

# *Welcome to our Winter Newsletter*

**December 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 4**



## St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Minister's December 2025 Message

My sisters and brothers, I extend greetings and peace to you, and I pray that you enjoyed your Thanksgiving Holiday with friends and family. We've had a busy time in the region since the last newsletter with the National Chapter held at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Marriottsville, MD, the Regional Chapter of Ministers held at the Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat Center in Bethesda, MD, and the Prayer Procession held in Silver Spring, MD.

This year's National Chapter of Ministers was held September 9-14, 2025, and as you remember from the last newsletter, we had the honor of being the host region. The 30 regions that constitute the National Fraternity from across the country were present, and the highlights resulting from the Chapter include the passing of the budget, reinstituting the publishing of four printed copies of the Tau Newsletter, and the election of a new National Executive Council.

Since this was an elective chapter, we had both an International Councilor and Spiritual Assistant, Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS, from Peru, and Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM Cap, from Africa in attendance, respectively. The election was held on Saturday, September 13<sup>th</sup>, and the photo below is of the new council, which is on the national website (<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/the-national-executive-council/>).



From left to right, Fr. Tomas Ginga Panzo Suva, OFM Cap.; secretary Susan Ronan, OFS; councilor Chris Leone, OFS; international councilor Mary Frances Charsky, OFS; minister Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS; vice minister Diane Menditto, OFS; treasurer Steve Roszhart, OFS; councilor Christine Blood, OFS; councilor Corinne Lorenzet, OFS; and the election presider Ana Maria Raffo Laos, OFS.

On the weekend of November 7-9, the region had both a National Visitation and its Annual Regional Chapter. Our national visitors were National Councilor, Corinne

## 2024 – 2027 Regional Council

### 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

### Regional Interfaith/

Ecumenical Chair:

Mike Huether, OFS

### Regional Spiritual Assistants:

OFM ~ Vacant

OFM Cap ~ Br. Michael Meza

OFM Conv. ~ Vacant

### 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

#### Regional Database Manager

#### Regional Newsletter Editor

#### Region Website Administrator

#### Vocations/Archivist

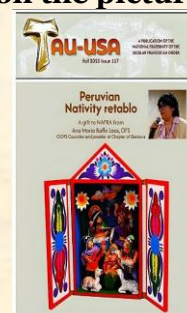
Bob Longo, OFS

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## TAU-USA – Fall 2025 Issue (Click on the picture below)



[Otoño TAU-EE. UU. – Español](#)  
[TAU-USA-Fall Korean-Articles](#)



Lorenzet, OFS, and National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM. The national visitors met with the Regional Executive Council on Friday evening, November 7<sup>th</sup>, to review our submission of the visitation paperwork and interview us collectively on our functioning.

On the weekend of November 7-9, the region had both a National Visitation and its Annual Regional Chapter. Our national visitors were National Councilor, Corinne Lorenzet, OFS, and National Spiritual Assistant, Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM. The national visitors met with the Regional Executive Council on Friday evening, November 7<sup>th</sup>, to review our submission of the visitation paperwork and interview us collectively on our functioning.

The local fraternity ministers arrived on Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup>, and we conducted the business of our chapter and turned over to the national visitors who met with the local spiritual assistants, and then with all the local fraternity ministers on Saturday afternoon.

On Saturday evening we had a special formation session with Franciscan Father Stan Fortuna, CFM (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oreS3HkPt18>). On Sunday morning, we held the Right of Remembrance for our deceased sisters and brothers and the closing Mass. It was a special time of sharing with each other and something we as a regional council (the local fraternity ministers and regional executive council) want to continue to foster with each other throughout the region.



This photo was taken in the chapel after Mass on Sunday. First row from left to right: Sita Chakrawarti (Regional Councilor and St. Thomas More, VA), Joan Kane (Regional Formation Assistant), Sandy Oleksy-Ojikutu (St. Anthony of Nagasaki), Anne Marie Pesagno (Pope St. John XXIII), Ruth Shea (St. Conrad), Consuello Wild (front) (St. Francis), Josh Goldberg (Tau), Mike Huether (Regional Councilor), Mary Ann Fanale (Our Lady Queen of the Angels), Melissa Reed-Konigsdorffer (St. Joseph of Cupertino), Bacillia Gueverra (Florecillas de San Francisco), Gary Burton (Regional Minister), Corinne Lorenzet (National Councilor). Second row: Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, Sandra Perez (San Camillo), Thomas Lee (St. Clare, MD), Francisco Lee (St. Bonaventure),

Kathleen Murphy (St. Clare, DE), Greg Gering (St. Joseph’s), Peg Crews (Our Lady of the Rosary), Jeff Topper (St. Conrad, PA), Toby Harkleroad (Regional Councilor). Back row: Clarence Neason (St. Francis, VA), Michael Oliver (Regional Vice Minister), Patrick Finney (Portiuncula), Teresa Knauff (Little Flower), Tom White (St. John the Beloved), Ed Semeia (Immaculata), Mike Warnalis (Companions of Francis and Clare), Tom Kane (St. Thomas More, PA), Randy Bender (Regional Treasurer), Patricia Boye (Regional JPIC), Mary Lynn Pitts (Holy Family), and William Wallace (Sacred Heart).

Finally, on Sunday, November 16<sup>th</sup>, a Prayer Procession was held that was sponsored by St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, MD. It was conducted in the Langley Park neighborhood that has been affected by Immigration and Customs Enforcement actions. There were approximately 200 people who were in attendance and gathered at the Langley Park-McCormick Elementary School in Silver Spring. A number of Secular Franciscans from around the region participated and helped to organize the event. The procession departed from the school and walked on the sidewalk through the neighborhood, stopping at certain intervals for prayer, scripture readings, and testimonials. At the conclusion of the procession, a bi-lingual Mass was held at the school with members of St. Camillus Parish and the participants.



To conclude, and on behalf of the Regional Executive Council, I wish you a fruitful and blessed **Advent Season**, and a **Merry Christmas** and **Happy New Year**.



## *Around the Region*

### *Newly Elected Councils*

#### **Congratulations newly elected Sacred Heart Fraternity Council**



<  
L – R

**Minister** ~ *William Wallace*, OFS  
**Vice Minister** ~ *Scott Graham*, OFS  
**Secretary** ~ *Patricia Britz*, OFS  
**Treasurer** ~ *Hyeonwood Choi*, OFS  
**Formation Director** ~ *Lisa Codispoti*, OFS  
**Councilor** ~ *Maria Ona*, OFS

L – R **Minister** ~ *Irene Theriault*, OFS,  
**Vice Minister** ~ *Tony Gibert*, OFS,  
**Secretary** ~ *Indira Kris*, OFS,  
**Treasurer** ~ *Ed Semeia*, OFS,  
**Councilor** ~ *Doug Chute*, OFS

>



**Congratulations to the new  
Immaculata Fraternity Council**

#### **Congratulations To St. Conrad Annapolis Fraternity**



**Newly Elected Council**

L – R **Councilor** ~ *Maryann Novak*, OFS,  
**Councilor** ~ *David Weir*, OFS,  
**Treasurer** ~ *Joe McHugh*, OFS,  
**Formation Director** ~ *Linda Haney*, OFS,  
**Secretary** ~ *Joan Faltot*, OFS,  
**Vice Minister** ~ *Jean Gaes*, OFS,  
**Minister** ~ *Ruth Shea*, OFS

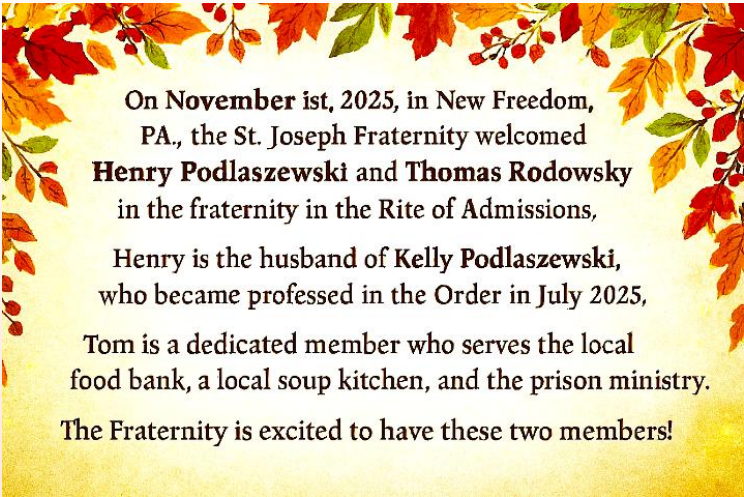
#### **CONGRATULATIONS TO ST. MARY OF THE ANGELS FRATERNY NEWLY ELECTED COUNCIL**



L - R **Minister** ~ *Tom McGrath*, OFS,  
**Vice Minister** ~ *Portia Fiesta*, OFS  
**Secretary** ~ *Ingrid Roberts*, OFS  
**Treasurer** ~ *Delia Sylla*, OFS  
**Formation Director** ~ *Carmencita Fiesta*, OFS  
**Councilor** ~ *Aurea Roland*, OFS,  
**Councilor** ~ *John Di Benedetto*, OFS  
**Councilor** ~ *Michaelle Sylla*, OFS



New Candidates



On **November 1st, 2025**, in New Freedom, PA., the St. Joseph Fraternity welcomed **Henry Podlaszewski** and **Thomas Rodowsky** in the fraternity in the Rite of Admissions,

Henry is the husband of **Kelly Podlaszewski**, who became professed in the Order in July 2025,

Tom is a dedicated member who serves the local food bank, a local soup kitchen, and the prison ministry.

The Fraternity is excited to have these two members!

Newly Professed

St. Francis DC Fraternity

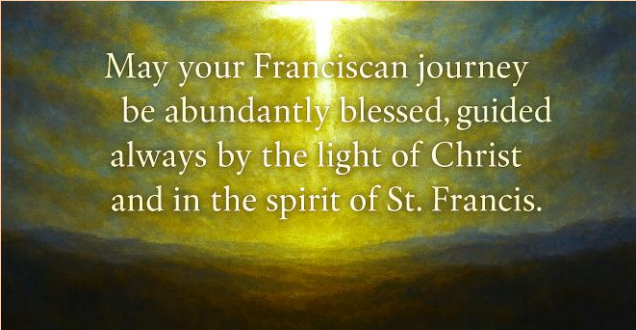


Tau Fraternity



L – R Minister - Josh Goldberg, OFS  
Jennifer Raimo, OFS  
Formation Director - Gil Donahue, OFS

L – R Erin Snow, OFS, Rosita Pugsley, OFS  
Maria Paula Ramos, OFS, Jose Rene Amaya Diaz, OFS  
Maria Soledad Villavicencio Pazmiño, OFS  
Franklin Eduardo Torres Gonzalez, OFS  
Jesenia Marisol Chavarria Burgos, OFS and  
Sandra Lizet Salgado Aguilera, OFS





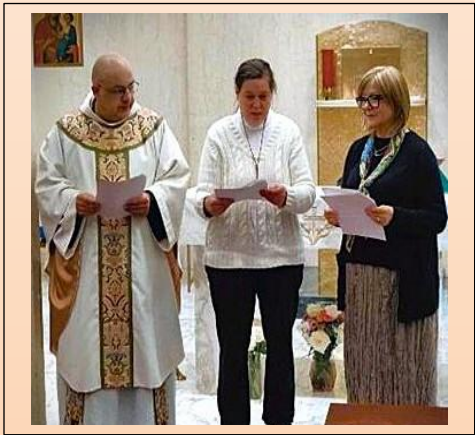
Fraternity Events Around the Region



The members of Little Flower Fraternity joyfully gathered to celebrate Helen Tumminello's, OFS, birthday with a luncheon filled with fellowship, laughter, and gratitude. We give thanks for her presence among us and the gift of community we share.



St. Anthony of Nagasaki Fraternity joyfully celebrates Kristen Doherty, OFS, on the occasion of her 25th anniversary as a Secular Franciscan. With gratitude for her witness and dedication, we honor her journey of living the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi.



With joy, the OFS family celebrates with Kristen as she renews her promises, affirming her Franciscan journey.

St. Conrad Hanover Fraternity Retreat



L - R Sister Mary Therese White, OSF (Spiritual Assistant), Judy Topper, OFS Jose Barata OFS, Jeff Topper, OFS Concetta Glorioso, OFS, Ken Gabor (Inquirer), and Bill McKenzie, OFS

The St. Conrad Fraternity in Hanover, Pennsylvania, recently had a retreat at the Aisling House in Manchester, Maryland. The retreat was held on Sunday, October 26.



**Tau Fraternity** Members Support LINK for World Day of the Poor on November 15. The fraternity in Herndon generously donated \$600 to the local charity LINK. The donation reflects the fraternity's ongoing commitment to serving those in need within its community.

Pictured left to right: Bill Richey, OFS; Vice Minister Cyndy Filan-Kim, OFS; Minister Josh Goldberg, OFS (holding the poster check); and LINK representative Joe Speetjens.



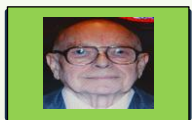
## *The Passing of Members in Our Franciscan Family*

*With hearts both grateful and sorrowful, we remember those among us who have journeyed home to the Father.*

*Their lives were woven into the fabric of our Franciscan community—marked by humility, service, and joy in the Gospel.*



**Our Franciscan brother, Richard Fairfax, OFS, a member of St. Thomas More, Harrisburg, PA, passed away on October 1, 2025. Richard professed on August 11, 2013, in St. Thomas More Fraternity.**



**Our Franciscan brother, James Davis, OFS, a member of Little Flower Fraternity, passed away on October 16, 2025. James professed on June 12, 1960, at Little Flower Fraternity.**



**Our Franciscan sister, Marion "Dale" Eppig, OFS, a member of St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity, passed away on October 18, 2025. Dale professed on June 16, 1985, in the Stigmata Fraternity in New Jersey.**



**Our Franciscan brother, Rob Closs, OFS, a member of the Companions of Francis and Clare Fraternity, passed away on October 28, 2025. Rob professed on December 15, 2019, in this fraternity.**



**Our Franciscan sister, Mary Barrett, OFS, a member of St. Conrad, Hanover, Fraternity, passed away on October 29, 2025. Mary professed on October 27, 1996, in this fraternity.**



**Our Franciscan sister, Kathy Duffy, OFS, a member of Pope St. John XXIII Fraternity, passed away on November 27, 2025. Kathy professed on February 17, 2016.**



**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.**

Interfaith Dialogue In The Contemporary World  
**Merry Christmas** and a **Happy New Year** to all!

This is the third and final part of my article on the blog, “The Significance of Interfaith Dialogue in the Contemporary World” by Dialogue Institute alumnus Danyar M. Ali and published in the Journal of Ecumenical Studies.

Interfaith dialogue emphasizes our common features as humans. Regardless of our many religious differences, we are all ultimately human and share the same basic needs and aspirations. Real dialogue allows us to understand this human commonality and develop much better relations based on it. When we share something in common, whether good or bad, it can become a platform on which to cooperate with each other and thus come together against the challenges that face all of humanity, and continue to do so, such as disease, poverty, and climate change.

How about world peace? Interfaith dialogue can be important even here in maintaining it. In a world where conflicts and wars are often the result of religious factors, interfaith dialogue can become an important tool for conflict and peaceful solutions. When religious leaders learn to sit together and discuss, it hopefully becomes an example for decision-makers and politicians on how to peacefully resolve differences. As Franciscans, the Sultan and the Saint come to mind here.

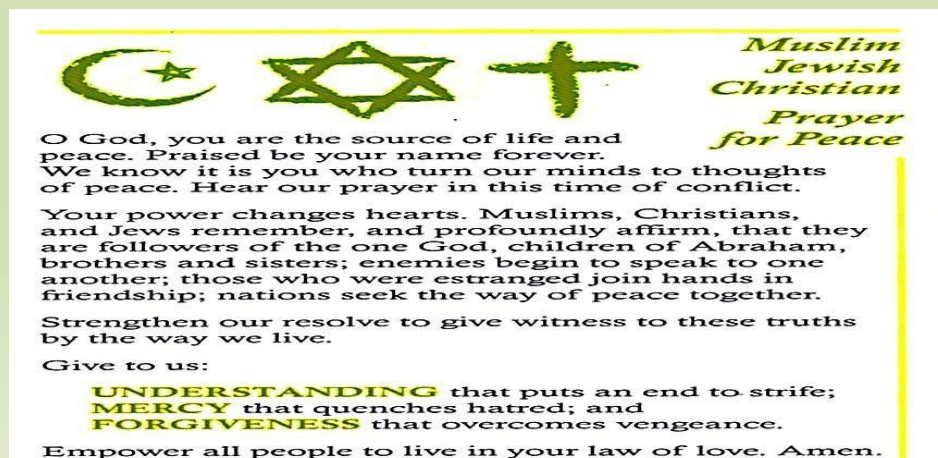
But interfaith dialogue is not easy to come by: it has its own barriers. Deep differences in traditions and beliefs, a history of hostility and conflict, the fear of a loss of unique identity, are all deterrents to effective dialogue. Some fear that dialogue may make their convictions weak or even force them to compromise basic religious principles. It is thus of the essence to conduct interfaith dialogue in a sensitive way regarding the differences of others with respect and try to achieve commonalities without convincing others about beliefs contrary to oneself. To assure this, the dialogue should not involve just religious heads, but people at the grassroots level where sensitization and education is needed.

Interfaith dialogue, in spite of all the obstacles here, is still one of the most important tools which can be used to establish a more united and peaceful world. By it, we can understand how to best respect differences and respect commonality. We can together solve many of the problems that all human beings face. Together, we can foster a society that recognizes diversity in religion and cultures can be an asset, not a source of division.

Our communities, our states, and our personal selves should take every possible measure to encourage and support interfaith dialogue: as Franciscans, we all should. It is necessary that the values of tolerance and respect for differences that we find in our Franciscan values be emphasized, taught, and spread through the media and our educational systems. In this respect, peace and coexistence will be in first place.

Interfaith dialogue is not only a religious issue, but a human one, and one that concerns the fate of all of us. It's the way to closer cooperation and greater understanding. We all must join in on this process for the good of our future.

Peace and all good,  
Mike





A reflection on Mary at the time of the Incarnation, inspired by the song  
“Candlelight Carol”

Max Lucado writes: “Wide awake is Mary. How young She is! Her head rests on the soft leather of Joseph’s saddle. She looks into the face of the baby, Her son, Her Lord, His Majesty. At this point in history, the human being who best understands who God is and what He is doing is a teenage girl in a smelly stable. It was the first time in the history of this world that anyone could ever think of heaven as being anywhere else than “somewhere up there.” When Jesus was in Her arms, Mary looked down to Heaven.” She can’t take Her eyes off Him.

She and Joseph kneel and adore Him. They know He is God...this is He who was prophesied through the ages. Mary remembers the words of the angel, “His kingdom will never end.” She touches the face of the infant-God, thinking of the recent events of this special day...

Bethlehem was so crowded. What, with all the commotion about the census, there were many people in town, and lots of noise, hassle and fuss. The very sight of a woman ready to give birth was enough to make the innkeepers say there was no room, and so Mary and Joseph were passed over...again and again. Sadly, there were no hearts in Bethlehem ready for the coming of the Son of David that day.

The serenity of Mary on the day of Jesus’ birth is something we should not easily forget. Mary’s silent trust in God the Father to take good care of His Son was total, so when the only place left in Bethlehem was a stable, Mary accepted...

Mary knew how special Jesus was. His greatness was even proclaimed from the heavens, where He was and is eternally recognized, loved, and glorified. The angelic choir began the Christmas celebration with the Gloria: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and peace to God’s people on earth.”

For Francis, the Incarnation was the basis of his spiritual life. He went out of his way to follow in every way the example of the “Word made flesh.” Therefore, it would seem natural that he had a special love for Mary, who brought God within our reach and “made the Lord of Majesty a brother to us. Thomas Celano wrote that Francis “embraced the Mother of Jesus with inexpressible love. He honored Her with his own praises (Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary), poured out prayers to Her, and offered Her his love in a way that no human tongue could express.” Further, he gave the Franciscan order its greatest joy when he appointed Her the advocate of the order. In that joy, he placed under Her wings the sons he would leave behind, that She might protect and cherish them to the end of time.

Pope St. John Paul II, whose love and devotion to Mary was well known to many, wrote that “Advent is the Marian season par excellence, because Mary is the woman who awaited and welcomed the Son of God made man in an exemplary way.” She is the one who was the first to open the doors of Her heart to Christ, and who shows us the way to do the same. She teaches us how to be humble, and reminds us that God looks upon the lowly. She enables us to understand the value of prayer, of inner silence, of listening to God’s Word. As our Advocate and Mediatrix of graces, She spurs us to see God’s will deeply and sincerely, even when this upsets our plans. She encourages us while we wait for the Lord, showing us how to share our time and energies with those in need. She, the Mother of God, the Virgin of expectation, intercedes with God the Father to obtain an abundance of mercy for His people at all times...She never abandons them.



And so let us pray with Mary as She looks upon Her Son on the day of His birth, remembering that the Key to understanding Mary is Jesus.

"Sleep well dear Jesus...

Enjoy the silence of the crib, for the noise of confusion will rumble in Your future.  
Savor the sweet safety of My arms and the loving tenderness reflected in My eyes,  
so that You carry it with You all Your days, for a day is coming when I will not be  
able to protect You.

Rest well, tiny hands, for though You belong to a king, You will touch no satin and  
own no gold. Your hands are reserved for works more precious...to touch a leper's  
open wound, to wipe a widow's weary tear, to claw the ground of Gethsemane..  
Sleep deeply, tiny eyes. Sleep while you can. For soon blurriness will clear and you  
will see what man has done to Your world.

Lie still, tiny mouth from which eternity will speak, for You will soon silence man's  
foolishness and define grace, mercy, and forgiveness.  
Be still, tiny tongue that will call us to You...

And be still, tiny feet now cupped in the palm of My hand, for You will journey far  
and wide to tell of Your Father's love for mankind.

*Candlelight Carol\** written by Neil Diamond

How do you capture the wind on the water?  
How do you count all the stars in the sky?  
How can you measure the love of a mother  
Or how can you write down a baby's first cry?

Shepherds and wise men will kneel and adore Him  
Seraphim round Him their vigil will keep  
Nations proclaim Him their Lord and their Savior  
But Mary will hold Him and sing Him to sleep.

Find Him at Bethlehem laid in a manger  
Christ our Redeemer asleep in the hay  
Godhead incarnate and hope of salvation  
A child with His mother that first Christmas Day

Candlelight, angel light, firelight and star glow  
Shine on His cradle till breaking of dawn  
Gloria, Gloria in excelsis Deo!  
Angels are singing the Christ child is born.



## **JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION**

### **Entering the Year of JPIC**

2026 will be the year to focus our St. Margaret of Cortona Region's efforts on our JPIC charism. Listening to the representative Secular Franciscans who attended the Summer 2024 Chapter of Mats, this JPIC focus is in response to the feedback from this gathering. The Chapter's planning process was thorough and intense, considering input from a large cross-section of participants. Defining what Secular Franciscans want both for their Fraternities and from the Region, the process resulted in naming four major themes:

- Engage and Encourage
- Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC)
- Technology
- Multi-Generational / Multi-Cultural

Specific ideas expressed in each of these categories have been cited often by Regional Minister Gary Burton, OFS, and Vice Minister Michael Oliver, OFS. During 2025, the focus was on “Engage and Encourage.” And for 2026. . . Thanks to your feedback, the Region's focus is on Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC). That is no surprise, perhaps, given how central the JPIC mission is to our Order's charism.

It would be helpful for us to look closely at the JPIC Mission for guidance.

*The mission of JPIC is to assist the Professed Secular Franciscans as they reflect on their relationship with God as manifested in the fruits of conversion in their lives. This with special regard to the daily choices made in the areas of justice, peacemaking and respect for all created things and people; as brothers and sisters of penance, bringing Life to the Gospel and the Gospel to Life.*

Repeating a particularly key phrase:

*This with special regard to the daily choices made. . .*

This broad definition of JPIC is important for our understanding of it. Some Fraternities mistakenly use JPIC to refer only to a Fraternity's charitable and advocacy work. While these individual and group apostolates are an integral part of the way we express our charism, JPIC is much more than the volunteer work we do once a month. For Secular Franciscans, it involves the “daily choices made” across all aspects of our lives – in Fraternity, at work, in our families, in our local communities, and even in our global perspective. In all of these ways, we are called upon again and again to make decisions that are just, inspire peacemaking, and demonstrate respect for all created things and people.

Rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, like our Order, the Church calls us to specific actions. For instance, as expressed in our Holy Father's first apostolic exhortation, we are called to “love the poor.” Speaking in a special way to Franciscans, it is not a coincidence that it was signed on October 4 and references the “Poor Man of Assisi,” In quoting Dilexi te:

*Eight centuries ago, Saint Francis prompted an evangelical renewal in the Christians and society of his time. Wealthy and self-confident, the young Francis was taken aback and converted by his direct contact with the poor and outcast of society. The story of his life continues to appeal to the minds and hearts of believers, and many non-believers as well. It “changed history.” A further step on the same path was taken by the Second Vatican Council, as Saint Paul VI pointed out when he said that “the ancient parable of the Samaritan served as the model for the Council's spirituality.” I am convinced that the preferential choice for the poor is a source of extraordinary renewal both for the Church and for society, if we can only set ourselves free of our self-centeredness and open our ears to their cry.*



So much of this is consistent with our own Rule. Not just in the Church’s call to love the poor, but across the entirety of the JPIC Mission. Perhaps the reason that JPIC is so often said to be the very heart of our charism. . . is because of the way its Mission Statement simply encapsulates a large portion of the Secular Franciscan Rule.

Another explicit instruction rooted in Catholic teaching, Pope Leo XIV recently addressed the United Nations climate talks, suggesting “urgent actions” for countries to stop climate change and its danger to the planet. Care for our planet is an ongoing concern for the Holy Father. In September, he asked "what must be done now to ensure that caring for our common home and listening to the cry of the earth and the poor do not appear as mere passing trends or, worse still, are seen and felt as divisive issues?" He called for us to experience a "true ecological conversion. . . from collecting data to caring, and from environmental discourse to an ecological conversion that transforms both personal and communal lifestyles."

All of these elements are rooted in Catholic Social Teaching, consistent with our Rule. Again, another example. . . and reason to stay informed of Church teaching that impacts the daily choices we make as Secular Franciscans.

So continuing on the path our Sisters and Brothers laid out for the Region last year at the Chapter of Mats. . . In 2026, the Region will support Fraternities with:

- the further roll out of a JPIC Speaker Series,
- “Living the Franciscan Charism,” a 2026 St. Margaret of Cortona Region spiritual retreat with a JPIC theme, on June 5 – 7,
- a working group meeting for Fraternity JPIC Animators in the fall, and
- numerous other opportunities to share, listen, and engage.

As we make these “daily choices,” let us ask for the intercession of our Seraphic Father Francis, our Holy Mother Clare, and Mary, our Mother Queen of the Seraphic Order, to be inspired by and faithful to Catholic Social Teaching and the Secular Franciscan Rule in all aspects of our professed lives.

**JPIC NEWS AND UPDATES**

**CAROLYN TOWNES HONORED WITH OFS JPIC AWARD**

Thanks to Carolyn Townes, a past National JPIC Animator for more than a decade, for her tireless dedication to Justice, Peace, and Creation. Generous in her outreach and an inspiration to many of us over the years, Carolyn received a well deserved National JPIC Award for her work, presented at the National Chapter meeting in Maryland in September. (See photo on page 14)

**FAN LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE INSPIRES STUDENTS**

Congratulations to Franciscan Action Network (FAN) for a successful 2025 Franciscan Justice Leadership Conference in Washington, DC, in October. The conference drew 150 participants from across the country, including students from nine Franciscan universities, and also 26 various Franciscan institutions, including many Franciscan religious communities. Dr. Vanessa White, OFS, author and Associate Professor at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, delivered the keynote address “Moved by the Spirit: Love, Hope, and Justice in Action.” (See photo on page 14)

The St. Margaret of Cortona Region had a table at the event, sharing information regarding the OFS. Thanks to FAN Executive Director Michele Dunne, OFS, for bringing us together and making this amazing event happen.



## **FR. STAN FORTUNA ADDRESSES REGIONAL MINISTERS**

Thanks to Fr. Stan Fortuna, CFR for his formation session at the annual Ministers’ meeting in November. Fr. Stan’s inspiring words felt like a good introduction to the Region’s 2026 year of focusing on our JPIC charism. Fr. Stan is a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal (CFR). Founded in the Bronx in 1987, the Order has grown to more than 130 friars serving the poor and evangelizing around the world. Known for his stirring homilies, Fr. Stan is an accomplished professional jazz musician and poet. (See photo on page 14)

## **FRATERNITIES PARTICIPATE IN WORLD DAY FOR THE POOR**

Thanks to the many Fraternities that participated in various charitable efforts in November in solidarity with the World Day of the Poor. Efforts among the Fraternities include food bank donations, volunteer work at shelters, and some extra financial support for local organizations serving the homeless. A personal thank you to Franciscans who donated blankets currently being distributed to the homeless for whom a shelter is not a viable option. With winter months upon us, please continue to remember the poor and homeless.

## **JOIN DECEMBER 15 ZOOM TEACHING ON USCCB LETTER ON IMMIGRATION**

Join us for a discussion of the Bishops’ Letter on Immigration, on a Zoom call scheduled for Monday, December 15 at 7:30 PM. In November, US Bishops issued a Special Message addressing their concern for the evolving situation impacting immigrants in the United States. It marked “the first time in 12 years the USCCB invoked this particularly urgent way of speaking as a body of bishops.” National JPIC Animator Joe Makley, OFS, will offer the opening prayer and thoughts. Janice Benton, OFS, and Pat Boye, OFS, will moderate the session. Please join us for a better understanding of this Special Message and our Holy Father’s response. A registration link can be found in the full page flyer on the event (on page 16) in this newsletter, or contact [jplic@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:jplic@secularfranciscan.org).

## **JOIN FEB-MAR ZOOM TEACHING ON DILEXI TE**

Mark your calendars for a two part Zoom teaching on Dilexi Te, the Holy Father’s new apostolic exhortation. The discussion of “love for the poor” will focus on how the Church’s teaching influences us as Secular Franciscans. Moderated by Janice Benton, OFS, and Pat Boye, OFS, Zoom calls are planned for Monday, February 23, and Monday, March 9, both starting at 7:30 PM. Look for an opportunity to register in January. Contact [jplic@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:jplic@secularfranciscan.org) if you have any questions.

## **MULTICULTURAL-ECUMENICAL-JPIC PROGRAM IN MARCH**

With so much overlap between JPIC and other aspects of our OFS charism, look for a joint multicultural-ecumenical-JPIC event in the Spring. Tentatively scheduled for March 27, planning is underway to host a Saturday morning speaker, but details were not yet confirmed at the time this newsletter went to print. Thanks to Sita Chakrawarti, OFS, and Mike Huether, OFS, for their planning efforts. Details and registration information will follow in January.

## **“LIVING OUR FRANCISCAN CHARISM” RETREAT, JUNE 5 – 7**

Join us for the “Living Our Franciscan Charism” St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Retreat to be held at Priest Field Center on June 5 – 7. A spiritual retreat with a JPIC theme, come prepared to share, listen, and engage. Ignite your Franciscan charism... bringing Life to Gospel and Gospel to Life. Retreat details will follow. For questions, please contact [2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org).



## JPIC SPEAKER TOPICS

A reminder to all Fraternities, speakers and discussion facilitators are available to interested Fraternities in the St. Margaret of Cortona Region, on JPIC related topics including the following:

- Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPIC): History and Overview for Secular Franciscans
- Care for Creation: A Franciscan Response
- Lady Poverty and the Franciscan Charism
- Immigration: A Franciscan Response
- Racism: A Franciscan Response
- Mindful Communication
- Peacemaking: An Overview
- Conflict and Dialogue
- Servant Leadership: What and Why
- Servant Leadership: Implementation Plan
- Secular Franciscans in the Community
- Secular Franciscans in the Workplace
- Secular Franciscans and Family

Let us know your specific need – a monthly Fraternity gathering presentation, a Fraternity Council meeting or formation class, or even help in presenting to a church group or in the community. We will attempt to match you with a Secular Franciscan, or in some cases another expert, who is willing to speak on and as appropriate, facilitate discussion on the topic. Contact us at [jpicspeakers@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:jpicspeakers@secularfranciscan.org). Also, please let us know if you personally are an expert on any of these topics and are interested in being a speaker-facilitator.

## JPIC MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of JPIC is to assist the Professed Secular Franciscans as they reflect on their relationship with God as manifested in the fruits of conversion in their lives. This with special regard to the daily choices made in the areas of justice, peacemaking and respect for all created things and people; as brothers and sisters of penance, bringing life to the Gospel and the Gospel to Life.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Please contact Pat Boye, OFS, or a member of the JPIC team at [jpilmoc@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:jpilmoc@secularfranciscan.org). If you are a JPIC coordinator at your local fraternity but not on our email list, please let us hear from you.

Pace e bene,  
Pat Boye, OFS  
Regional JPIC Chair





## MORE AROUND THE REGION



Upper left, clockwise: Dr. Vanessa White, OFS, addressing the 2025 FAN Justice Leadership Conference in October; Carolyn Townes, OFS, receiving National JPIC Award from National Minister Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS; Mass with Fr. Juan de la Cruz Turcios, OFM, at St. Camillus Parish in Silver Spring, MD, following a procession in solidarity with the immigrant community in which more than 200 persons participated.

## 2025 Chapter of Ministers Our Lady of Bethesda Retreat House



Chapter of Ministers participants (center), surrounded by upper left (clockwise): Fr. Stan Fortuna, CFR; Mark Warnalis, OFS, of Companions of Francis and Clare Fraternity and Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM; Lower right picture, Ed Semeia, OFS, of Immaculata Fraternity and Sandy Oleksy-Ojikutu, OFS, of Saint Anthony of Nagasaki Fraternity; and lower left picture, Regional Minister Gary Burton, OFS, and Fr. Stan Fortuna, CFR.



# **LIVING OUR FRANCISCAN CHARISM**

## **St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Retreat**

**Priestfield Center**  
**June 5 - 7, 2026**

Celebrate the Region’s 2026 “Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation” theme with a Spiritual Retreat focused on making JPIC-driven choices in our daily lives.

Reflect upon the themes of “justice, peacemaking, and respect for all created things and people,” as we bring “Life to Gospel and Gospel to Life” in our Fraternities, families, the workplace, and local and global communities.

Come prepared to share, listen, and engage.

For more information, contact [2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org)



## **U.S. Bishops Speak Out on Immigration**

**In November, U.S. Catholic Bishops issued a Special Message addressing their concern for the evolving situation impacting immigrants in the United States. It marked the first time in twelve years the USCCB invoked this particularly urgent way of speaking as a body of bishops.**



**Join Secular Franciscans in the St. Margaret of Cortona Region on a ZOOM CALL to discuss this Special Message on immigration, our Catholic Social Teaching, and follow-on actions.**

**Monday, December 15  
7:30 to 8:45 pm ET**

**Moderated by Janice Benton, OFS, St. Francis Fraternity  
and Pat Boye, OFS, Regional JPIC Chair**

**Opening Prayer and thoughts by Joe Makley, OFS, National JPIC Animator**

**Please register in advance at the following link to receive login  
information for the Zoom call.**

**<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/ZwoT-ASHRfacAJDlvLhigQ>**

**Register ASAP as attendance is limited.**

***Closed caption and ASL Interpreting will be available for Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants. If you need the ASL interpreter, please be sure to write “Yes” in the request box on the registration form.***

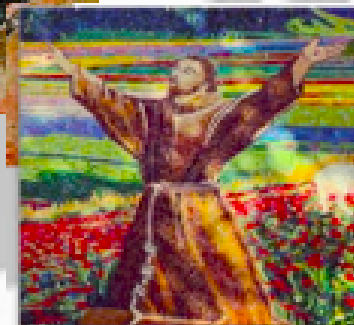
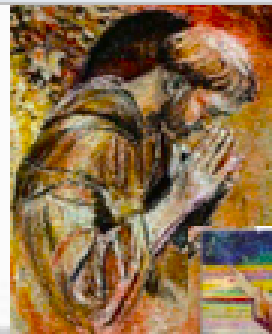




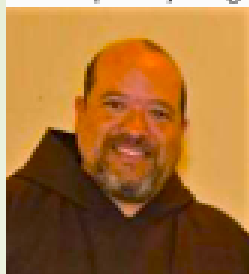
[\(click here for more information\)](#)

## Day of Reflection for Inquirers and Candidates to the Secular Franciscan Order

EMBRACING THE GOSPEL LIFE:  
Conversion, Commitment, Faith, Service



Especially designed for Candidates and Inquirers! OFS professed members are also invited!



**Br. Michael Meza, OFM-Cap** is our presenter for the day. The presentation will give much food for thought about how your life will change after profession to the Secular Franciscan Order. This event is also good for current professed members to refresh their commitment to our OFS life.

**Date:** Saturday, February 7, 2026

**Time:** 9:30 am to 4:00 pm

**Cost:** \$50 Lunch included

**Place:** Franciscan Monastery of the Holy Land  
1400 Quincy St. NE,  
Washington, DC

**ALL ARE WELCOME!**

The Day of Reflection is especially for inquirers and candidates to learn more about our Franciscan spirituality and way of life, and to seek deeper discernment about their decision to accept and profess into the vocation of the Secular Franciscan Order.

- **Fraternity Formation Directors** are especially encouraged to attend with their candidates and inquirers, as there will be time for discussion amongst your group.
- **All OFS members** are welcome to attend as this event can refresh and renew your commitment to profession.

**REGISTRATION - Deadline January 30, 2026**

To register, click on this link:

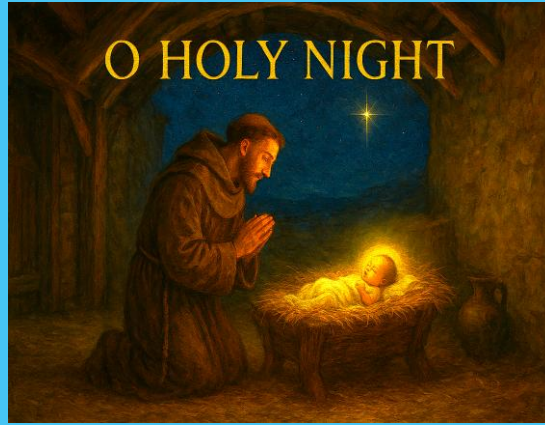
<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/2025DayofReflectionCandidatesInquirers#/>

Please note that payment can be made electronically on this page or a check can be written and mailed in. A registration is not confirmed until payment is received.

If you have any questions or need more information, feel free to contact Rita Colleran at [rlcolleran10@gmail.com](mailto:rlcolleran10@gmail.com) or 703-310-9958 if you have any questions



*“A Blessed Christmas Season to All, as we rejoice  
in the humble birth of our Savior and the gift of love shared among us.”*



Picture by AI

✿ ✨ A Franciscan Christmas Poem ✨ ✿

In Bethlehem's humble stable bright,  
Where stars sang softly through the night,  
The Child of Heaven, meek and small,  
Was born to bring God's love to all.

St. Francis kneels with heart aflame,  
To praise the Babe who gently came;  
With creatures gathered round in peace,  
He blesses God whose mercies never cease.

The ox and lamb, the sparrow's song,  
All join the shepherd's joyful throng;  
Creation lifts its voice to say,  
“Christ is born this holy day!”

O poverty, so pure, so sweet,  
Where heaven and earth in silence meet;  
Francis whispers, soft and mild,  
“Make my soul a crib for the Child.”

So let us walk in Francis' way,  
With hearts made simple, pure as clay;  
To love all creatures, great and small,  
And see Christ's light shine over all.

Poem by AI