

The Communio

Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region
Serving Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina & South Carolina



Celebrating the Season of Creation
Sept. 1-Oct. 4, 2024
See Page 5 for details

Minister's Message

By Ellen Ferrone, OFS
BSSF Regional Minister

Blessings my dear sisters and brothers,

ARG has just completed. What a joyful time.

Reflecting on the Lectio Divina Prayer, John 15:5, 11, 15-17

"I am the vine you are the branches."



BSSF Spiritual Assistant Fr. Bob Menard, OFM, and Regional Minister Ellen Ferrone, OFS at ARG in Black Mountain.
Photo by Judith Walsh

It touched me deeply as I was reflecting. Here we all are branches of the Lord, 200+ Seculars gathered for worship, formation and fellowship.

"Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit..."

We remain in the Lord to bear much fruit, this is evidenced by our love for each other, serving our sisters and brothers who can no longer serve and need our assistance and the world we serve with our apostolates.

"I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete"

The feeling of joy was palatable. Our liturgies were beautifully celebrated by Fr Jerome Wolbert, OFM, and Fr. Bob Menard, OFM. These celebrations were enhanced with our lectors, vocalists, musicians guitarists and pianist. The smiles, the hugs, the laughter. A

Secular Franciscan sister once said to me that being together in a gathering was like being embraced in a big, long hug. That's what the weekend was for me.

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"Because I have told you everything I have heard from the Father".

As Jesus feeds his followers, so too we were fed by Fr Bob's presentation on the Stigmata. The wonderful homilies, the enthusiasm of Becky Bresnehan, OFS, presentation on Justice & Peace. Our Q& A sessions where we go deeper into our Franciscan Spirituality and servant leadership.

"It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you".

Yes, we were all chosen by our loving Savior; first to our Catholic Faith and then to our calling to be Secular Franciscans. Who do I invite to walk this faith journey with me?

"and appointed you to go and bear much fruit that will remain..."

We are blessed by the generosity of our God and how the Holy Spirit is calling us to all go and share the good news as Secular Franciscans.

"This I command you; love one another."

And we do!

Thank you to all who helped in the planning for ARG 2024, the preparation for our visitation, for special guests, for those who kept everything on track and moving forward. For the gift of our visitors and the Visitation.

Peace and love,
Ellen



Spiritual Assistant Installed at ARG New Training Begins in November

Fr. Bob Menard, OFM, regional spiritual assistant, installed Theresa Christie, OFS, as the newest spiritual assistant during Mass at the Annual Regional Gathering.

Theresa is a member of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary fraternity in Augusta, GA.

Four more spiritual assistants are in training and will be installed next year.

A new spiritual assistant training program will begin Nov. 8-10 at the Living Waters Retreat Center in Maggie Valley, NC. Applications are due by Oct. 15 to regional minister Ellen Ferrone, OFS.

For more information, visit the [Spiritual Assistant's Training Program webpage](#).

'The Lord Gave Me Sisters and Brothers'--Thankfully

By Lynn Oeser, OFS
BSSF Region Formation Director

[View the video about the 30-year journey of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region.](#)

My Dear Sisters and Brothers,
Grace and Peace to you!

I write this the Monday after ARG. What a joy to celebrate with sisters and brothers: 30 years a region, 800 years of the gift of the stigmata, the Feast of St. Clare AND a Visitation! Wow!

As I was reviewing the BSSF Guidelines for Formation Documents a few months ago I became more and more amazed at the work that the early councils put into the development of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region and how blessed we are that they did.

I remember back to my first ARG in 2015. I was an orientee at the time and many of the brothers and sisters from earlier days were living, healthy and present. Little did I know at the time that they were giants and I would be walking in their footsteps. I am humbled.

When the ARG planning committee was talking about ways to celebrate I had a vision of a story corps style audio slideshow with memories from "long timers" about the birth of the BSSF Region. I had no clue how to make it happen. I wasn't even sure that it could be done. I gave it to the Lord and I prayed, *Lord, this is your order, this is your region. If this story is to be told and remembered, show me how and please send help. St. Francis and St. Clare, pray for us.*

My first email was to brother Michael Hancock, OFS. I described what I had in mind and asked if it was even possible with limited resources and abilities. He assured me that it could be done and offered some suggestions and support.

I remembered that our sister and JPIC Animator, Allison Salerno OFS, is a journalist and does audio production. I reached out to Allison and she joyfully said yes to take part in the project. We talked and planned. I reached out to ministers and collected photos and images, and Allison organized the interview process giving instruction on the interview itself and a recording.

The project was going along smoothly when we ran into a glitch. We learned that we would be unable to present the project at ARG as planned because we needed to be in a meeting with our national visitors.

Dear Lord, please show us the way and send us the help. St. Francis and St. Clare, pray for us.

When we reported on the progress of the project at the regional executive council meeting, we shared details of the glitch. Sister Sharon Winzeler, our Communion editor, spoke up. She graciously and reassuringly offered to take the audio and the slide show and make a video that could simply be played for our sisters and brothers at ARG.

Here I am, Lord, I have come to do your will. Heb10:9

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Allison used her gifts on the audio production, and Sharon guided and helped me with the slides and she created the video. They did a really nice job. The story was told in a beautiful way.

I didn't know what to do, I asked the Lord and He Lord blessed me with sisters and brothers.

How much I have learned and grown since 2015. My cup runneth over.



Pictured at left in 2015, from left to right, were orientees Lee Cunningham, Ellen Ferrone, and Lynn Oeser.

Now all are permanently professed and serve as regional councilor, regional minister, and regional formation director, respectively. What a difference nine years makes.

Formation Bulletin Board

Save the date from Vickie Click, OFS, chair, NAFRA Centenary Task Force:

- We will celebrate the 800th anniversary of St. Francis of Assisi receiving the stigmata at a national Zoom webinar on Sunday, Oct. 6. Times are: 3 p.m. Eastern/2 p.m. Center/1 p.m. Mountain/Noon Pacific. Duration will be 60-75 minutes. Registration info will be distributed a month in advance.
- [Centenary Resource Page](#)—2024 Celebrating the Gift of the Stigmata and 2025 Celebrating the Canticle of the Creatures.
- [Newly updated Ritual is now available at the Gospel to Life Bookstore.](#)
- [Resources for the Season of Creation are available.](#)
- [Initial and Ongoing Formation Resources](#)



Lynn Oeser, OFS, is the formation director at the Fraternity of Brother Francis in Newton, NC, and is regional formation director.

Season of Creation Provides Chance to Step Up as Stewards

By Allison Salerno, OFS

BSSF Region Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation Animator

Recently Fr. Bob Menard, OFM, our Spiritual Assistant, mentioned to me that each year, Catholics join Christians across the globe to celebrate the Season of Creation, beginning Sept. 1 - the World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation until the Feast of St. Francis on Oct. 4.

What can we do as fraternities to observe this season?

Pope Francis tells us this season gives “individual believers and communities a fitting opportunity to reaffirm their personal vocation to be stewards of creation, to thank God for the wonderful handiwork which he has entrusted to our care, and to implore his help for the protection of creation as well as his pardon for the sins committed against the world in which we live.”

The United States Conference of Bishops [offers tips](#) on how best to observe the season.

Here are some of their suggestions. Which ones appeal to you?

1. In your daily life, try to identify the ways in which you can choose reusables, rather than disposables, such as coffee mugs, reusable bags, or cloth napkins, and commit to making one change during this month.(Maybe try to avoid using disposable items at your fraternity meeting)
2. Before and after meals, say a short prayer of thanksgiving for the lifegiving food that sustains and nourishes us. Briefly consider how all nourishment ultimately comes from the earth, and give thanks for all the human hands that helped bring this food to your table.
3. In calling for a deep "ecological conversion," Pope Francis has emphasized the importance of examining one's own conscience, of recognizing one's sins against creation, however great or small. Seeing the interconnectedness of our world leads to an understanding that “[e]very violation of solidarity and civic friendship harms the environment” (Caritas in Veritate, no. 51). We invite you to bring these sins to confession and to perform a spiritual work of mercy for our common home, such as an act of “grateful contemplation of God’s world” (Laudato Si’, no. 214)
4. As I mentioned in my last Communion column, organize a litter clean up this fall in your community. And let me know how it goes!

Our rule compels us to see how all of creation is a web of life soaked with the marks of our Creator. *“Moreover they should respect all creatures, animate and inanimate, which “bear the imprint of the Most High,” and they should strive to move from the temptation of exploiting creation to the Franciscan concept of universal kinship.”*




Allison Salerno, OFS, is a member of the Fraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis in Johns Creek, Georgia.



This is the area outside the walls of Assisi where St. Francis is thought to have composed “The Canticle of the Creatures,” in the Umbrian dialect of Italian. St. Francis believed that the common people should be able to pray in their own language instead of Latin. Today the world celebrates the Season of Creation and honors St. Francis by celebrating it in the weeks leading up to his feast day on Oct. 4. Find more Season of Creation resources at <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/wp-content/uploads/JPIC-Resource-Bulletin-08.23.2024.pdf>

photo by Sharon Winzeler, OFS

CONGRATULATIONS

 **Bishop Mark Beckman**

From the Secular Franciscans

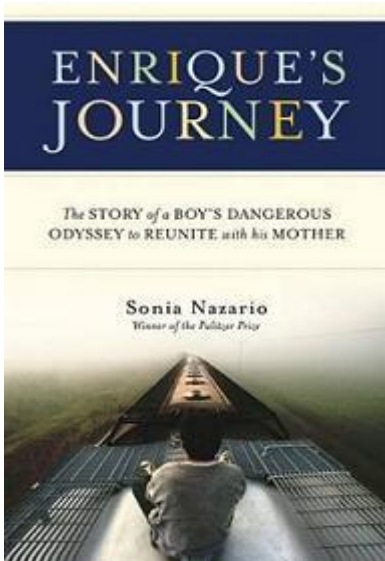
Sts. Francis & Clare Fraternity Knoxville, TN <small>saintsfrancisandclareknoxville.com</small>	Channel of Peace Fraternity Chattanooga, TN <small>channelofpeace-sfo.org</small>
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*“I have done what was mine to do,
may Christ now teach you what you are to do”*

- St. Francis of Assisi

Discussing Enrique's Journey

by David Cruz-Urbe, OFS
Regional Multicultural Animator



This past May, members of our region, along with Secular Franciscans from across the United States, participated in a Zoom reading group sponsored by the regional MCC. We read and discussed the book *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to be Reunited with his Mother*, by the Pulitzer prize winning journalist Sonia Nazario.

It is the true story of Enrique, whose mother, driven by abject poverty and her inability to support her children, left them behind in Honduras to find work in the United States.

A decade later, when Enrique was 15, he himself decided to go find his mother, then working in South Carolina. He attempted to make the dangerous trip seven times before he succeeded, risking his life traveling on the top of trains through broiling heat and freezing cold, getting robbed and beaten by drug gangs and corrupt immigration police.

He also met a wide swathe of ordinary people, themselves poor, who look out for the Central American immigrants and try to help them on their journey. Though reunited with his mother, it is not a storybook ending, as Enrique and his mother discover that the other is not the person they remember from a decade before, and they must deal with years of pent up anger and resentment.

Our discussion was wide-ranging: we talked about our own ancestors and their experience coming to America, as well as about our friends and fellow parishioners who are recent immigrants.

Two members of our group had done missionary work in Honduras and could describe their own experience of the extreme poverty in that country. Another member of the group had worked extensively with immigrants here in the US, and described the problems they confronted once they were here.

As parents we explored the choices made by Enrique's mother and their consequences. It was an eye-opening experience for all participants as we looked at the problem of illegal immigration, the real people involved, and what our response should be, as individuals and as a nation, to undocumented immigrants.

This book is a great opportunity for ongoing formation in your fraternities, bringing our Catholic and Franciscan charism to bear on this social issue that impacts all of us.

On the next page, you can find the reading schedule and discussion questions we used for the reading group. If you need any help using this material, or if questions come up that you want help in answering, please feel free to contact me.

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Readings and discussion questions for *Enrique's Journey*

Week 1: Prologue, Chapters 1-2

- 1) What motivated Sonia Nazario to write this book? What has motivated you to read it and join this discussion group?
- 2) The United States has often been referred to as a “nation of immigrants.” What does that mean to you? How does Enrique’s story compare to how you thought about this before?
- 3) Do you have any personal experience as an immigrant? Does anyone in your immediate family or friends? What have you learned from their experience? Do you think it is typical?
- 4) What is one scene or image from Enrique’s life in Honduras that struck you? Why? What about in the life of his mother Lourdes in the United States?

Week 2: Chapters 3-4

- 1) In our discussion last week, we talked a lot about the generosity of the poor. However, when Enrique enters Chiapas, the southernmost state in Mexico, his experience is quite different: people are openly hostile to the migrants, and they are subjected to a lot of crime and violence. Why do you think that happens? What turns people away from a more generous response? How can we keep ourselves from having the same response?
- 2) On the other hand, in the states of Oaxaca and Veracruz, migrants receive a much more positive and affirming welcome. Of the many stories that the author tells about the people reaching out to migrants, was there any one in particular that spoke to you? If so, which one, and why?
- 3) Why do you think the people in these states are led to do these things, including committing civil disobedience and resisting attempts by the police and immigration authorities to detain migrants? What role does their faith, and the example of their priests and bishops play in this? What can we take from their example, as Secular Franciscans?
- 4) What do you think Enrique learned about himself and others during his journey across Mexico?
- 5) Having reached the middle of the book, are there any insights or feelings that you want to share? What do you think you have learned so far?



David Cruz-Urbe, OFS, is a member of St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity in Bessemer, AL, and serves as the BSSF Regional Multi-Cultural Commission Chair.

Some 200 Secular Franciscans Praise, Worship and Celebrate at ARG

Filled with the joy of prayer, service, work, fellowship, and laughter, members brought the Franciscan spirit alive at the Annual Regional Gathering held Aug. 9-11 in Black Mountain, NC.

Pictured below:

- A full choir and musicians accompanied daily mass.
- Members led the procession before Sunday Mass with their fraternity banners
- Deacon Phil Rzewnicki, OFS, and Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, preside at Mass.
- Fraternity T-shirts celebrated the 800th anniversary of Francis's stigmata and the 30th anniversary of the BSSF Region.



Annual Regional Gathering (continued)

- Members of the Fraternity of St. Clare in Winston-Salem, NC, led a memorial service for our recently deceased brothers and sisters.
- So many members helped construct gleaning bags for the Society of St. Andrew that all 5,000 of them were completed by Saturday morning.



Encouraging Diversity in Fraternities

By David Cruz-Uribe, OFS, Regional MCC animator
and Allison Salerno, OFS, Regional JPIC animator

At the Annual Regional gathering (ARG), we were encouraged by how many brothers and sisters showed up for our session on how to start conversations within local fraternities about racism. More than 30 people attended; they gathered in groups to answer questions provoked by our region's letter on racism. Almost everyone there felt that the following question was of great importance:

Have you ever experienced a situation - either within the order or in your daily life - where you witnessed a person of color being treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity? How did it make you feel? What can you take from that experience?

All the questions they discussed are posted on the regional website in the materials on racism.

During their discussions, the groups developed several questions that they felt should also be included in any discussion. Some of them:

- *Why can't we see this (i.e., racism happening in front of us)?*
- *How does fear play a role in racism?*
- *How does racism affect the soul?*
- *How do we sometimes personally encourage or participate in racism?*

These questions can make us uncomfortable. In the United States, our parishes are growing more diverse; in 2007, the percentage of Catholics identifying as White was 65 percent. By 2014 that percentage had dropped to 59 percent, as more of us worshipers identify as Black, Asian, and Latino, according to surveys from the Pew Research Center.

At the ARG, some session participants approached us afterwards and asked what they can do to attract vocations to their fraternities that would better reflect the diversity of their parishes. We want to share a few ideas right away to help you get started.

Allison called Tabitha Whang, OFS, who is one of the MCC animators for the Stigmata of St. Francis fraternity in Johns Creek, Georgia, to get her perspective. Tabitha immigrated to the United States from South Korea 40 years ago and said a lack of English skills can be an impediment to joining an English-language fraternity.

“For me, in my personal experience, it was hard,” to go through formation in an English-language fraternity. While Tabitha has strong speaking and comprehension skills, writing answers in English was challenging. She professed five years ago in Dallas, Texas in a fraternity that had Spanish and Korean speakers as well as Secular Franciscans whose first language was English. We may not be able to speak their language, but if we are mindful about these problems and look for creative solutions, we can bridge this gap.

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A good first step to engaging more diverse population, Tabitha said, is to contact the parish priest and ask who ministers to those populations.

“Make a connection,” Tabitha said. “That’s a good starting point. Some priests are very open and can introduce us to the congregation.” The person ministering to these populations can also help you identify people who are bilingual or able to bridge cultural differences, making outreach easier.



Food, such as the lumpia offered at David’s fraternity meeting, attracts visitors to ‘Come and See’ what fraternities are all about.

David said that food is a great vehicle for uniting people of different cultures. He recalled an experience in his parish in Oakland, California, while he was in graduate school. A group of Filipinos had started attending mass, and even had a choir that offered to sing at one of our masses. They seemed distant and did not interact with the rest of the parish. A permanent deacon who ran the Filipino ministry for the diocese suggested to the pastor and parish council that we invite them to an event, but told us, “they will not believe you are serious unless you ask them to bring food.” So we did exactly that, and they all came, bringing an incredible selection of dishes to share. They were soon an active part of the parish.

So one possibility is to organize a “Come and See” event, and ask various groups in your parish or area to attend, but make eating together a part of the event, and ask everyone to bring something to share. The combinations may be unusual—in Oakland we had BBQ, mac and cheese, lumpia, and stir-fried noodles!--but the sharing will help bring people closer together.

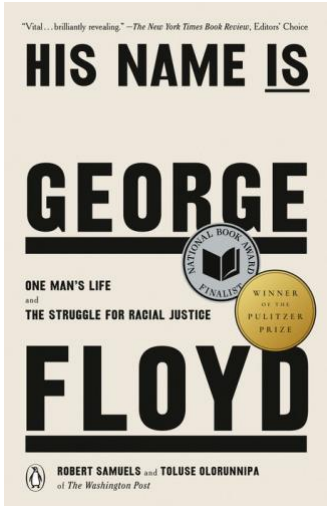
These are just a few ideas. We encourage you to be creative, to be, as Pope Francis put it “joyful missionaries” of the gospel and of our Franciscan charism. If something works, tell us about it.



New Council at St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity

The new council of St. Joseph Cupertino Fraternity in Bessemer, AL, left to right: Roxanne Bessette, OFS, councilor; Richard Taylor, OFS, vice minister; David Cruz-Uribe, OFS, minister; Karen Thorne, OFS, treasurer; Gabrielle Cruz-Uribe, OFS, formation director; and Lannie Newman, OFS, councilor. Not pictured is Kelly Horwitz, OFS, secretary.

Multicultural Commission Fall Book Selection



The Multicultural Commission is organizing another reading group for this fall. The book is *His Name is George Floyd: One Man's Life and the Struggle for Racial Justice*, by Robert Samuels and Toluse Olorunnipa.

This book, based on thousands of hours of investigative reporting, including extensive interviews with George Floyd's family and friends, tells the story of his life: his successes, his failures, and his missed opportunities.

It also examines the broad social forces that led to his death at the hands of the Minneapolis police and the protest and reform movement that it catalyzed. It won the Pulitzer Prize and was a National Book Award finalist.

The book group will meet on Zoom four times, once a week, starting in late September or early October.

If you are interested in participating, please send an email to David Cruz-Urbe OFS, david.cruzuribe1963@gmail.com.

Copies of the book may be ordered from betterworldbooks.com or from bookshop.org, or your local bookstore.

BROTHERS AND SISTERS OF ST. FRANCIS SCHEDULE OF VISITATIONS AND ELECTIONS 2024 - 2025

2024

Date	Minister	Fraternity	E/V	Councilor	Spiritual Assistant
Sept 14*	Laura Cleary	Immaculate Conception, Jonesboro, GA	E	Margi Williams	Fr. Paul Pantiru, OFM
Oct 12*	Cindy Bryan	Crucified Christ, North Charleston, SC	E	Becky Bresnahan	Sr Kathy Adamski, OSF
Nov 17- 18*	Cathy Champon	St Clare, Ashville, NC	V	Betti Longinotti	Joanita Nellenbach
Nov 23*	Brenda Harris	St Francis of the Hill, Hendersonville, NC	E	JC Liu	Charlie Comberrel

* confirmed

Seven Dolores Contributes to Fort Campbell Community



The Seven Dolores of the Blessed Virgin Fraternity Apostolate: Fort Campbell Ministry

Our Fort Campbell Apostolate began in July 2023. We chose to support this Ministry as our members are scattered throughout Middle Tennessee (and Alabama). Rather than forming an apostolate to serve one town/city, we thought that supporting the military would be ideal as all towns where our members live may have soldiers residing in their area. Listed below is a brief description of this apostolate.

The Fort Campbell Ministry was started several years ago by a retired military family who were members of St. Philip Parish. The family approached the chaplain of the Soldier's Catholic Chapel of Fort Campbell with an idea to provide some type of support to families of Ft. Campbell. The chaplain liked the idea and thus the St. Philip/Ft. Campbell ministry was born. The chaplain indicated that needs were greatest among the very young families with babies and small children and that diapers, baby wipes, formula/baby food would help fill those needs. Our fraternity appreciates the recent Apostolic Bequest for \$300 from the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region.

Profession at St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, NC



St. Francis of the Hills Fraternity, Hendersonville, N.C., celebrated the Rite of Profession on July 6 with Mass in Our Lady of the Angels Chapel at Immaculate Conception Catholic Church in Hendersonville, followed by a reception in the parish hall. Radiating joy: Mark Taylor, OFS, formation director (left); Margaret Cavagnaro, OFS, newly professed; Father Roberto Perez, OFM Cap., presider; Gina Roe, OFS, newly professed; Brenda Harris, OFS, minister. (Photo by Joanita M. Nellenbach, OFS)

Rite of Welcoming at Padre Pio Fraternity, Raleigh, NC



Six fraternity members were welcomed into candidacy on Sunday, Aug. 25, at a gathering of the Padre Pio Fraternity in Raleigh, NC. Spiritual Assistant Hugh Macsherry, OFM, led the ceremony.

New candidates are, from left to right: Dorothy Ann Pribish, OFS; Deborah Marusak, OFS; Stacy Lewis, OFS; John Price, OFS; Eyram Klu, OFS; and Courtney Cantrell, OFS.

Secretary's Report from Regional Fraternity Council Meeting

By Mary Sacavage, OFS
BSSF Regional Secretary

These are the highlights from **the Regional Fraternity Council Meeting of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region** held on Saturday, August 10, 2024, at Ridgecrest Conference Center.

Several Ministers shared examples of joint fraternity events held using **Joint Fraternity Grants** from the region. Members thought it was helpful and were especially grateful for the financial support.

Regional Fraternity Council (Regional Executive Council and ministers from each local Fraternity) will have a Zoom meeting on **Oct. 15** for the review and approval of the 2025 budget.

The Regional Treasurer suggested that it is important for **local fraternities to have a budget** to know how we spend our money. It is better to turn in receipts and get reimbursed rather than just making donations, so it gives the fraternity a better idea of expenses. The members could then give more to common fund in donations in lieu of the donations.

The Annual Regional Gathering in 2025 will be an **election year** for a new **Regional Executive Council**. The nominating committee will be announced at the October meeting. As REC and as ministers we should be looking at who will replace us.

Formation for **Spiritual Assistants Weekend retreat, 2025**—see who you might approach about becoming a Spiritual Assistant. We will seek a National Duns Scotus grant this year for an April 2025 meeting for a Spiritual Assistants' retreat. We will also ask local fraternities to support this financially.

National Goals: Vocations, Communications, Relationships—Lynn Oeser keeps this in the forefront for us. We are working on building relationships by reaching out.

ARG 2025: August 8-10, 2025

Multicultural Commission is seeking more people who speak Spanish or are bilingual.

Consider seeking an **Apostolate grant**. The fund still has approximately ½ of the funds still available for active ongoing apostolates. This year's ARG apostolate was a huge success—we finished tying all of the gleaning bags in record time—next year we may have TWO spools of mesh to tie!

Our Fraternal Visitors provided us with much food for thought. Consider things that we are grateful for from our regional council and fraternities as well as challenges we face. Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM, started this discussion by asking each member of REC to think of one word that describes the challenges for REC and local fraternities. Individuals shared a multitude of “one word” responses.

Consider attending the **Quinquennial in 2026. It will be in Lexington, KY, at the Marriot Resort and Spa from July 29 to Aug. 2, 2026.** Perhaps fraternities could consider scholarships. Please try to get people excited about attending.

How Healthy Are Your Knees?

By Margi Williams, OFS
BSSF Regional Councilor

How healthy are your knees? No, I don't mean physical health.

Let me explain. Recently, when I said something to my husband, his response was "you always." The first cousin of "you always" is "you never." Companion cousins are "you should" and "you shouldn't."

We've all heard these terms – from others or even from ourselves. When you hear these words, or are faced with difficult circumstances, how do you respond? What's the first thing out of your mouth? Do you have a knee-jerk reaction? Or, are your knees worn from being on them in prayer? Your knees are a sign of your spiritual health.

A knee-jerk reaction is an automatic, unthinking, emotional response that doesn't engage the brain. It is a response to anger, fear or other strong emotion. We hit the roof emotionally without thinking. We apply labels: Nazi, racist, misogynist, homophobe, fake, Lie, etc. We see knee-jerk reactions in ourselves, in others, and in the public narrative.

Knee-jerk reactions focus on perceived threats instead of opportunities. When we are tempted to respond emotionally, we can stop and focus on the opportunity instead. As kids we were told to "count to 10." As Franciscans, we can look to our Franciscan charism, engage in Franciscan dialogue, go to scripture - and pray!

Franciscan dialogue exemplifies our Franciscan charism by calling us to see Christ in all and to be messengers of peace. When we label, we shut down dialogue. Conversely, in Franciscan dialogue, with ourselves or with others, we listen, "we accept the experiences of others as real and valid," we seek to understand, then we "work together toward common understanding." Basically, we "Listen, Discern and Go Forth."

Scripture tells us to let our hearts be pure (Psalm 24:4-5) for out of the heart the mouth speaks (Luke 6:45). The book of James tells us about the power of the tongue (James 3:1-12) and we are told to put a guard over our mouth (Psalm 141:3). Instead, let our words be pleasing to our Lord (Psalm 19:15). How? By giving thanks (1 Thessalonians 5:18) and praising (Psalm 34:2). For thanksgiving and praise take us before the very throne of God. (Psalm 100:4).

How do we strengthen our spiritual knees? In prayer, especially praise and thanksgiving. Two very quick prayers are "Jesus I trust in you" and "Praise the Lord anyway (PTLA)." Back in 2020, a door closed in my life. When I found out I said "Jesus, I trust in you!" Very soon three new doors opened.

Once an evangelist fell through the stage while speaking. Next the audience saw two arms raised through the stage and a loud voice proclaiming PTLA. Finally, the Appendix of our Ritual gives us several prayers of praise. Cantic of Brother Sun, The Exhortation to the Praise of God, Praises of God and The Praises to Be Said at All the Hours show us St. Francis' love of praising the Lord.

BSSF Regional Executive Council Roster

Minister: Ellen Ferrone, OFS

Vice Minister: Martha Roman, OFS

Secretary: Mary Sacavage, OFS

Treasurer: Zubair Simonson, OFS

Formation Director: Lynn Oeser, OFS

Spiritual Assistant: Fr. Bob Menard, OFM

Area Councilors

Area 1: Margi Williams, OFS; Gabrielle Cruz-Uribe, OFS
AL: Bessemer; **GA:** Athens, Blairsville, Conyers, Duluth, Jonesboro;
TN: Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

Area 2: Becky Bresnahan, OFS; JC Liu, OFS
GA: Augusta, St. Simons Island; **NC:** Asheville, Charlotte, Hendersonville, Newton; **SC:** Aiken, Charleston, Columbia, Greenville, Hilton Head Island, Spartanburg

Area 3: Lee Cunningham, OFS; Betti Pettinati-Longinotti OFS
NC: Burlington, Elizabeth City, Fayetteville, Greensboro, Morehead City, Raleigh, Wilmington, Winston-Salem;
SC: Garden City

Archivist: Lee Cunningham, OFS

Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Animator: Allisen Salerno, OFS

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