



December 2025

THE CALL

St. Thomas More Fraternity, Secular Franciscan Order

From Gospel to Life and Life to Gospel

Minister: Sita Chakrawarti, OFS; Vice Minister: Janette Martin, OFS; Secretary: Thomas Bender, OFS; Treasurer: Joseph Kennedy, OFS; Formation Director: Michael Landrigan, OFS; Councilor-at-Large: Ann Corro, OFS,

Meeting – 2:00 p.m. - Sunday, December 14, 2025

Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church Hall
830 23rd St S, Arlington, VA 22202-2445

We are collecting children's hats, gloves and scarves for the Mother of Light Center.

Advent and Christmas Party

- *Opening Prayer and Grace*
- *Short Business Meeting*
- *Fellowship and Meal – Please bring finger food, desserts; something appropriate for an Advent and Christmas Party*
- *Liturgy of the Hours – Evening Prayer II for the Third Sunday of Advent*
 - Psalms from Week III of the Psalter
 - Reading, Responsory, Antiphon for the Canticle of Mary, Intercessions and Closing Prayer from the Proper of Seasons for the Third Sunday of Advent, Evening Prayer II.
 - Hymn TBD. Please bring your breviary and hymnal.

Remote Access to the Monthly Meeting Info

The remote link will be up to say hi and to pray the office at 3:30 p.m.

Zoom Link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85418000041?pwd=d0pFSDREaDJmdjZpNWlqbli4T20rZz09>

Meeting ID: 854 1800 0041 - Passcode: 668951

Dial by your location: Phone: +1 301 715 8592

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Minister's Reflection



This month is full of important events and ideas, making it hard to find a focus for this reflection. So I'm going to try to combine at least three of them, to see if I can express how they cohere for me into one overarching message. The three events are Advent, the Immaculate Conception, and - the really big one – Christmas.

Advent is a time of preparation and waiting. We watch winter drawing in, with the bare trees, early dark evenings, and increasingly cold temperatures. (I love the contrast of red and green decorations against the bare, dark brown or gray trees. It's quite different south of the equator, where it's summer, but that's a separate topic...) The Church was very smart to choose this season for Advent and Christmas, when we truly see the barren, possibly frozen, land bear fruit in the form of the baby Jesus.

For Francis, this was such a special time that he, and Clare as well, treated it as a mini-Lent. They fasted and prayed even more intensely during these four weeks. Even today, we are exhorted to find spiritual ways to ponder the meaning of Advent, including confession, almsgiving, etc.

In the midst of this season, we have a truly bright light, the feast of the Immaculate

Conception of Our Blessed Mother Mary. This is another clever decree on the part of the Church, reminding us of how Mary was the perfect mother for Jesus, truly receiving Him into her heart, body, and life. Here, too, we have Francis and Clare's example of devotion to Our Lady and their attempts to imitate her.

One of the things I love most about Mary is her willingness not only to bring Jesus to us in the flesh, but also to become our mother as well. I enjoy collecting images of Mary, rejoicing in the variety of depictions of her around the world. I have several statues and pictures of her, ranging from Spanish and Hungarian porcelain to Palestinian olive wood, and copies of Eastern European icons. In Bangladesh, I found a statue of a mother and child, probably not originally intended as a Madonna, but somehow speaking to me of her and her beloved son. Likewise, in Cameroon, I found a bust of a woman that struck me as a portrait of Our Lady, whether designed as such or not. We can find images of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Our Lady of Kibeho, Our Lady of Fatima, etc. To me it is so beautiful that all of these representations, white and blonde, Black, Asian, or Latin American – while the real Mary would have been a dark-haired Middle Eastern Jewish woman – are valid portraits. Because Our Lord empowered his mother to be mother to all of us, His children, all over the world, it is fitting that each culture can see in her a reflection of their own faces and colorings, making her a truly universal mother.

Of course, all of this is a lead-up to the high point of our faith: Jesus' coming to us as a human baby. To Francis, this was so crucial to our lives and faith that he created the first creche at Greccio 800 years ago. He wanted people, most of whom were probably illiterate, to see just how vulnerable the little baby was, such a wonderful paradox for the form of the Creator of the Universe. A special part of Franciscan theology posits that, even without the need to die to redeem us from our sins, Jesus would have come to earth, because He loves us and wanted to share in our humanity.

That, really, is the point of all that is going on this month. Advent helps us to prepare for

Christmas. We have the example of Our Blessed Mother as the perfect vessel for bringing Christ to earth. After this, we can truly celebrate His birth. Our Lord wants to be part of our lives, wants to share His love with us, and wants us to share it with Him and others. Let us use this time of Advent, looking to Our Lady, Francis, and Clare as examples, to deepen our practices of penance and conversion to try to draw closer to the manger and marvel at the gift of God's love and blessings. Amen.

Pax et Bonum,
Sita

Professions

12/8/2002

Mary Ann Caruso - Our Lady of Lourdes

Birthdays of the Month

December

Mary Ann Caruso (21st)

January

Terrence Lisbeth (25th)

Christine Plunkett (27th)

Necrology

Anna Hannigan – December 1990

Fannie Emmert – December 2007

Thomas Coipuram – December 13, 2012

Catherine Wynne – December 17, 2017

Prayer Intentions

For...

- *For vocations to our Fraternity and all branches of the Franciscan family.*
- *For victims of violence particularly the two National Guard Soldiers shot (one mortally) in DC and the conversion of the violent.*
- *For the upholding of human life from conception until natural death.*
- *The health, protection and guidance of Pope Leo XIV, all bishops, priests, deacons, friars and religious sisters.*
- *Peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East.*
- *A just peace in Ukraine and protection for her Ukrainian and Ruthenian Rite Catholics.*
- *Federal Employees negotiating this time of*

uncertainty.

- *Angela Gill who is suffering from shortness of breath and awaiting a diagnosis of what is wrong.*
- *Grace Coipuram, OFS*
- *For continued healing for Andrea Bender, OFS*
- *Patrick Birello's back and leg issues.*
- *For Ralph Palsek's, grand-nephew Damien James and family after the death of his father Robert Lawrence.*
- *For recovery for Ralph Palasek from an infection.*
- *Patricia Kennedy, mother of Joseph Kennedy, OFS who suffers from congestive heart failure.*
- *For Anne-Marie's mother-in-law who is home but still recovering from a serious infection.*
- *Louis, son of Clarissa, of STM Parish, and for all those suffering from depression.*
- *Liz's friend Dan who has Parkinson's Disease.*
- *The sister of a friend of April, who does not want her sister to pray for her.*
- *April's friend, whose husband avoids Church, and his ex-wife who never went to Church.*
- *The grandson of April's friend and another friend with suddenly worsening dementia.*
- *For April's friend's mother, Adelaide and Christian, the grandson of a friend.*
- *The Poor Holy Souls in Purgatory.*
- *Religious freedom and for all persecuted for their belief in God.*
- *Prisoners, the sick, poor, hungry, lonely, the elderly and their caregivers, homeless, unemployed, the dying and those with no one to pray for them.*
- *The work of the Order of Malta in Bethlehem in this time of strife and war.*
- *The union of all Christians and salvation of all.*

Secretary's Notes

This Sunday is our Advent/Christmas Party and so bring food and beverages.

Also, Gil Donahue wrote an article on *Why St. Francis Loved Christmas* in a feature entitled *Spiritual Assistants Corner* on page 3. On page 6 is a *Straight Answers* column written in 2003 by Fr. William Saunders, now pastor of St. Agnes Parish in Arlington, on the origins of the Christmas Creche. St. Agnes has an elephant in their parish creche.

Peace and Good, Randy



WHY ST. FRANCIS LOVED CHRISTMAS

Christmas has become for us Christians a very festive season. The commercial aspect sometimes overwhelms the religious element. Even so, we enjoy opportunities to share good times with family and friends. In our region of the northern hemisphere, with fewer hours of sunlight, we revel in the outdoor decorations and other Christmas lights—traditions which are very comforting to us.

Francis, who so admired humility, was deeply touched by Jesus Christ being born as a poor baby. To make the importance of this evident to others, he established the first living manger scene at Greccio. In Jesus, God was physically present to the world. As a newborn, he was both humble and vulnerable, completely dependent on family for his well-being.

As the Church is the body of Jesus, Francis understood that it, too, is vulnerable and needing our care and attention. The most direct way Francis could manage this was to be, like Jesus, as present as possible to all other people. And especially to those in need (i.e., all of us).

In the Incarnation, God demonstrated his deep love for humanity. And God sought to directly experience humanity the way we do—with the exception of our sinful failings. In line with Jesus' example, Francis taught members of his Order to be as present as possible to the poor.

Over the ages, Francis' special insights have been developed by theologians of note, especially St. Bonaventure and Bl. John Duns Scotus. Taking a somewhat different view than St. Thomas Aquinas, Scotus understood that the Incarnation was God's original plan, not just a reaction to sin. As Jesus often described himself as the Good Shepherd, in Jesus God was seeking to recall all humankind to the manner in which God had originally intended us to live.

For Franciscans, the Incarnation is the ultimate manifestation of God's love and humility. God became human to intimately connect with His creation. Jesus is the "firstborn of every creature" (Colossians 1:15). Thus, Franciscans understand that the Incarnation is the "primacy of Christ" in relation to the cosmos.

Indeed, Christ is the "preeminent gift of God." Francis of Assisi's insights into the beauty of creation are seen as flowing from his understanding of Christ's central role in creation itself. Keeping these spiritual elements of Christmas in mind, let us look for opportunities to reflect God's joy into the lives of others as we make our pilgrimage through Advent to Christmas.



Bethlehem, Make Ready

*Bethlehem, make ready, Eden has been opened for all. * Ephrathah, prepare yourself, for the Tree of Life has blossomed from the Virgin in the cave. * Her womb has become a spiritual paradise in which divinity was planted. * If we partake of it we shall live and not die like Adam. * Christ is born to raise up the likeness that had fallen.* (Troparion for the Pre-feast of the Nativity, December 20-23)

Those who were evangelized by the Greeks share this hymn near the end of Advent. Bethlehem, make ready The poetry of the Church gives us images to help us reflect on the meaning of Christmas, the birth of the Christ child.

Bethlehem and Ephrathah are synonyms by the time of Jesus' birth; the Church calls Bethlehem to prepare to receive the One who will bring our salvation. We all prepare with Bethlehem.

Mary's womb is a kind of paradise because the Son of God dwelled there. Jesus is called "the Tree of Life" which blossomed forth as Mary gave birth to Jesus, "I AM the Life." But we can't help remember that Jesus ultimately is nailed to a tree which brings us Life.

Adam chose to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. God had planned for Adam—a name which means human being—to walk with Him, to know only Good (Genesis 3:8-9; recall Jesus said, "Why do you call me 'Good'? No one is good but God alone" in Mark 10:17-18). The LORD does not want mankind to be forever separated from Him, so He cannot risk us eating of the Tree of Life and living forever apart from God. This is what God meant when He warned Adam that choosing the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil will mean choosing death.

But in Christ's birth, Eden is opened for everyone—not only for Jews, but for all mankind, for all Adams. This is why Christ is born: to raise up those who have been made in His image and likeness but have fallen, tarnishing that likeness. Partaking of Jesus Christ and participating in the Church which has the Blessed Virgin Mary as its Mother, we repent and—reconciled with God—may partake of the Tree of Life.

For your December reflection and discussion:

* How do you prepare for Christmas? How does your Advent preparation help you to repent of knowing evil and allow yourself to become "brother, sister, and mother" to Jesus Christ? (See Matthew 12:46-50 and St Francis, Letter to the Faithful, 1)

* What is some of your favorite Advent poetry (this includes lyrics) that helps you to prepare for Christmas?

Jerome, ofm
National Spiritual Assistant
OFS Animator, OFM Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe ofs.assistant@friars.us
We'd love your feedback!

St. Francis and the Christmas Creche
What is the origin of the Nativity Scene (creche)?

Fr. William Saunders

The story of the origin of the Christmas creche rests with the very holy man, St. Francis of Assisi.

In the year 1223, St. Francis, a deacon, was visiting the town of Greccio to celebrate Christmas. Greccio was a small town built on a mountainside overlooking a beautiful valley. The people had cultivated the fertile area with vineyards. St. Francis realized that the chapel of the Franciscan hermitage would be too small to hold the congregation for Midnight Mass. So he found a niche in the rock near the town square and set up the altar. However, this Midnight Mass would be very special, unlike any other Midnight Mass.

St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) in his *Life of St. Francis of Assisi* tells the story the best:



It happened in the third year before his death, that in order to excite the inhabitants of Greccio to commemorate the nativity of the Infant Jesus with great devotion, [St. Francis] determined to keep it with all possible solemnity; and lest he should be accused of lightness or novelty, he asked and obtained the permission of the sovereign Pontiff. Then he prepared a manger, and brought hay, and an ox and an ass to the place appointed. The brethren were summoned, the people ran together, the forest resounded with their voices, and that venerable night was made glorious by many and brilliant lights and sonorous psalms of praise. The man of God [St. Francis] stood before the manger, full of devotion and piety, bathed in tears and radiant with joy; the Holy Gospel was chanted by Francis, the Levite of Christ. Then he preached to the people around the nativity of the poor King; and being unable to utter His name for the tenderness of His love, He called Him the Babe of Bethlehem. A certain valiant and veracious soldier, Master John of Greccio, who, for the love of Christ, had left the warfare of this world, and become a dear friend of this holy man, affirmed that he beheld an Infant marvelously beautiful, sleeping in the manger, Whom the blessed Father Francis embraced with both his arms, as if he would awake Him from sleep. This vision of the devout soldier is credible, not only by reason of the sanctity of him that saw it, but by reason of the miracles which afterwards confirmed its truth. For example of Francis, if it be considered by the world, is doubtless sufficient to excite all hearts which are negligent in the faith of Christ; and the hay of that manger, being preserved by the people, miraculously cured all diseases of cattle, and many other pestilences; God thus in all things glorifying his servant, and witnessing to the great efficacy of his holy prayers by manifest prodigies and miracles.

Although the story is long old, the message is clear for us. Our own Nativity scenes which rest under our Christmas trees are a visible reminder of that night when our Savior was born. May we never forget to see in our hearts the little Babe of Bethlehem, who came to save us from sin. We must never forget that the wood of the manger that held Him so securely would one day give way to the wood of the cross. May we

too embrace Him with all of our love as did St. Francis. To all of the readers of Straight Answers, I wish you a very holy Christmas.

Saunders, Rev. William. "St. Francis and the Christmas Creche." *Arlington Catholic Herald*.
<https://catholiceducation.org/en/culture/st-francis-and-the-christmas-creche.html> accessed 12/6/2025.

Saints of the Month

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Franciscan-Saints-01-2023.pdf>

- December 2* - Bl. Mary Angela Astorch, Capuchin Poor Clare (September 1, 1592 - December 2, 1665)
<https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-maria-angela-astorch/>
Bl. Raphael Chylinski, Priest, Order of Friars Minor, Conventual
(January 8, 1680/90 - December 2, 1742)
https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=7637
- December 4* - Bl. François Galves, Priest, Order of Friars Minor, martyr (d. 1623)
https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=3444
Bl. Pietro Tecelano, Third Order Secular (c. 1190-December 1289)
<https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-pietro-tecelano/>
- December 5* - Bl. Peter of Sienna, Third Order Secular (d. December 4, 1289)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-peter-of-siena.html>
- December 7* - St. Mary Joseph Rosello, Third Order Secular before founding another institute
(December 7, 1811)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/saint-mary-joseph-rossello.html>
- December 8* - Feast of the Immaculate Conception, Patroness of the Seraphic Order, Holy Day of Obligation,
Plenary Indulgence for tertiaries and cord bearers
<https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/saint/solemnity-of-the-immaculate-conception-of-the-blessed-virgin-77>
- December 9* - Bl. Clara Isabella Fornari, Poor Clare Nun (June 25, 1697 - December 9, 1744)
<https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-clara-isabella-fornari/>
- December 11* - Bl. Francis (Arthur) Bell, Priest, Order of Friars Minor, martyr of England
(January 13, 1590-December 11, 1643)
<https://supremacyandsurvival.blogspot.com/2011/12/blessed-arthur-bell-ofm.html>
Bl. Hugolinus Magalotti, Third Order Secular (d. 1373)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-hugolinus-magalotti.html>
- December 12* - Finding the Body of Our Holy Father St. Francis
<https://www.churchpop.com/2016/10/04/the-mystery-of-the-hidden-tomb-of-st-francis-of-assisi/>
Bl. Bartolo da San Gimignano, Priest, Third Order Secular (1228-December 1300)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/bartolo-of-san-gimignano.html>
Bl. Pius Ludwik Bartosik, Priest, Friars Minor Conventual, martyr
(August 21, 1909-December 12, 1941)
<https://militiaoftheimmaculata.com/blessed-martyrs-of-niepokalanow/>
Our Lady of Guadalupe
<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07043a.htm>
- December 14* - Bl. Jean Disalceat, Priest, Franciscan (c. 1278-December 1349)
<https://catholicsaints.info/blessed-john-disalceat/>
- December 15* - Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Franciscan Order
<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/2021/11/28/the-blessed-virgin-mary-and-st-francis-of-assisi/>
Bl. Mary Frances Schervier, Founder Religious Sisters of the Third Order Regular of St. Francis
(January 8, 1819-December 14, 1876) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Frances_Schervier

- December 23- Bl. Nicolas Factor-Estaña, Priest, Order of Friars Minor (June 29, 1520-December 23, 1583)
<https://anastpaul.com/2019/12/23/saint-of-the-day-23-december-blessed-nicolas-factor-estana-ofm-1520-1583/>
- December 24- Bl. Bentivolio of Bonio, Priest, Order of Friars Minor (d. 1231)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-bentivolio-buoni.html>
- December 25- Nativity of Our Lord Jesus Christ
<https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/culture/catholic-contributions/st-francis-and-the-christmas-creche.html>
- December 28- Bl. Matthia Nazzarei, Poor Clare Nun (March 1, 1253-December 28, 1319)
<http://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-matthia-nazzarei.html>
- December 29- Bl. Gerard Cagnoli, Lay Brother, Order of Friars Minor (c. 1267-c. 1342)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-gerard-cagnoli.html>
- December 30- Bl. Margaret Colonna, Poor Clare Nun (c. 1255-December 30, 1280)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-margaret-colonna.html>
- January 1 - Mary, Mother of God
<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/church/news/2017-12/gospel-reflection-mary-mother-of-god.html>
- January 3 - Most Holy Name of Jesus
<https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=6850>
- January 4 - Bl. Christina of Tuscany, Virgin, Third Order Secular (d. 1310)
<https://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-christina-of-tuscany.html>
- January 5 - Bl. Didacus Joseph of Cadiz, Priest, First Order, Capuchin (1743-1801)
https://www.capuchin.org/saints_blessed/didacus-joseph-of-cadiz/#
 Bl. Ruggiero da Todi, Religious, Order of Friars Minor (d. 1237)
<http://catholic.net/op/articles/1513/cat/1205/ruggiero-da-todi-.html#>
- January 6 - St. Charles of Sezze, Priest, Order of Friars Minor (October 19, 1613 – January 6, 1670)
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_of_Sezze
- January 7 - St. Angela of Foligno, Widow, Third Order Secular (1248-January 3, 1309)
<https://stfrancis.clas.asu.edu/article/angela-foligno>
- January 8 - Bl. Eurosia Fabris Barban, Third Order Secular (September 27, 1866-January 8, 1932)
<https://stevenwood.com/reflections/franciscan/0108-18.htm>
- January 9 - Bl. Giles of Laurenzana, Lay Brother, Order of Friars Minor (1443-January 10, 1518)
<http://www.roman-catholic-saints.com/blessed-giles-of-lorenzana.html>
- January 10 - Bl. Gregory X, Pope, Third Order Secular (c. 1210-January 10, 1276)
<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/gregory-x-pope-bl>

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! All 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 changes 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!.

To register, click this link: <https://www.signupgenius.com/go/2025DayofReflectionCandidatesInquirers#/REGISTRATION> - **Deadline January 30, 2026**

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. Feel free to contact Rita Colleran at rlcolleran10@gmail.com or 703-310-9958 if you have any questions.