

WINTER 2025

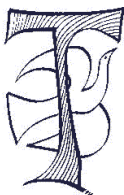
Communio

That All May Be One

Newsletter of the Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Region
Secular Franciscan Order



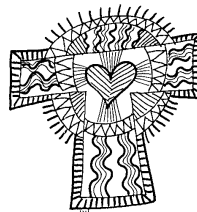
Spirituality



Formation



Fraternity



Apostolate



Minister's Letter 2025

What is Mine to Do?

My dear sisters and brothers,

Blessings this Advent Season!

I was excited to read Pope Leo's Exhortation Dilexi Te, "I have Loved You". It struck me as so Franciscan. I will admit, there's a lot to take in, yet it all comes down to the preferential option for the poor. So, if the Holy Father is speaking to me in Franciscan terms how do I respond to the command from our Father Francis "You must do what is yours to do", in light of Dilexi Te "I Have Loved You".

Chapter One's focus for me appears to be the action of touching/embracing or the command to take care of. In Mt 26:8-9,11 the woman pours costly oil on Jesus's head. The parable of the Samaritan, he cleans the man's wounds and takes him to the inn and gives him shelter. "Just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (Mt 25:40). In the person of a leper, Christ himself embraced Francis and changed his life.

At the heart of who we are as Franciscans, this is what we are called to; to touch, to embrace and encounter the leper. For some this is easier than others. Some have a heart that naturally reaches out and wants to sit and have a meal with someone in a homeless shelter, work in a medical clinic, visit the prisoner, visit the sick, welcome the stranger. Others it's a process. When I first started going to feed the homeless with my fraternity, I was happy to help organize, bring food and coordinate. Others helped serve the food and sit and visit. Eventually I helped serve, then helped carry meals for the guests, and then visited. It took time for me to be comfortable with myself. For I was more fearful that I would say the wrong thing. With God's grace I've have many wonderful encounters with people in all walks of life; I'm humbled and grateful.

We are in the season of hope. What can we hope for? We can hope for world peace, peace in our country, peace in our neighborhoods. May I suggest that each of us start with hope for peace in our own hearts. Peace to be transformed with the smallest of encounter and as with our Father Francis we have peace for all.

What is mine to do is to walk with Christ who is my sister and brother.

Blessings this Advent Season may you see the Lord in all you encounter.

Love

Your sister in Christ

Ellen





Close Encounter of the Franciscan Kind

by Lynn Oeser OFS, Regional Formation director

Many years ago, my husband and I were traveling by car with our four small children to visit family for the holidays. We found ourselves crawling in our vehicle for hours on I95 heading north. We had exhausted every story, every game, and every song of our vast collection. The music became an orchestrated whine: “He touched me”, “She touched me”, “I’m sick”, and the groaning crescendo, “When are we going to be there?” To add to the ambiance, the weather was cold and wet. What should have been a 12-hour trip was 9 hours in with at least 6 hours to go. My husband and I were beyond bickering at each other; we were catatonic and shell shocked.

We found ourselves at a busy MacDonald’s in Maryland. Sitting in a cozy booth the children were becoming inebriated on French fries, chicken nuggets, catsup and a special treat, soda.

Despite the outside noise, the stillness and “family quiet” was respite. A woman and her school aged son were watching us. I returned a smile which gave me a little more lift, and then came a very unexpected surprise. Along with the manager, the woman and her son approached us with an ice cream cone for each of us. She simply said, “From our family to yours”.

The kindness and warmth revived and restored all of us. After reboarding our vehicle, there was a holy peace that accompanied us on the rest of our journey. That woman carried Christ to us. Somebody touched ME that day, it must have been the hand of the Lord!

Inspired by the very Franciscan message of [Pope Leo’s Exhortation Dilexi te](#) (on Love of the Poor) and its emphasis on encounter, I have been reflecting with gratitude on the encounters like this that form, have formed, and are forming me into the holiness that my heart desires and the Franciscan that I am called to become. In these encounters where Christ comes to me through others, light is shed on what is mine to do and I choose to turn, to convert and to reach out to encounter my neighbor. The impactful stories that we read about St. Francis entail his encounters with God and neighbor and the “touches” that moved him to conversion.

Read in the light of [Pope Francis's encyclical Dilexit Nos](#) (The Human and Divine Love of the Heart of Jesus Christ), I perceive an organic, infusive flow of “Love the Lord, your God with your whole heart, your whole soul and your whole strength”, and “Love your neighbor as yourself”. My heart hears the Sermon on the Mount speaking to me in my earthly time.

The release of Dilexi te on October 4th, the Feast of St. Francis, is providential in helping us to address the National Executive Council’s (NEC) release of the priority, *Living the Gospel*, and the theme, *Go into the World and Proclaim the Good News Mt16:15*.

Our rule calls us to observe the Gospel of our Lord, Jesus Christ by following the example of St. Francis of Assisi who made Christ the center of his life with God and people, going from gospel to life and life to gospel(art.4). Pope Leo in Dilexi te gives us a blueprint for carrying Christ to the poor in today’s world. I hope that many will prayerfully read this convicting exhortation.

FORMATION NEWS

1. From the current issue of [TAU-USA pg 8](#) on the **National priority**

The new national priority developed by a task force is “Living the Gospel.” This priority emphasizes building relationships, inspiring others to seek God, forming ourselves in the Franciscan way of life, attracting vocations, and working to rebuild the Church.

“When we are living the Gospel, we are involved in the activities and challenges of the world, integrating faith and action in our daily lives, nurturing hope, sowing seeds, and transforming hearts and minds,” Chris Leone, OFS, task force member said. “These actions represent what Christ would be to the world.” In addition to Chris, other task force members were Janet Angelillo, OFS; Pamela Boespflug, OFS; Ellen Ferrone, OFS; and Jeffrey Wilson, OFS.

The article was written by Sharon Winzeler OFS

2. **The BSSF Formation Commission** works to serve the fraternities of our region through improved communication and relationship building. Your contacts to the commission are your area councilors and your regional formation director.

3. **The Next Formation Forum will be Wednesday, Dec. 17th at 7:30 EST.**

Formation Forum sessions are for all Formation Directors, formators and Spiritual Assistants, all professed are invited. The sessions are one hour long, will occur the third week of the month rotating Wednesday and Thursday evenings. During the sessions we pray, share information and announcements, and have a “Forming Formators” session to feed us as formators. A zoom link will be sent to formation directors and spiritual assistants on DEC 16th Formation Directors, please share the link with your formation teams and any professed who may wish to attend.

4. [The BSSF Regional FORMATORS’ Guidelines For Orientation and Initial Formation](#) provides very important information regarding Aspirancy and Initial Formation. This information includes the requirements for Sacramental Documents issued by the Church, the content for each stage of formation, the requirements for interviews and much more. We will be reviewing sections of these guidelines at the Formation Forums. In October we reviewed through Orientation. We will look at Inquiry guidelines in December

5. In 2026 we will Celebrate the [800th Centenary of the Easter of St. Francis](#).

6. At the Regional Fraternal Council Meeting in August, Fr. Jerome Wolbert OFM encouraged a front to back scan of the OFS [Constitutions](#) and Statutes to become aware of what they contain and where to look when reference is needed.

At every step in the Franciscan Way, one should journey with the sacred scripture in one hand and the Rule and Constitutions in the other. – Dcn. Tom Bello Former National Minister



Small Things ... Great Love

*By Allison Salerno, OFS
Regional JPIC Animator*

In mid-October, I was diagnosed with a tibial stress fracture and a torn meniscus, in addition to the osteoarthritis I already was managing on my right knee. As an active backpacker in her early sixties, being sidelined with this repetitive stress injury - initially unable to drive a car and having a hard time walking and standing - has prompted a lot of contemplation. I am still not cleared even to walk our dog and it will be the new year before I am expected to heal fully.

Meanwhile, our National Chapter has named our priorities for 2025-2028 as “Go Out into the World.” These priorities encourage us to live the gospel by, among other tasks, integrating faith and action in our daily lives and through building relationships.

How can I, as a Secular Franciscan committed to building a just and peaceful world, do that if I am unable to get into the world?

While my disability is temporary, hundreds of Secular Franciscans in the United States face a more permanent loss of mobility with age.

In her 2025 OFS-USA State of the Order Address, delivered Sept. 10 at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Maryland, National Minister Jan deRose-Bamman, OFS shared that only 1 percent of professed active members of the Secular Franciscans are age 44 or younger. More than half of us are in our sixties or older.

The most obvious solution to continuing with my Franciscan vocation is to immerse myself in prayer. And I am- not only praying the Liturgy of the Hours but also reading the Gospel more. I am reflecting on how to welcome and embrace Sister Disability and Brother Old Age.

Attending Mass proves challenging as standing up is tough and kneeling impossible. I have to shake off my vanity, relying on my trekking poles for support and not worrying if folks are judging (they likely are not) why I am not standing or kneeling during Mass.

However, too many of us, including me, spend too much of our time learning about the outside world by passively looking at screens - be it scrolling on our phones or sitting and listening to so-called journalists on TV who stoke fear while they build ratings and keep us feeling isolated. We Secular Franciscans are not immune to such behavior.

I talked about my predicament with my friend Charles Rohrbacher, current deacon for the Cathedral of the Nativity of Mary in Juneau, Alaska.

“Francis’ call to embrace Lady Poverty surely isn’t limited to material poverty but to all of the ways we experience impoverishment in our lives,” he said.

“Disability is certainly one of them. In my experience, one of the gifts of poverty is that it can open our hearts to be more generous.”

As I contemplated months at home, I felt unsatisfied. I wanted to connect face to face with people in need. Then, on Halloween, my husband devised a great solution.

On Halloween, we generally set up shop at the end of our driveway in Athens, Ga. with a table of candy and two folding chairs. This year, Greg headed to Kroger and, in addition to buying candy, spent about \$20 on 'real food;' bags of microwaveable rice and cans of tuna fish. He also purchased erasable colored pencils for the children. He helped me walk to the end of our driveway and he set up two folding tables - one for candy and the other for food.

We were keenly aware some of our neighbors are having a hard time putting food on their tables, particularly in a weakening economy when eligible Georgians were not receiving expected SNAP benefits the following day. Our home sits about two blocks from a public housing complex and while I don't know individual family stories, I do understand family budgets are strained.

Of the 40 or so children who trick-or-treated at our driveway, I saw all but two children walking with their parents from the public housing complex. My husband explained to the parents that we're all having a hard time with our budgets and that we had extra food to share. The food was gone before the candy.

My husband and I certainly can't feed every hungry family in our neighborhood. For one evening, we provided a few with dinner.

For me, the moral imperative is to ***do something*** however small, to alleviate suffering. To bring the Gospel to Life.

While Lady Poverty sits beside me these days, I try to reflect on what the world would look like if my attitudes and my actions were multiplied. Am I adding to divisiveness among neighbors in my speech and actions or am I trying to promote justice and build peace?

I think about what Saint Teresa of Calcutta tells us: *"In this life we cannot do great things. We can only do small things with great love."*



Inquiring minds want to know...

What is the Common Fund? Why does each fraternity have one?

Well as in most things in our Franciscan lives it stems from our Rule:

Secular Franciscan Rule #25: "Regarding expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means. Local fraternities should contribute toward the expenses of the higher fraternity councils."

The terms "common fund" or "fair share" are not explicitly used in the Rule. We as good stewards create a budget each year. So how do we create the budget?

1. We begin with the expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity, such as:
 - Donation to the church where we meet
 - Stipend to our spiritual assistant
 - Formation materials for those in initial formation
 - Gifts for those being professed
2. Next, we look at the needs of worship, such as:
 - Copies of the LOH at Gatherings.
 - Stipend to musician/cantor at Professions
 - License for music
3. Then we anticipate expenses for our apostolate, which may include:
 - Monies for gleanings bag materials
 - Monies for roadside care packages
 - Monies for diapers for the food pantry
4. And last but not least, we contribute to expenses of the higher fraternity:
 - The Region creates a budget
 - The budget is approved by the Ministers
 - The Region identifies suggested contribution of each fraternity

As indicated above, Items 1+2+3+4= yearly budget.

WINTER 2025

As in our household budgets, we need to have income to support the budget. We turn to our brothers and sisters and ask that they contribute according to their own means. For our Regional Fraternity, we look at the yearly budget, divide by the number of Professed and Candidates in all of the local fraternities in the region to arrive at the suggested annual contribution.

Most people don't like talking about money, well unless maybe you're an accountant or billionaire. Yet it's a part of how we run our households, our churches and our fraternities.

As a young child, I remember being excited to put a few coins in the collection basket, I now give nieces and nephews bigger coins and maybe a dollar bill. As we move through our life's journey, we are able to contribute more when we don't have family expenses, and then possibly more when we are empty nesters and our income has grown, to then maybe a little less when we retire and are on a fixed income.

It's the same in our fraternity family, it's what each individual can give. Some give as much as they can and it's "the 2 small coins," others more because they have been blessed with more financial gifts. They are all gifts received from the Lord which we share.

It's always a gift, because those who have been given, give in return.

Thank you for your generous support spiritually, through encounter with the lesser, and financially.

God bless

Ellen



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 [PROJECT LINUS](#)

Our Lady's Rosary Makers to make rosaries for distribution to missions all over the world. [OUR LADY'S ROSARY MAKERS](#)

CAN I PRAY WITH YOU?

God calls us all to be disciples and evangelists. The prospect of this task can be daunting, but for me, it has always been more daunting than scary. I often feel inadequate, as if I lack the knowledge or the right words to express my faith. While I can readily discuss my faith and the divine interventions in my life with the Franciscans, praying with a stranger is a different experience altogether.

Recently, I graduated from the Encounter School of Ministry, where I learned how to invoke the Holy Spirit. Prior to this education, I had never truly understood the workings of the Holy Spirit in my life. What I discovered is that when we call upon the Holy Spirit, we must remain still and quiet, listening attentively to His voice or guidance. Furthermore, regardless of the number of times I have invoked Him, He consistently provides me with signs, words, or individuals I need to speak with or pray with. He never fails to offer me the appropriate words to express my faith. This is truly remarkable!

Recently, I ventured out in public wearing a T-shirt that read, “Can I pray with you?” Before entering a particular store, I called upon the Holy Spirit to accompany me and provide me with the signs I needed to engage in evangelism with others. Not only did He grant me the words, but in some instances, individuals approached me and expressed their willingness to pray with me. It was an extraordinary day!

Sometimes, we must venture beyond our comfort zones and genuinely pay attention to those we encounter. We can simply engage in conversation, offer a smile, or provide a compliment. You may be surprised how this simple act can lead to a meaningful dialogue, prayer, or sharing of our faith.

Therefore, I challenge you all to step outside your comfort zone and inquire, “Can I pray with you?”

May peace and abundant blessings be upon you.

Sincerely,
Susan McArthur, OFS
Minister, ST Elizabeth of Hungary, Augusta
Area 3 Regional Councilor



The Franciscan Witness of Joy

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

Okay, confession time: Whenever I speak about a trial or difficult time I am going through and someone says to me, “It’s perfect joy”, I want to haul off and slug ‘em! But because I am a Franciscan who is committed to nonviolence, I hold my peace, and the slug! Yet, inside I still quietly seethe about the “perfect joy” concept; which, if I am being honest, has always rubbed me the wrong way.

There are the apostles. James telling us *to count it all joy when we go through trials* (James 1:2). Or, Paul exhorting us to rejoice again and again (Phil 4:4), as he was languishing in a dank, dark prison. Peter speaks of “*an inexpressible and glorious joy*” (1 Peter 1:8). Even the prophets of old, like Nehemiah saying *to not be grieved because the joy of the Lord is our strength* (Neh. 8:10). From Isaiah to the Psalmists, we hear and read over and over and over again about the power of joy and being joyful in all seasons, not just the good times.



In times of despair and darkness, when all seems lost, the thought of being joyful seems almost out of place. How can we speak of joy, let alone be joyful, when the world appears to be falling apart? Well, this is what all the prophets, the apostles, and St. Francis was trying to tell us. No matter what is going on around you, never let it get inside of you. Because inside of you is the joy of the Lord, that deep, abiding feeling of delight that arises from something profoundly good and satisfying – like our Lord.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus prays for His disciples as he prays for us today: “*I speak these things... so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them*” (John 17:13). Again Jesus said: “*You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy... no one will take your joy away from you*” (John 16:20–22). Jesus acknowledged the sorrow but promised it would turn into joy. How? Because we are not to let the world and the things of the world seep into our souls; that is where the spirit of God abides and it is all pure joy.

Saints Francis and Clare were known for their exuberant spirits, even in the face of adversity and illness. Even as he was approaching Sister Death, Francis sang the praises of God with his companions and refused to let his joy be diminished. This was not some cockeyed optimism, but a refusal to allow suffering and death have the final word. Francis

knew that joy was not optional, but a gift and a source of strength from the Lord, who promised that his joy will be complete in all of us.

Just as the Peace Prayer is attributed to our Father Francis – we know he did not write it – we can take meaning and comfort from the words: *“Where there is sadness, joy”* and *“It is in dying that we are born to eternal life.”* These words are the sentiments of what St. Francis embodied. Another attribute says: *“Let us leave sadness to the devil and his angels. As for us, we wish always to rejoice in the Lord.”* This, for me, sums up St. Francis’ “perfect joy”.

How is Your Prayer Life?

Margi Williams OFS

BSSF Area 2 Councilor

Minister, Fraternity of the Stigmata of St. Francis, Johns Creek, GA

St. Francis was a man of prayer. As Secular Franciscans, we are called to prayer. Per The Rule (art 8), *“As Jesus was the true worshipper of the Father, so let prayer and contemplation be the soul of all they are and do.”* Prayer should be the underpinning of all we do. But, how do we pray?

Growing in prayer is part of our ongoing conversion. When I first started coming to Secular Franciscan meetings, I was asked “How is your prayer life?” I’m sure I mumbled something. As a 12-year-old, after a traumatic event, I cried out *“Lord, take my life!”* My loving Heavenly Father took that as a prayer of surrender and I have seen His hand in my life ever since – both in good times and in challenging times. *“Lord, order my footsteps, let my hands do Your work, let my mouth speak Your word and let my heart be pure in Your sight”.*

Fairly recently, several people I knew passed away peacefully. Prayer was a big part of their lives. Curious, I asked our pastor, who said that those who have an active prayer life tend to pass peacefully.

At our Secular Franciscan meetings, the unfamiliar Liturgy of the Hours impressed me. When St. Francis met the sultan, he was impressed with the Muslim call to prayer, occurring five times a day. Hence, Franciscans have a special relationship with the Liturgy of the Hours, which is also prayed five plus times a day.

Personally, I struggled to use *Christian Prayer* and used a phone app instead. After Deacon Tom passed I have been blessed with his 4-volume set. The fact that he kept it close has given me a greater appreciation for these prayers.

What is prayer? It is a conversation and good conversations are two-sided. The Liturgy of the Hours is the communal prayer of the Church. It contains not only prayers but the Word of God. *Indeed, the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword (Hebrews 4:12)* Per The Rule (art 5): *“Secular Franciscans, therefore, should seek to encounter the living and active person of Christ ... in Sacred Scripture ...”.* When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours, we talk to our Heavenly Father and He speaks to us through His Scripture. It is a two-way unique conversation.

As scripture passages are repeated while praying the Liturgy of the Hours, they become familiar. The psalms show David's heart both in the good times and in challenging times. For us, remembering these passages becomes a way of God speaking to us in the seasons of our own lives.

The prayers of the Liturgy of the Hours are apostolate because the Apostles prayed the psalms. And, they are communal liturgical prayers because they are laid out for certain times of each day so that at any given moment many Catholics are praying the same words. They are not for the intention of any one person or group but are prayers for the Church as a whole. In essence, we are praying without ceasing. Our prayers are rising in unison to God!

Just reflect! When we pray the Liturgy of the Hours at our meetings, as the preferred prayer in our Ritual and the Constitutions, our prayers are joining the prayers of others who are praying the same prayers. What a wonderful bouquet of prayer to be sending to our Heavenly Father! Amen!

How is your prayer life?

The Transitus of Surprises

*Frances Acosta, OFS; Area 5 Councilor
St. Maximilian Kobe Fraternity, Charlotte, NC*

Franciscan habit, check. Candles, check. Readers, check. Food, check. Sound familiar? This is what we do to prepare for the most awaited night of the year. We come together to celebrate Sister Death, remembering the profound moment of St. Francis' passing. So, what makes this year at our fraternity special? I would describe this year's celebration of the Transitus at St. Maximilian Kolbe fraternity as a Transitus full of big surprises. Just like all Secular Franciscan families, this meaningful annual event serves to deepen and intensify our commitment to following Christ by embracing His inspiring example of simplicity, humility, and poverty. I truly look forward to it every year, as it offers a cherished opportunity to renew our promises, reflect deeply on our spiritual journey and commitment to living the Gospel, and honor our beloved Seraphic Father with genuine and heartfelt devotion.

As some of you may know, we here at the Diocese of Charlotte have been deeply honored and blessed to have a Franciscan Bishop among us. Bishop Michael T. Martin, OFM Conv., was appointed to this important role in the year 2024, bringing with him a rich tradition of Franciscan spirituality and leadership. He began his service just a month before I started working at the Diocese. As part of our preparations, we sent out invitations to invite others to join us in celebrating this special occasion. I folded the invitation carefully, went upstairs, and placed it in Bishop Martin's mailbox without any particular expectations. Fast forward to the event: as I was video taping the Transitus, I glanced behind me and to my surprise, the Bishop was sitting very incognito in the back, quietly singing along. He came! It was such a wonderful surprise and a true gift for our fraternity. He stayed afterward and spent time socializing with us all. This Transitus at St. Maximilian Kolbe will definitely be remembered with deep reverence and heartfelt reflection. It certainly solidifies the fact that our Franciscan family arms extend far beyond what we can immediately see or imagine.

If we can learn anything from this simple yet profound invitation, it is precisely that: **TO INVITE**. Too often, we miss valuable opportunities because we lack the courage to extend an invitation or because we fear the

response we might receive. It is important that we do not lose sight of the true significance of a selfless invitation. When we invite others without any expectations or conditions, we protect ourselves from disappointment and instead hold only the hopeful desire that the recipient will find some benefit or joy in our gesture. Do not be afraid to invite someone to a gathering or a celebration, you never know who may show up!

Enjoy the photos!

St. Maximillian Kolbe Fraternity



Frances Acosta, OFS; Bishop Michael Martin, OFM, Conv;
J.C. Liu, OFS

What is there to do in Myrtle Beach?

Well, how about lunch and fellowship with members of Blessed Duns Scotus Fraternity of course. Members of the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity were joined by members of the Blessed John Duns Scotus Fraternity for at the Grumpy Monk during their beach vacation trip. What a blast!



Blessed John Duns Scotus Fraternity: Ted and Joanie Penney, Kathleen and Rich Barnes, and Charles and Mary Sacavage.

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity: Susan McArthur, Theresa Christie, Becky Bresnahan and Carrie Murga

Shout Out Pages:



Type to enter text | In recognition for creative ideas in a fraternity.

FRANCISCAN COOKIES FOR A CAUSE

Kelly Horowitz, OFS

Stt Joseph Cupertino Fraternity, Bessemer, AL

Each year, St. Francis of Assisi parish in Bessemer, the host parish of St. Joseph Cupertino fraternity, celebrates the feast of St. Francis with a parish picnic. In conjunction with that celebration the parish has a friendly "Friends and Family" fundraising competition to raise money for the small parish. Members of the parish gather in fundraising teams and compete to see which team can raise the most money.



This year, St. Joseph Cupertino joined the challenge. How does a Franciscan fraternity raise funds for a parish named after our founder to honor his feast day? By selling St. Francis' favorite cookies, of course! St. Joseph Cupertino's members solicited orders from friends and members of their family and churches and then set aside a (long!) afternoon to bake almond cookies. To encourage those potential customers who did not want the temptation of delicious cookies in their house, fraternity members offered the option of buying cookies and donating them to the homeless ministry of the Friars Poor of Jesus Christ, a local order of Franciscan brothers.

When all was said and done, the fraternity baked over 1,000 almond cookies in an afternoon and will provide the Friars Poor with 87 dozen cookies at intervals throughout the year. The fraternity raised \$1,755 for its host parish, the parish raised over \$30,000 and the cookie customers have been introduced to the Secular Franciscan Order, the Friars Poor homeless ministry and just how addictive almond cookies are. Lady Jacoba's legacy lives on!



Kelly Horowitz, OFS, Gabrielle and David Cruz-Urbe, OFS, Earnestine Braxton, OFS, Karen Thorne, OFS



Karen, Gabrielle and Earnestine hard at work making cookies

LIVING JPIC

Tori Walters, OFS

Christ Community Fraternity, North Charleston, SC

My name is Tori, and I am a Candidate in Formation to profess in the Secular Franciscans in my area, the Crucified Christ Fraternity. Before beginning Franciscans or even attending any meetings, I believed my calling, my vocation, is helping those less fortunate in my community. This has led me to study Catholic Social Teaching (CST) along with Catholic Social Justice (CSJ). I am trying, though slowly, due to the College I am attending online, to earn my Certificate in CST/CSJ. I believe JPIC was hidden from me by our Lord so I could make a proper discernment into Secular Franciscans rather than an emotional one based solely on JPIC. Imagine my pleasant surprise when I found this committee after discerning that Secular Franciscans is where I am supposed to be and began reaching out to our local Fraternity. I told our Minister, Cindy, that at some point in the future, I want to be a part of the JPIC committee. I am now the “unofficial official” JPIC Coordinator for our Fraternity. I went right to work.



Renee Kerr, OFS and Tori Walters, OFS



Cindy Arcady and Cindy Bryan, OFS

I introduced the idea of donating and spending time with the men’s and women’s homeless shelters in our community. We can collect items on their “immediate needs” list, spend time with the residents, pray with them, share a meal and conversation with them, etc. They were receptive. We shopped for items on their list, and 2 women went to the women’s shelter and 2 men went to the men’s shelter. We have decided to try and do this on a quarterly timeframe. We also want to volunteer and donate to the St. Claire’s Home for women who have decided to have their babies but are in a situation they need to get out of.

My idea is to “make the rounds” in our community showing the gospel together as Secular Franciscans, in the spirit of Francis and Matthew 25, while still learning and hopefully teaching about CST/CSJ. These days, we too need to “rebuild our Church” and showing the gospel is one way to do that. Pax et bonum.

Baby Shower – a Franciscan Encounter

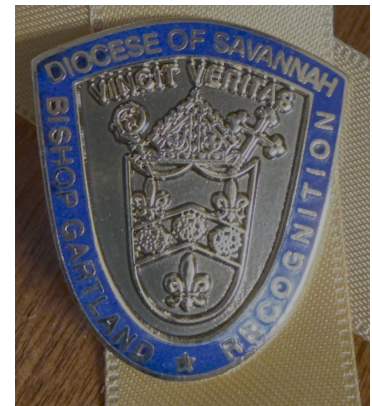
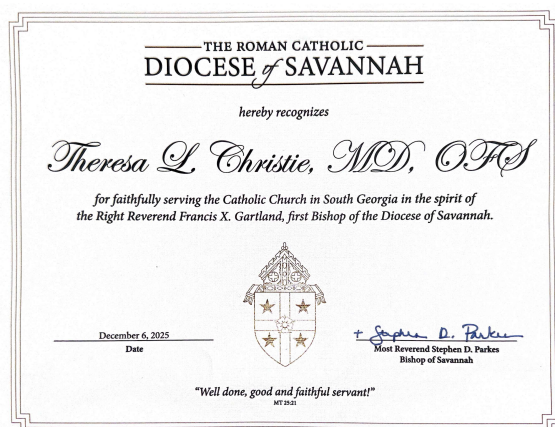
Our Baby Shower at St. Gerard Parish in Aiken to honor his feast day was a success in introducing the parish to our Fraternity and the way of Secular Franciscans. The children were precious. Carol King, OFS' baked ziti made for a deliciously satisfying meal time. Most of all we helped the couple get off to a good start becoming mommy and daddy. The mother immigrated from Ecuador. The father was officially welcomed into the Catholic Church in a ceremony on October 4th. Last week the couple's marriage was Convalidated.

A Baby Shower is a joyous custom where a community gets together to give support to a couple starting a family. Some people even brought gifts for the Life Choices Crisis Pregnancy Center in Aiken.



BISHOP GARTLAND RECOGNITION OF SERVICE

The Bishop Gartland Recognition of Service is an honor bestowed by the Diocese of Savannah on persons who have given distinguished service to the Church in the spirit of its first bishop, Right Rev. Francis X. Gartland (served 1850–1854). On December 6, 2025, Theresa Christie, OFS was recognized by the Savannah Diocese for her service to the Church. Theresa was nominated by her pastor, Fr. Mark Ross to receive this distinguished recognition



NEW COUNCILS



Newly Elected Council:

Minister: Jenny Moore - previously Vice Minister

Vice Minister: Patrica Romejko

Secretary: Rose Clawson

Treasurer: Kathi Traywick

Formation Director: Linda McKnight - previously Councilor

Councilor: Matthew Moore - previously

Professions

It was a beautiful August day in Spartanburg, South Carolina as St. Michael the Archangel fraternity welcomed their **newly professed member, Fran Dangelico, OFS**. Fran is a member of Jesus, Our Risen Savior Catholic Church in Spartanburg and is married to Lou Dangelico. We were pleased to have our regional minister Ellen Ferrone, OFS and our regional treasurer, Charlie Comberrel, OFS in attendance. Pictured with Fran in the front row are Angie Waldrop, OFS, Sarah Beth Quinn, OFS, Esther Kelly, OFS, Sara Nell Boggs, OFS, Beverly Wadding, OFS, Jane Morris, OFS, Michaelleen Davis, OFS, Fran Dangelico, OFS, Bonnie Wacker, OFS, Lou Dangelico, Sandra Rodriguez, OFS, and Betsy Witt, OFS. In the back row are Fr. Giovannie Nuñez, CRM, Fr. Liam Panganiban, CRM, Paula Duncan, OFS, Ellen Ferrone, OFS and Charlie Comberrel, OFS



The Beatitudes, St Francis of Assisi, and Us

“The Meek”

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

When we consider this Beatitude, we are immediately stymied by the modern misconception of “meek/meekness.” In the current vernacular, “meek” is generally used as a character descriptor and as a synonym for “weak” creating a mental image of an individual who is spiritless, spineless, a pushover, gullible, cowardly, and passive. This erroneous interpretation makes this one of the hardest Beatitudes to clearly define. Immediately the questions surface, “Is meekness simply a synonym for humility, patience, gentleness, respectfulness, or kindness [all of which fall under the current connotation of “weak” as interpreted by the 4th grade playground bully and a hefty percentage of corporate executives and many others in positions of power]; or is it more than the surface reveals?” The answer to both questions is ‘Yes.’” Meekness is a disposition of the soul, a foundation for all the other virtues – it encompasses the virtues listed above, that are frequently mistaken for weakness, and absorbs all other related virtues as well. Father J. Kirby (2017) noted that “meekness is not a solitary act, but rather a habit of virtue that we must develop.” In reality, there is no trace of weakness or cowardliness in those who are meek; but rather, an unflappable courage; a level-headed and clear understanding of just who they are and where they stand in relation to their God and their neighbor (Kirby 2017, Cole 2022). Regardless of the immediate situation, the truly meek are not flustered, there is a strength of mind, heart and body that flows from an interior calm and an acceptance of self-identity. Meekness not only facilitates within us an awareness of our personal sinfulness when we fall, but also our dignity at ALL TIMES as children of God. Therefore, we can define meekness as an interior, gentle strength manifested in a spiritual poise and confidence allowing “us to be at peace in our own skin while also empowering us to pour ourselves out in self-donation to others” (Kirby, 2017). Mother Mary Francis wrote in *Catholic Exchange* (Oct. 2021) that the meek “are whole persons. They take that firm stance that only the gentle can assume. The domineering, the aggressive, the blustering are not so much taking a stance as posturing.” She continued with this description, “the meek are the self-possessed, which is to say that they are God-possessed since God has been allowed to possess their ‘selves.’” In his 393 AD homily concerning the “Sermon on the Mount,” St. Augustine noted (citing Rom 12:21), “The meek are those who submit to wickedness and do not resist evil but overcome evil with good” ... “Let the haughty quarrel and contend for earthly and temporal things. But ‘blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the land.’ This is the land from which they cannot be expelled” (Hagios Study Series, 2021) – the Promised Land, the Kingdom of Happiness, the Kingdom of Heaven. This relates closely to the first Beatitude for the Poor in Spirit are frequently referred to as meek; “for they have the strength to maintain a love that, in the words of St. Paul, ‘bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things’ (1 COR 13:7)” (*CatholicIdentity*, 2020).

St. Bonaventure, St. Francis’s biographer, stated in a homily about Francis’s humility, his meekness, “Humility, the guardian and embellishment of all the virtues, had filled the man of God with abundance. In his own opinion, he was nothing but a sinner, though in truth he was a mirror and the splendor of every kind of holiness (Harios, 2021). It was Francis’s contention that Christ had descended from His heavenly glory in the bosom of God the Father to dwell in our lowly estate so to teach us humility, meekness, through example and word. It was this humility, this meekness so beautifully manifested in St. Francis, that drew others to join him in his life of poverty and repentance. Following closely in the footsteps of his Master and Teacher, Jesus Christ, who said, “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart” (MAT 11:29), St. Francis became a model of discipleship for his followers

and for us. It was this great humility, meekness, and compassion that prompted him to pen the Rule, setting forth the foundation and boundaries of the soon-to-be Order. And it was this same character punctuated by patience and perseverance that swayed Pope Innocent III, after much debate with the curia and prayer, to approve the Order. Thomas of Celano notes in, *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents, Vol I*, that Francis stayed focused on God, his Father, “considering that more was lacking in him than [was] present ... Humble in manner, he was more humble in opinion and most humble in his own estimation.” Francis was the model, the very definition of meekness.

Jesus proclaimed meekness as the expression of His most divine heart. He asked us to master and follow one lesson plan, one blueprint, one path, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest” (Mat 11:29). In this He does not burden us with His yoke, nor does He yoke us, but rather suggests that we assume His yoke ourselves – willingly and joyfully. “Excellence in humility and meekness requires the practiced ease possible only to a whole lifetime of striving” (Mother Francis, 2021). This entails practice and dogged determination. This path is not for the lethargic, the apathetic, or the selfish for there must be the practiced labor of learning to lift a burden before we can appreciate its lightness. For this spiritual labor, we “shall find rest for [our] soul” (Mat 11:29). There is a quiet strength of those who are meek; a reposefulness (Francis 2021). It is in the reposefulness, interior calm and peace, that possession of the land abides. In Scripture, the word “meek” also indicates an individual who does not have earthly possessions or property. Note that the meek do not conquer the earth/land or purchase it, they inherit it. The land is a promise and a gift. This allows us to more clearly understand the relationship with “the poor in spirit” for those who stake out no particular claims or holding (material, ideological, doctrinal, etc.,) are free enough to possess everything. There are no squatters’ rights. St. Francis told his brothers, “If we own property, my brothers, then we shall have to have weapons to defend it.” When we stake out claims, regardless of the nature of the holdings, and defend these tiny insignificant plots with weapons of pride, blindness, arrogance, ruthlessness, aggressiveness, indifference, and are compassionless, we forfeit the land promised to the meek – we render life wasted, squandered, lost. The meek have learned to possess their own souls in peace. Subsequently, “they stand without fear upon the land become theirs not by acquisition but by gift and reward” (Francis 2021) – their inheritance: the Promised Land, the Kingdom of Heaven for which the words “land” and “the earth” are merely metaphors. Pope Francis in his Catecheses on the Beatitudes (2020) tells us that the meek have received an inheritance, the most sublime of territories, learning how to protect quite another “earth” – they protect their peace, their relationship with God, and His gifts, preserving mercy, fraternity, trust, and hope; because the meek are merciful, fraternal, trusting people with hope. A devout Jew, Jesus knew and lived the Scriptures and calls us today to follow His example of justice, kindness, love, humility, simplicity, gentleness – in sum, His meekness. These values were as countercultural in Jesus’s time as they were for Francis who followed closely in His Master’s footsteps, and remain countercultural for us today. We are called to “walk humbly with God” – “Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest.” Your inheritance and peace will be firm.

Cindy Craig, OFS

Councilor/Spirituality Pillar

St. Elizabeth of Hungary Fraternity, Augusta, GA

[References provided on request](#)



Health Tips from Dr. T

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

Exercise Is Good for Our Brains

Exercise is widely known for its physical benefits—improving cardiovascular health, building muscle, and maintaining a healthy weight. But science increasingly shows that its impact on the brain is just as powerful. From enhancing memory and cognitive function to reducing anxiety and depression, regular physical activity is one of the most effective ways to support mental well-being and brain health.

One of the most immediate effects of exercise is the release of certain neurotransmitters, specifically endorphins and dopamine. These neurotransmitters act as the body's natural mood lifters, helping to reduce feelings of anxiety, stress, and depression. Exercise also stimulates the production of brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), a protein that supports the growth and survival of neurons. BDNF plays a critical role in memory formation, learning, and higher thinking. Studies have shown that people who engage in regular aerobic activity—like walking, running, swimming or cycling—tend to perform better on memory and learning tasks.

As we age, our brains naturally undergo changes that can affect memory and cognitive function. However, regular exercise has been linked to a lower risk of cognitive decline and diseases such as Alzheimer's and dementia. It appears that exercise not only slows brain aging but can also help maintain the hippocampus, which is the area of the brain crucial for memory.

Physical activity enhances blood flow to the brain, delivering more oxygen and nutrients that improve cognitive performance. This can lead to better concentration, sharper thinking, and faster problem-solving skills. Exercise also increases the brain's production of norepinephrine, a neurotransmitter that helps with attention and alertness.

Exercise has been shown to help people fall asleep more quickly, enjoy deeper sleep, and feel more rested the next day. Good sleep is essential for brain health, as it allows the brain to clear toxins, process information, and consolidate memories. Better sleep also improves emotional regulation and decision-making.

People who exercise regularly often report feeling more capable of handling life's stressors. Physical activity can act as a buffer against the harmful effects of stress by helping regulate cortisol levels (the body's main stress hormone) and increasing resilience. This contributes to greater emotional stability and improved overall mental health.

The connection between physical movement and brain health is clear and compelling. Exercise doesn't just strengthen your body—it sharpens your mind, lifts your mood, and protects your brain as you age. Whether it's a brisk walk, a dance class, or a bike ride, incorporating regular movement into your routine is one of the most powerful investments you can make in your mental well-being. So lace up your shoes—not just for your heart, but for your brain too.

WINTER 2025



The Easter of Francis: Rekindle the Flame.

The 21st Quinquennial
Congress

July 29 - August 2, 2026
In Lexington, Kentucky

Please visit [21st Congress Secular
Franciscan Order - USA.](https://www.21stcongresssecularfranciscan.org)



The **Jubilee Year 2025** is a special year of grace and spiritual renewal in the Catholic Church, proclaimed by Pope Francis. It marks a time of pilgrimage, forgiveness, and reconciliation, inviting the faithful to deepen their relationship with God.



Jubilee Years, also known as **Holy Years**, traditionally occur every 25 years. The 2025 Jubilee will follow the theme "**Pilgrims of Hope**", emphasizing faith, unity, and the Church's mission in a world facing challenges such as social injustice, conflict, and environmental concerns.

The Holy Doors of the four major basilicas in Rome—St. Peter's, St. John Lateran, St. Paul Outside the Walls, and St. Mary Major—will be opened, symbolizing an invitation to conversion and mercy.

As the first ordinary Jubilee since the Great Jubilee of 2000, the **2025 Jubilee Year** represents a significant moment of spiritual revival for the Catholic Church and a call for believers to embrace hope and renewal.

Franciscan **websites**



Franciscan reading: [St. Anthony Messenger](#)

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](#)

The Gospel Through a Franciscan Lens

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

[Farther Christopher's Homilies](#)



BSSF Regional Executive Council Roster

Minister: Ellen Ferrone, OFS

Vice Minister: David Cruz-Uribe, OFS

Secretary: Theresa Christie, OFS

Treasurer: Charlie Comberrel, OFS

Formation Director: Lynn Oeser, OFS

Spiritual Assistant: Fr. Bob Menard, OFM

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Area 1: Gabrielle Cruz-Uribe, 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, Anderson

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

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

Multicultural Commission Chair: David Cruz-Uribe, OFS

Youth/Young Adult Fraternal Animator: Bob Dorsch, OFS

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Area 2: Cathy Champon, OFS

Area 3: Mary Welch, OFS

Area 4: Anthony Cumia, OFS

Area 5: Bob Sabisch, OFS

Communio editor: Theresa Christie, OFS



Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis Schedule of Visitations and Elections

	* confirmed				
Date	Minister	Fraternity	E/V	Area	
January 24 -25, 2026 *	Sharon Winzeler	Padre Pio Fraternity, Raleigh, NC	V	5	Fran Acosta, OFS (Michaleen Davis, OFS; Travis Bongiorno, OFS Fr. Bill Robinson, OFM Conv
March 7, 2026 *	Judy Graff	Sacred Hearts of Jesus and Mary, Bluffton, SC	E	3	Becky Bresnahan, OFS (Susan McArthur, OFS) Ken Wessling, OFS
March 8, 2026	Ron Johnson	Channel of Peace, Chattanooga, TN	E	1	
March 14, 2026*	Esther Kelly	Fraternity of brother Francis, Newton, NC	E	4	Fran Acosta, OFS; Michaelleen Davis, OFS; Georgette Schraeder, OFS
March 21st, 2026*	Mary Sacavage	Bl John Duns Scotus, Murrels Inlet, SC	E	3	Becky Bresnahan, OFS; (Susan McArthur, OFS); Sr. Kathy Adamsky,
April 22, 2026	Valerie Baronkin	Our Lady of Good Counsel, Greenville, SC	V	4	
April 24-25, 2026*	Brenda Harris	St Francis of the Hills, Hendersonville, NC	V	4	Fran Acosta, OFS; (Michaelleen Davis, OFS); fr. Hugh Macsherry, OFM
November 21, 2026	Michaelleen Davis	St. Michael the Archangel	E	4	

SUBMISSIONS TO THE COMMUNIO CAN BE SENT TO:

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