Prayer to St. Francis of Assisi

Saint Francis, our brother, you who eight hundred years ago went to meet Sister Death as a man at peace, intercede for us before the Lord.

You recognized true peace in the Crucifix of San Damiano, teach us to seek in Him the source of all reconciliation that breaks down every wall.

You who, unarmed, crossed the lines of war and misunderstanding, give us the courage to build bridges where the world raises up boundaries.

In this time afflicted by conflict and division, intercede for us so that we may become peacemakers: unarmed and disarming witnesses of the peace that comes from Christ. Amen.



The Power of Little Fraternities

By the National Formation Commission

The evaluations from the Quinquennial Congress ("the Q") made one thing absolutely clear: the "little fraternities" were one of the best parts of the event. Participants consistently reported feeling deeply connected, noting that these small groups allowed them to build meaningful relationships with Secular Franciscans from different parts of the country.

As Secular Franciscans, we can replicate this success in our regular initial and ongoing formation sessions. By shifting away from lecture-style teaching and utilizing a structured three-step flow - Inform, Process, and Share - we can unlock the true power of fraternal dialogue, driving deep connection and lifelong conversion.



1. Inform: In this first step, we encounter the material, looking closely at the Rule, the General Constitutions, or Sacred Scripture. Limit the length of your initial presentation or reading.

The keynote talks at the Q were intentionally crafted to stir reflection rather than just deliver information. Friar Bill Short's lecture invited participants to enter the mystery of Francis' transitus through story and symbol. Dr. Darleen Pryds' keynote emphasized attentive, relational listening - exactly the disposition needed for small group dialogue. Friar Wayne Hellmann's presentation on Pope Leo's prayer for the jubilee year called Franciscans to listen deeply to the voices woven through the Jubilee Prayer.

These talks didn't "finish" the conversation - they *opened* it. They provided rich seeds that required processing, silence, and sharing. The little fraternities became the place where those seeds germinated.

2. Process: Too often, we rush from hearing a presentation or reading a text straight into sharing about it. This hasty transition usually results in surface-level responses. At the Q, there was a break before the Little Fraternities began their discussions. Folks had some time to decompress and let the Holy Spirit work.

3. Share: The magic of the Little Fraternities at the Q happened because people felt safe enough to share and to be vulnerable. Our facilitators were well-prepared to keep the conversation on track by using "Mutual Invitation." When people know they will not be interrupted, corrected, or debated, they speak from the heart. This is why the Q groups felt safe.

The questions were designed for cultivation, not debate. The keynoters were asked to provide three questions to be discussed in the Little Fraternities. The questions were **openended, reflective, grounded in the keynote themes,** and **aimed at personal and communal conversion.** (See samples below.)

Sample Questions from Keynotes
(Others can be found in the Q program)

Bro. Bill Short, OFM: With his passing from this life to the Lord, our Brother Francis entrusted to his many followers the mission of living according to the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ. What aspect of the life of Francis is most inspiring to you in trying to live the Gospel today?

Dr. Darleen Pryds: Do you self-identify as a care-receiver? If so, what are the graces and challenges you experience. If not, why not? How does Franciscan spirituality support your reception of care?

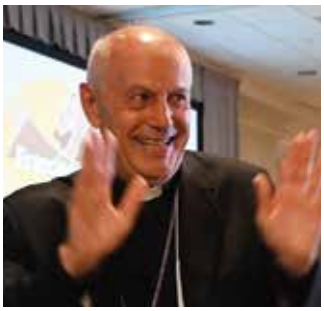
Fr. Wayne Hellman, OFM Conv.: How might Secular Franciscans become "unarmed and disarming witnesses?"

Through the discussions in our small fraternities, we were being formed: We listened in silence to the Holy Spirit, and the words of our brothers and sisters. We verbalized our own thoughts. We processed the topic through discussion, and we saw how we can incorporate it into our lives. This *is* Secular Franciscan formation!

The National Formation Commission hopes that with the resources provided on the Quinquennial resources page: https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/updates-from-the-q-july-29th-through-august-1st-2026/ , individual regions and local fraternities will have a source and method for carrying out many months of ongoing formation.

Archbishop Caccia Calls Secular Franciscans to Bring Mercy and Peace Home from the Quinquennial

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair



The presence of the Apostolic Nuncio made this year's Quinquennial Congress especially memorable. His participation underscored the importance of the Secular Franciscan vocation within the life of the Church and strengthened the bonds between the Holy See and the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States.

His Excellency, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, joined hundreds of Secular Franciscans gathered in Lexington, Kentucky. He attended after accepting a personal invitation from National Minister Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS.

As Pope Leo XIV's representative in the United States, Archbishop Caccia conveyed an Apostolic Blessing from the pope to all those attending the Congress. The blessing served as a powerful reminder of the Holy Father's spiritual closeness to the Secular Franciscans and their vocation to live the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis.

At a Mass celebrating the Feast of the Portiuncula, Archbishop Caccia invited Secular Franciscans to consider what it means to follow St. Francis after the gathering ends.

The archbishop began his homily discussing Francis' encounter with the leper. What Francis had once found bitter became "sweetness of soul and body" as he discovered compassion and service. Archbishop Caccia explained that Francis' conversion was a series of passages. They ranged from seeking worldly glory to seeking God, from wealth to poverty, and from choosing his companions to receiving others as brothers and sisters. Archbishop Caccia reminded listeners that those we serve can lead us toward our own transformation.

He then turned our attention to the Portiuncula. Francis repaired its neglected chapel with his own hands, and there the first fraternity took shape. Its humble beginnings showed that God does not require something impressive. God asks for a place made available to him, Archbishop Caccia said. For Secular Franciscans, that place may be a home, workplace, parish, or neighborhood.

Archbishop Caccia posed a question: "What little portion has God entrusted to me?" Repairing what is damaged might begin with listening to one person, offering mercy in one relationship, or doing an act of charity without seeking recognition, he suggested.







Archbishop Caccia also connected the Portiuncula with forgiveness and peace. Francis wanted people burdened by sin to encounter God's mercy. He said that Franciscans, in turn, are called to make that mercy visible to others.

Peace, Archbishop Caccia said, is a gift from God that must be lived actively. Peace in action could be listening before judging, protecting the vulnerable, caring for creation, and refusing to bring hostility into the places entrusted to us.

The Quinquennial Congress, he concluded, was more than a gathering to remember. It sent participants home with a mission. The Archbishop challenged listeners to make their own little portions of the world places of mercy and peace from which the Gospel can spread.

Watch Archbishop Caccia's homily

Watch the papal blessing

APOSTOLIC NUNCIATURE
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

3339 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20008-3610

June 29th, 2026

Prot. N: 645/26

Dear Mrs. DeRose-Bamman,

I forward you the following message on the occasion of the National Gathering of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – USA, to be held from July 29 to August 2, 2026, in Lexington, Kentucky, transmitted by His Eminence Cardinal Pietro Parolin, Secretary of State of the Holy See, on behalf of His Holiness Pope Leo XIV.

> His Holiness Pope Leo XIV was pleased to be informed of the gathering of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – USA, and he sends cordial greetings to all taking part. In this year marking the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Francis, His Holiness trusts that you will be inspired to follow with ever greater fidelity the example of the *Poverello* of Assisi through imitating his humility, his joy and, in a particular way, his desire to foster peace among peoples. As the Holy Father recently wrote to the Ministers General of the Conference of the Franciscan Family, "the peace that the Seraphic Father proclaims is the peace that Christ himself made resound between heaven and earth" (*Letter*, 10 January 2026). He therefore encourages all members of the Fraternity to be "unarmed and disarming" witnesses in their daily lives of the peace that comes from Jesus (cf. ibid.). With these sentiments, Pope Leo XIV entrusts the Order to the maternal intercession of Mary, Queen of Peace, and Saint Francis, and he willingly imparts his Apostolic Blessing.
>
> Cardinal Pietro Parolin
> *Secretary of State*

With prayers and best wishes for the National Gathering, I remain

Yours sincerely,

+ Gabriele Caccia
Apostolic Nuncio

Mrs. Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS
National Minister
National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order – USA
Cincinnati, Ohio

International Guests at the Quinquennial

By Mary Frances Charsky, OFS • International Councilor



The 21st Quinquennial of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States was enriched by the presence of several distinguished international guests. Their participation reminded us that while we belong to local fraternities, we are also members of a worldwide Franciscan family.

Among our honored guests were Tibor Kauser, OFS, Minister General; Mary Stronach, OFS, Vice Minister General; Fr. Stefan Acatrenei, OFM Conv.; Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS; and Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States of America. Their presence was a blessing for all who attended the gathering in Lexington, Kentucky.

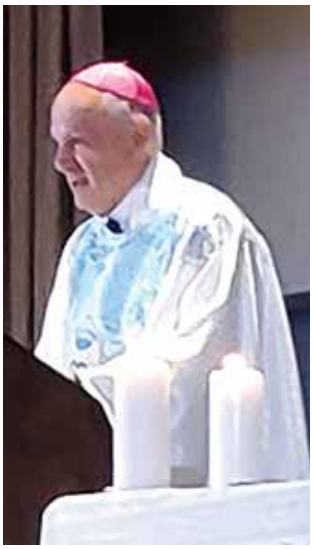
With guests from Hungary, Romania, Peru, and Italy, the Quinquennial reflected the international nature of our Order. It was a wonderful reminder that we have brothers and sisters throughout the world who share the same Gospel-centered vocation inspired by Saint Francis and Saint Clare. Although we may live in different countries and cultures, we are united by our Rule, our charism, and our spirit of fraternity.

Throughout the week, participants had many opportunities to interact with our guests. Whether attending Mass, listening to keynotes, participating in panel discussions, sharing meals, or simply greeting one another in the hallways, we experienced the joy of being part of one Franciscan family. We prayed together, learned from one another, and celebrated our common vocation. As many participants remarked, an OFS Quinquennial truly feels like a family reunion.

A highlight of the gathering was the international panel discussion featuring Tibor Kauser (Hungary), Mary Stronach (USA), Fr. Stefan Acatrinei (Romania and Italy), and Ana Maria Raffo Laos (Peru). Their reflections provided insights into the life and mission of the Secular Franciscan Order around the world and offered encouragement for the future. Their perspectives helped us to better appreciate the challenges, hopes, and opportunities facing our international fraternity.

Particularly inspiring was the witness of Tibor Kauser, who attended the entire Quinquennial with his wife, Agnes Kauser, a fellow Secular Franciscan. His presence and accessibility reflected the servant leadership that is at the heart of Franciscan life. Likewise, Mary Stronach, the first member from the United States to serve on the Presidency of CIOFS, shared her experience of serving the international fraternity and strengthening bonds among Franciscans worldwide.

We were also blessed by the presence of Archbishop Gabriele Caccia (Italy), who brought the apostolic blessing from Pope Leo XIV to us. He is the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States.



Archbishop Caccia's warmth and encouragement were evident in both his homily and his interactions with participants. His appreciation for the Franciscan charism and way of life was deeply felt and greatly appreciated.

The presence of our international guests was one of the many blessings of the Quinquennial. Through prayer, fellowship, and shared experiences, they helped us recognize once again that we are part of something far greater than ourselves: a worldwide Franciscan fraternity united in faith, hope, and love. May the connections formed during our time together continue to strengthen and inspire us as we live our vocation each day.



Rekindling the Flame at the 21st Quinquennial Congress

By Joe Edwards, OFS • Member of the Q Committee



Attending a Quinquennial Congress is a uniquely joyful and uplifting experience - one that is nearly impossible to fully describe to someone who was not there. The 21st Quinquennial Congress was no exception. As we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the Easter of St. Francis, the gathering became a powerful opportunity to "Rekindle the Flame" within each of us. It was a truly awesome assembly of the Franciscan Family: Secular Franciscans, friars from the various branches of the First Order, Franciscan sisters, and countless friends of St. Francis and St. Clare from across the country and around the world.

I left the Congress energized and deeply moved by the people I encountered - including several I met for the first time. I had the pleasure of picking Darleen Pryds up at the Louisville airport and getting to know her both personally and as a writer. Later, I drove International General Minister Tibor Kauser, and his wife, Agnes, back to the airport. Encounters like these reminded me how profoundly connected we are as brothers and sisters in this global Franciscan family.

Equally meaningful was reconnecting with my OFS family - those serving in national leadership and other Seculars I usually see only at national gatherings. These brothers and sisters have become mentors and models of Gospel living who continue to guide my growth and formation. Their presence alone would have made the entire experience worthwhile.

Serving on the Planning Committee

I was blessed to serve on the planning committee for the past four years. Witnessing the Congress unfold after so much preparation was a profound example of Franciscan fraternal love and joy. The liturgies, morning prayer services, uplifting choir, small fraternity discussion groups, keynote presentations, panel discussions, Holy Hour, quiet adoration chapel, vendors, shared meals, and evening social activities allowed us to become fully immersed in fraternity. The Congress truly rekindled the flame as we celebrated the 800th anniversary of the death - and new life - of our founder. Smiles and laughter throughout the week testified to the joy we shared.

My role was to serve as the "local contact," since I live just a few miles away in Louisville. Whenever needs arose, I helped problemsolve - whether locating a four-foot statue of St. Francis in Cincinnati (graciously loaned by the Friars of Our Lady of Guadalupe Province) or coordinating details with Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., the bishop of Lexington.

Bishop Stowe's enthusiastic endorsement of Q2026 opened the door for two major sponsors, each contributing $10,000 - UK St. Claire Foundation (Mr. Donald Lloyd and Mr. Chris McClurg) and CHI St. Joseph Healthcare Foundation (Mr. David Franz, Ms. Marie Murray, and Ms. Amy Wallot). The latter sponsor funded our Congress service project supporting disadvantaged Catholics in Appalachia who face displacement due to disasters. Attendees generously donated socks and washcloths for men, women, and children. More than forty volunteers sorted the items and assembled 196 blessing bags filled with toiletries. Additionally, we sent $4,859 to Catholic Charities of Lexington (CCL) to assist displaced families. The UK St. Claire Foundation's contribution ensured financial support for attendees needing assistance.

Gifted Speakers and Shared Wisdom

Our three keynote speakers were exceptional - personable, authentic, and deeply knowledgeable. Each spoke with expertise and a genuine sense of being "at home" among the Franciscan family. Their insights enriched the experience and offered wisdom we will carry forward into our fraternities and ministries.

For those unable to attend, the Congress can be experienced virtually. Photos, the nuncio's address, and keynote presentations are available online at: 2026 Quinquennial

There was no doubt that the Holy Spirit was with us. Now it is up to all attendees to share our renewed enthusiasm with a world longing for peace.










Lexington
Welcomes
21st Quinquennial Congress






THE
FRANCISCAN
GOSPEL TO LIFE TOUR

















LEXINGTON, KY






STER OF ST. FRANCIS
INDLE THE FLAME













A Moment of Grace, Renewal, and Franciscan Identity

By Fr. Cid Joseph, OFM • National Spiritual Assistant



Did you know that every five years something extraordinary happens within the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States? Hundreds of Franciscans - seculars, friars, and religious - leave their homes, their ministries, and their daily rhythms to gather for what we simply call “the Q.” But the Quinquennial is far more than a congress, or a gathering. It is a homecoming of the heart, a moment when the Franciscan family pauses, listens, reflects, and renews its commitment to the Gospel life.



As a new member of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA), I experienced this year’s Quinquennial with fresh eyes and a grateful heart. From July 29 to August 1, 2026, more than five hundred members of the OFS National Fraternity gathered in Lexington, Kentucky, to celebrate the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of St. Francis and to “rekindle the flame” of our vocation. What I witnessed was not simply an event - it was a living expression of the Franciscan soul.

The days were full, structured, and beautifully balanced: morning prayer, formation, fraternity, Eucharist, and joyful evening events. The formation sessions were rich and deeply rooted in our tradition. Friars and scholars helped us rediscover the spiritual depth of Francis’ final moments, the tenderness of Franciscan relationships, and the prophetic call to peace that still echoes through our world. These teachings were not academic exercises; they were invitations to conversion, to deeper identity, and to renewed mission.

One of the most moving aspects of the congress was the presence of forty people in initial formation who are discerning profession to the OFS. Their enthusiasm, questions, and hope reminded all of us that the Franciscan vocation is alive, dynamic, and growing. Their participation brought a youthful energy to the gathering and made visible the future of the Order.

The international presence also gave the Congress a global heartbeat. Representatives from the OFS worldwide, the Bishop of Kentucky, the Minister General of the Seculars - Tibor Kauser, OFS, and the Vice Minister General - Mary Stronach, OFS, along with the Apostolic Nuncio to the United States - Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, joined us in prayer, dialogue, and fraternity. Their presence reminded us that our vocation is not only national - it is universal. We walk this path with brothers and sisters across continents, cultures, and languages, united by the same Rule and the same desire to follow Christ in the footprints of Francis and Clare.

And yes - Franciscans know how to celebrate! The evenings were filled with laughter, music, and the unforgettable “Franciscans Got Talent,” where joy became a form of evangelization. Even the Apostolic Nuncio joined in the fun, proving once again that Franciscan joy is contagious.

But what struck me most was the unity. Friars, seculars, and Franciscan religious - one family, one charism, one mission. The Quinquennial reminded me that the OFS does not walk alone. We walk together, each branch of the Franciscan family supporting the others, each vocation enriching the whole.

When the Congress concluded, participants returned to their fraternities carrying something precious: a renewed flame; a deeper sense of identity; a clearer understanding of mission; and a stronger commitment to live and bear witness to the Gospel in daily life.

For those who have never attended a Quinquennial, I invite you to consider it. It is a moment of grace, a breath of the Spirit, and a powerful reminder of who we are. For those who have attended, may the memory continue to inspire your journey.

May our next Quinquennial be again a moment of joyful renewal - a spark that ignites deeper love for the Gospel we profess.

"Make New Friends but Keep the Old: One Is Silver, the Other Gold."

By Jeff & Teresa Redder, OFS

In the fifth year after our professions, we attended our first Q in 1997, in Newark, Delaware, which was co-hosted by our region - St. Katharine Drexel, and St. Margaret of Cortona Region. What a wondrous experience of meeting new people and sharing the vibrant Franciscan spirit! It was then such a blessing to attend five more Q gatherings. The memories of each one remind us of the Girl Scout song: "Make New Friends but Keep the Old."

As we visited the registration table in Lexington, we could feel the energy of the Q coursing through the hospitality of our brothers and sisters welcoming us. Teresa received an invitation from Ray List to join his little fraternity: an "old" friend from our St. Bonaventure Retreat in Assisi last November. When her little fraternity met, Teresa joyfully also reconnected with Kate Golski from the same pilgrimage.

At the opening Mass on the feast of Saints Martha, Mary and Lazarus, Franciscan Bishop John Stowe gave us an inspiring homily about listening to the Word of God and being attentive to how we are hospitable to others, especially to those around us who might otherwise go unnoticed. Experiences like this make us appreciate the psalter when we hear "My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready."

Throughout the Q, it was wonderful to see so many people visiting the various exhibitors in the hallway. At the Franciscan Mission Service (FMS) table, we warmly greeted returned missioner Julia Pinto from the FMS staff. At the 2022 Q in Arizona, Julia was still in mission at the US/Mexico border and shared her experiences at the FMS exhibit. Fellow Secular Franciscan Ralph Anderson had visited their table and discerned a call to mission, leaving for Bolivia in 2023. Now also a returned missioner, Ralph was working at the Q's Living Waters for the World exhibit with personal experiences from his mission trip.

Visiting each of the exhibits, we took great pride in seeing members from our region staffing the Franciscan Month and Franciscan School of Theology tables (Judi Painter and Denise Clare). Judi was just professed in May! Teresa found lots of goodies to bring home from the Gospel to Life Bookstore, and Jeff was thankful we had driven to Kentucky to haul everything back home. 😊

Each of the three keynote talks were so rich with Jubilee Year reflections, but it was in our little fraternities that we pooled our experiences and shared insights. It was simply amazing to meet these new friends and give thanks for the blessing of fraternity. Every shared meal gave us an opportunity to get to know brothers and sisters from many states. How privileged we were again to have our International Minister and his wife with us for another Q!

Both of us were delighted that the newly appointed Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, shared the Jubilee Year festivities with us, offering such a warm presence of humble service and joyful remembrance of the Italian traditions with the celebration of the Porziuncola. When we came home, we looked up more information about him, appreciating that he chose for his episcopal motto "Credidimus caritati" (We believe in love). Indeed, it is love that builds a more fraternal and evangelical world!

Most attendees bask in the glow of the Q long after it concludes, grateful for seeing the old friends again and for making new friends to treasure as silver and gold. This is the very essence of lived fraternity, a precious gift from our good and gracious God. ♥♥







Raffle Winners

Quinquennial Artists Share Their Gifts

The Quinquennial art raffle celebrated the creativity and generosity of seven artists. The day before the drawing, the artists were introduced to attendees, and their names and descriptions of their works appeared in the Q program.

On drawing day, the artwork and ticket jars were displayed in the ballroom. The artists were invited to sit in front so they could personally present their creations to the winners. Betty Holler, OFS, drew the winning tickets, and Bruce Nordstrom, OFS, announced the names.



Artist: Cindy Wesley, OFS
Winner: Helen Lewis, OFS



Artist: Teri Rieman, OFS
Winner: Becky Menich, OFS



Artist: Beth Ettensohn, OFS
Winner: Carmen Duron, OFS



Artists: Ed & Donna Weisenberger, OFS
Winner: Denise Carrasquillo, OFS



Artist: Denise McCarthy, OFS
Winner: Rosalie Leitelt, OFS



Artist: Judi Painter, OFS
Winner: Linda Quaranto, OFS



Artist: Rosie Fedorchuk, OFS
Winner: Vicki Schultz, OFS

With hearts overflowing with gratitude, we want to thank everyone who helped make the 2026 Quinquennial Congress not only a reality but a resounding blessed event.

For every sacrifice, every prayer, every gift of time and talent, and every act of service, we offer our heartfelt thanks. It takes a village… or in this case a Beautiful Franciscan Family.



We are deeply appreciative of our keynote speakers, Br. Bill Short, OFM, Darleen Pryds, PhD, and Fr. J. Wayne Hellmann, OFM Conv. who offered uplifting and insightful presentations.

We express our sincere thanks to Howard Shroeder, OFS, for designing the glorious Q 2026 logos, for Kathleen Carsten, OFS, for composing our beautiful Q prayer and Stan Sisson, OFS, for laying out our gorgeous Official Q Program Booklet. We thank all our generous patrons who sent their prayers and well-wishes to include in the booklet.



A special word of gratitude goes to our international guests: Tibor Kauser, OFS, our Minister General, and his wife Agnes Kauserne Michaletzky, OFS; Mary Stronach, OFS, Vice Minister General; Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS, our Presidency Councilor; and Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, OFM Conv., our General Spiritual Assistant, for sharing their presence, wisdom, and Franciscan spirit with us.





We extend our sincere appreciation to the National Executive Council (NEC) for its support, encouragement, participation, and prayers as well as to the Regional Ministers for encouraging attendance and participation for all their members.

We also thank our gifted Commission Chairs: Layna Maher, OFS; Kathleen Molaro, OFS; and Joe Makley, OFS, who offered a valuable panel discussion and the many facilitators who guided the Little Fraternities in their discussions.

We want to recognize the members of the CNSA, Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv.; Fr. John DeLaRiva, OFM Cap.; Fr. Cid Joseph, OFM; and Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR, (the latter, who sadly could only join us in spirit) for their continual Spiritual Assistance and prayerful support.



We are most grateful to Bishop John Stowe, OFM Conv., for welcoming us and celebrating Mass and for Beth Keenon, his administrative coordinator from the Diocese of Lexington, who coordinated to generously allow us to use the items necessary for all the Eucharistic Celebrations held during the Q.



We were all deeply blessed by the presence and participation of Papal Nuncio, His Excellency Archbishop Gabriele Caccia.



We recognize the amazing Liturgy committee and all who coordinated and participated in the liturgies, especially Kathy and Tim Taormina, OFS; Donna Hollis, OFS; and Cherryle Frugé, OFS. (The latter could not be with us.) We are grateful to the gifted musicians and artists who shared their talents and helped make each Mass a beautiful celebration, especially Rosie Fedorchuk, OFS, our local contact.



Thank you to Jim Thomas, OFS, for faithfully maintaining the Q website as well as Sharon Winzeler, OFS,for her intuitive videotaping and reporting narrative about the Q.



Thank you as well to Vickie Klick, OFS, our skilled photographer.



Our sincere gratitude for Theresa Brown, OFS, who tirelessly organized the vendors and non-profit organizations and to Chris Leone, OFS, who kindly oversaw the scholarship process. Thank you as well to Jan Benton, OFS, and Susan Tabor, OFS, for heading the Accessibility Committee. Many thanks to all the volunteers who helped staff the registration and information tables.

Our heartfelt appreciation goes to Cindy Wesley, OFS, who once again designed and created a masterpiece quilt, and all the artists who donated their beautiful creations for the raffle: Rosie Fedorchuk, OFS; Denise McCarthy, OFS; Beth Moser, OFS; Judi Painter, OFS; Teri Rieman, OFS; and Donna Weisenberger, OFS. Thank you to Pat Nikolaisen, OFS, who coordinated our Raffle and to all her volunteers.





We are thankful for Kathy Adams, OFS, who diligently managed the Q Merchandise subcommittee and for her husband John Adams, OFS, who helped her load and unload trucks full of boxes.





Thank you to all who donated items for the service project and helped fill the blessing bags for our Appalachian brothers and sisters. A big thank you to John Grillot, OFS, who helped organize the activity.

We want to thank all who participated in the entertainment portion of our Q, especially Deacon Will Tribbey, OFS, and the dynamic duo, Carmen Durón, OFS, and Amy Sperry, OFS, who coordinated the evening activities.

We are especially grateful to the staff of the Griffin Gate Marriott for welcoming us so graciously and working with us throughout the Congress.



We are grateful to all who sacrificed to attend the Q, as well as to those who were unable to be with us but faithfully prayed that the Holy Spirit would guide the Q Core Planning Committee throughout its preparation and inspire us to make wise decisions.

We also want to thank our generous sponsors (below), including all the members who kindly donated to the Scholarship Fund and acknowledge the significant grant awarded to the Q treasury from the Duns Scotus Formation Fund:

VISITLEX

VisitLex who underwrote a portion of our banquet invoice from the Griffin Gate Marriott

St. Joseph Hospital, who funded our Service Project.

CHI Saint Joseph Health
A member of CommonSpirit

St. Claire HealthCare

UK St. Claire Healthcare who subsidized several scholarships for members to attend the Q.

With grateful hearts, we thank the Lord for each and every one of you for sharing your gifts and for your participation. We could not have had a Q without U!

Most of all, we humbly thank God, our Father, for giving each of us the gift of the Holy Spirit and for blessing us with such a spirit-filled celebration of our Franciscan family.

The Q Core Planning Committee

Br. Bob Brady, OFM
Jim Graczyk, OFS and Cathy Roszhart, OFS (Co-Chairs)
Joe Edwards, OFS *Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS*
Diane Menditto, OFS *Susan Ronan, OFS*



OFS-USA Q 2026
29 July - 02 August
Lexington, KY



From a Vanload of Books to a National Franciscan Bookstore

By Sharon Winzeler, OFS • Communications Committee Chair



When Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS helped bring a vanload of books to the 2022 Quinquennial, she did not expect those boxes to become the beginning of the National Fraternity Bookstore. She and then National Minister Jan Parker, OFS simply wanted Secular Franciscans to be able to pick up a book, look inside, and decide whether it would help them. Claudia, who was serving as National Treasurer at that time, and Jan saw the approaching Quinquennial as an opportunity to bring the books directly to members.

On a planning trip to Phoenix, they stopped in Lindsborg, Kansas, collected a vanload of Smoky Valley books, and delivered them to Jeff Campbell of Tau Publishing, who stored them until the gathering. At the Q, members could browse formation materials alongside the newly revised brown Rule Book and the reprinted *Fraternity Register*. Claudia purchased a Square credit card reader and taught herself to enter inventory and accept credit cards.

The books sold well, but many boxes remained when the event ended. Former National Councilor Joshua Molidor, OFS carried some home to Texas in his Suburban, while Jan and Claudia packed the van. During the long drive from Phoenix to Missouri, with Mary Bitner, OFS joining them, they brainstormed what to do next and chose the name Gospel to Life Bookstore. Claudia's dining room became its unofficial headquarters. Jan kept books to sell from St. Louis, and Joshua's supply became a southern location.

The revised Ritual gave the volunteers a reason to create an online store. Claudia credits Miriam Kennedy, OFS both for her dedication to revising the Ritual and for helping establish the website sales location. Online sales began when the Ritual was printed in August 2024. Its first 2,200 copies sold out in 90 days; another 2,000 sold in eight months. The Ritual is now in its third printing.

The operation grew gradually. "When we first discussed a bookstore, I recall Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM suggesting we sell the Tau crosses - and now we do. On a trip to Assisi, Italy, Mary Frances Charsky purchased our first batch from the Friars in Assisi. Now, when Corinne Lorenzet travels to Italy, she buys 200 - 300 Taus for us to sell. We have also added holy cards: one featuring the San Damiano Crucifix with our profession promise on the back, one of St. Francis, and one of St. Clare. They are available in English, Spanish, and Korean," Claudia said.



So now the bookstore offers more than books. Members can find holy cards in three, languages, profession candles and certificates, Christmas cards, rosaries, lapel pins, and other items suggested by fellow Franciscans. Two books are available as free digital downloads, with more planned.

The National Fraternity owns the bookstore and its merchandise, and any profits help cover OFS-USA operating expenses. Claudia volunteers to manage the operation, finding products, tracking stock, working with printers, and filling online orders. For three years her dining room has served as office, packing station, and storage space. A climate-controlled storage unit now holds the extra inventory, while she keeps enough at home to fill a week or two of orders.

Claudia hopes the bookstore will keep responding to what members need to nurture their Franciscan vocations. She foresees a local fraternity someday sharing the work as an apostolate. You can view the offerings at Gospel to Life Bookstore

If you have an idea or request you can email gospeltolifebookstore@gmail.com or call Claudia directly at 1-800-FRANCIS extension 2.

Franciscan Youth / Young Adults

Unite
Ignite
Invite

Secular Franciscan Order

Let's Walk Together: Quinquennial 2026

By Kathleen Molaro, OFS
Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission Chair

T 21

At the Quinquennial (Q), attendees were reminded that Secular Franciscans are called in Article 24 of our Rule "To foster communion among members … especially with youth groups," and to "adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life …"

The Franciscan Youth and Young Adult Commission helps fraternities adopt appropriate means for growth while addressing five basic spiritual needs identified by researchers as important to younger generations: prayer, community, service, vocation, and peaceful conflict resolution.

As Pope Francis said in Christus Vivit, "We need to make more room for the voices of young people to be heard." So, words of wisdom and insight regarding these desires from young adults were interspersed into the Q presentation.

One of the speakers, Adrian, shared how alone he felt after becoming Catholic. The zeal he had felt was difficult to hang onto when he moved to a different parish. A priest befriended him, and Adrian said, "I realized I just needed one person who showed they cared and who could help me find the mentor and the community I so desperately needed."

Are you willing to be that one person? Young people thirst for a deeper faith and its connection to everyday life yet feel as alone and unsupported as Adrian felt. How can you help?

When you encounter a young person, do you offer a greeting or invitation? Does your gospel witness convey presence, inspiration, and love? Do you include younger generations in your prayer? These are important questions for you and your fraternity to answer.

The youth commission is intimately tied to the Formation and JPIC commissions. Working with Formation Directors and JPIC animators, fraternities are finding ways to connect our young people to opportunities in these areas. Fraternities are reporting their successes at inviting participation in JPIC events, prayer services, Bible studies, and days of reflection.

Formation chair Layna Maher, OFS reminded us that understanding why and what we do can lead to deep transformation. JPIC animator Joe Makley, OFS agreed, urging us to examine the roots of social issues and the heart of Catholic Social Teaching, tradition, and our Rule. As he said, "We need experiences that will transform us. True conversion leads to the action that is so necessary for change." Young people are eager to be part of that change.

As our Bishops tell us in the most recent youth ministry framework—*Listen, Teach, Send*, "Each of the young people in our midst have a unique name, face, and identity: beloved by God and integral to the mission of the Church. Just as Jesus drew near to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, may we also draw near to youth and in imitation of Christ and by the grace of God, faithfully listen, teach, and send them forth on the journey ahead."

As baptized Catholics, and especially Secular Franciscans, we share in this mission and have a unique opportunity, and in fact a clear call to share the gospel life with our younger Catholics. Young people want the same things we want … a holy purpose, love, security, community, friends, and to change the world. But most of all they desire a closeness to and relationship with Jesus. Let's walk together and help each other in this beautiful journey.

What the younger generations are saying they need from us …



Encounter • Presence • Prayer
Inspiration • Witness • Love

Seize the Day

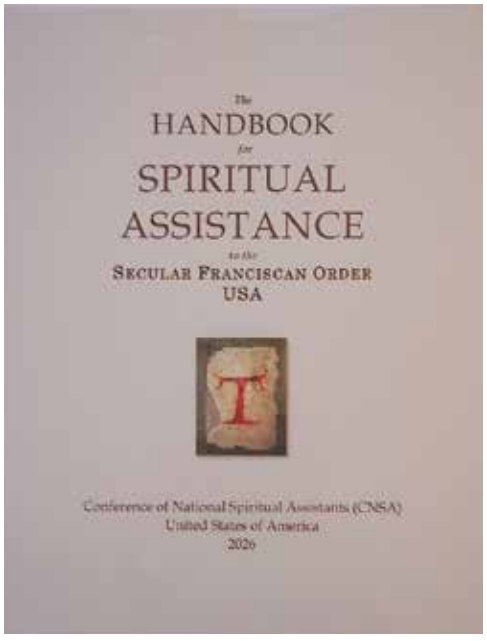
By Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, TOR • National Spiritual Assistant

"Carpe diem. Seize the day. Make your lives extraordinary." From *Dead Poets Society*

With editorializing granted, *"This is the day the CNSA Staff has made. Let us rejoice and be glad."* Sure! Right! I got it. Another manual, mandated. Words, words, and more words. The pictures are a welcome addition.

Behold, the long-awaited day has arrived for the roll-out of the 2026 revision of The Handbook for Spiritual Assistance to the Secular Franciscan Order - USA. Written as spiritual assistance, its revision realized at the "Q," and now offered to be blessed by the Lord.

Believe me, the work (blood, sweat, and ink) was to make the handbook an easy referenced document to navigate. You will notice that the CNSA Staff made the content of spiritual assistance access-friendly, and *practical.* Your part is to make its application *pastoral.*



Any encounter on our part should make visible the virtue of mercy, from heart to face. Otherwise, the encounter changes nothing. Offered by you, sisters and brothers of the Franciscan Family. Spiritual assistance is a matter of attentiveness and sensitivity to the concrete needs when encountered. The handbook "should not be thrown at them." Mercy, applied pastorally, will take us to the next best step. God's mercy overcomes barriers. God's coming to meet us is the mercy-bridge that connects and unites.

Yes, the structure of the handbook has changed. The purpose for the change is to gather together the "what, where, how, and why" to compose a pertinent pathway to a resolution. The Introduction starting on page four illustrates the change. Again, the assistance offered can be realized when applied pastorally.

The content of chapter seven was first to be revised. Having heard a request from regional fraternity councils, the CNSA staff realized this revision of information was the most sought after. The councils' requests initiated the handbook. It is not meant to be shelved, but to be a working document 54 years in the making (see *"About the Revision,"* pages 1-3).

The addition of chapter nine brings us the awareness of how the Church lives the Gospel. The OFS Rule can be found embedded in the Documents of Vatican II, in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in the Beatitudes and in Matthew 25, and especially in Catholic Social Teaching. One example is from the Second Vatican Council's declaration on the laity, *Apostolicam actuositatem* (AA) which "reminds us that the spirit of prayer and contemplation, union with Christ, is the soul of our life." (AA para. 4). "This document reminds us that our presence in the world is not simply about a salvation after earthly life but that our life in Christ impels us to make His presence known in various ways - suited to our abilities and resources - today, here and now" (Chapter 9, p. 91).

CNSA Message

"When we have time, let's do good."

By Fr. Marek, OFM Conv. • CNSA President-in-turn

St. Francis of Assisi warmly told his brothers, "When we have time, let's do good." Over the centuries, we Franciscans have reflected a lot on poverty, but for St. Francis, it was always tied to brotherhood - to the joy of *Fraternitas*.

The "Q" celebration gave us a wonderful chance to gather in person. It was a true celebration of *Fraternitas*! We loved meeting face-to-face and celebrating God's presence in our lives. One highlight was a friendly get-together of Spiritual Assistants with Tibor Kaiser, OFS, Minister General, and Fr. Stefan Acatrinei, General Spiritual Assistant to the Secular Franciscan Order. It was a listening session where we shared the joys and challenges of our shared journey.

On behalf of the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants, I'm so grateful for this chance to share our hopes, joys, challenges, and love for the Franciscan way of life.

We'll keep listening and learning how best to support Secular Franciscans in the U.S.

Along with my CNSA friars, I'm hoping we can start a study group with friars and Secular Franciscans to help us find the best path forward for our unique situation. We'll keep you updated on our plans.

CALENDAR

MONTH	DAY	EVENT/MEETING
November	7-8	Our Lady of Guadalupe Region Election
	13-14	Bl. Solanus Casey Region Visitation
	13-14	Our Lady of Indiana Region Visitation
	17	International Day of Secular Franciscan Solidarity & Feast Day of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Co-patron of the entire Franciscan Third Order, including the OFS
December	3	NAFRA Fall Virtual Meeting
	5	JPIC Virtual Meeting
2027		
January	29-31	St. Francis Region Election

NAFRA – National Fraternity Council JPIC – Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation

Please pray for the success of these events.

PRAYER FOR THE XVIII GENERAL CHAPTER OF THE OFS • NOV 27 - DEC 5, 2027

"Love one another as I have loved you" Fraternity-Work-Mission

Lord Jesus, who through the life and mission of Francis of Assisi,
your servant and faithful follower,
show us the path of the Gospel as a guiding principle for our lives,
aware that we exist in a world filled with contradictions,
violence, and rejections of your message of salvation,
we confidently ask you:

Awaken in us the fraternal love that serves as a living testimony
to your New Commandment of Love in the world full of divisions and conflicts;
the grace of working faithfully and devotedly towards the development
and enhancement of the living conditions for your children on earth,
with appreciation and respect for all that is the work of Your hands
and for the growth of the Kingdom of God;
that each of us, in fraternity, through communion with You in the Eucharist,
in purity of heart, seeking always and in everything to fulfill Your will,
may feel inspired by the Holy Spirit to become witnesses and instruments
of the mission of the Church and to proclaim Your Kingdom,
with our own lives in fraternal living, and, when necessary,
through the Word, which is spirit and life.

We confidently ask you, through the intercession of Father Saint Francis,
of the Immaculate Mary, the Virgin transformed into a temple,
and in Jesus, your Son, who dwelled among us and extended his hand
to lift us from the burden that held us down.

Nominations for the CIOFS Presidency positions are due before March 31, 2027, to CIOFS. Please share any possible nominations with your Regional Minister.

Regional Ministers, please then contact Mary Frances Charsky, OFS or Diane Menditto, OFS for further information. Thank you.



Current and previous National Ministers Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, and Jan Parker, OFS, at the 2026 Quinquennial Congress in Lexington.

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