

Welcome to our Spring Newsletter

FEBRUARY 2025

ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA REGION

UP TO NOW NEWSLETTER



**Covering the District of Columbia,
Central Maryland,
Southern Pennsylvania, all of Virginia,
one fraternity in Delaware,
one fraternity in West Virginia,**

“Let us begin again, for up to now we have done nothing”

~ St. Francis of Assisi

2025 ~ Issue 1

**St. Margaret of Cortona
Regional Minister's
February 2025 Message**

Greetings! Peace be with you, my sisters and brothers. I pray that you enjoyed your Thanksgiving holiday, Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany seasons.

During this issue of the newsletter, I have two important items to communicate. First is the Feedback Pursuit Areas that resulted from the Chapter of Mats held back in September 2024 and presented to the local fraternity ministers at the Chapter of Ministers held in November 2024. The second item is the change in the format of regional retreats for 2025 from a weekend event to three separate one-day events.

During the weekend of November 9-10, 2024, the region held its Annual Chapter of Ministers' meeting at Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat House in Bethesda, Maryland. Prominent on the meeting agenda was the presentation of the pursuit areas that were derived from the feedback we received from our members attending the Chapter of Mats in September. As you recall, I indicated that we had to publish a report from the Chapter of Mats to the national which we did and submitted back in October. Additionally, the region promised to analyze the feedback and develop a follow-up approach, which was also done, and is named the Feedback Pursuit Areas.

As indicated in the diagram below, the feedback received fell in one of four areas (categories) that will be pursued collectively by the region via the local fraternities and supported by the regional council to address the feedback in an ongoing manner in four different but related categories.



("Regional Minister's Message" continued on page 2)

- Regional Minister:**
Gary Burton, OFS
- Vice Minister:**
Michael Oliver, OFS
- Secretary:**
Maria Martinez, OFS
- Treasurer:**
Randy Bender, OFS
- Formation Director:**
Rita Colleran, OFS
- Area Councilor (N. MD/S. PA):**
Michael Huether, OFS
- Area Councilor (MD/DE):**
Tobias Harkleroad, OFS
- Area Councilor (Metro-DC):**
Mary Tchida Badjo, OFS
- Area Councilors (VA):**
Sita Chakrawarti, OFS
- Area Councilors (VA):**
Jamie Elia, OFS
- Regional Interfaith/
Ecumenical Chair**
Mike Huether, OFS

- Regional Spiritual Assistants:**
Fr. Russel Murray, OFM
Br. Michael Meza, OFM Cap
Anne Mulqueen, OFS
(OFM Conv. delegated)

-
- Appointed Council Positions**
 - Regional JPIC Chair:**
Pat Boye, OFS
 - Regional Multi-Cultural Chair:**
Sita Chakrawarti, OFS
 - Regional Youth and Young
Adult Commission Chair:**
Carl Stacy, OFS

-
- Appointed
Non-Council Positions**
 - Vocations/Archivist/
Regional Newsletter Editor**
 - Regional Database Manager:**
Bob Longo, OFS

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•**Engage and Encourage:** This deals with supporting each other on our Franciscan journeys and perspective members seeking a vocation. This will be done via evangelizing, inviting others to meet and speak with us, conducting Open Houses, and increasing opportunities for social gatherings.



Figure 1: SMC Region’s Feedback Pursuit Areas

•**Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC):** Many of us are already engaged in this important work in one way or another as either an individual or group apostolate involving Care for Creation, Respect Life, Anti-Human Trafficking, and/or through the Franciscan Action Network (FAN).

•**Technology:** Like the previous category, many of you are using technology to promote your work in engaging and encouraging and supporting your JPIC efforts by means of videoconferencing software (Zoom and Microsoft Teams), digitally archiving your important documents through Google or Microsoft OneDrive, and using tools like Google Translate and Magisterium AI to support your multi-cultural outreach and formation.

•**Multi-generational and multi-cultural:** This category addresses a growth area that many fraternities and regions also have regarding their outreach to and interaction with Youth and Young Adults and ethnic groups. Engaging and encouraging these groups will involve events like special liturgies and gatherings to help us connect and be in relationship with them.

The Feedback Pursuit Areas is intended to be both a framework that is a cross-cutting and an ongoing approach to support the efforts to fulfill our mission as Secular Franciscans. There will be more forthcoming soon and please speak with your ministers, councils, and the regional council if you have any questions.

The second item for this newsletter pertains to the annual regional retreats. In the past these retreats were weekend events (Friday-Sunday) that were spiritually enriching and enjoyable. Recent feedback received indicated that these weekend events were becoming cost prohibitive for many and the locations were not convenient for those living in the distant areas of our region. After reflecting on the matter, the regional council and I decided to try a different approach that is intended to be less expensive and easier for members to attend. Starting in 2025, instead of one weekend event, there will be three one-day events held on a Saturday in different geographically distributed areas in the region (North, Central, and South). These events or Days of Reflection shouldn’t cost more than \$50.00 per person and should be for the most part within 90 minutes or less of driving time for most members.

The first of these events will be held at Saint Francis of Assisi Parish and Fraternity in Triangle, Virginia on March 8, 2025, from 10:00 am to 3:00 pm, and will be led by Father Russell Murray, OFM. The second of these events is scheduled for May 24, 2025, at Saint Anthony’s Shrine in Ellicott City, Maryland which is intended for ministers and vice ministers. The third event is scheduled for October of 2025 in the Charlottesville, Virginia area (exact date to be determined). These three events are in addition to the annual regional events like the Day of Reflection for

Inquirers and Candidates which this year is at St. Anthony’s Shrine on March 29, 2025, and the Regional Formation Directors’ Retreat which will be at the Priestfield Retreat Center the weekend of June 27-29, 2025. More information will be provided on these events as time draws nearer.

That’s all for now. I pray that God continues to bless and protect you and your loved ones each day.

Pax,
Gary Burton, OFS
Minister
Saint Margaret of Cortona Region



Around the Region

Congratulations to our Newest Candidates

Companions of Francis and Clare

<p>L-R Diane Koropchak, OFS Joanne Hawley, OFS Marianne Ast, OFS</p>		<p>L R Zachary Conger, OFS Kris Krulik, OFS Frank Otto, OFS</p>
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Newly Professed

	<p>Our Lady of the Rosary Genni McGlynn, OFS celebrated her profession on December 21, 2024</p>	
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Losses in the Secular Franciscan Family



Our Franciscan sister, Marilyn Wall, OFS, a member of St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity passed away on November 29, 2024. Marilyn was professed on November 9, 2014.



Our Franciscan sister, Mary Loeffler Sobczynski, passed away on December 17, 2024. Mary was a member of Holy Family Fraternity and was professed on October 12, 2020.



Mary Ann Corr, OFS, a former minister of Mt. St. Sepulchre Fraternity, transitioned to the next life on January 11, 2025. Mary Ann recently transferred to St. Francis DC Fraternity. On June 21, 1981, Mary Ann professed at Mt. St. Sepulchre Fraternity.

Prayer for the Deceased

Remember, Lord,
those who have died and
have gone before us marked
with the sign of faith,
especially those for whom
we now pray. May these
and all who sleep in Christ
find in Your presence light,
happiness and peace.
Through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

www.ShareCatholic.com

The 2024 National Chapter JPIC Award

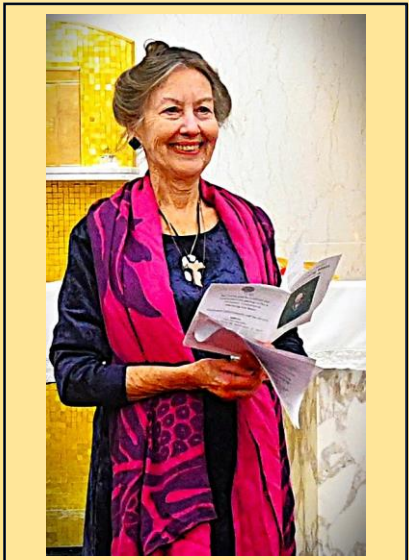


The 2024 National Chapter JPIC Award recipient is from the St. Margaret of Cortona Region, Michele Dunne, OFS. Michele is the past minister of the Mount Saint Sepulchre Fraternity at the Holy Land Monastery in Washington, D.C. Michele is currently the executive director of the Franciscan Action Network.

In a recent interview with Joe Makley, OFS, Michele stated, “I feel blessed to be doing work every day that seems like a direct response to the call of my Franciscan vocation. And I am endlessly inspired by my fellow Franciscans! So many Seculars have given many years of direct service to our impoverished, vulnerable, and marginalized brothers and sisters, as well as to our beloved earth. And many of them engage in loving advocacy for public policies to address the underlying causes of poverty, injustice, environmental destruction, and insults to human dignity at all stages of life. To see all the love that Seculars, sisters, friars, and young Franciscan volunteers bring to the world is amazing and humbling”.

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Mary Liepold, OFS, on Assignment with the Franciscan Mission Service



Mary Liepold, OFS of St. Francis Fraternity in Washington, D.C., has taken an assignment with the Franciscan Mission Service (FMS) to serve with others at the Southwest Border of the U.S. providing services to immigrants and the needy. Mary has spent a number of months working with FMS to prepare for her assignment which will post her sometime next month in the El Paso, Texas area.

Mary's commissioning mass was celebrated by a Conventual friar in an OFM shrine, there were Franciscan sisters present, and a number of Secular Franciscans were there to support Mary. Mary is not the only Secular Franciscan in the US who is officially on mission with FMS. [Ralph Anderson](#) is a Secular Franciscan from the Pacific Northwest who is currently in Bolivia on mission. Ralph found FMS when he attended the National OFS Q in Phoenix several years ago.



Regional Spiritual Assistant Message

Communion (Fraternity) and Mission (Apostolate) in the Second Vatican Council Documents,

Lumen Gentium and Gaudium et Spes

Anne Hope Mulqueen, ofs
Regional Spiritual Assistant

How many of us are familiar with the content of these two key Council documents? If you aren't familiar with them, you'll learn a lot by reading and reflecting on them. You'll notice that many Articles of our Rule came from these two documents. Read them with our Rule in mind, and see if you can find comparable passages.

The Second Vatican Council, convened by Pope John XXIII and continued under Pope Paul VI, produced several documents that have significantly shaped the Catholic Church today. *Lumen Gentium* and *Gaudium et Spes* stand out for their insights into the nature of the Church and its mission in the world. For this article, I will focus on those two points: (1) our communion (relationship) with God and others and (2) the mission (apostolate).

Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, provides a vision of the Church's identity and structure. Central to this vision is the concept of communion. The document emphasizes that the Church is a "sacrament," a sign and instrument of communion with God and unity among all people.

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, complements *Lumen Gentium* by addressing the Church's relationship with society. The theme of communion is central to our engagement with the world.

Communion in *Lumen Gentium* is rooted in the Trinity. The Church is described as a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the source and the model for the Church's communion. We are called to participate in the divine life and reflect the unity and love of the Trinity in our relationships with God and each other.

Lumen Gentium introduces the concept of the Church as the "People of God," a community of believers bound together by faith. This inclusive vision emphasizes the dignity and equality of all baptized people, regardless of their roles within the Church. The document emphasizes that all members are called to holiness and mission.

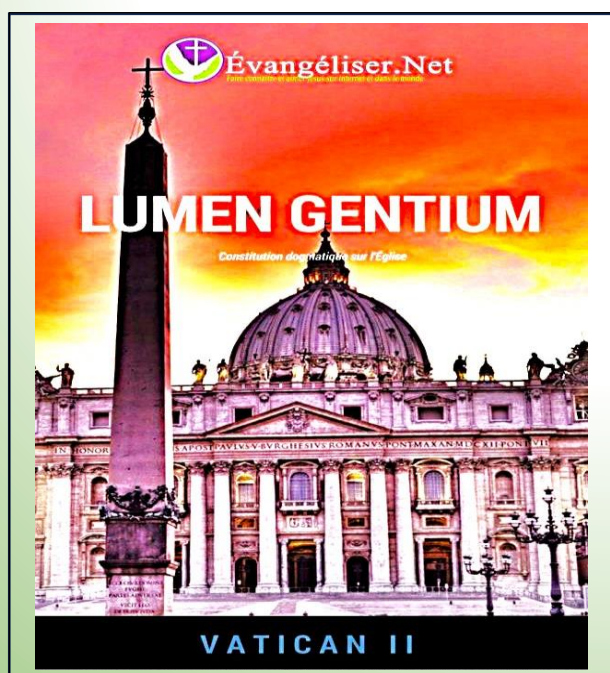
Mission is a vital aspect of the Church's identity. *Lumen Gentium* emphasizes that the Church exists to evangelize and witness to the Gospel, while *Gaudium et Spes* asserts that the Church should be a transformative presence in the world. These documents encourage us to participate in apostolic activities and spread the Gospel in all areas of life, including family, work, and society. They emphasize the Church's deep concern for all people, their joys, hopes, and anxieties, especially the poor and afflicted. Mission is rooted in the conviction that we are all created in God's image and share a common destiny. Therefore, the Church, the People of God, is called to be a sign of unity and a promoter of human dignity and justice.

If you decide to read and study these documents, I suggest you pay particular attention to these elements.

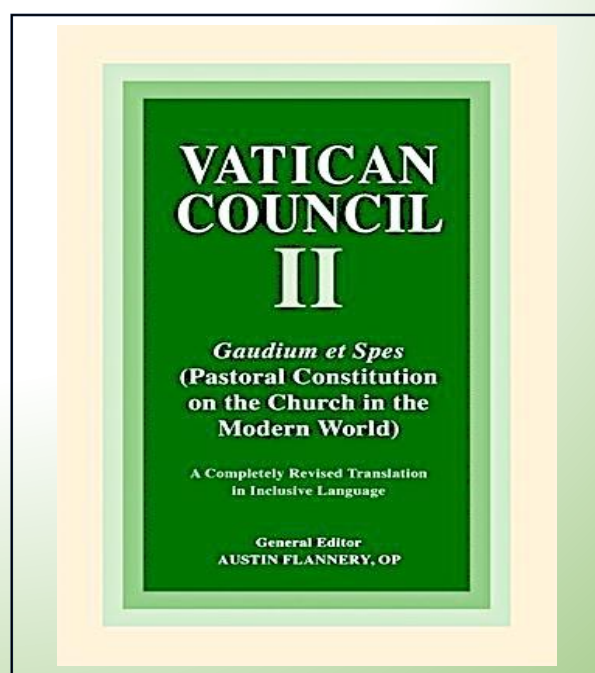
- The Church as a sacrament, a sign of communion with God and others
- The People of God
- The Laity
- The Universal Call to Holiness
- Mary and a Pilgrim Church
- Zeal for evangelization
- Dialogue between the Church and the World
- Human Dignity
- The Role of the Family
- Social Justice
- The Role of the Church in the Modern World

As members of the Church and the Secular Franciscan Order, we continue to live and work in the modern world. The insights of these Vatican II documents are relevant and guide our efforts to build a more just and compassionate society as we work toward building a fraternal and evangelical world and bringing about the Kingdom of God (Paraphrase of Article 14, OFS Rule).

[Lumen Gentium](#)



[Gaudium et Spes](#)



Carlo Acutis: God’s Influencer

By Donna Dellaglio OFS
Little Flower Fraternity

EUCCHARISTIC MIRACLES EXHIBIT

The Atreum at Soaring Timbers
610 N Bestgate Road, Annapolis MD



- Knights of Columbus Hall - Next Door to SJN
- Sunday February 9th 8:00 AM – 3:00 PM

Knights of Columbus Annapolis Council #1384 will host an Exhibition of Eucharistic Miracles created and designed by the Blessed Carlo Acutis.

All are welcome to explore the exhibit of this modern-day Saint-to-Be, up for canonization in 2025, and draw closer to the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist.



- Veneration of a first-class relic
- A display of over 60 documented Vatican approved Eucharistic miracles
- Eucharistic video and literature

An opportunity to strengthen our Eucharistic Revival, spiritual formation and faith maturation.

“Sadness is looking at ourselves, happiness is looking towards God”
- Carlo Acutis

“Those who believe, don’t leave”
- Matthew Kelly

Today’s Catholic church is challenged by a myriad of modern distractions. As a result, young people are turning away from their faith. Carlo Acutis was an exception to this trend. Beatified in 2020, this teenager has become a role model for young people seeking to live a faith-forward life. Holiness was not an abstract concept for him. He said, “To always be close to Jesus, that is my life plan”.

Born in London in 1991, Carlo was a true millennial. His parents were not religious and it was Carlo who exemplified faith for his parents. As a young child, he insisted on stopping to “say hello to Jesus” anytime he passed a church. It was this example that drew his parents back to the church.

Fascinated by computers, Carlo taught himself to use the internet, as well as, the basics of programming and graphic design. While he loved playing video games, he ultimately combined his passion for technology with his desire to please God. Nicknamed God’s Influencer, he used the internet to spread the message of God’s love and mercy. He built websites dedicated to religious instruction and evangelization. His profound love for the Eucharist was evident in his most enduring legacy: a website dedicated to Eucharistic miracles from around the globe.

Ultimately Carlo was diagnosed with leukemia at the age of fifteen. The illness and subsequent treatments were difficult and caused him to suffer. Despite this, his faith remained unshaken. He offered his pain to God for the Church and for the intentions of the pope.

Throughout his short life, and especially during his illness, Carlo lived his life radiating joy. He was aware of the suffering of others and responded with compassion. Using money from his weekly allowance, he attended to the

needs of the homeless, needy, and immigrants. He explained, “Our lives will truly be beautiful if we discover how to love God above all things and our neighbor as ourselves.”

Today Blessed Carlo is buried in Assisi due to his devotion to Saint Francis. He rests upon the very spot where tradition indicates that Saint Francis shed his clothing for a habit and renounced his wealth.

Throughout his short life, Blessed Carlo exhibited a holy wisdom far beyond his years. His life reflected his words— “To always be united with Christ: That is my life’s program.” As devout Franciscans, this should be our endeavor as well.

The Vatican has confirmed that Blessed Carlo is slated to be canonized on April 27, 2025, in Rome. This will take place during the Catholic Church's Jubilee of Teenagers, which will run from April 25-27, 2025.

ENCOUNTERING the ‘Other’ with “THE SULTAN AND THE SAINT”

My article this month is based on an article written and placed on the Catholic University website by Katie Bahr, assistant director of Media Relations and Communications of Catholic University of Washington, DC. The article is a report on a conference of discussions on the 800th anniversary of the revered meeting between Saint Francis of Assisi and the Sultan Malik Al Kamil. The conference was entitled, “The Sultan and the Saint: The Spiritual Journey of Transformative Encounter”. The conference was one of many historical examinations which give us new understandings of our modern world. Catholic and Muslim scholars and religious leaders gathered at the Catholic University of America on November 7, 2019 to examine the historical content of the meeting, its legacy, and what it can teach Christians and Muslims who seek d=similar encounters of interreligious dialogue of today.

This day of discussion began with remarks from University President John Garvey, who referred to St. Francis’s encounter with Sultan Al-Kamil “an extraordinary peaceful encounter set against a backdrop of violence” during the Fifth Crusade of 1219. Though stories of this meeting suggest that the sultan was advised to execute the friars, he instead chose to meet with Francis “over the course of several days, courteously listening as Francis preached the Gospel,” Garvey said. Reflecting on this meeting, Garvey called Francis’s actions as “an act of ardent love of God” and a reflection of his ability to see the image of God in others. “Francis shows us how to encounter the other, I suggest, by showing us how to love the other,” he said.

Assistant Professor of History Lev Weitz explained the many ways in which the lives of Christians and Muslims intersected in the centuries leading up to Francis’s meeting with the sultan. During those years of expansion of the Islamic Empire, many Muslims lived among Christians and Jews, conducting business and cultural exchanges together on a near daily basis. “Interreligious contact was really there and a part of life,” said Weitz. “This context of both conflict and exchange both informed St. Francis and the sultan and indicate why they met in the first place.”

Rev. Michael Calabria, OFM., director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at St. Bonaventure University, spoke about the importance of distinguishing hagiographical accounts of the meeting from actual historical evidence of what it entailed. If one reads hagiography as history, it is possible to exacerbate discords rather than heal them, ” he said. Early Franciscan biographical accounts of Francis’s encounter with the sultan are not purely reliable, said Father Calabria, because Francis’s motivations and actions vary greatly, in the reflection of the changing political climates in which authors were living. In addition, he said, the stories often treat the sultan as “more of a prop for the lead actor.” In reality, Sultan Al-Kamil was known to be a spiritual and educated man who would have already been exposed to Christian teachings.

Speakers of a keynote session discussed current challenges Christian and Muslims face while encountering the “other”. Custos of the Holy Land Brother Francesco Patton, OFM, shared his personal experiences of living in the Holy Land with Christians and Muslims in close proximity every day. He said it is important not to view people who are different as enemies but as brothers and sisters. “For Francis, ‘the other’ is a gift from God and the way to relate to him is to welcome him with kindness,” Father Patton said. “How fragile is any peace obtained through the defeat of the enemy, when we see an emphasis on difference and

incompatibility complicated by a lack of communication between different religions, “he said. Only genuine encounters and dialogue can be of benefit in the long term.”

Archbishop Christophe Pierre, Apostolic Nuncio, reflected upon encounters between Pope Francis and Muslim leaders of today, particularly his visit with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Ahamad al-Tayyib in Morocco earlier in 2019. During this visit, both faith leaders signed a document entitled, “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together.” The archbishop said, “Pope Francis sees human fraternity as a path for peace and mutual understanding in this world and a force for good. The protocol for which we will be judged is based on fraternity. Christians are called to be neighbors and brothers to others and to treat them with respect and compassion like St. Francis of Assisi, and to remember that ‘whatever you did to the least of my brothers and sisters, you did to me.’”

The session concluded with a reflection from Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat, president of the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation, who said the historic encounter provides “a mission for us to follow, a story of reaching out to ‘the other’ for the sake of peace, reconciliation, and harmony. This will not happen unless we have deep faith in the Almighty and are willing to leave and forsake your comfort zone to accept the challenges that are presented to us in life, “ In the modern world where some spread hatred and suspicion that is “divisive and threatening,” Imam Arafat challenged people of faith to “stand and fight against discrimination” and remember St. Francis’s call for peace.

The conference concluded with a roundtable discussion on Christians and Muslims from the D.C area with interest in interfaith dialogue and a small group discussion about the relevance of Christian-Muslim relations on the Catholic University campus. The event was sponsored by the School of Theology and Religious Studies, the Institute for Interreligious Study and Dialogue at Catholic University, The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, The Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, and the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation.

Mike Huether
Ecumenical/Interfaith Chair



**Muslim
Jewish
Christian
Prayer
for Peace**

O God, you are the source of life and peace. Praised be your name forever. We know it is you who turn our minds to thoughts of peace. Hear our prayer in this time of conflict.

Your power changes hearts. Muslims, Christians, and Jews remember, and profoundly affirm, that they are followers of the one God, children of Abraham, brothers and sisters; enemies begin to speak to one another; those who were estranged join hands in friendship; nations seek the way of peace together.

Strengthen our resolve to give witness to these truths by the way we live.

Give to us:

UNDERSTANDING that puts an end to strife;
MERCY that quenches hatred; and
FORGIVENESS that overcomes vengeance.

Empower all people to live in your law of love. Amen.

*Prayer from Pax Christi USA and
the Fellowship of Reconciliation*

Visit www.paxchristiusa.org for more prayer cards like this one.

Hope

Pope Francis has chosen the theme of Hope for the 2025 Jubilee Year. Though many live quite comfortably in their homes and countries, there are also millions of people who suffer want. Such want takes on many faces, to include homelessness, thirst, hunger, oppression, war, mental, physical, and spiritual anguish, and so much more. But in declaring a year of hope, our Pope asks us to reflect on how we can break through such seemingly impossible situations.

Hope is a gift which is given to each of us from above, and sharing that hope is the task of all human beings. It requires that we choose every day to be faithful to God's faithfulness to us, to reach out to those lacking hope and to give them some of our own. It requires that when we encounter the world, we see and appreciate the good that exists, and strive to bring that good to all we meet. It requires of us to let go of petty grievances, to humble ourselves before the Lord, to thank Him for our blessings, and to ask Him to show us the way to bring hope to others. It requires that we persevere when we feel beaten by the burden of caring for others. It requires that we pray for continued strength and guidance, that we look head-on at despair, loneliness, poverty, persecution, and sometimes just evil, and search for ways to right the wrongs done to others. And when it doesn't come easily, it requires for us not to retreat, but to look again, to see what may be missing in our efforts to right the wrongs done to others.

Jesus gave us the ultimate gift of hope when He became Incarnate. But on a different scale, He gave us the gift of hope in the creation He made. Though a fictitious tale, the following exemplifies such hope in our world:

The story of the Old Tree and the Tiny Seed. In a barren, windswept valley where the sun seemed to barely reach, stood an ancient, gnarled tree, its branches reaching out like skeletal fingers towards the sky. The villagers called it the "Hope Tree," but for years, it had borne no fruit- its leaves brittle and sparse, mirroring the despair that had settled upon their community. A harsh drought had ravaged the land, leaving fields cracked and parched, with no sign of rain in sight.

One day, a young girl named Anya, known for her resilient spirit, found herself sitting beneath the old tree, her eyes filled with tears. She had watched her family struggle, their once-vibrant faces now etched with worry. As she gazed at the barren branches, a tiny seed, carried by the wind, landed gently in her palm. It was a seed of the very plant that could bring life back to their valley, a plant that had long been forgotten.

Anya held the seed close, whispering a silent prayer for rain. She carefully planted it in the dry earth beneath the Hope Tree, nurturing it with the little water she could *spare*. Day after day, she returned to the spot, her heart filled with a quiet hope, even as the sun beat relentlessly on the parched land.

Weeks turned into months, and still there was no sign of rain. The villagers began to lose faith, but Anya held on, tending to her small plant with unwavering determination. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, a tiny sprout emerged from the soil, reaching towards the sky with a tenacity that mirrored Anya's spirit.

As the little sprout grew, so did the hope within the village. People started to gather around the Hope Tree, sharing stories of better times, their eyes flickering with a renewed belief. The sight of the small green shoot against the backdrop of the arid landscape became a symbol of resilience, a testament to the power of hope even in the darkest of times.

We can reflect upon and learn so much from this simple story. The "Hope Tree" symbolizes hope in a world where all seems lost. Though beaten by severe drought in their area of the country, under the shade of this tree a "vibrant" child hoped that a seed could sprout a plant. She ultimately, renewed the spirit of her community who, like the tree, had been beaten down by the ramifications of drought. Because of her hope, her care, and "her silent prayer for rain", it happened - the seed sprouted a shoot, the rain fell, the Hope Tree thrived, the community revived. There was renewal..

Let us learn from Anya's story that a small step can lead to a great reward. Let us be filled with her resilient spirit and her persistence in praying and caring. Let us join Pope Francis in his endeavor to renew our world. Let us not lose hope that we can make a difference- for one day, it will be our seed of hope that will lead someone to the life God meant him to live as one of His children.

FORMATION

February 2025 Newsletter Article

Jubilee 2025: What It Can Mean for Each of Us

As you are aware, 2025 is a very exciting year for us Catholics. It is the year of Jubilee – a year of rejoicing and celebration that occurs every twenty-five years. Our Pope Francis has emphasized that this Jubilee is about

remembering the hope that our Lord Jesus gives us in all we do. **“SPES NON CONFUNDIT. “Hope does not disappoint”** (Rom 5:5) [Click on the title as a link to the encyclical.](#)

It addresses so many areas in our human lives and truly tells us of the abundant hope that we can live in through Jesus Christ. Pope Francis writes:

“Hope is born of love and based on the love springing from the pierced heart of Jesus upon the cross: “For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life” (Rom 5:19). That life becomes manifest in our own life of faith, which begins with Baptism, develops in openness to God’s grace and is enlivened by a hope constantly renewed and confirmed by the working of the Holy Spirit.”

I love about the enlivened hope that is constantly renewed and confirmed by the Holy Spirit, who dwells in us. In our retreats and days of reflection we often talk about that special gift of the Holy Spirit when we live and work together in fraternity. This is beyond the joy felt when we do things alone. There is a special bond and filling that comes when we serve others together in unity and fraternity.

In his Christmas Eve homily, **the Opening Of The Holy Door And Midnight Mass Beginning Of The Ordinary Jubilee**, [Click on the title as a link to this homily](#), Pope Francis challenges us to move quickly and be about our Lord’s work in this world - to reject our old ways of mediocrity.

“With haste, then, let us set out to behold the Lord who is born for us, our hearts joyful and attentive, ready to meet him and then to bring hope to the way we live our daily lives. And this is our task: to bring hope into the different situations of life. For Christian hope is not a cinematic “happy ending” which we passively await, but rather, a promise, the Lord’s promise, to be welcomed here and now in our world of suffering and sighs. It is a summons not to tarry, to be kept back by our old habits, or to wallow in mediocrity or laziness.”



Pope Francis Opens Holy Doors of St. Peters Basilica for Jubilee

- *servant leadership* to walk with others to guide them toward a life full of the Holy Spirit and in relationship with Jesus, Our Lord,

A good place to begin is within our own families as well as our own fraternities. How can we work to serve our communities if we do not attend to our own fraternal family? As we all continue to age, it is no secret that our Order is aging. Many of our faithful members are beginning to face the dilemmas that aging brings – ill health, loss of independence, loneliness. These issues come upon us even if we are not aging but by other circumstances. Pope Francis reminds us that: *“All of us have received the gift and task of bringing hope wherever hope has been lost, lives broken, promises unkept, dreams shattered and hearts overwhelmed by adversity. We are called to bring hope to the weary who have no strength to carry on, the lonely oppressed by the bitterness of failure, and all those who are broken-hearted. To bring hope to the interminable, dreary days of prisoners, to the cold and dismal lodgings of the poor, and to all those places desecrated by war and violence. To bring hope there, to sow hope there.”*

“Signs of hope should also be shown to the sick, at home or in hospital. Their sufferings can be allayed by the closeness and affection of those who visit them. Works of mercy are also works of hope that give rise to immense gratitude. Gratitude should likewise be shown to all those healthcare workers who, often in precarious conditions, carry out their mission with constant care and concern for the sick and for those who are most vulnerable.”

“Inclusive attention should also be given to all those in particularly difficult situations, who experience their own weaknesses and limitations, especially those affected by illnesses or disabilities that severely restrict their personal independence and freedom. Care given to them is a hymn to human dignity, a song of hope that calls for the choral participation of society as a whole.”

“The elderly, who frequently feel lonely and abandoned, also deserve signs of hope. Esteem for the treasure that they are, their life experiences, their accumulated wisdom and the contribution that they can still make, is incumbent on the Christian community and civil society, which are called to cooperate in strengthening the covenant between generations.”

Not quite a New Years’ resolution, but only a growing in our desire and commitment to grow closer to Jesus, let us look to working together to improve the service we give in fraternity to each other. Going at least two by two to visit those who need your light, teaming up to provide transportation to fraternity gatherings for those who can no longer drive, or giving a celebration to one in honor of their profession anniversary or birthday together in fraternity. These are simple ways – yet if done regularly – can truly make a significant difference in our fraternity families and create a culture of belonging.

Our Pope Francis reminds us: *“Hope finds its supreme witness in the Mother of God. In the Blessed Virgin, we see that hope is not naive optimism but a gift of grace amid the realities of life.”*

Together let’s re-commit to give Life to the Gospel by Bringing the Gospel to Life by caring for each other better than before in 2025!

Your sister in St. Francis,

Rita Colleran, OFS
Regional Formation Director



Announcement



Mark Your Calendars for these Uplifting Events!

We are very blessed to have so many opportunities to come together to learn and grow in our vocation together! Many times we have our Religious Brothers teaching and walking with us.

Below are the events, so far, planned for 2025. Please mark your calendars to join in the Spirit of our Franciscan life!

1. **March 8: Day of Reflection hosted with St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, St. Francis of Assisi Parish School, Triangle Virginia.**
Fr. Russel Murray OFM will guide with his teaching about *"Living in Friendship with Jesus and Friendship"* and *"Forgiveness as Redemptive Suffering."*

As one of our Regional Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Russel is known for his insight, knowledge and gentle manner. A dynamic and engaging speaker, Fr. Russ will lead us in prayerful reflection as we strive to grow closer to God in this Jubilee year. Please join us in this opportunity for prayerful reflection as we embrace our call to radical daily conversion.

2. **March 29: Day of Reflection for Inquirers and Candidates, Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, DC**
All Inquirers and Candidates are especially invited to attend as this is created to help you with the discernment prior to making your OFS profession promises. Any OFS members are invited as it is a good time to refresh your commitment to our vocation.

Br. Michael Meza, OFM-Cap will guide and teach us about this deeply spiritual step that you are about to make in your relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. What does your commitment mean? How does Franciscan spirituality and charism affect your everyday life? What is the Franciscan way of Life? What is the "radical internal change" that the Rule speaks about? Come to intensify your understanding and reflect on this direction for your life.

3. **May 24: Embracing Your Leadership Journey, Shrine of St. Anthony, Ellicott City MD** A one day seminar for Ministers and Council members to discuss servant leadership issues. *More information to follow shortly.*
4. **June 27 - 29: Regional Formation Retreat, Priest Field Pastoral Center, WV**
The theme: Caring for Each Other – The Health and Heartbeat of Your Fraternity
This year all OFS members are invited, and each fraternity is required to send at least one council member-- usually the Formation Director or Minister. This year we will focus and building family belonging in our fraternities among all members. *More information to follow shortly.*

Day of Reflection

St. Margaret of Cortona Region invites your fraternity to a very special regional retreat!

Hosted by St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity of Triangle, VA

**Living in Friendship with Jesus and Francis:
Manifesting Our Savior and Our Seraphic Father in Our Daily Lives."**

When: Saturday, March 8, 2025 9:30 am to 3:00 pm

Where: St. Francis of Assisi Parish School, 18825 Fuller Heights Road, Triangle, Virginia 22172

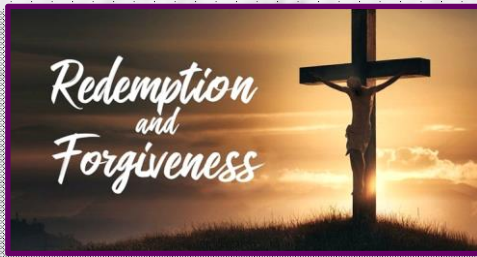
Cost: \$27.00 (lunch included)

A freewill offering will be collected for Fr. Russel Murray OFM

During this time of Lent, join us for this special day of unity in our Franciscan life to reflect about our journey to grow closer to our Lord.



Fr. Russel Murray OFM will guide with his teaching about "Living in Friendship with Jesus and Friendship" and "Forgiveness as Redemptive Suffering."



As one of our Regional Spiritual Assistants, Fr. Russel is known for his insight, knowledge and gentle manner. A dynamic and engaging speaker, Fr. Russ will lead us in prayerful reflection as we strive to grow closer to God in this Jubilee year. Please join us in this opportunity for prayerful reflection as we embrace our call to radical daily conversion.

Registration: Deadline is February 21, 2025

Register at this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/March8DayofReflection#/>

You can pay online or at the door. Checks made payable to:

St. Margaret of Cortona OFS Region

If unable to attend in person we will broadcast the session via Zoom at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89428905132?pwd=Yi9DaTZnV1hLbGVpdTRUb211ZklGQT09#success>

For registration assistance contact: Rita Collieran at rlcolleran10@gmail.com or 703-310-9958

Contact: Clarence Neason at cneasonjr@gmail.com or

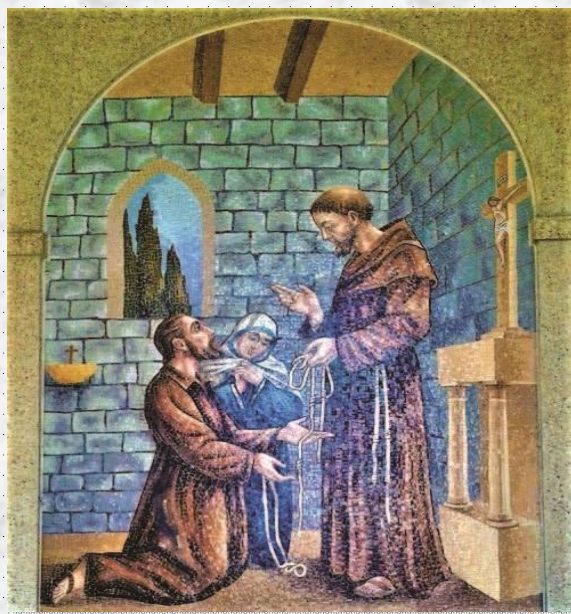
James O'Shaughnessy OFS at jamestoshaughnessy@gmail.com



St. Margaret of Cortona OFS Region

Day of Reflection for Inquirers and Candidates

All Inquirers, Candidates, and OFS members are welcome!



St. Francis of Assisi blessing the first Secular Franciscans.

Join us for this Day of Reflection that will help you discern and prepare for your future with the OFS. Profession into the Secular Franciscan Order is a solemn and ecclesial lifelong commitment. Prayer and discernment is necessary before one makes the promises of profession.



Br. Michael Meza, OFM-Cap will guide and teach us about this deeply spiritual step that you are about to make in your relationship with our Lord Jesus Christ. What does your commitment mean? How does Franciscan spirituality and charism effect your everyday life? What is the Franciscan way of Life? What is the "radical internal change" that the Rule speaks about? Come to intensify your understanding and reflect on this direction for your life.

All Inquirers, Candidates, and OFS members are welcome!

This is a good way to renew your commitment and ignite your conversion of the Franciscan way of life.

Where: Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land in America, 1400 Quincy St. NE, DC

When: March 29, 2025 Saturday, 9:30am—3:00pm

Cost: \$50 lunch is included

A freewill offering will be collected for Br. Michael Meza, OFM Cap

REGISTER: DEADLINE MARCH 21, 2025

Register online at: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/March29Reflection#/>

You can pay electronically online or at the door. If paying at the door by check please make it payable to: **St. Margaret of Cortona OFS Region**

Contact for more information or assistance with registration.

Rita Colleran OFS, Regional Formation Director, rlcolleran10@gmail.com cell: 703-310-9958