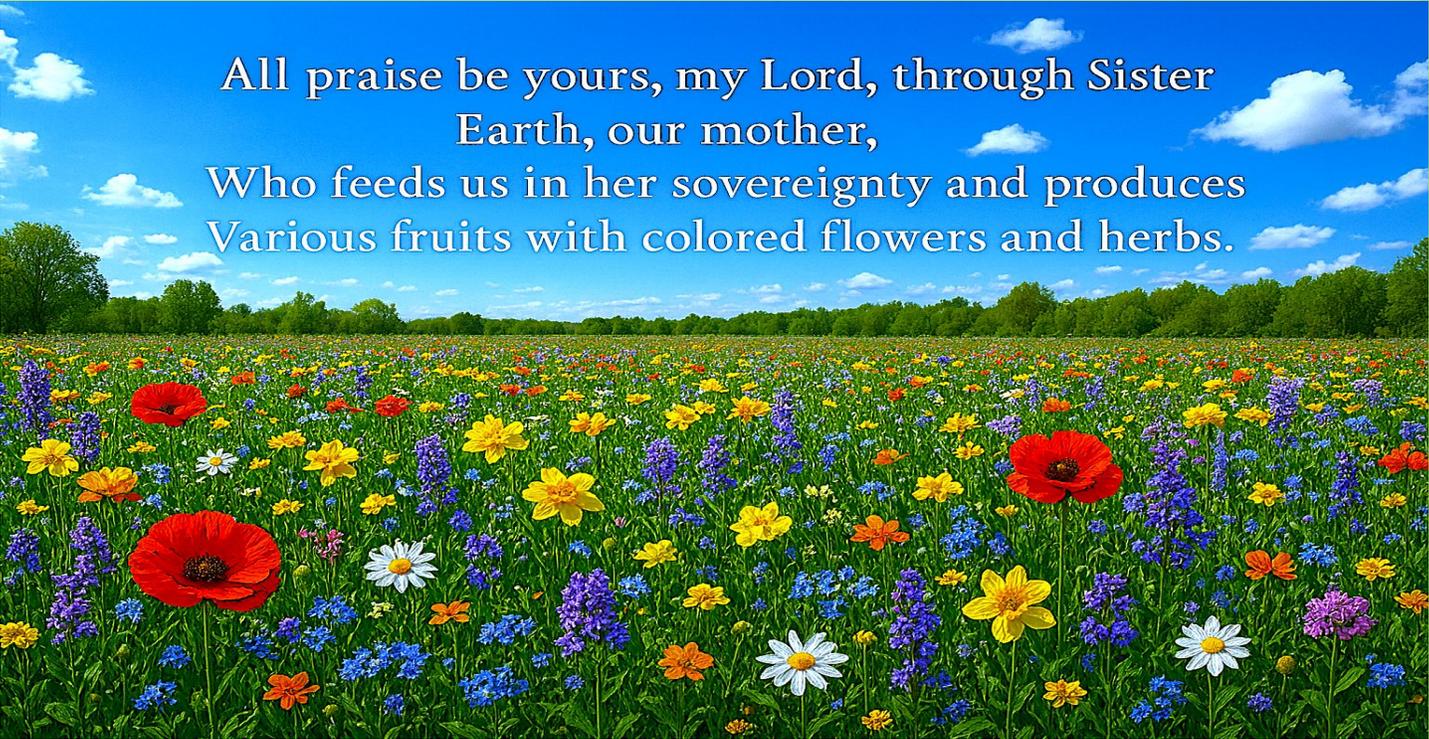


# *Welcome to our Spring Newsletter*

**March 2026**

**ST. MARGARET OF CORTONA REGION**

**UP TO NOW NEWSLETTER**



All praise be yours, my Lord, through Sister  
Earth, our mother,  
Who feeds us in her sovereignty and produces  
Various fruits with colored flowers and herbs.

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

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

**~ St. Francis of Assisi ~**

2026 ~ Issue 1

**St. Margaret of Cortona  
Regional Minister's  
March 2026 Message**

My sisters and brothers, I extend greetings and peace to you, and I pray that you enjoyed your Advent and Christmas and New Years Holiday Seasons with friends and family. We have some exciting events planned this year that I hope you will take advantage of, along with some important announcements regarding the assignment changes on the Regional Executive Council (REC), and then a mention about an important resource for you during this Jubilee Year of St. Francis.

Regarding the events, one already occurred on February 7th, which was our Annual Day of Reflection for Candidates and Inquirers, which was open to all Professed as well. It was held at the Franciscan Monastery in Washington, D.C. with over 60 people in attendance and coming from all over the region. Brother Michael Meza, OFM Cap., one of our Regional Spiritual Assistants, was our facilitator, and he did a wonderful job as usual.

There are two upcoming events in June, one of which features a new offering, a Justice Peace and Integrity of Creation (JPIC) themed spiritual retreat to be held at the Priestfield Retreat Center in Kearneysville, West Virginia, the weekend of June 5-7, 2026. It will focus on how to make JPIC-driven choices in our daily lives consistent with our Franciscan Spirituality. The retreat master will be Father Stan Fortuna, CFR, a founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal. Father Stan is an inspirational speaker, will intersperse his facilitation with music, and there will be panel discussions with our own members to talk about the connection between our spirituality and putting our faith into action like Francis. It is open to all members of the region and is not, I repeat: it is not a politically motivated event. Mass, confessions, and Adoration will be offered as part of the retreat. Please be on the lookout for the flyer and registration link. I hope to see you there.

The second event in June is our annual Formation Retreat. It will also be held at the Priestfield Retreat Center on the weekend of June 26-28, 2026. This retreat is also open to all members of the region and will be led by Father Jude Winkler, OFM Conv., who was with us at last year's formation event. He is an accomplished theologian and has a wonderful sense of humor. The theme this year is "Be the Light" in your family, community, Church, and Fraternity. Mass and confessions will be offered. Please be on the lookout for this flyer and registration link as well. I hope to see you there.

One quick administrative note about the scheduling of these two events is important to communicate. I have heard feedback about the events being scheduled so near one another that it caused confusion. I want to assure you that we did what we could to space them out. However,

**2024 – 2027 Regional Council**

**Regional Minister:**

Gary Burton, OFS

**Vice Minister:**

Michael Oliver, OFS

**Secretary:**

Maria Martinez, OFS

**Treasurer:**

Randy Bender, OFS

**Formation Director:**

Tom White, OFS

**Area Councilor (N. MD/S. PA):**

Michael Huether, OFS

**Area Councilor (MD/DE):**

Vacant

**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:**

Vacant

**Appointed**

**Non-Council Positions**

**Regional Database Manager**

**Regional Newsletter Editor**

**Region Website Administrator**

**Vocations/Archivist**

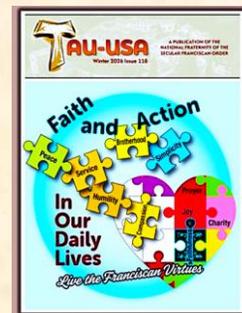
Bob Longo, OFS

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**TAU-USA – Winter 2026 Issue  
(Click on the picture below)**



**[Invierno TAU-EE. UU](#)  
[TAU-USA-Winter Korean-Articles](#)**

based on the constraints of the venues we contacted and cost, these were the only dates available, and it was decided to go forward with them both in the same month. I apologize if there was any confusion associated with their advertisement. Both are spiritually themed and have elements of forming ourselves as Franciscans. I encourage you to attend either one or both events if you can.

Concerning announcements, I sent out an email to the local minister to inform you that we’ve had some assignment changes on the REC as follows:

First, is the resignation of Toby Harkleroad as Area Councilor of the REC, which was effective on February 3, 2026. We thank Toby for all of his hard work, sacrifices, and contributions he has made to the region over the years. We wish him well on the new endeavors he has embarked on. The Vice Minister, Michael Oliver, and I will work together to address the elections and visits that were assigned to Toby in his geographical area.

Second, and as some of you may already know about the resignation of Rita Colleran as Formation Director and Joan Kane as Assistant Formation Director, both of which became effective on Sunday, February 8th. I made a public announcement about this at the Franciscan Monastery to the attendees of the Day of Reflection for Candidates and Inquirers back on February 7th, where I thanked both Rita and Joan for their sacrifice and willingness to serve, and presented them with a small gift as a token of the region's appreciation.

Third, is the appointment of our brother, Tom White, the minister of St. John the Beloved Apostle Fraternity, as the new Formation Director of our region. Tom was appointed by the REC on February 3rd, is completing his transition with Rita to take over the formation program and will serve on the REC as a nonvoting member. We thank Tom for his willingness to serve in this important capacity for our region.

Fourth, Father Jerome Wolbert, OFM the Provincial Spiritual Assistant for the Our Lady of Guadalupe Province (one of the four Provinces our region is bonded to), has appointed both Brother Henry Fulmer, OFM and Brother Jose Luis Peralta, OFM as co-Regional Spiritual Assistants for our region. I will be in touch with them both soon and look forward to collaborating with them on helping us with due and past due fraternal visits.

Finally, as many of you already know, Pope Leo XIV announced that this is a Jubilee Year of St. Francis. With that, he has granted the issuing of plenary indulgences to those visiting Franciscan-related sites whether they be churches, shrines, or other places of worship.

Here are the conditions for obtaining the indulgence:

- follow the usual conditions of a plenary indulgence: sacramental confession, Eucharistic communion, and prayer according to the intentions of the Holy Father
- participate in the Year of Saint Francis by visiting, in the form of a pilgrimage, any Franciscan conventual church or place of worship anywhere in the world dedicated to Saint Francis or connected to him for any reason
- devoutly follow the Jubilee rites or spend at least a reasonable period of time in pious meditation and raise prayers to God
- Conclude with the Our Father, the Creed, and invocations to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Clare, and all the Saints of the Franciscan Family.

Our National Fraternity’s website has all the information in connection with this papal decree and has a link to the national database that you can query to locate the nearest Franciscan worship site. Below is the link to the webpage on our national website.

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/jubilee-year-of-saint-francis/>

To conclude and on behalf of the Regional Executive Council, I wish you and your family and friends a fruitful and blessed Lenten and Easter Season.

Gary Burton, OFS  
Regional Minister

# *Around the Region*

## *Newly Elected Councils*

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

#### **Companions of Francis and Clare Fraternity**



L-R  
Minister ~ **Mike Warnalis**, OFS  
Vice Minister ~ **Tom Fame**, OFS  
Secretary ~ **Ann Mayo**, OFS  
Treasurer ~ **Paul Wyar**, OFS  
Formation  
Director ~ **Gayle Danielsen**, OFS  
Councilor ~ **Sandra Tapia**, OFS

#### **Our Lady of the Rosary Fraternity**



L-R  
Minister ~ **Peg Crews**, OFS  
Vice Minister ~ **Carol Murphy**, OFS  
Secretary ~ **Genevieve M. McGlynn**, OFS  
Treasurer ~ **Marylou Holloway**, OFS  
Formation  
Director ~ **Karen A. Rutherford-Coulson**, OFS  
Councilor ~ **Eileen Murray**, OFS

### *New Inquirers*

#### **Sacred Heart Fraternity**



L-R **Frank Cunnana** and  
**Michael Guthrie**

#### **St. Clare Delaware Fraternity**



L-R **Pauletta Riley**,  
**Marilyn Butler-Murphy**, and  
**Sandy Garber**

#### **St. Conrad Annapolis Fraternity**



**Tara  
Turner**

### New Candidates

#### Little Flower Fraternity



#### Our Lady Queen of the Angels Fraternity



#### Pope John XXIII Fraternity - **CONGRATULATIONS**



### Newly Professed

#### St. Clare Delaware Fraternity



Mary-Anna Harvie, OFS, Delizabeth Diaz-Martinez, OFS  
Sandy Paulen, OFS, Mary McKeon, OFS, Diane Zell, OFS

#### St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity



#### Portiuncula Fraternity



< Tracey Owens, OFS

# Fraternity Events Around the Region

## Pope St. John XXIII Fraternity Events



Live Manger presentation at Holy Family Catholic Church, Davidsonville, Maryland  
Sponsored by Pope St. John XXIII Secular Franciscan Fraternity



PRAYER SHAWL MINISTRY  
Chris Gordon, OFS



Members of Pope St. John XXIII Secular Franciscan Fraternity serve dinner to the homeless



Franciscan Wake Service at Holy Family Catholic Church for Kathy Duffy, OFS

### Tau Fraternity



- L-R
- Cynthia Filan-Kim, OFS
- Pam Brooks, OFS
- Bill Richey, OFS
- Walter Gawlak, OFS
- Stanley Hoover, OFS
- Sharon Goldberg, OFS
- Joe Boyle, OFS

These seven members led the Stations of the Cross at St. Joseph’s Church in Herndon, Virginia on Friday evening February 27. They distributed the booklets and were the readers and bearers of candles and the Crucifix during this service.

## *The Passing of a Member 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.*

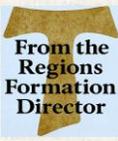


**Our Franciscan brother, Bernie Kuchta, OFS, a member of Mary Our Queen Fraternity, passed away on December 9, 2025. Bernie professed on October 16, 1995, in this Fraternity.**



**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.**





## Let us Begin Again

“Let us begin again, for up to now we have done nothing.” This is a great theme for formation and really for anything Franciscan. This theme also works well with the season of Lent. I’m the new Regional Formation Director, so this is also an opportunity to get to know me.

Lent is all about starting over. It is a time for us to reflect on the things we should have done and did not do, and the things we did that we should not have done. It’s also about finding ways to make up for our shortcomings and finding ways to overcome our weaknesses. It’s about the various “ways.” Jesus told us that he is the way, the truth, and the life. There are other ways we can follow, but only Jesus’ way will get us to Heaven. For Franciscans, we follow Saint Francis, who shows us how to follow Jesus way. We also receive through Francis our command from Jesus to “Rebuild my Church.” This puts us in a special situation with the Lord.

So, for us, our Franciscan way is a little different from the way everyone else follows Jesus. To borrow an Army term, Jesus put another “rock in our ruck.” Jesus gave us more work. Our command to “Rebuild my Church” is a sacred obligation. Everyone is expected to give alms, fast, and pray, but as Franciscans, we are called to go further. We all know that the Church referred to by Jesus was not the building or the institution, but the people. Over the centuries, the Church has experienced significant challenges, which resulted in clearer theological understanding and knowledge. In Francis’s time, he was the change that was needed for the Church. By his example, he showed that it was possible to live the Gospel life, that clergy could live what they preached, and that the laity had a significant role in rebuilding the Church. Francis showed us that the laity were not just followers, but leaders, who could uplift and rebuild the Church. Francis, though he was laity in the beginning (Later, he became a Deacon), led by example, influencing how the people of God lived their lives and invigorating the Church.

You may ask what kind of leader was Francis? From the beginning of Francis’ ministry until his death, he was a servant leader. Francis served Laity, Clergy, and his brothers and sisters; in short, he served everyone. Francis imitated Jesus, who came to serve and not be served. For each of us, that calling is a little different because we are secular, but the work begun by Francis is still going on because the people of God always need uplifting. Every generation is challenged with similar questions and challenges. Worldly technology and knowledge always increase, but basic spiritual questions and challenges always remain. Each generation must navigate all these questions using the examples and revelations of Christ and the saints, including St. Francis.

This goes to the heart of why we must begin again, for up to now we have done nothing. With every person we encounter, we begin again, with new challenges, new discussions, new teaching. That is why the command to “rebuild my Church” is as relevant today as it was when Francis first received it. As seculars, we rebuild the Church where we find ourselves. So, that rebuilding might be a co-worker, a parishioner, and student, a teacher, a homeless person, an immigrant, a Priest, or anyone that God sends to us along the way. With each encounter, the people we touch gain something and so do we. That rebuilding is necessary even in ourselves. We must “first remove the plank from our own eye so you can clearly see to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye.”

In every case, we are called to work with everyone as Jesus showed revealed to us in the Gospels. This is how we live our Franciscan charism. This is one reason the Third Order was established: to go where the religious brothers and sisters could not effectively go. Secular Franciscans are called to rebuild the people at work, in our communities, families, schools, shops, hospitals, and even into our political, judicial, and military institutions to ensure these institutions reflect our spiritual values.

We do that at the ballot box, by talking to our Congressional Representatives, and by letting our voices be heard. Most often, our voices are not heard but rather are seen when we care for the physical and spiritual needs of the poor, sick, imprisoned, and society’s outcasts. Sometimes, the Lord’s love and mercy are not heard in the howling of the wind, but in a whisper to the people around us. In a way, we have returned to giving alms, fasting and prayer. Maybe that is the way it should be, because we should never forget that even though we may do many things, we are not really us doing anything. It is God who does all things through us. Maybe this is why we feel as though we face the same obstacles every Lent. We are only “unworthy servants who have only done what our master told us.” Let us begin again, for up to now we have done nothing.” ~ Tom White, OFS ~ **Regional Formation Director**

## Opportunity and Challenge for Ecumenism

MAY GOD BLESS YOU DURING THIS LENTEN SEASON AND UPCOMING EASTER SEASON!

This is the first of a series of articles I will be presenting that is taken from and based on an article written by Cardinal Kurt Koch, which appeared during the month of February 2025 in the Vatican newspaper, “L’OSSERVATORE ROMANO”. Cardinal Koch is the Prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity. This periodical has a dual purpose of documentation and commentary of all Papal texts and documents of the Holy See in Italian and all the languages in which they were originally written and spoken. It provides complete and accurate accounts of international and cultural affairs, debates, and events happening currently in the Church, with special attention given to Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue.

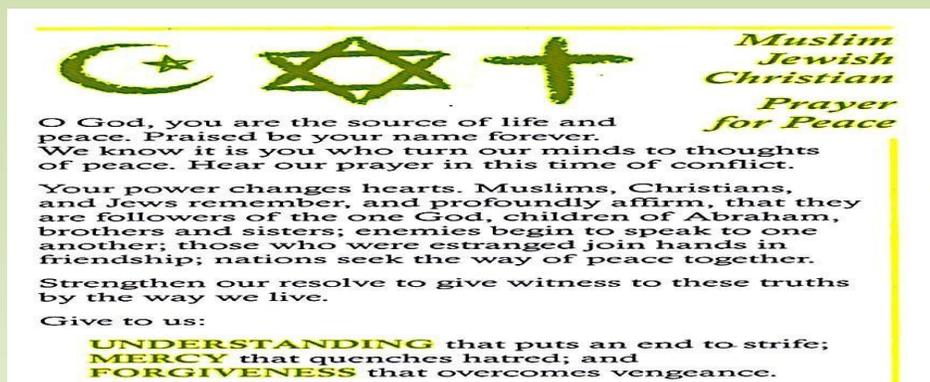
The Jubilee Year of 2025 was a Holy Year proclaimed by the late Pope Francis to rejuvenate Christian Hope. The 1700<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first Ecumenical Council in Church history, held in Nicaea in 325, was also celebrated. Many significant ecumenical dimensions were made evident by the Holy Father’s desire to travel to Nicaea to commemorate this event together with Bartholomew I. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches was also involved in the celebration.

The doctrinal issues addressed by the Council, which were of particular ecumenical relevance, were summarized in the “Declaration of the 318 Fathers”. In this declaration, the Fathers professed their faith in “one God the Father all powerful, maker of all things both seen and unseen, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten from the Father, that is from the substance of the Father, God from God, light from light true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father, through whom all things came to be, both those in heaven and those on earth”. In the Letter of the Synod to the Egyptians, the Fathers announced that primarily, Arius and his followers were enemies of the faith and opposers of its law. They unanimously agreed to a pronouncement of a denunciation and ban of Arius’s opinion and blasphemous expressions, a term he applied to the Son of God. These declarations established the content for the Creed formulated by the Council, which professed faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God, “consubstantial with the Father”. At this time in history, a violent dispute in Christianity broke out, particularly in the eastern Roman Empire. In the early 300’s, in Christian monotheism, especially was this an issue. This controversy mainly revolved around the reconciliation of the profession of the Christian faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God with that of faith in one God, in accordance with monotheistic belief.

In the next issue, we continue the discussion on this ecumenical controversy.

Mike

Regional Interfaith/Ecumenical:  
Committee Chair



## *A Lenten Reflection*

*Psalm 139: A Psalm of David (Read with your heart)*

*O Lord, You have searched me and You know me! You know when I sit and when I rise;*

*You perceive my thoughts from afar.*

*You discern my going out and my lying down, You are familiar with all my ways.*

*Before a word is on my tongue, You know it completely, O Lord.*

*You hem me in, behind and before, You have laid Your hand upon me.*

*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; too lofty for me to attain.*

*Where can I go from Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence?*

*If I go up to the heavens, You are there! If I make my bed in the depths, You are there!*

*If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,*

*even there, Your hand will guide me, Your right hand will hold me fast.*

*If I say, “Surely the darkness will hide me, and the light become night around me,”*

*even the darkness will not be dark to You; the night will shine like the day,*

*For darkness is as light to You.*

*For You created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother’s womb.*

*I praise You because I am fearfully and wonderfully made,*

*Your words are wonderful; I know that full well.*

*My frame was not hidden from You when I was made in a secret place.*

*When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body.*

*All the days ordained for me were written in Your book before they came to be.*

*How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!*

*Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand.*

*When I awake, I am still with you...*

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Test me and know my anxious thoughts!*

*See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!”*

*Psalm 139 is a favorite for me. So reassuring, so inspiring... At this time of Lent, I offer it as a source of meditation and contemplation for us Secular Franciscans, for it can help us focus on the Lord’s knowledge and understanding of us and on the tremendous love which He has for each of us despite our downfalls-the love for which He sacrificed Himself when sent here by His Father.*

*In the opening 6 verses of the psalm, we are reminded that God knows our hearts, our fears, our thoughts, our motives, our dreams, our frustrations. He knows everything about our past, present, and future. He understands us, notices all that is going on around and inside us every day, every minute of the day, and even knows our true motives for every move we make...*

*Furthermore, as needed, He is the One who is merciful to us, forgiving our inadequacies so that we may grow in holiness and live in union with Him. And when we repent, He is the one who blesses us.*

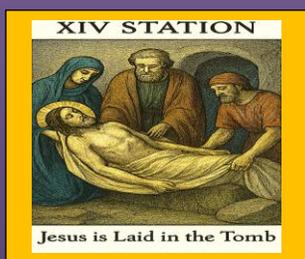
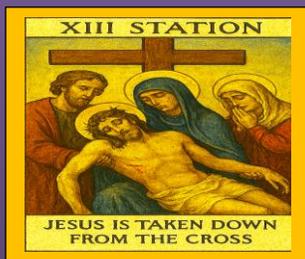
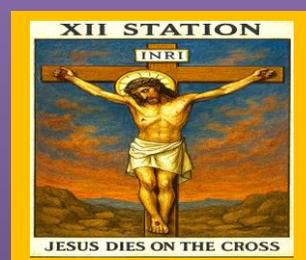
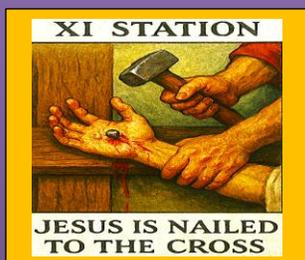
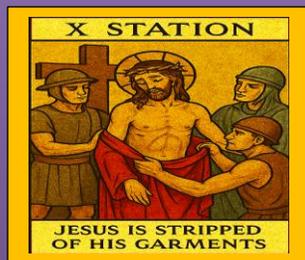
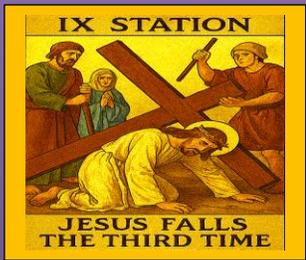
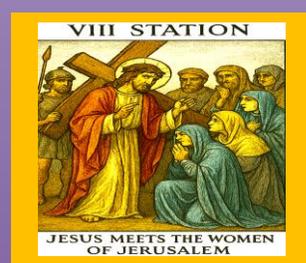
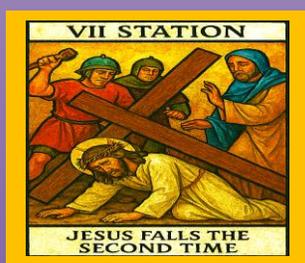
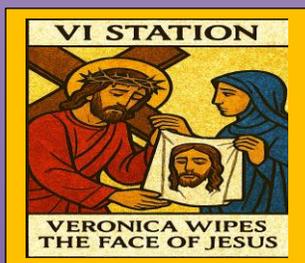
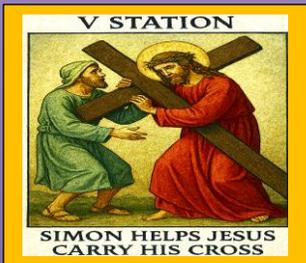
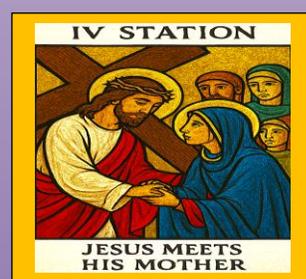
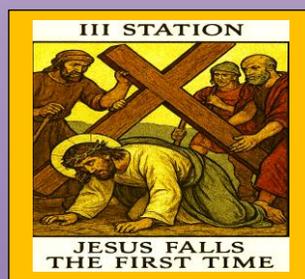
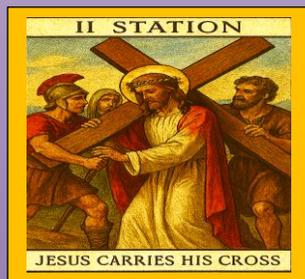
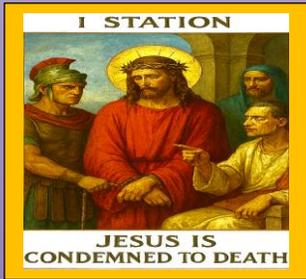
*If God knows everything about us, He has heard our lies and gossip, seen our anger, known when we were hypocritical and not living the Gospel life. We can not hide from His sight, and with His light He will search us out - continually trying to lead us back to Him, picking us up when we fall, giving us the grace we need to complete the ongoing conversion so essential to our spiritual life. And why does He try so hard?  
- because He loves us more than we can possibly imagine, because we are His beloved, chosen, dearly loved children - the ones He thirsted for when giving His life for all when on the Cross.*

He is the one who made us (lines 13-16), giving us our personality, spiritual gifts, innate abilities, and a particular purpose that sets us apart for Him. We are His treasure, made in His likeness, made for Him, made out of love, and He wants us to be with Him forever. And as He has fashioned us, He has plans for us and offers us opportunities each day to give back to Him our praise and thanksgiving.

He knows the circumstances we face, the dilemmas we must overcome to be Christ-like, the obstacles which confuse and frustrate us. He knows the temptations we face, the choices we must make if we are to live the Rule of our order. He wants us to persevere, to choose to live out the promises we made at our profession, to continue our journey of ongoing conversion toward Him, to carry the cross, to love as He has loved us.

So as we live this season of Lent, and as we consider how important Jesus’ sacrifice is for us, let’s do our best to give back to Him the love He has so freely shown to us-remembering that all we are and all we could ever need is found in living our lives for Him as He lived His for us.

Joan Kane, OFS  
Little Flower Fraternity



## JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

### **Pope Leo XIV Declares Franciscan Jubilee**

*His Holiness Pope Leo XIV has arranged that, from the 10th January, 2026 to the 10th January, 2027, this Year of St. Francis will be celebrated, during which all the Christian faithful are invited to follow the example of the Saint of Assisi, becoming models of holiness of life and constant witnesses of peace. . .*

from the Vatican, 10 January 2026

Writing to my fellow Sisters and Brothers in the last quarterly newsletter, we were just entering 2026 as the year designated by the St. Margaret of Cortona Region as the “year of JPIC,” based upon initiatives planned for by the Region over a four-year period, and initiated following the Region’s Chapter of Mats in 2024.

We knew at that time that we were approaching the 800th anniversary of our Seraphic Father’s passing. The team tasked with planning the St. Margaret of Cortona 2026 Regional Retreat had already planned on the “Living Our Franciscan Charism” theme, including a spiritual talk on the significance of the 800th anniversary for us as Secular Franciscans. So imagine our planning team’s joy in learning that we will be coming together in this way as a region for what now *is also* a Franciscan Jubilee year!

In Pope Leo XIV’s letter to the Franciscan family just three days prior to his declaration of the Franciscan Jubilee Year, he writes:

*In commemorating the significant anniversary of the eighth centenary of his passing, I wish to join spiritually with the entire Franciscan Family and with all those who will take part in the commemorative events, hoping that the message of peace may find a profound echo in the Church and society today.*

from the Vatican, 7 January 2026

In the same letter, our Holy Father continues:

*. . . may the example and spiritual legacy of this Saint, strong in faith, steadfast in hope and ardent in active charity towards his neighbor, inspire in everyone the importance of trusting in the Lord, of living a life faithful to the Gospel, and of accepting and illuminating every circumstance and action of life with faith and prayer.*

from the Vatican, 7 January 2026

Fr. Stan Fortuna, CFR, the retreat master for “Living Our Franciscan Charism,” is joyful to be leading our annual retreat in this special Jubilee year. “800 years measures 1226 to 2026. Francesco himself is immeasurable,” Fr. Stan explained, in a recent conversation. “As one of his sons. . . More than ever, he holds me spellbound, firing me to love Jesus and His Church, and every single person on the planet, without exception.”

Our St. Margaret of Cortona Region Minister Gary Burton said that he too felt “blessed by this special Franciscan Jubilee,” and reminds us also about the plenary indulgences associated with the Jubilee. One source of additional guidance is our own OFS national website [www.secularfranciscansusa.org/jubilee-year-of-saint-francis/](http://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/jubilee-year-of-saint-francis/).

Many thanks to the volunteers planning the annual retreat, most of them on the JPIC team because of the theme. As we all know, JPIC lies in the heart of our Franciscan charism, rooted in the Rule and Catholic social teaching.

There will be spiritual talks on the 800th anniversary, Love for the Poor, “Life to Gospel and Gospel to Life,” and “What is Ours to Do.” In addition, fellow Secular Franciscans will share how this core JPIC aspect of our charism intersects with formation, multicultural, and interfaith initiatives. The weekend also will be full of engagement and sharing of the apostolates in which our Fraternities are involved. We pray for a Holy Spirit filled gathering, with opportunities for prayer, Mass, and Adoration.

On a practical note, the retreat is June 5 - 7 at Priest Field Spiritual Center in Kearneysville, West Virginia. See the flyer in this newsletter for more details on what is planned. Because of the Retreat’s focus on our Franciscan Charism, please encourage candidates, inquirers, and newly professed to attend. Personally, I went to my first annual regional retreat as a candidate, and it was a meaningful part of my Franciscan journey. Of course, it is intended not only for Fraternity leadership, formation directors, JPIC animators, and other servant leaders but. . . for anyone looking to reignite their Franciscan charism.

### **Prayer for Peace**

At the time this newsletter is going to press, our nation is at war. Following is a prayer written by Pope Leo XIV in that same January 7 address to the Franciscan community. It feels full of meaning at this time.

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

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

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

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

from the Vatican, 7 January 2026

As we continue on our Franciscan journey, 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 teaching and the Secular Franciscan Rule in all aspects of our professed lives.

### **JPIC NEWS AND UPDATES**

#### **DILEXI TE – A ZOOM CONVERSATION AMONG SECULAR FRANCISCANS**

Join us on Monday, March 9 for the second of a two-part zoom conversation on Dilexi Te, the Holy Father’s new apostolic exhortation. The discussion of “love for the poor” will focus on how the Church teaching influences

us as Secular Franciscans. Part One on February 23 addressed Chapters 1 and 2. The March 9 call starts at 7:30 PM and covers Chapters 3, 4, and 5. If you are not already registered, please do so at:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/vD4tnwr2TBCT2xau6bM1JQ>

You are welcome to attend the Part Two session, whether or not you attended Part One.

### **SOCIAL JUSTICE: AN INTERFAITH CONVERSATION WITH RABBI JON CUTLER**

With so much overlap between JPIC and other aspects of our OFS charism, the Region is planning a joint multicultural-interfaith-JPIC event. Look for more information by email. Thanks to Regional Multicultural Chair Sita Chakrawarti, OFS and Regional Interfaith/Ecumenical Chair Mike Huether, OFS for their planning efforts.

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

Join us for the “Living Our Franciscan Charism,” the 2026 St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Retreat to be held at Priest Field Spiritual 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. See the flyer in this newsletter, which includes a registration link. **Fees are discounted for early registration through March 15.** 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. If you are interested in a topic not listed here, let us know and we may be able to work with you on it. 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.

### **ZOOM TEACHING ON USCCB SPECIAL MESSAGE ON IMMIGRATION**

Thanks to our National JPIC Animator Joe Makley for joining us in December for a zoom conversation on the Bishops’ Letter on Immigration, as well as our own National OFS Statement on Immigration. If you are interested in

resources on this issue and were unable to attend, please contact us and we will send you more information and links. Thanks also to Janice Benton, OFS, Gary Burton, OFS, Anne Mulqueen, OFS, and Michele Dunne, OFS, for their participation on the call. For fraternities engaged in this important mission, continue to share with us your work, so we may put Fraternities and individuals in contact with each other to share and inspire.

### **PRAYERS FOR QUEEN OF PEACE REGION**

As many of you already know, in our reaching out in January to JPIC leadership at our sister OFS Queen of Peace Region, which includes Minneapolis, we were asked to remember them in our prayers. Let us please continue to do so.

Thanks also to Toby Harkleroad, OFS for his inspiring conversation with OFS zoom participants on Toby’s trip to Minneapolis in January for an interfaith gathering of spiritual leaders to advocate on immigration issues. Toby discussed how he discerned what was “his to do,” as well as what he encountered on his journey.

### **MORE JPIC NEWS**

Please consider supporting the Lenten H2O Water Project. See the full page flyer in this newsletter for more information on this meaningful OFS program.

Connect with events sponsored by Franciscan Action Network (FAN) at [www.franciscanaction.org/events/](http://www.franciscanaction.org/events/)

Secular Franciscans across multiple fraternities participated in this year’s Right to Life March, both in Washington, DC in January and at other state sites.

Thanks to the Missionaries of Charity Sisters in Washington, DC for hosting a Lenten Day of Reflection to thank its volunteers. Secular Franciscans from several fraternities support the Sisters’ work in various ways.

Finally, please prayerfully remember the plight of women on International Women’s Day on March 8. And look for more news from the region as we approach Earth Day on April 22.

### **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**

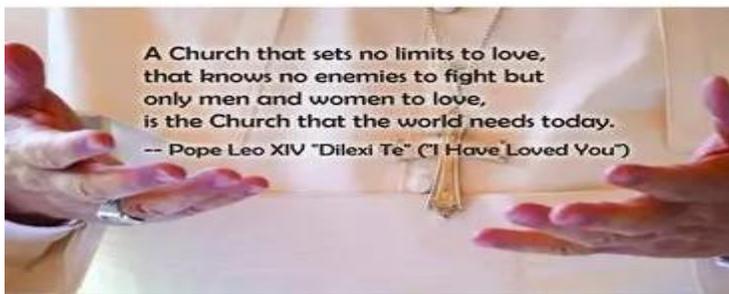
Please contact Pat Boye, OFS or a member of the JPIC team at [jplicmoc@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:jplicmoc@secularfranciscan.org). If you are a JPIC coordinator at your local fraternity but not on our email list, please let us hear from you.

Pace e bene,  
Pat Boye, OFS  
Regional JPIC Chair

## ***Dilexi Te* and Our Franciscan Charism A Conversation Among Secular Franciscans Part Two: Monday, March 9**

In October 2025, not coincidentally on the feast of our Seraphic Father, Pope Leo XIV released his first apostolic exhortation *Dilexi Te*. Addressing all Christians, our Holy Father describes the close relationship between our love for the poor and our love for the Lord.

Listen and share your own thoughts on *Dilexi Te*, Catholic social teaching on the poor, how it relates to our Rule, and its special significance for Secular Franciscans.



**Join Secular Franciscans in the  
St. Margaret of Cortona Region  
on the second of  
a two-part ZOOM CALL**

**Monday, March 9  
7:30 to 8:45 pm ET**

**The February 23 call focused on *Dilexi Te* Chapters 1 and 2, with Chapters 3 through 5 to be discussed on the March 9 call. You are welcome to attend on March 9, whether or not you attended Part One.**

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

**NEW REGISTRATION LINK: If you are not already registered, please do so at:**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/vD4tnwr2TBCT2xau6bM1JQ>

**REGISTER in advance at the following link to receive login information for the call.**

**New registrants will receive links to additional resources, including the *Dilexi Te* document.**

**THE PROGRAM IS FREE OF CHARGE. However, a voluntary contribution allows us to cover administrative costs and continue to bring you future JPIC-themed programs.**

**To MAKE A VOLUNTARY CONTRIBUTION, please use the following link.**

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409094DAAA72EAAF94-62374431-dilexi#/>

**Closed captioning and ASL Interpreting will be available for Deaf and Hard of Hearing participants.**



## Secular Franciscan Order - USA

# H2O Project

The Lenten H2O Project is an easy way for our entire fraternity to take collective action for the poor who have no access to clean drinking water. During Lent, whenever you would normally buy a coffee or soda, have water instead, and put aside the money saved. Also make a note to focus on and appreciate the clean water that is so available to us, say a prayer, and think of our brothers and sisters who live without clean tap water. Lent is the promotion, but contributions are accepted all year. One member said "I will just add up my coffee cost for all of lent, and send in a check to match that." Use Apostolic creativity!



Lord, may we never again take for granted a drop of Sister Water, “so precious and pure,” so necessary to our bodies, and integral to all life on our sister Mother Earth.

May we never tire in our efforts to assist those who are deprived of clean water to obtain a steady supply, and always strive for their dignity and health, as much as for our own.

And may we always praise you, whose creation is miraculous and beautiful beyond our understanding. Amen

Photo of a completed well for a family in the Bolivian Altiplano, funded by an H2O Project grant. (Jan. 29, 2026.) *“It is truly a miracle for people who have been drinking from an improvised well, or simply an open pit where the animals also drink (while sometimes walking in the water), to have a protected groundwater source that has easy access for their family.”* Jason Obergfell, of Suma Jayma Project

*Please send all contributions to:*  
H2O Lenten Project,  
c/o Steve Roszart OFS  
National Treasurer  
20487 N 263rd Dr.  
Buckeye, AZ 85396.



*Make the check payable to:*  
**OFS-USA**  
with ‘H2O Project’ in the memo line.  
Thank you for your contributions!

Last year, your donations helped bring clean water to:  
- two families on the Bolivian Altiplano,  
- deep well drilling at a Franciscan school in a remote area of Kenya,  
- and well drilling in Tanzania.  
On behalf of these communities, thank you!

### SERAPHIC FATHER’S REMAINS VENERATED

For the first time in 800 years, the remains of St. Francis are on display for an extended public viewing and veneration, from February 22 to March 22. With our Holy Father’s blessing, the skeletal remains of St. Francis were exhumed and placed on a glass enclosed table in the crypt of the Basilica of Saint Francis of Assisi.

Coinciding with the Franciscan Jubilee Year that marks 800 years since his passing, pilgrims to the viewing include some of our own Franciscan family.

Fr. Stan Fortuna, CFR has been to Assisi over the years “more times” than he can remember. “Every time I have been to Assisi is special. This time will be unique. . . Francesco was overwhelmed by Jesus,” Fr. Stan explains. “Thus Francesco was and is himself overwhelming . . . in his life, in his spirit, and in his bones.”

Fr. Stan said that he will remember the Secular Franciscans of the St. Margaret of Cortona Region in prayer during his veneration of our Seraphic Father. We will have an opportunity to hear more about Fr. Stan’s visit when he leads our 2026 Regional Retreat on June 5 - 7 at Priest Field Spiritual Center.

Blessed Solanus Casey Fraternity Minister Thom Partenope is another Franciscan pilgrim planning to venerate our Seraphic Father in Assisi. For Thom, the opportunity to be present was an “Easter season surprise.” Thom planned his trip last year, as a part of a church group’s pilgrimage. And only in recent days, he was pleased to learn that his pilgrimage coincided with the public display and veneration of our Seraphic Father.

*We imagine there may be others in our Region making the pilgrimage to Assisi. Let us hear from you at [2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org). Whether or not you are able to attend the June 5 - 7 Regional Retreat with Fr. Stan, we would like to share your stories.*



LIVING OUR FRANCISCAN CHARISM  
St. Margaret of Cortona Regional Retreat  
June 5 -7, 2026  
Priest Field Pastoral Center, Kearneysville, WV



Our St. Margaret of Cortona Annual Retreat celebrates the Region's 2026 "Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation" theme in 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, workplace, and local and global communities. Come prepared to share, listen, and engage.

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND**

Everyone, but especially:  
All those with a desire to reignite our Franciscan charism  
Fraternity JPIC Animators and Formation Directors  
Fraternity and Regional Leadership  
Newly Professed, Candidates, and Inquirers  
Fraternities who do not have their own annual retreat  
All those who feel called to discern what is "ours to do"

**WHAT TO EXPECT**

Rev. Stan Fortuna, CFR is our retreat master. A founding member of the Franciscan Friars of the Renewal, Fr. Stan is beloved by many Secular Franciscans and has led other retreats for Fraternities in the region. He is also an accomplished professional musician, composer, and poet. Founded in 1987, the CFRs work with the poorest of the poor in the Bronx and around the world.

Known for his stirring homilies, Fr. Stan's talks will include themes such as Love for the Poor, Life to Gospel and Gospel to Life, Discerning What is "Ours to Do," and the special significance of the 800th Anniversary of the Passing of Our Seraphic Father. Mass will be celebrated on Saturday and Sunday mornings. And of course, there will be Adoration and the Liturgy of the Hours. Time for Confession may be limited, as Fr. Stan is the only priest attending.

In addition, the JPIC team planning the retreat will host at least two panels, comprised of our own Brothers and Sisters, including discussion of:

Fraternity Apostolates Across the Region, including examples of charitable and advocacy work with those who are homeless, immigrants, and the environment.

JPIC's broader mission across Fraternities, our families, the workplace, and in our local and global communities.

How JPIC intersects with the region's formation, multicultural, and interfaith initiatives; and how we are guided by our OFS Rule.

Finally, there will be some time in the evening or over meals, to relax and interact with our Sisters and Brothers. For those so inclined, there is an exercise room and a walking trail in the woods. A member of our planning team recently said that the only thing Secular Franciscans like better than getting together to eat is getting together to sing. Given that Fr. Stan is a musician, it is likely that singing and music will also be a part of what to expect on the weekend.

Goals for the Retreat include:

CARE FOR CREATION - Registrants will receive more information closer to the retreat on how we plan to recycle, reuse, carpool, and take other measures to care for creation.



**GIVING BACK** - Registrants will be asked to bring a canned good or nonperishable food item to the retreat. Along with any unopened snacks, we will donate these items to a local food bank with the assistance of local Secular Franciscans.

**INCLUDE EVERYONE** - We want to make every attempt to simply include everyone. If you are disabled and need assistance, we may be able to match you with a volunteer. If you need a language Interpreter/Translator, please let us know your needs. We are working on bringing in an ASL Interpreter for those who are Deaf. And if you want to attend the retreat but are unable to drive, plan early and let us try to help you find a ride with someone else from your area.

The retreat will begin on Friday, June 5, with registration from 3:00 to 5:00 PM. We will end on Sunday, June 7 at 12 noon. Meals provided are dinner on Friday, breakfast/lunch/dinner on Saturday, and breakfast on Sunday.

### **RETREAT FEES AND PAYMENT**

Check out the registration site for more details regarding retreat fees, deadlines, and the registration process. Priest Field offers mostly shared double rooms. There are a limited number of single rooms and even a dorm/bunk house available. Double and single rooms are \$310 and \$350 per person, including all retreat fees and meals. With an early registration option, register before March 15 and receive a discounted \$285 or \$325 rate.

The dorm/bunk house is \$250 per person, and designated for women only. A commuter rate of \$150 includes all retreat fees and meals for the 3-day retreat, with no overnight room. For all registration options, register and send payment by check or Zelle. Credit card payment is also an option, but there is an additional processing fee added at checkout. Again, please see a more detailed description on the registration site.

REGISTER NOW:

<https://www.signupgenius.com/go/409094DAAA72EAAF94-62122762-2026>

Contact [2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org](mailto:2026MOCRetreat@secularfranciscan.org) for more information

