

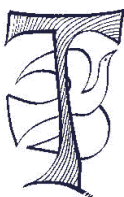
FALL 2026

Communio

That All May Be One
Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region



Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate



Minister's Letter:

Admonition XXVII Virtue Puts Vice to Flight

*Where there is charity and wisdom
There is neither fear nor ignorance.*

*Where there is patience and humility
There is neither anger nor disturbance.*

*Where there is poverty with joy
There is neither greed nor avarice.*

*Where there is rest and meditation
There is neither anxiety nor restlessness.*

*Where there is fear of the Lord to guard the entrance
There the enemy cannot have a place to enter.*

*Where there is a heart full of mercy and discernment
There is neither excess nor hardness of heart.*



Our Father Francis writes this Admonition near the end of his life, where he is turning inward, a reminder that the Christian life begins and remains with God by looking inward.

Charity is our complete response to the love which God has given us. Our God who loved us first, called us by our name. Wisdom comes from this same relationship, trusting that all comes from God, seeing the world through God's eyes. Through prayer can I attempt to even thinking of loving as God loves, to see my sisters, brothers and creation having the fingerprint of God.

Love opens the door to wisdom, without love thoughts are clouded with judgement and control, leaving no room for wisdom or charity.

Thinking of God's patience with me, can I take a breath, invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly offer some small level of patience to all.

Can I experience poverty with joy, the joy of being grateful for all God has provided. Where my heart is centered on God's joy, there is no need to cling to recognition or control. I trust that God will provide all that I need.

Do I take the time for rest and meditation? If I am rested, am I less anxious? Do I move the cares from my thoughts during meditation, building that relationship of trust with the Lord? Allowing myself to be grounded in the Lord, leaving no need to be anxious or restless.

Francis uses “fear of the Lord” which is trust in the Lord. I personally can relate better to “trust” vs “fear of the Lord”. If I am trusting in the Lord, then the sins of pride, resentment and despair won’t be able to enter my heart.

When I place my trust in God, trust knowing that God is merciful. I can then follow in God’s footsteps and be merciful.

So how can I live my life following this Admonition?

Maybe I can offer love instead of fear, patience instead of anger, generosity vs my need to control, mercy instead of a stubborn heart.

As Our Father Francis said, for up to now we have done nothing, let me begin again.

Peace and love

Your sister

Ellen

Reference: Sine Proprio; the Franciscan Art of Living Freely

Edited by: Casey Cole, OFM

FORMATION

A Pondering Thought



It seems fitting that the Feast of St. Francis falls on a Sunday in the 800 Centenary Year of the Easter of St. Francis. A Sunday, when the Feast of the Most High, the all Good, the Supreme Good always takes precedence over other feasts. How joyful the minority spirit of the Poverello of Assisi must be in that perfect union with his Creator God. How joyful it is for us, who follow the Way of St. Francis, to celebrate and adore our Lord with him in the company of all the angels and saints in perfect charity.

Humility, patience, perfect simplicity, and true peace of heart are all its aim, but above everything else it desires the fear of God, the divine wisdom and the divine love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. - St Francis of Assisi

Lynn Oeser, OFS, BSSF Regional Formation Director

Formation News

+ St. Michael's Lent Padre Pio Fraternity in Raleigh invites members in the region to join them in prayer as they observe St. Michael's Lent, one of the five lents that St. Francis observed in retreat with prayer, fasting and penance. The remaining dates are:

August 30, 2026. 7:00 PM

Sept 6, 2026 7:00 PM

Sept 20, 2026 7:00 PM

If you would like to participate contact Lynn at matcat01@hotmail.com and I will forward the Invitation.

+ Formation Forums and opportunity for formation Directors and Spiritual Assistants to share news and experience formation- all Professed are invited.

Calendar for 2026

Oct 21, 2026	Formation Forum W
Nov 19, 2026	Formation Forum TH
Dec 16, 2026	Formation Forum W

+ Recommended Resources

[The Life of St. Francis: A Compendium of Early Legends](#)

by: **Bret Thoman OFS**

[Sine Proprio: The Franciscan Art of Living Freely](#)

by: **Casey Cole OFM**

[An Annotated Study Version of Dilexi te](#)

[BSSF Formation Page](#)

[Secular Francisca Order-USA](#)



Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation



By Allison Salerno, OFS
Regional JPIC Animator

My father, a retired surgeon, spent more than a decade descending into dementia, a brain disorder our family believes was prompted by a lifetime of interrupted sleep as he answered calls from the hospital at all hours. As his disease was progressing, visiting him became increasingly hard. I would cry all the way home after visits. It pained me to see this brilliant man - who had timed himself as he completed the Sunday New York Times crossword in red pen - so compromised.

When I talked to my priest about how futile my visits felt, he told me I was conducting a “ministry of presence.” That gave me the spiritual strength to continue. The week my father died, he recognized my footsteps coming into his room even though his eyes were closed. He called me by name.

As I reflect on the National Franciscan Family’s call for a World Week for the Poor (Nov. 9-15, 2026), I am reminded that poverty is not just about material lack; each of us will experience poverty. With humility, let us understand each of us is poor. We might have material wealth but have strained family connections, health struggles or social and cultural isolation.

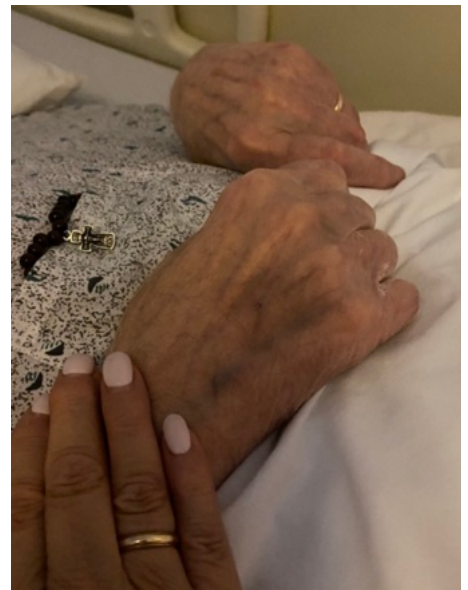
Acknowledging our shared poverty does not negate the need to understand the systemic problems that many face, such as a lack of affordable housing, wages that require multiple jobs, lack of or exorbitant expense of health care.

Likewise, we cannot measure our success at engaging with the poor purely using quantitative measures, such as we served X number of meals to hungry people or we helped X people find permanent housing.

We need to find concrete ways to help people with their material needs *and* we need to do so with the understanding we are merely fellow beggars in search of the God who summoned each of us into being.

When we listen to the vulnerable, we need to use open-ended questions with the poor we encounter so they can tell their own stories.

Instead of: When did you set up your tent at this park?



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Ask: How did you decide to set up your tent at this park?

We need to slow down, ask *one* question at a time and to give space to silence. Silence in conversation is a gift; it gives the speaker time to collect their thoughts so they might tell us their stories.

We cannot measure the impact of our efforts; the fruits might ripen years after we are gone.

John 7: 34-38 *Jesus said to them..., "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me and to finish his work. Do you not say, 'In four months the harvest will be here'? I tell you, look up and see the fields ripe for the harvest. The reaper is already receiving his payment and gathering crops for eternal life, so that the sower and reaper can rejoice together. For here the saying is verified that 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap what you have not worked for; others have done the work, and you are sharing the fruits of their work."*

[Proposal for World Week of the Poor 2026](#)

Meet Vera Walker - Regional Multicultural Animator



Vera Walker (formerly Stewart) is a member of the St. Clare of Assisi – Aiken Fraternity. She serves as the fraternity's treasurer and Multicultural Animator. Vera lives in Lexington, South Carolina and is a member of the Corpus Christi Catholic Church. In her parish, she is a member of Christ Renews His Parish, which plans and holds annual retreats to enliven the spiritual lives of parishioners.

In 2025, Vera transferred to St. Clare of Assisi from Tau Fraternity in Herndon, Virginia. She professed in January 2014 and served as their secretary from 2016 - 2021. In that role, she revived the fraternity's monthly newsletter, which you can find on their [website](#). In an effort to participate more closely with the parish where Tau Fraternity meets, Vera and one other Tau Fraternity member volunteered as adult leaders for the St. Joseph Youth

Ministry from 2022 - 2024. She was also appointed Secretary of the St. Margaret of Cortona Secular Franciscan Region for a short period.

In the outside world, Vera retired from a career as an auditor with the federal government. She currently works at the Lexington County Sheriff's Department in the office of finance. Vera is a Taekwondo Master at Black Tiger Taekwondo. She is also a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, a service-oriented organization. She has three adult children and two grandsons. If you attend the ARG, please look for Vera!

Meditative Music and the Franciscan Heart: Preparing the Way

In the spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi, whose life was marked by simplicity, contemplation, and a deep awareness of God's presence in all things, the use of meditative music within our monthly gatherings of the Fraternity of the Stigmata of Saint Francis offers a natural extension of our shared vocation.

Music, when thoughtfully composed and intentionally presented, becomes more than sound—it becomes a pathway. For members who travel varying distances to attend our meetings, the transition from the pace of daily life into a posture of prayer is not always immediate. Responsibilities, travel fatigue, and the distractions of the world can linger. Meditative music, particularly in the form of short, reflective pieces lasting no more than a few minutes, provides a gentle bridge between these two spaces.

In this context, the creation of new meditative pieces specifically for fraternity use becomes an offering rather than a performance. Drawing on the gift of music, these compositions are shaped to serve the opening moments of our gatherings—helping to quiet the mind, steady the heart, and prepare each member for prayer. Whether instrumental or accompanied by simple, spiritually grounded lyrics, they are crafted with the needs of the fraternity in mind, offering a shared entry into stillness.

These compositions are not designed to perform, but to prepare. Instrumental pieces allow the mind to settle without the need for interpretation, offering a quiet interior space where each person may encounter God personally. When lyrics are included, they remain minimal and contemplative, echoing themes of surrender, peace, and divine presence. In this way, the music invites rather than directs, allowing space for personal reflection and quiet interior listening.

Within the Franciscan tradition, this movement inward carries a deeper purpose. Rule 8 reminds us that prayer is not merely an activity, but a way of life—calling us from surface reflection into deeper union with God. Meditation becomes the doorway to contemplation. As the mind quiets and the heart becomes attentive, we are drawn beyond words into a more profound awareness of God's presence. Meditative music serves this movement: helping us settle, so that we may listen; helping us listen, so that we may encounter.

There is wisdom in brevity. A short composition respects the rhythm of our gatherings while still allowing time for interior transition. It acknowledges that silence is an essential partner to music. The tones fade, but the contemplation continues, often extending quietly into the opening prayers and shared reflections that follow.

For a Franciscan fraternity, this approach aligns closely with our charism. Saint Francis of Assisi embraced a profound simplicity that opened the heart. Meditative music, when crafted with restraint, mirrors this philosophy. It avoids excess and instead creates space—space for God, for stillness, and for community.



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Shared listening also unifies the fraternity. Though each member reflects personally, there is a quiet awareness that all are entering the same moment of preparation. It draws us together before any words are spoken.

In this way, meditative music becomes an integral part of our gatherings—guiding us into deeper meditation, and through it, into the deeper contemplation to which we are called.

Dr. John Edgar (Reid) is a producer and composer of meditative music and a candidate in the Fraternity of the Stigmata of Saint Francis, Johns Creek, GA.

Hear more meditative music at: drjohnedgarmusic.com.

Request a free copy of the proposal, "Meditative Music for Fraternity Gatherings," by writing to: drjohnedgarcomposer@gmail.com

WHAT TO WEAR TO CHURCH

Getting dressed for church
there's always a care
Oh what to put on?
Oh what shall I wear?
Don't choose apparel
out of a barrel
Good taste should require
Good Sunday attire



Try to look your best
Have Angels impressed
You're there as their guest

Don't take things too far
by dressing bizarre
He will still love you
the way that you are
Cause it's by His grace
we enter His courts
So for Heaven's sake
don't ever wear shorts

Tony DaVino OFS, Minister, St Clare of Assisi
Fraternity, Aiken, SC

Is your Fraternity struggling to find an apostolate that everyone can do?

Check out: Project Linus is a national organization whose volunteers, called "blanketeers," make blankets for distribution to children who are seriously ill or have been traumatized. There may be a chapter near you <https://www.projectlinus.org/>

Our Lady of the Rosary Makers make rosaries for distribution to missions all over the world. <https://www.olrm.org/>

Life and Dignity of the Human Person

The Dignity of Me: You see me, but you don't see me. You hear me, but you don't hear me. You donate food items to me but you don't see the mouth it feeds or the soul it warms and nourishes. You don't give me the dignity of me. You donate clothing that is torn, damaged, and/or stained. If you don't want to wear them, why do you think I do? I think you see me as the clothes you discarded; as disposable, expendable, something to be discarded. I am a human, a person, just like you. I once had a house, a job, and could pay my bills, like you. I lost it all. All I have left is the dignity of me and so many times that too is taken away. I gather up what I can of it and continue on. I feel, I hurt, I care. Do you?

What did you think of when you read the paragraph above?

The heart and center of this theme is this: Every person is created in the image of God and is therefore deserving of dignity and respect.

Being created by our one Father, we are thus brothers and sisters and as such we are obligated, in fact commanded, to take care of and love each other. As Secular Franciscans, this should be in our nature-to see Christ in each other and in ourselves to show to others. I state the bare basics again: every person has the dignity of personhood simply because they are, like us, made in the image of God. As Secular Franciscans we are to see Christ in all—in nature and in those around us. The Catechism states we are to look, “upon his neighbor as another self” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #1931, Article 3 Social Justice). How do we do this? Lk. 10:25-37, Jesus gives us a new commandment and the parable of the Good Samaritan. Unless we see others in this perspective, through the lens of the Good Samaritan, something vital will be missing from our Franciscan lives. If we each stop and think, and remember, the person next to us or in front of us is a person deserving of dignity, with the indwelling God, we will be much better humans for it. Pax et Bonum. For more on this one, see Centesimus Annus JP II 1991, and the Catechism of the Catholic Church #357, Part 1, Page 102.

Tori Walters, OFS, Candidate, Crucified Christ Fraternity, Goose Creek, SC



BELONG – BELIEVE – BEHAVE: BELIEVE in the Multifaceted St. Francis,

If the Church is a hospital for sick souls, then, are we an outpatient clinic? Being a Secular Franciscan means Ongoing Conversion. Every one of us is undergoing Ongoing Conversion as we come more and more to Believe as we learn about St. Francis and to understand who we are as Secular Franciscans.

So, how do we Believe? The first basic requirement to Belong is to be a Catholic in good standing. To Believe as a Secular Franciscan is a process. The first question that was asked of me was “How is your prayer life?” St. Francis was a man of prayer. Our prayer life, especially the Liturgy of the Hours, is the basis of who we are as Secular Franciscans.

Part of the Believe process is also learning about St. Francis as a multifaceted saint. Asking Franciscans about their favorite St. Francis story tells a lot about what being a Franciscan means to them. When asked this question, some tell about St. Francis’ devotion to the Eucharist and to prayer, and for the first Nativity Scene. Some tell about his vision in the country chapel of San Damiano in which the Icon of Christ Crucified said to him, “Francis, Francis, go and repair My church which, as you can see, is falling into ruins.” Francis at first took this to mean physically rebuilding the church but came to also see the church as in need of spiritual rebuilding.

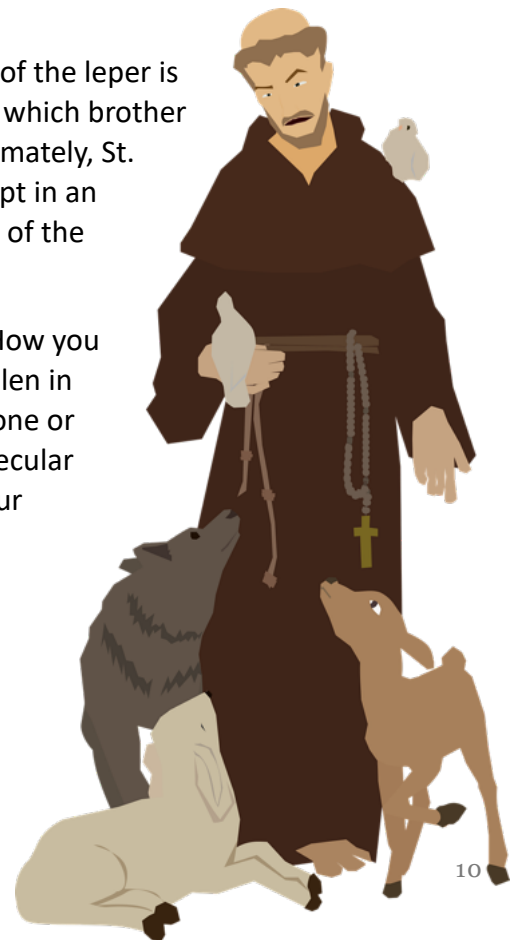
Francis lived a simple life. In 1206, he renounced his father before the Bishop of Assisi, including stripping himself naked prompting the bishop to cover Francis with his own cloak. This symbolizes total reliance on God, by giving up even what he was wearing, and falling in love with “Lady Poverty”.

St. Francis loved all God’s creation. He called all creatures his “brothers and sisters” as shown by the story of the wolf of Gubbio and the story of his preaching to the birds. His love for all creation is shown in “The Canticle of the Sun”.

The hungry brother story reflects his love for others and his hugging of the leper is symbolic of loving those rejected by society. Even when asked to say which brother was the most perfect, he found good qualities in all his brothers. Ultimately, St. Francis is known as a man of peace. For, in 1219, Francis went to Egypt in an attempt to convert the sultan Al-Kamil and put an end to the conflict of the Fifth Crusade.

If you were to tell someone about St. Francis, what would you say? How you describe St. Francis tells a lot about you as a Franciscan. Have you fallen in love with the whole multifaceted St. Francis or do you just focus on one or more aspects of him? Do you put him in a box? What does being a Secular Franciscan mean to you and how does it inform the way you, and your fraternity, live *Life to Gospel; Gospel to Live* every day?

Margi Williams OFS, BSSF Area 2 Councilor
Minister, Fraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis, Johns Creek, GA



Blessed Ceferino Gimenez Malla

Here in the BSSF Region we are blessed to have the opportunity to visit a shrine dedicated to one of our own. Blessed Ceferino was not only the first Romani to be beatified but he also was a Secular Franciscan. There is a shrine to Blessed Ceferino in our region at St. Edward's Church in N. Augusta. The church was first established as a mission to the Irish Traveler community that have populated the area. As an itinerant people group, similar to Romani, they have a high regard for Blessed Ceferino and his faithfulness.

Ceferino Gimenez Malla was a Romani. They are the people who had been erroneously referred to as gypsies. Although Ceferino was a member of this oppressed group, he was highly respected as a man of integrity and devotion to the Catholic faith. He lived in Spain during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39). One day he saw a priest being arrested by anti-catholic anarchists. When he intervened they turned on him and asked if he had a weapon. "Only this", he said, holding up his rosary. He was beaten and thrown into prison. His faith was so antagonizing to his captors that they told him that if he gave up his rosary they would let him go. He refused and was executed. Sixty years later he was beatified by Pope Saint John Paul II. His feast day is May 4th.

A silver plated statue of him clutching his beloved rosary while being executed stands in front of the entrance to St. Edward's Church in North Augusta. Declared a shrine in 2001.



Tony DaVino, OFS, Minister, St. Clare Fraternity Aiken, SC

We had 41 people from our Region participate in the Q.



21st QUINQUENNIAL CONGRESS PHOTO ALBUM



Shout Out Page:

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Elizabeth City, NC

Faith, Fraternity and Fun were the recipe for success in our local Parish, Holy Family Catholic Church as we joined in celebrating Vacation Bible School with our children this summer.

The children learned through drama, dance, sports and music that we are all welcome to the table of the Lord, that the Father provides, Jesus knows us all by name, and invites us to be servants.

We brought our own fraternal joy to gathering by preparing 2 meals for this Faith filled week.

Sharing in their enthusiasm as well as their teachers, volunteers and Father Alex, our Pastor filled our hearts with gratitude for the gift of each other and the blessing of being part of this Holy Family.

by Pam Barber, OFS, Formation Director, St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Elizabeth City, NC



members of fraternity who helped from left to right:

Dory Davis, OFS, minister; Eileen Chaney, OFS, vice-minister; Mary Ann Walker Jordan (candidate); Janet Norfleet, OFS; Lee Norfleet, OFS, Secretary; Cee Cee Petruncio, OFS, Treasurer



Crucified Christ Fraternity, Goose Creek, SC: Homeless Shelters Donation

Cindy Bryan, Minister (left) and Cindy Arcady, Candidate (right) drop off donations collected by the Crucified Christ Fraternity. Once again, we are celebrating those climbing out of unfortunate situations and bettering themselves for self-sufficiency. We are donating to both the men's shelter, Anchor House, and the women's shelter, Lighthouse, quarterly.



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NEW COUNCILS



Seven Dolors of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Franklin, TN
Left to right: Councilor 3: Audrey Amort; Councilor 2: Patty Lovell; Secretary: Joanne Conley; Minister: Sofia Grey; Vice Minister: Joshua Strobe; Formation Director: Stephen Brace; Councilor 1: Deacon Simeon Panagatos; Treasurer: Kathleen Kirkpatrick



St Clare Fraternity, Asheville, NC—from left to right
Councilor: Gwen Hobson; Formation Director: Barbara Freeman; Secretary: Gail Carroll; Treasurer: Jill Varney; Vice Minister: Tony Lazaro; Minister: Louisa Emmons; & Ecclesial witness: Joanita Nellenbach

PROFESSIONS:



Fraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis
Left to right: Drew Bogda, OFS; Lisa Springfield, OFS and Carey Whipple, OFS

Franciscan Family of Greensboro honored during Blessings Weekend at Saint Francis Springs Prayer Center

This year Saint Francis Springs Prayer Center (SFSPC) chose to honor the Franciscan Family of Greensboro for Blessings Weekend, July 3-5.

SFSPC describes the aim of Blessings Weekend:

“At St. Francis Springs Prayer Center, our hope is to be a place of abundant blessing to all. The Blessings Weekend was born out of our own experience of blessing from the countless remarkable people who touch this place. Each year we select an individual or ministry who reflects the life of Saint Francis and St. Clare while embodying our core Franciscan values of hospitality, justice, and contemplation. The Blessings Weekend is a time to bring together, all those who have been blessed by the chosen individual or ministry in celebration of the very blessing they are.”

What a joyous Blessings weekend we celebrated for our fraternity’s 30th anniversary and the 250th birthday of our beloved USA!

We filled the house with our fellow Franciscans (including our Regional Minister, Ellen Ferrone, and Area Councilor, Lee Cunningham), families, and special guests, and shared fellowship during custom-made meals, a Tai chi session, and evening musical entertainment by the Penn Family. The children enjoyed origami, games, s’mores, and sparklers.

Our deceased members were honored in a Saturday Memorial Service (see photo), and we shared memories in photo displays and expressions of gratitude for our fraternity in a gathering with the Director, Steve Swayne, who updated us on its history and current success. We expressed our appreciation to the Springs with two framed gifts: our Land Acknowledgment and the Cantic of the Creatures (from Assisi).

We prayed together during our Cantic of the Creatures service, Taizé around the Cross, and Sunday Mass, with music (including cello, violin, piano, and guitar) directed by Sister Judith Marie Kubicki, CSSF, Provincial of the Felician Sisters of North America.

We are grateful to the Springs and our guests who traveled from several states and from many corners of North Carolina, to share this unforgettable weekend.



Back Row (left to right): Joe Vodenichar, Frank Massey, Judith Walsh, Eunice Barr, Shirley Robless, Holly Bessey, Georgette Schraeder, Jeanne Kiley, Freda Mandarano
Front Row (left to right): Mary Faint, Kandice Weglin, Fr. Bob Menard, Kathy Gallucci, Gene Mandarano

St. Francis Springs Prayer Center Pilgrimage

Eight pilgrims from the **St. Maximilian Kolbe fraternity, Charlotte** gathered at Saint Francis Springs Prayer Center for the Franciscan Jubilee Pilgrimage, embracing the Jubilee theme, "**Opening the Soul to the Discovery of Fraternity.**" The day provided a beautiful opportunity for prayer, reflection, reconciliation, and fellowship while inviting participants to deepen their relationship with Christ and one another through the Franciscan spirit.

The pilgrimage began with the **Mass for Pilgrims**, where Fr. Bob Menard (Regional Spiritual Assistant) reflected on Solomon's prayer for a listening and discerning heart. His homily reminded us that authentic faith is not simply about gaining knowledge, but about allowing God's Word to transform our hearts. We were encouraged to seek the unique "pearl of wisdom" God reveals through Scripture while remaining open to the wisdom He shares through the experiences and insights of others. This message became a guiding theme throughout the day.

A meaningful opportunity for the **Sacrament of Reconciliation** followed, offering pilgrims the grace of God's mercy and healing. Several participants later shared that Confession was one of the most powerful moments of the pilgrimage, renewing their hearts and strengthening their commitment to follow Christ more faithfully.

The afternoon concluded with a **Holy Hour** in the peaceful San Damiano Chapel. During Eucharistic Adoration, Fr. Bob invited us to prayerfully consider the next steps in our relationship with God, reminding us with these simple but profound words: ***"As you gaze upon Him, He gazes upon you."***

His reflection encouraged everyone to rest quietly in the Lord's presence, trusting that discernment begins not with having all the answers but with spending time in loving communion with Christ.

The day also offered abundant opportunities for fraternity. Shared meals, conversations, peaceful walks along the prayer trails, and moments of quiet reflection strengthened the bonds among fraternity members. Participants appreciated the justice and ecology reflections throughout the grounds, the serene beauty of the Prayer Center, and the welcoming hospitality extended by Fr. Bob and the staff.

We shared how the experience brought renewed clarity to their personal discernment and Franciscan vocation. Janet beautifully summarized the day's central message:

"As we read and meditate on the Gospel, we should look for the pearl of wisdom meant for us. Remember that pearl, but also be open to listening to the pearl that other people have found in the Gospel."

Although small in number, our group experienced the richness of true fraternity. Through the Eucharist, Scripture, Reconciliation, Eucharistic Adoration, and joyful fellowship, we were reminded that fraternity is far more than simply gathering together. It is listening together for God's voice, encouraging one another on the journey of faith, and walking forward as disciples of Christ.

We departed Saint Francis Springs with grateful hearts, renewed spirits, and a deeper commitment to continue discerning God's call while living the Gospel in the spirit of St. Francis.

Frances Acosta, OFS; Area 4 Councilor, St. Maximilian Kolbe Fraternity, Charlotte, NC



Janet Ceraldi, Fran Acosta, Jerome Wagner, Mark Ceraldi, Jennye Taylor Johnson, Hamp Dulin(Inquirer) and JC Liu.



Theresa L. Christie, MD, OFS
St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta GA

The Gut Microbiome: What It Is and Why It Matters for Your Health

In recent years, the gut microbiome has emerged as one of the most fascinating and essential topics in health science. Often referred to as a “second brain,” this vast community of microorganisms living in your digestive tract plays a crucial role in your overall well-being. Understanding the gut microbiome—and how to care for it—can profoundly impact your health, from digestion to immunity and even mood.

The gut microbiome refers to the **trillions** of bacteria, viruses, fungi, and other microbes that inhabit your gastrointestinal tract, primarily in the large intestine. Each person’s microbiome is unique, like a fingerprint, shaped by genetics, diet, environment, medications (especially antibiotics), and lifestyle.

These microbes aren’t just passive passengers; they are active participants in key bodily processes. While many are beneficial and even essential, some can be harmful—especially when the balance is disrupted. This ecosystem of microbes is dynamic and can shift quickly in response to changes in diet, stress, or illness.

The microbes in your gut microbiome help break down complex carbohydrates, fiber, and other nutrients that your body can’t digest on its own. In doing so, they produce short-chain fatty acids (SCFAs), which nourish the cells lining your colon and help reduce inflammation.

A healthy microbiome helps train the immune system to recognize harmful invaders and tolerate harmless ones. Dysbiosis occurs when there is an imbalance in the microbiome as a result of inappropriate antibiotic use, poor diet, chemotherapy, overuse of antacids, smoking, alcohol, food additives, and environmental factors .. Research has linked dysbiosis to multiple chronic conditions, including: obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, inflammatory bowel disease (IBD), autoimmune diseases, and neurodegenerative disorders to name a few.

There is a two-way communication system that occurs between the gut and the brain known as the **gut-brain axis**. As a result of this communication, gut bacteria influence the production of neurotransmitters. In doing so they can have an impact on mood, fatigue, stress responses, and even mental health conditions like anxiety and depression.

Studies have shown that a diverse microbiome is associated with a healthier body weight, and overall improved health. Eating a variety of fiber rich foods; fruits, vegetables, legumes, and whole grains, helps to feed the beneficial microbes and create a diverse microbiome. Fermented foods like yogurt, kefir, sauerkraut, kimchi, kombucha, and miso are rich in probiotics, which introduce beneficial microbes into the gut. Prebiotics (like inulin and resistant starch) feed your good microbes. Probiotic supplements can help, especially after antibiotics, though quality and strain matter. Limiting processed foods and sugar as well as regular exercise help to maintain a healthy microbiome. Managing stress and good sleep hygiene have been show to be beneficial to your gut also.

Your gut microbiome is not just a silent partner in your health—it is an active, complex system that influences digestion, immunity, mood, and long-term wellness. By nurturing this inner ecosystem through diet, lifestyle, and mindful living, you can unlock profound benefits for your body and mind.

Franciscan **websites**



The Monastery of St. Clare: [Poor Clares](#)

Franciscan Friars: [Our Lady of Guadalupe Province](#)

Pilgrimages: [Franciscan Pilgrimages](#)

Justice and Peace: [Franciscan Action Network](#)

Secular Franciscan Order: [National Secular Franciscan Website](#)

Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis: [Regional Secular Franciscan Website](#)

Consilium Internationale OFS: [CIOFS](#)

TAU: [TAU-USA](#)

The Gospel Through a Franciscan Lens

Homilies from Fr. Christopher are available on the national website :

[Fr. Christopher's Homilies](#)



BSSF Regional Executive Council Roster

Minister: Ellen Ferrone, OFS

Vice Minister: David Cruz-Urbe, OFS

Secretary: Theresa Christie, OFS

Treasurer: Charlie Comberrel, OFS

Formation Director: Lynn Oeser, OFS

Spiritual Assistant: Fr. Bob Menard, OFM

Area Councilors

Area 1: Gabrielle Cruz-Urbe, OFS

AL: Bessemer; **TN:** Chattanooga, Knoxville, Nashville

Area 2: Margi Williams, OFS

GA: Blairsville, Johns Creek, Lithia Springs, Jonesboro;

Area 3: Becky Bresnahan, OFS; Susan McArthur, OFS

GA: Augusta, **SC:** Aiken, N. Charleston, Murrells Inlet, Bluffton

Area 4: Michaelleen Davis, OFS, Frances Acosta, OFS

NC: Newton, Charlotte, Asheville, Hendersonville, **SC:** Spartanburg, Greenville, Indian Land;

Area 5: Lee Cunningham, OFS; Travis Bongiorno, OFS

NC: Elizabeth City, Morehead City, Wilmington, Raleigh, Burlington, Greensboro, Winston-Salem

Archivist: Lee Cunningham, OFS

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

Multicultural Commission Chair: Vera Walker, OFS

Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator: Vacant

Web Master: Michaelleen Davis, OFS

Prayer Ministry (online prayer requests)

Area 1: Lindy Crace, OFS

Area 2: Anthony Cumia, OFS

Area 3: Christine Lukesh, OFS

Area 4: Carol Drum, OFS

Area 5: Bob Sabisch, OFS

Communio editor: Theresa Christie, OFS

