

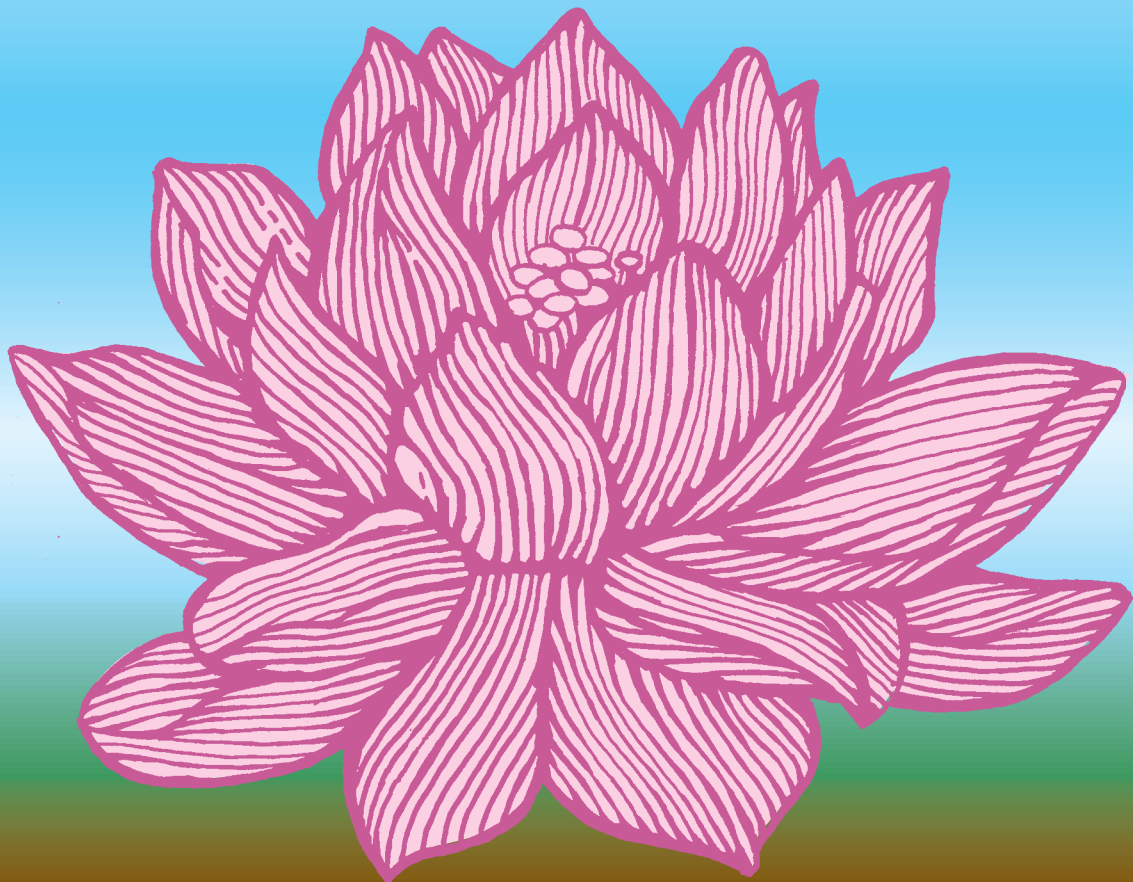


TAU-USA

Spring 2024 Issue 111

A PUBLICATION OF THE
NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE
SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

RENEWAL



The Lotus Flower rises up each day from the muck
and mire and presents itself...anew.

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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Renewal-What Does It Mean To Us?

by Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS, National Minister

The theme for this edition of the TAU-USA is “Renewal.” What comes to mind? A day of rest? Something one does for a magazine subscription or a driver’s or professional license? What happens when we do not renew something? We may become burned out or exhausted in terms of our mind, or we may need to pay extra or pay a fine in terms of a license, or perhaps we might not be able to practice our profession/work. How about a renewal of our commitment to the Gospel? Sure, it doesn’t “expire,” but our efforts may be flat or lack effectiveness. As brothers and sisters of penance, the ongoing renewal of our hearts – ongoing conversion – is key to living out our profession of the OFS Rule. There are two areas that refer to renewal I would like to highlight here.

Article 7 of our OFS Rule states: *“United by their vocation as ‘brothers and sisters of penance’, and motivated by the dynamic power of the gospel, let them conform their thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls ‘conversion.’ Human frailty makes it necessary that this conversion be carried out daily. On this road to renewal the sacrament of reconciliation is the privileged sign of the Father’s mercy and the source of grace.”*



When referring to the new OFS Rule in 1978, (now almost 46 years old) the Ministers General challenged us to: *“...welcome the Franciscan message that it contains and the guidance it offers you in living according to the holy Gospel. A cornerstone of the renewal that we hope for, is to return to the origins, to the spiritual experience of Saint Francis of Assisi and of the Brothers and Sisters of Penance, who received their inspiration and guidance from him.”*

The phrases: “road to renewal” and “a cornerstone of the renewal” appeal to me. Our road or journey to renewal is daily conversion. If our goal is to be renewed in Christ, then an important aspect is to return to our original commitment. Our Seraphic Father St. Francis reminded all: *“for until now – we have done nothing.”* Each day of our journey, we are reminded to begin again.



There are different approaches to achieving this daily conversion. Lately, I begin the day by reflecting on an article of the OFS Rule and then praying the profession renewal prayer.

What approaches do you take?



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

Secular Franciscan Order-USA
www.secularfranciscansusa.org

See page 19 to order Prayer Cards

A few years after I professed, I attended a workshop on the OFS Rule and Constitutions given by Fr. Benet Fonck, OFM, (long-time Spiritual Assistant to the OFS and author of *Fully Mature in the Fullness of Christ*). Several of us at the workshop asked: “How could we live the Rule as working people – there seemed to be so much to do and only so much time in the day? What was the minimum required to fulfill our obligation?” Fr. Benet replied that each day we should be sure to have three things: prayer, fraternity and evangelization.

- **Prayer** – spending time with God.
- **Fraternity** – spending time with one or more members (it can be as simple as an email or a brief call – something to stay onnected with our Franciscan family).
- **Evangelization** – sharing our faith.

This simple but profound message helped me to get back to the basics, to begin again each day with the true meaning of the journey and to minimize distractions from the goal of serving Christ. May our commitment to the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order never expire and lead us closer to the ultimate cornerstone of our faith – Jesus Christ. Praise be Jesus now and forever!

Easter Blessings from the National Executive Council.



Praying in Holy Places

by Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM
National Spiritual Assistant

For many people, a pilgrimage is a time of renewal. Going to a specific, holy place, often walking more than usual, praying in a place that is made significant by who has been there and what has happened in the past, any one of these things would help us to reflect on our lives, and a pilgrimage usually has all of them.

Living at the Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, I am aware that our church and monastery were built 125 years ago when it took 45 days to cross the Atlantic and travel through Europe, across the Mediterranean, up through Egypt to the place where Jesus walked and “pitched his tent” among us (John 1).

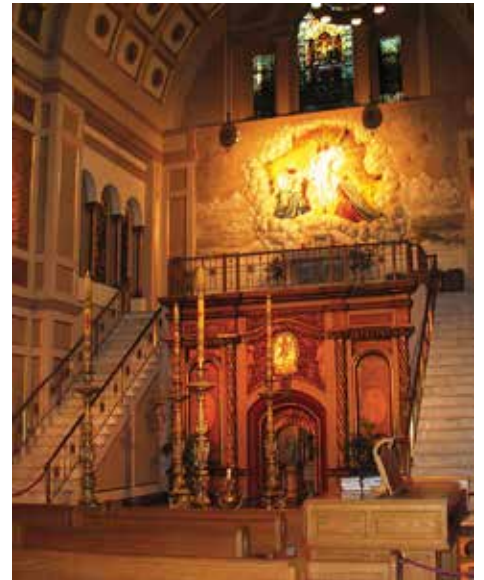
While today it is possible to fly from DC to Tel Aviv in 11 hours, it is not advisable during this time of war to travel there. So even today there are reasons beyond cost preventing our walking where Jesus walked. That said, the Monastery where I live has many replicas of Holy Land shrines, precisely to answer this difficulty.

St. Jerome described the Holy Land as “the Fifth Gospel,” by which he meant that being in the Holy Land, seeing and praying and walking, helps a person to better understand the written Gospels. Many of the Christians who live or have lived in the Holy Land express such appreciation for being in this “special place.” I remember when I was there years ago, climbing Mount Tabor and praying in the Place of the Resurrection. When I was a child my pastor would describe what it was like to be on the road from Jerusalem down to Jericho.

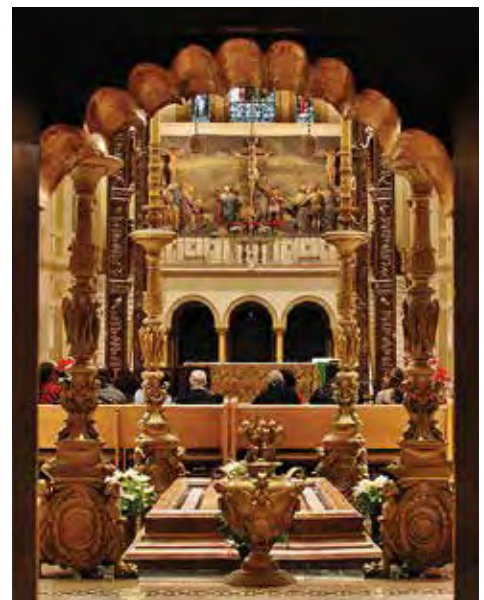
But the nature of a pilgrimage is that we eventually return home—changed, hopefully, but still we return. And so, I bring my memory of Mount Tabor and the Empty Tomb home with me. The priest’s preaching is changed by his experience on that lonely road where the Good Samaritan found the man beaten by thieves.

The Holy Land is not the only place of pilgrimage. People journey to holy sites all over the world, and the Monastery of the Holy Land in DC is one of those places. Just today as I finish writing this, there is a group now on our grounds.

When the Church was but a few hundred years old, Egeria went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. We have her recollections today, so helpful to those who study the history of the Church, pilgrimages, or Liturgy. She describes processions and worship that with some adaptation has persisted to this day. Some of these processions are followed not only in the Holy Land but also replicated in our Monastery. But the big question for our keeping Lent and celebration of the Resurrection is what do I bring home, what do I replicate in my heart and in my life?



Calvary (replica) viewed from the Place of the Resurrection.



Mt. St. Sepulcher Church, Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, Washington, DC. Photos used with permission.



Spiritual Renewal for Young Catholics

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS
National FY/YA Animator

Young adults are often at a crossroads, not only regarding school, work, relationships, and family, but also in their faith life. They may be questioning or have even left the faith in which they were raised. Maybe for the first time they are experiencing a draw toward God. In some cases, a young person discovers a renewed faith-life, but doesn't know how to nourish this new reality. Finding time and energy to give thought, let alone action, to their spiritual lives is often not a "luxury" they feel they can afford. We, as more "seasoned" Catholics, can offer simple ways to revitalize this important area of their lives.

Reflecting on the story of St. Francis and his experience of renewal and transformation, we know he was close to the same age as many of the young people we hope to serve. He too sought answers when he felt confused, and later when his heart was moved toward conversion. He too experienced tension between contemporary social mores and the role of faith.

Our world is bombarded with racial issues, drug and sex trafficking, terrorism, war and violence...and the list goes on. It's no wonder we may feel overwhelmed, depressed, and hopeless. Like Francis, many of our youth are ready to explore new options and are open to refreshing and transforming opportunities. Our Rule calls us to "adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life..." (art. 24) One way individuals and fraternities can respond is to provide encouragement, support, and times of respite to our young adult brothers and sisters. Here are some ideas that have proved successful:

- Evenings of prayer. Young people are thirsty for a relationship with God. Offer an evening of Taizé, a para-liturgical prayer service, adoration, or an experience in visio or lectio divina.
- Encouraging messages. Social media platforms are a great way to send thoughtful messages to the younger generations. Or, surprise them with heartfelt written cards or notes.
- Ventures into nature. Gather for a hike after Mass. Camping or backpacking takes more prep than a walk but is well worth the effort. Or meet for a picnic at a beach to mingle and build relationships.
- Home-cooked meals. Young people appreciate a good meal and perhaps even time to study together with "tutors" on hand.
- Movie nights. Gather to watch a thought provoking or simply fun movie. Our Rule states that "A sense of community will make them (us) joyful," (art. 13) which is an important aspect of renewal.
- Retreats. Providing a half day, whole day, or even a weekend retreat is a dynamic means of rejuvenation and growth in holiness.
- Plan a Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Action. Invite young adults to join you. Taking action when we feel powerless about the world's ills rejuvenates our spirits.
- Take a Pilgrimage. Even a short road trip to a local holy place can be a way to escape stress, pray together, and build community with fellow pilgrims. (See Previous Article)

We can help our younger generation learn "Where there is rest and meditation, there is neither anxiety nor restlessness." (Admonition XXVII, FA:ED, pg. 137) Of course, we are on our journey together, and as these are all multi-generational activities, we can be renewed right along with them!

Joy Comes with the Morning

by Ron Lacey, OFS

National Ecumenical / Interfaith Committee Chair

You may have heard the Zen koan: “Coming, going – what’s the difference?” A koan is a riddle that at first seems nonsensical, but when properly understood, it shows the inadequacy of human logic. It is only in our deluded state that we think we’re entering one place without leaving another.

This koan has been much on my mind lately. My beloved fraternity – St Anthony, Boston – has been deactivated. We were once the largest fraternity in St Elizabeth of Hungary Region, but age, sickness, death, a few departures, and no new blood have taken their toll. I’m sure many of you have had similar experiences; we’ve said a tearful goodbye to many fraternities.

But with deactivation come new things: exploring other fraternities, making new friends, learning new things, and ultimately, transferring into another fraternity. Coming, going . . . death, resurrection!

It isn’t just fraternity life, is it? It seems that everything works this way: the old gives way to the new. We are often sad to lose the old, but we must never despair, for our Lord may prune, but he does so only to help his branch yield more fruit (Jn 15:2). In the area of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, for example, we leave our old isolation, lose our false sense of security, and we enter a new path of discovery; we gain new friends and new wisdom. It doesn’t always happen in that order, but “joy comes with the morning!” (Ps 30:5).

Our beloved sister Carolyn Townes recently shared with us on the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee a reflection by Ronald Rolheiser, OMI, who spoke of real ecumenism as a path of “progressive convergence.” Drawing on the late Cardinal Dulles, Rolheiser says that ecumenism is not about making converts, pointing out everyone else’s errors, bringing them around our altar. (It is Jesus’ altar, not ours!) In other words, it isn’t about getting them to leave their church for ours. Progressive convergence is about drawing closer to the Prince of Peace – something that demands a persistent turning away from sin, arrogance, the horrible need to be right – and as we draw closer and closer to Jesus, we find in our disagreements a cause for shame, for we find ourselves gathered around him, whose one and only commandment is love.

This Easter Season, ask yourself: “Where am I going?” “Where does this lead?” “Where do I want to go, and what do I have to give up to get there?” Remember in whom we live, move, and have our being (Acts 17:28). Remember that we can ascend the heavens, and he is there; we can make our bed in the depths, and he is there (Ps 139:8). Remember that our neighbors – particularly the ones we ignore and the ones we don’t like – are in fact the gate of heaven. And remember, Jesus is making all things new (Rev 21:5)





Taking Action for Renewal

by Joe Makley, OFS
National JPIC Animator



I write this in the second week of Lent under snow, knowing it will be read in April or May, the season of renewal. Despite the state of the world, it is good to inhale the spring air and say prayers of wonder and gratitude.

February was Black History month in the US. I began it by watching *Eyes on the Prize*, the powerful documentary about the Civil Rights era. I reflected on the history of our Church in the US during that time, seeking lessons for our own struggle with injustices today. Our family moved to the South from New England in 1963. Many people we met there favored the oppressive status quo and saw the marches and sit-ins as an unfortunate result of “agitation.” I was shocked to learn that this included many white Catholics. Our family was on the side of Dr. King, and Peter, Paul and Mary and all the “good guys” in favor of integration. Our parents taught and modeled respect and dignity for everyone regardless of color, but it was the activists (including many Franciscans) who really practiced love. They took the beatings and died in the streets and did the heavy lifting of getting Civil Rights into law. They made what John Lewis called “good trouble.” To put it in Secular Franciscan terms, they were “individually and collectively... in the forefront in promoting justice by the testimony of their human lives and courageous initiatives.” What I was reminded of was that love must be practiced, unreservedly, relentlessly, without fear, to make a difference.



It was another one of those “For up to now, we have done nothing.” moments.

Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation is meant to be more than a list of topics. It is a model to show how our life in the Rule brings about conversion, and how our actions are its fruit. We practice contemplative prayer, we reflect on our Gospel call, experience conversion, and apply it to this age and place. In our work, in our family life, in the parish and in our fraternities, we are a people of renewal.

Innocents will still be suffering and dying in wars and displacement, politicians will be scapegoating and marginalizing groups of people, the poor will struggle for human dignity, and we will still be putting unsustainable amounts of carbon into the atmosphere. We do not obsess over the people whose errors have caused all this. In Chapter 7 of his Rule of 1223, St. Francis said of his friars: “They must be careful not to be angry or upset ... because anger or annoyance in themselves or others, makes it difficult to be charitable.” (Omnibus P. 62.) We do not fear. We forgive, we pray for everyone, and we roll up our sleeves to make peace and justice and respect for all creation a living reality. When possible, we strategize as fraternities to address the greatest needs in our community and form an apostolate. We are doing a lot, whether it’s marches and megaphones or letter writing, or public prayer events, private fasting or Novenas, or public singing, we are out there in love, trying to further human dignity in this world. It is nothing less than the demands of the Gospel.

“And after the Lord gave me some brothers...”

by Justin Carisio, OFS
National Formation Commission

In the days before his death in 1226, St. Francis created a document that the Franciscan tradition calls “The Testament.”¹ He described this text as “a remembrance, admonition, exhortation, and my testament, which I, little brother Francis, make for you my blessed brothers...”² Among other things, Francis recounts how he formed his order: “And after the Lord gave me some brothers, no one showed me what I had to do, but the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.”³

For St. Francis, living “according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel” was physical and sacramental. One of its signal characteristics would be its communal nature. Modeled on the example of Jesus and the apostles, it would be a community of brothers who would “give themselves to honest work,” living a life of poverty in the world “as pilgrims and strangers.”⁴ In this and the other ways in which the Franciscan movement would take shape—St. Clare’s cloistered Poor Ladies or the secular Brothers and Sisters of Penance—the paradigm of Franciscan life would be fraternity. Moreover, Franciscan fraternity would not be an abstract idea, not a collection of names on paper. For Secular Franciscans, fraternity then, as now, means brothers and sisters who are physically present to one another. That is why attendance at fraternity meetings is vital to our Franciscan way of life.

Our Rule states, “The local fraternity is to be established canonically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love.” (Rule, Article 22) The commentary on the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order states, “The local fraternity is the basic living organism of the whole Secular Franciscan Order and a visible sign of the whole Church in miniature.”⁵ The Constitutions emphasize that “The fraternity must offer to its members opportunities for coming together and collaborating through meetings to be held with as great a frequency as allowed by the situation and with the involvement of all its members.” (Constitutions, 53:1)

During the pandemic, many fraternities resourcefully turned to conference calls and internet services to meet these obligations at a time when physical gatherings were not possible. Some local fraternities continue to offer these options. However, they should only be employed in extraordinary circumstances or when necessary to engage members truly unable to attend a regular gathering.

In a homily he gave in April 2020, during the height of the Covid crisis, Pope Francis reminded us of the necessity of physically coming together. Acknowledging the utility of television and the internet under those circumstances, he nevertheless emphasized that Christians should seek a “daily familiarity with the Lord” that is intimate and personal but always in community: “The ideal of the Church is always with the people and with the sacraments. Always.” In a sentence that should ring true in the ears of every Franciscan, he stated, “The Church, the sacraments, the People of God are concrete.”⁶

Believing that our local fraternities are indeed a living organism, a visible sign of the church in miniature, Secular Franciscans should take the Holy Father’s words to heart, reminding ourselves that fraternity is concrete. Fraternity is not virtual. The Lord has given us brothers and sisters as a gift. We should rejoice in our opportunities to come together and do so with eager anticipation.

1 St. Francis of Assisi, “The Testament” in Francis of Assisi: Early Documents (FA:ED I), edited by Regis J. Armstrong, J. A. Wayne Hellmann, William J. Short (New York, London, and Manila: New City Press, 1999), 124. 2 Ibid., 127. 3 Ibid., 125.

4 Ibid., 125-126. 5 Conference of National Spiritual Assistants of the USA, From Gospel to Life, The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order With Commentary (National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order, 2023), 25

6 www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/the-churchs-ideal-is-to-be-with-the-people-pope-says-15505 (accessed Mar 2, 2024).

The Gift of Greccio

by Patrick Martin, OFS
National Centenary Task Force

According to the American Museum of Natural History, two thousand years ago our planet's population was about 170 million souls (a far cry from today's population of about 8 billion). Hundreds of thousands of babies were born that year. And in a far corner of the Roman Empire, a child was born to a carpenter and his wife in a small shed or cave in the village of Bethlehem.



Eight hundred years ago, our Seraphic Father, St. Francis, created that scene again in the hill town of Greccio. That event, that statement of incarnational belief, would influence the direction and theological foundation of the Franciscan Movement forever.

This past year, the worldwide Franciscan Family celebrated the eighth centenary of the Nativity scene at Greccio. Here in the United States many events were held at the national, regional, and fraternity level to remember and remind us about the importance of what happened at Greccio in 1223.

Mother Cabrini Region's Regional Formation Day last March focused on the incarnation, starting with a presentation by Fr. Edward Tverdek, OFM, entitled "The Incarnation, the Atonement, and the 'Franciscan Thesis.'" The afternoon included a slide tour of Greccio, presentations on the many dimensions of the Centenary, and a closing liturgy. Regional Minister, Luana Lienhart, said, "Our formation team put together a beautiful set of presentations on recognizing the Incarnation in ourselves and each other. We focused on the works of mercy/JPIC/multicultural dimensions of the Incarnation and collected goods for a shelter for women and their children."

The San Diego District of the St. Francis Region planned its Greccio event working with the First Order, Second Order and Third Order Regular to bring the entire Franciscan Family together for celebrations in November at two different locations in the diocese. "It's events where the branches of the Franciscan family come together - and when we gather with Seculars from many fraternities, in our District, Region, or Nationally - that we truly experience what it is to be a member of this beautiful community. Our Franciscan spirituality is so much more than what's in any one Fraternity - and that's a camaraderie you could deeply feel at both of these Greccio events," said Laura Chun, Minister of San Luis Rey Fraternity.



The Sanctuary at Greccio

Also in November, the OFS-USA Centenary Task Force presented an online event called, "Celebrating Christmas at Greccio," where more than 300 individuals and groups saw a virtual tour of Greccio conducted by Sr. Maryann Dosen, ssfc. Following the tour, readings from the writings of two early Franciscan biographers were shared with the group: Thomas of Celano, one of the original followers of St. Francis, and St. Bonaventure, a "second generation" Franciscan who interviewed the remaining original followers. Discussion questions were given to the participants, who met in small groups for sharing. Videos of the presentations can be found at the OFS-USA website: *Centenary Resources: Christmas at Greccio - Secular Franciscan Order - USA*

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/centenary-resources-christmas-at-greccio/>



San Diego Greccio Celebration:
Receiving small bundles of straw and blessing cards for home crèches.



Blessing of a Crèche

God of Mary and Joseph,
of shepherds and animals,
bless us whenever we gaze
on this manger scene.

Through all the days of Christmas
may these figures tell the story
of how humans, angels, and animals
found the Christ in this poor place.
Fill our house with hospitality, joy,
gentleness, and thanksgiving,
and guide our steps in the way of peace.
We ask this through Christ, our Savior.
Amen.

Honoring the 800th anniversary of the
crèche of St. Francis at Greccio.

We Are Called To Renewal

by Francine Gikow, OFS

*“Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good, and acceptable and perfect.” (Rom12:2)**

This passage from St. Paul, notes three levels of adherence to God’s will: good, acceptable and perfect. Initially there is a minimum of following Christ which is solely good (not evil). Next we have acceptability which reflects a little higher adherence but still withholds total commitment and finally, there is perfection; for those who are fully committed to follow Christ and to become transformed by Him. It is a renunciation of self and desires, with a total intention of living for Christ in this world.

Secular Franciscans are called to the highest level of following Christ- of being as perfect as humanly possible. In our Rite of Profession, we acknowledge that Christ’s grace has *“led these your servants to live their faith more fully in the context of the world,”* and has a goal *“of perfect Christian love so that the Church may be rebuilt and her mission to be fulfilled....”* (Ritual, 23-24) Finally, we are called to *“conform our thoughts and deeds to those of Christ by means of that radical interior change which the gospel itself calls conversion.”* (Rule, 7)

How can we do this? We know we are not able to do all of this on our own but rather it is through God’s grace which gives us the ability to persevere in our vocational journey toward perfection. God initiates the call and we respond. Like the disciples, Jesus calls each of us by name, personally and individually, to come and see, and to stay awhile with Him in prayer. We begin by answering His call of invitation, to dwell in prayer and encounter Him in a deepening, intimate relationship.

Jesus routinely went to the desert to stay with His Father. So too is our need for “desert time” to connect with Jesus. Our time cannot be rushed nor become routine. God wants us to encounter Him and make ourselves available to Him without the clutter of our own agenda or wishes. Do not worry about *how* you pray, or using a specific style of prayer. What matters most is your relationship with God:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men, know what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26-27)

Our time with God is the first step toward renewal - for without God, there is nothing. The disciples were attracted to Jesus after their first encounter with Him, stayed with Him to hear His message and then, when filled with the fire of the Holy Spirit, were sent to proclaim Christ to the world. Likewise, we must first listen, then discern, and ultimately go forth on a mission to spread the good news of Jesus - who is the same Jesus we personally encounter in the fire of our prayer.

*...ask for grace not instruction, desire not understanding, the groaning of prayer not diligent reading... not light but the fire that totally inflames us and carries us into God by ecstatic unctions and burning affections. This fire is God. (St. Bonaventure, *The Soul’s Journey Into God*. 7:6)*

*All Scripture citations taken from RSV-2CE.

21st Quinquennial Congress

Mark your calendar!

21st Quinquennial Congress July 29 - August 2, 2026

As we commemorate the 800th anniversary
of Francis' Transitus, our theme is:

"The Easter of St. Francis: Rekindle the flame"

Lexington Griffin Gate Marriott Golf Resort
Lexington, KY



DRIVING DISTANCE TO LEXINGTON, KY

CITY	DISTANCE
Louisville, KY	77 miles
Cincinnati, OH	82 miles
Knoxville, TN	172 miles
Charleston, WV	176 miles
Indianapolis, IN	189 miles
Columbus, OH	189 miles
Nashville, TN	214 miles
Cleveland, OH	331 miles
St. Louis, MO	337 miles
Detroit, MI	345 miles
Pittsburgh, PA	372 miles
Chicago, IL	373 miles
Atlanta, GA	382 miles
Charlotte, NC	401 miles
Birmingham, AL	404 miles
Memphis, TN	422 miles
Milwaukee, WI	469 miles
Washington, DC	512 miles
Buffalo, NY	515 miles
Baltimore, MD	538 miles
Charleston, SC	542 miles
Norfolk, VA	583 miles
Kansas City, MO	583 miles



The Cross and St. Francis

by Bret Thoman, OFS

On Friday, January 5, 2024, at the Sanctuary of La Verna, the Franciscan Family officially opened the VIII Centenary of the Stigmata of St. Francis, with an event entitled “From the wounds to new life.” Eight centuries ago this year, up on the same mountain, on September 17, 1224, he received the stigmata; that is, the wounds of Christ were revealed on his hands, feet, and side. However, St. Francis’ interiorization of the cross took place much earlier. It happened around 1205-06, at the beginning of his conversion.

After Francis’ dream of becoming a knight ended in failure, he was praying in solitary places around Assisi in order to discern what God wanted for him. The Legend of the Three Companions describes one pivotal moment.

While he was walking by the church of San Damiano, he was told in the Spirit to go inside for a prayer. Once he entered, he began to pray intensely before an image of the Crucified, which spoke to him in a tender and kind voice: “Francis, don’t you see that my house is being destroyed? Go, then, and rebuild it for me.”

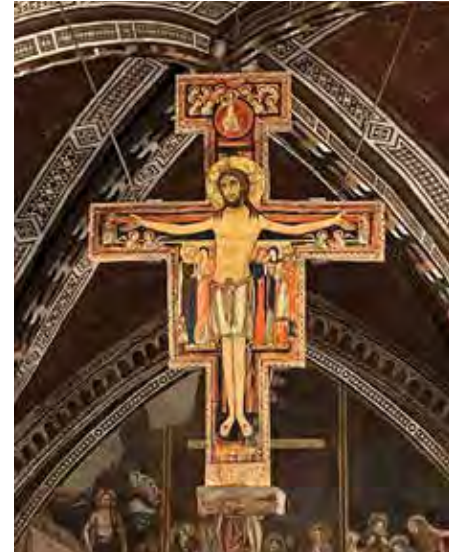
Thomas of Celano, Francis’ first biographer, recorded something that perhaps not everyone understood: “From that time on, compassion for the Crucified was impressed into his holy soul. And we honestly believe the wounds of the sacred Passion were impressed deep in his heart, though not yet on his flesh” (Second Life 10: Book II: 249). That would take place in 1224, in Laverna.

From that moment, Francis looked at the cross as the highest expression of the “minority” of Christ. St. Francis’ understanding of the cross was not mere abstract theological assent. Instead, the cross was something concrete that lived within him.

The cross is the lowest place Christ assumed when he came down from the heavens to assume human flesh: “though he was in the form of God, Jesus did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather, he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross!” (Philippians 2: 5-8).

With Christ as his example, in his footsteps, Francis began to appropriate to himself the cross. He so identified with the cross that he used it as a type of signature. He would leave the marking of the Tau etched into walls and ceilings wherever he went. He signed his name with the Tau in the few manuscripts we have written by him.

Francis embodied the cross of Christ so fully that it informed him in every circumstance of life—especially the difficult ones. The way he did so is perhaps best revealed in one of Francis’ dictated writings known as “True and Perfect Joy,” recounted in Little Flowers of St. Francis (Chapter 8).



The San Damiano Crucifix



Entrance to the San Damiano Monastery

In the popular narrative, Francis and Brother Leo were returning to the Portiuncula from Perugia during the cold winter months. As they walked, Francis said to Brother Leo that true joy would not exist in great circumstances, such as if all the theologians of Paris, prelates, and royalty were to enter the Order. He continues, saying that true joy would not be present even if his brothers were to convert all non-believers to the faith, or if he had so much grace from God that he healed the sick and performed miracles.

Then Francis reveals what true joy is. He tells Brother Leo that if the two were to arrive at the Portiuncula in Assisi in the dead of night, during the winter, freezing, covered with mud and ice, and the porter would not recognize them, but order them to go away, telling them that they were “simple and stupid!”, then Francis says, “I tell you this: If I had patience and did not become upset, true joy, as well as true virtue and the salvation of my soul, would consist in this.”

St. Francis was teaching Brother Leo that nothing good is ours; rather, all good comes from God. He said that the greatest graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit are those of conquering oneself and willingly enduring “sufferings, insults, humiliations, and hardships for the love of Christ”; for Scripture says, “Who confers distinction upon you? What do you possess that you have not received? But if you have received it, why are you boasting as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7);

Francis concludes with one final verse: “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Galatians 6:14). And this same cross would reveal itself soon on his body.



The Church of San Damiano

St. John the Baptist Fraternity Essay Contest Winner



Kathryn Swegart - Formation Director, Jordan Smith, and Dean Astumian - Minister of St. John the Baptist Fraternity in Winslow, Maine.

The St. John the Baptist fraternity in Winslow, Maine is pleased to announce the winner of its essay contest, opened to high school and college students in Maine. The winner is Jordan Smith, a student at Colby College in Waterville, Maine. He is a member of Corpus Christi Parish in Waterville and is active in Colby Catholics. Jordan is from Severna Park, Maryland.

With brilliance and insight, Jordan weaves a philosophical connection between beauty and God as proclaimed by St. Francis in the Canticle of the Sun. Jordan received a \$100 prize and a Word of Fire Bible. We hope that you are inspired by the thoughtful writing of this young man. Praise be to God!

St. Francis' Canticle of the Sun reveals his complex understanding of the relationship between God, Nature, and Man. From the outset, Francis unqualifiedly recognizes God as "Most High." Nothing else matches the grandeur of God. However, this does not prevent Francis from proclaiming: "Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures." The creation may be praised alongside God because His glory is manifest through creation. This 'translucent' element of creation that allows one to see through it to its Creator is the essence of beauty. The connection between translucence and beauty is emphasized in Francis' identification of "Brother Sun" as the creature closest to God. The reason the sun "bear a likeness" to God most of all is that he is "beautiful and radiant." Just as the sun shines its rays to not only reveal the beauty of the physical world but also to give it life and sustenance, so too God's overflowing goodness manifests itself not only in the continual sustaining of being but in the essential beauty of all that exists. For the God Who is Beauty Itself will always produce beautiful creatures. That is to say, being and beauty are coextensive for St. Francis. Beauty is not something I merely personally will to believe or not. Beauty is constantly eliciting a response from me. It calls me out of my own being into the source of my being through the creation in which beauty inheres. Beauty raises beauty into the Beautiful Itself.

The precise connection between God, Nature, Beauty, and its implications for people on a practical basis comes to light in the second half of Francis' canticle in which he praises "Sister Mother Earth, / who sustains us and governs us and who produces / varied fruits with colored flowers and herbs." The title "Sister Mother" is emblematic of the dual nature of all of creation:

Insofar as the Earth is mere matter and must receive her being from God, she is called "Sister," but insofar as God has given her the ability to produce her own fruits, she is called "Mother." These fruits are intrinsically "colored," which is to say that, just like the sun, the sustenance that Mother Earth provides cannot be separated from the beauty that she produces. Though this may seem to make the beautiful overwhelming, perhaps even to the point that the individual cannot resist it, St. Francis is careful to avoid this conclusion. For Francis mourns: "Woe to those who die in mortal sin." It is only those who serve God "with great humility" that shall be spared from "the second death." Humility, as the opposite of closeminded and selfish pride, is nothing but the openness to being and beauty that leads one invariably to God. The choice, therefore, is ours: We may open ourselves to the beauty of God and His creation or close in on ourselves and experience eternal darkness.

Word Search

Secular Franciscan Order

G	S	N	A	C	S	I	C	N	A	R	F	T
E	R	G	P	O	E	U	L	M	S	U	V	I
N	Y	J	T	M	R	D	A	O	S	H	A	N
E	S	N	N	P	V	P	W	F	I	E	Y	T
R	F	U	E	A	A	H	E	Y	S	G	R	E
A	P	J	T	S	N	V	N	W	I	D	A	G
L	O	U	I	S	T	H	E	K	I	N	G	R
C	R	S	N	I	L	U	R	A	C	L	N	I
O	E	T	E	O	E	M	P	O	A	W	U	T
N	N	I	P	N	A	I	K	U	H	R	H	Y
S	O	C	R	F	D	L	T	B	E	K	F	O
T	I	E	E	B	E	I	R	O	P	R	O	F
I	S	M	T	X	R	T	D	L	E	O	H	C
T	R	E	P	E	S	Y	W	Y	A	M	T	R
U	E	R	A	L	H	K	A	B	C	E	E	E
T	V	C	H	U	I	R	O	X	E	K	B	A
I	N	Y	C	R	P	C	B	E	L	M	A	T
O	O	W	A	S	L	O	I	P	V	S	Z	I
N	C	L	T	F	A	H	R	T	E	O	I	O
S	P	O	G	O	K	M	N	S	Y	R	L	N
C	Y	T	I	N	R	E	T	A	R	F	E	R

ASSISI
CHAPTER
COMPASSION
CONVERSION
ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY
FRANCISCANS
FRATERNITY
GENERAL CONSTITUTIONS

HUMILITY
INTEGRITY OF CREATION
JUSTICE
LOUIS THE KING
LOVE
MERCY
OFS RULE
PEACE

PENITENT
PRAYER
RENEWAL
RITUAL
ROME
SERVANT LEADERSHIP
SIMPLICITY
TAU

Word Scramble Puzzle

Unscramble the letters to find synonyms of RENEWAL.

1. kweiganan _____
2. bhriter _____
3. acrighgne _____
4. netcrmemcenome _____
5. crurcerene _____
6. lirgenifl _____
7. tofirnareom _____
8. gortirenanee _____
9. vnoeiturenja _____
10. pegnerion _____
11. stehiprmenle _____
12. rinsorteoat _____
13. psotruneim _____
14. ercorsirentu _____
15. tienavziriatio _____
16. ivlarve _____

Prayer inspired by Pope Francis' Laudate Deum

We praise you, O God, Creator of all things,
whose mystery unfolds in a leaf, in a mountain
trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face.

Jesus, your Son, taught us to wonder
as he made his way throughout the land,
contemplating the beauty of creation.

We pray, O God, that you may stir in us
a reverent awareness of our invisible link with the
entire created world.

We pray for humility—
to remember that we, too, are created
and are not creation's masters.

We pray for compassion—
for open eyes and hearts
to welcome those forced to flee from their homes
due to rising sea levels and drought.

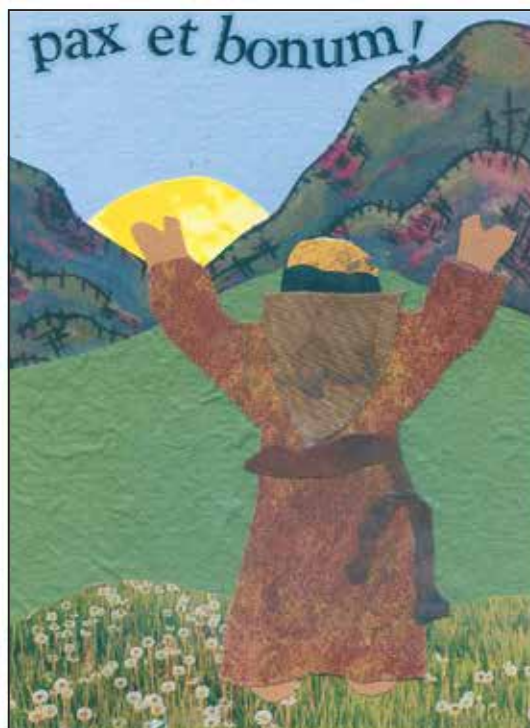
We pray for repentance—
so that our thirst for power and domination
may be transformed into service.

We pray for simplicity—
and the will to turn from our greed
which impacts vulnerable people everywhere.

We pray for cultural conversion—
that we may simplify our lifestyles,
reduce pollution and waste,
and exercise prudence in our decision making.

We pray for policy changes—
that as a nation and world we may work together
to reverse the course of climate change.

Our hearts ache as we ponder:
"The world sings of an infinite Love:
how can we fail to care for it?"
We praise you, O God, confident that you work
in our hearts and through our actions,



This prayer is inspired by [Laudate Deum](#), Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation on care for creation in follow-up to [Laudato Si'](#). [Laudate Deum](#) is available on the Vatican website under "Apostolic Exhortations."

The poem is from the USCCB and the artwork is by Kathleen Molaro, OFS

From the National Treasurer:



Traditionally this issue of the TAU-USA, contains the financial statement of the National Fraternity for the previous calendar year. However, during the National Executive Council meeting March 7-11, 2024, it was decided that it would be prudent and in the interest of cyber security that we no longer print financial details in the TAU-USA. The financial statement for the year ending December 31, 2023, has been provided to Regional Ministers to share with members in their Regions. Please contact your regional minister for a copy. The financial statement is for members and is not to be shared with people outside of the OFS-USA. If there is a request from someone outside the National Fraternity, please ask them to contact National Treasurer, Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS, @ claudiakauz.sfo@gmail.com.

Link for placing an order with Smoky Valley Printing:

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

Opportunity to Serve-National Historian Position Opening

The National Executive Council is seeking applicants for the position of National Historian. If you are interested in serving in this capacity, or if you would like to nominate someone for the position, please contact National Secretary Susan Ronan, OFS, at ofsusasecretary@gmail.com for an application form prior to May 5, 2024.

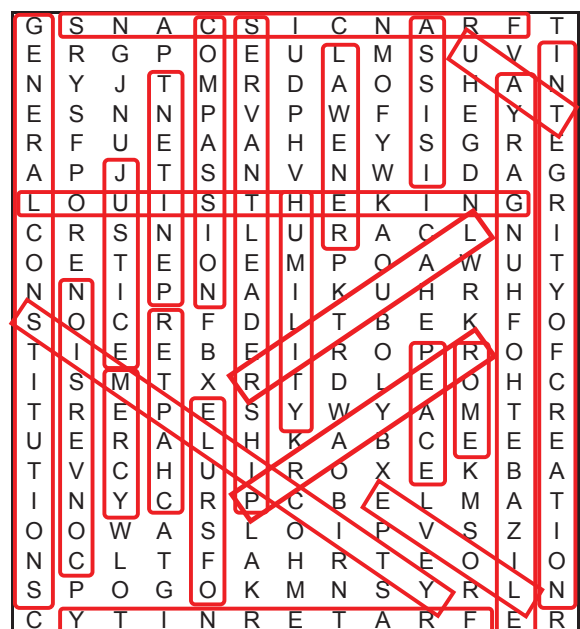
The qualities required for the position of National Historian include:

- An interest in the history of the Secular Franciscan Order in the United States
- The ability to conduct research, and good writing and communication skills
- Familiarity with the structure of the Secular Franciscan Order
- A willingness to reach out to various Secular Franciscan Order groups, and the wider Franciscan family
- Ability to travel, as needed, to do research
- Willingness to gain knowledge of the OFS Archives at St. Bonaventure University
- The time and ability to begin writing the next volume of OFS History in the USA

Word Scramble

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. awakening | 9. rejuvenation |
| 2. rebirth | 10. reopening |
| 3. recharging | 11. replenishment |
| 4. recommencement | 12. restoration |
| 5. recurrence | 13. resumption |
| 6. refilling | 14. resurrection |
| 7. reformation | 15. revitalization |
| 8. regeneration | 16. revival |

Word Search





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Email form to claudiakauz.sfo@gmail.com or mail to: National Fraternity-OFS-USA, 2007 Maverick Trl, Harrisonville, MO 64701-1545			

For Additional formation materials - see Smoky Valley order form.

Prices effective March 15, 2024