



# The Joyful Messenger

Summer 2025

## SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

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### Five Franciscan Martyrs Region

#### REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Regional Minister	Jeane Swaynos, OFS
Regional Vice Minister	Sheila Solomon, OFS
Regional Formation Director	Janice Novello, OFS, PhD.
Regional Secretary	Marcia Stambouliau, OFS
Regional Treasurer	Karen Rooney, OFS
Regional Spiritual Assistant	vacant



#### REGIONAL FAMILY COUNCILORS

Rachel Ahern, OFS  
Mark Banschbach, OFS  
Larry Bleau, OFS  
Awilda Guadalupe, OFS  
Kelly Otero, OFS  
Margie Sweeney, OFS

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### STANDING APPOINTMENTS

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Webmaster	Jolee Rinick, OFS
Electronic Newsletter Editor pro tem	Larry Bleau, OFS – volunteer needed
Multi-Cultural Liaison	volunteer needed
Youth / Young Adult Apostolate (YouFra)	Janice Novello, OFS, PhD.

## **Mission Statement**

The mission of the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region of the Secular Franciscan Order is to walk in the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi by bringing the gospel to life and life to the gospel and promoting a sanctified family life.

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## **Message from Jeane Swaynos, OFS FFMR Regional Minister**

On May 16-18 over 25 fraternities gathered together with Father Jerome Wolbert OFM and Donna Hollis OFS from the National Fraternity at our Chapter meeting. This visitation takes place once every three years, but this was the first time a friar had extended his visit and took time to visit the local fraternities as well. We gathered together at the San Pedro Center with over 75 people for our Annual Chapter Meeting and a personal visit from people on the National Council. This Chapter meeting was in the middle of Father Jerome's visit to local fraternities in the region. He conducted partial and full visitations to 16 local fraternities along with a presentation in southwest Florida. He arrived on May 9th in Tampa, then traveled East to Melbourne, South to Boynton Beach, back north to San Pedro, then on to Daytona and Tallahassee. He then proceeded to Debary, back to the west coast, and finally completed his adventure on May 26th in Cape Coral. We kept him busy and the reports to local fraternities will follow. After he left us, he went on to visit other regions in the country, so he apologizes for being behind in his report.

During the gathering at San Pedro, he met and connected with many other brothers and sisters in local fraternities he was not able to visit personally. His 7-page final regional report has been sent to your ministers to share with you where you will find his reaction to these visits. He shared specific ways to help us grow. For many fraternities that have not seen a friar for many years, this was a spark that was much needed. He now better understands our struggle being short of Spiritual Assistants and how that impacts the local fraternities.

Donna Hollis, our National Council, has also sent her fraternal report. After you read it, please share any comments with her as well. Since we have had her as a councilor for over six years, she has a special relationship with many of us, and this is reflected in her report.

Please feel free to write and communicate with Father Jerome and Donna. They are there to continue to guide us and help us grow closer to our Franciscan spirituality. Thank you all for reaching out and accommodating this special visit. You all contributed to its success.

► See article below for some main points from the visitation reports.

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## 21<sup>st</sup> Quinquennial Congress – Mark your calendar!

### July 29 – Aug 2, 2026

As we commemorate the 800th anniversary of Francis Transitus, our theme is:

#### **“The Easter of St. Francis: Rekindle the Flame”**

The Quinquennial will be held next year at the Lexington Griffin Gate Marriott Golf Resort in Lexington, KY. See flyer at the end of this newsletter. For more details online, visit <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/21st-quinquennial-congress-q2026/>.

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## NAFRA News

### Jeane Swaynos, OFS, FFMR Regional Minister

Here is some news from our National Fraternity. The next National Chapter will be held in September.

#### **JPIC Award**

The recipient of the 2024 Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation award is **Carolyn Townes, OFS**. Carolyn’s contributions over many years to Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation, and to the Order, are well known, and we will all hear more soon! The official presentation will be at our National Chapter in Marriottsville, MD, in September.

Let us all take a moment to congratulate Carolyn, and say a prayer of thanks for all the nominees, whose lives are such powerful examples for Franciscan work and living.

*Joe Makley, OFS, Animator, JPIC Commission, OFS-USA*

#### **Support for FAN (Franciscan Action Network)**

At the next National Chapter Meeting and National Election, the National Fraternity will take a vote whether to support FAN or continue to remain as we are. Detailed information has been forwarded to your ministers. Please talk about this within your fraternity, and if you have a strong opinion, please let Jeane know at [swaynos@cfl.rr.com](mailto:swaynos@cfl.rr.com).

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## Regional Visitation Highlights

### Jeane Swaynos, OFS, FFMR Regional Minister

Here are some of the highlights in the reports from our Visitors. Many of these can be implemented at the local fraternity level. Fr. Jerome's report, along with Donna's report, was sent to your local minister. Be sure you have an opportunity to read it.

- **Success** – We updated our Regional Guidelines, and our Previsitation and Election forms.
- **Care of aging members** – Work to build strong fraternal relationships by examining how you include those who frequently cannot attend meetings in person.
- **Help find Spiritual Assistants** – Assist the OFS Animator in finding a spiritual assistant for your fraternity. While it is the friars' responsibility first, if you are near people who might serve and the friars are far away, they will still need your help to identify such people and will rely on your research to find someone, else they may appoint a person not suitable for your particular fraternity.
- **Rekindle your fraternity's relationship with Friars** – Connect (or reconnect) with the friars who established your fraternity and the friar province to which you are currently bonded; these are not necessarily the same.
- **Read Rules and Constitution** – Ensure that all in leadership – indeed all those capable of leadership – have read not only the Rule but also the General Constitutions, the International Statutes, and the National Statutes, and are aware of where to find what type of guidance and perspective. This would be good ongoing council formation: to read legislation and then let each council member share what surprises them or what helps us live our OFS vocation.



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## From Dr. Janice Mary Novello, OFS FFMR Formation Director

### *At the house of Martha and Mary*

*Lk 10:38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!"*

*41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but few things are needed—or indeed only one. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

I have always felt a kinship with Martha. Being a mother and grandmother in charge of all the holiday festivities, along with acting as a host for many community fundraisers, I knew firsthand that there were many details that needed full attention, swift decisions, and action. Poor Martha, there she was with a deluge of disciples entering her home, unannounced, and she needing to provide Hebrew Hospitality for everyone. Comfortable seating arrangements had to be found while food and drink had to be served immediately.

Yes, I empathized with Martha.

But we Franciscans scour the Gospels for deeper meaning—ways that we may use these writings to live our Charism of Gospel to Life, Life to Gospel. We work to see how Luke can be understood and applied to assist our lives to grow richer in the Lord.

It is easy to see that we Seculars are experts at being Marthas in our Fraternities. The Minister is setting up Gatherings and completing Regional Reports. The secretary is typing up minutes, sending out cards, and keeping attendance. The treasurer is going to the bank and posting the available funds while keeping an eye on the next Fair Share. The Formation Director is planning a yearlong theme for ongoing formation, while keeping track of where the Candidates are in their studies. The members are signing up to bring refreshments and working diligently on the Fraternity's Apostolate and upcoming events. We have Martha down pat.

Let us stop and recall when Saint Francis asked Saint Clare which he should be — Contemplative or Active — she said both. And from that moment we Franciscans have taken that to heart, but perhaps not practice.

Jesus taught that Mary's contemplation of His words, the turning them in her mind into understanding was the better part. No matter how busy, no matter how important, no matter how demanding our actions are we must stop and sit at the foot of Jesus and let Him speak to us in quiet and clam and peace. That is how we truly live our Charism.

Secular Franciscans throughout our Region are practicing Meditation, Lectio Divina, and using the two pillars of Morning and Evening Prayer to merge the outreach of Martha to the quietness of Mary. This oneness of purpose does not come easy, but with daily discipline and love. Thus, we will grow in our Solemn Promise of Poverty to the World by being deliberately still.

Jesus, I am listening.



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## Upcoming Events

### **Sep 27 - St. Elizabeth of Hungary Family Gathering**

On Saturday, September 27, the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Family will hold its Family Gathering at St. Mary of the Lakes Catholic Church, 218 Ocklawaha, Eustis, FL 32726, in the Guadalupe Room. Check-in will be at 9:30, and the gathering will run from 10:00-3:30. We will have formation, a discussion of the *Instrumentum Laboris*, a presentation on servant leadership, and will discuss any local issues you may have. Lunch and social time are included. Contact your Family Councilor for more details and to register. If you want to have lunch, we need a head count by Sep 13; after that bring your own.

### **Oct 3 - Franciscan Weekend Retreat – Transitus**

There will be a weekend retreat on **October 3-5** at the **San Pedro Center**. The retreat leader will be Fr. Francisco Arrendondo OFM Cap. It will begin with check-in at 4pm on Friday and end with 11am Mass on Sunday and will include a Transitus service.

For more information and registration see <https://www.sanpedrocenter.org/upcoming-events/franciscan-weekend-retreat-2025> .

### **Dec - Franciscan Greccio Celebration**

In December all members of the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region are invited to congregate at the **Shrine of Our Lady of the Universe** in Orlando, FL, for the third annual Greccio celebration. As details emerge we'll send them to your minister, so be on the lookout.





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## Meet Your Provincials

### Jeane Swaynos OFS, FFMR Regional Minister

Each of the fraternities is bonded to one of the following four obediences. Below are the friars from each obedience who serve as Provincial Assistant for that obedience. Together they form the Conference of National Spiritual Assistants (CNSA). At our last visitation Fr. Jerome recommended that each local fraternity contact and form a relationship with the Provincial Assistant for the particular obedience to which the fraternity is bonded. Please be sure to email them, send them your newsletters, and let them know when you are having special events or professions. Their contact information is listed below.

#### **Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv.**



Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv, of Our Lady of the Angels Province, is originally from Poland, and has been a missionary to Kenya and Tanzania. He also served as Vocation Director, Retreat Director, Postulant Director, and parish priest. His last ministry before joining the CNSA was Vice Director of Novitiate in Arroyo Grande, CA. Fr. Marek has worked with Secular Franciscans for many years. He is currently the CNSA president in turn.

His email is: [OFS-National@olaprovince.org](mailto:OFS-National@olaprovince.org)

The fraternities bonded to this obedience are:

- St. Anthony of Padua, Boynton Beach
- St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Port St. Lucie
- St. Padre Pio, Jensen Beach



**Fr. Christopher Panagoplos, T.O.R.**



Fr. Chris Panagoplos TOR is Provincial Spiritual Assistant for Immaculate Conception Province, Third Order Regular obedience (TOR). He is the Regional Spiritual Assistant for the Lady Poverty Region, which covers central and western PA, all of WV, and some of OH. He is also a member of the Franciscan Family Forum Core Team.

His email is: [XtoferTOR@aol.com](mailto:XtoferTOR@aol.com)

The fraternities bonded to this obedience are:

- Lady Poverty, Winter Park
- Portiuncula, Bradenton
- St. Clare of Assisi, Port Charlotte
- St. Josephs Cocoa Beach
- St. Michael the Archangel, Tampa
- The Encounter, Winter Haven

**Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM**



Fr. Jerome Wolbert OFM is the Provincial Spiritual Assistant for Our Lady of Guadalupe Province, Order of Friars Minor. This province covers nearly the entire USA.

His email is: [jeromeofm@gmail.com](mailto:jeromeofm@gmail.com)

The fraternities bonded to this obedience are:

- Blessed Solanus Casey, Venice
- Divine Mercy, Vero Beach
- Espejo de Cristo, Hialeah
- Little Flock, Fairhope, AL
- Little Flower of St. Francis, Daytona Beach
- Mother of the Living Gospel, Orlando
- Nombre de Dios, Palm Coast
- Our Lady of the Angels, Melbourne
- Our Lady of Guadalupe, Tallahassee
- San Damiano, Ruskin
- San Damiano, Summerfield
- St. Anthony of Padua, Gulfport
- St. Bonaventure, Fleming Island
- St. Clare, Ave Maria
- St. Francis, Apopka
- St. Francis of Assisi, Clearwater
- St. John Capistrano, Tampa
- St. Joseph's Ft. Lauderdale
- St. Maximillian Kolbe, Cape Coral
- St. Maximillian Kolbe, DeBary

**Fr. John DeLaRiva, OFM Cap.**



Fr. John DeLaRiva, OFM Cap., is the Provincial Assistant for the OFM Cap. obedience. He was born in February of 1961 and raised in Orange County, CA. He joined the Capuchin Franciscans in 1989 at the age of 29, professed Final Vows in 1996, and was ordained a Priest in 1999. His ministries have focused on parish work, Chaplaincy for hospitals, high schools, and jails. His previous assignment was as Rector of the National Shrine of Saint Francis of Assisi located in San Francisco, CA.

His email is: [papajcali@gmail.com](mailto:papajcali@gmail.com)

Currently no fraternities in our Region are bonded to the OFM Cap. obedience.



# News From the Fraternities

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## Espejo de Cristo Fraternity Hialeah, FL

Espejo de Cristo (Mirror of Christ) Fraternity and friars of the St. Padre Pio Friary participated in a Day of Prayer based on St. Francis' *The Canticle of the Sun*.



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## San Damiano Fraternity Ruskin, FL

More than 45 people gathered for a Day of Reflection in St. Joachim Hall on a recent Saturday, sponsored by the Secular Franciscans. Fr. Kevin and Reinaldo Jara led them in a day of “Gazing: Seeing & Being Seen.” Parishioners and Secular Franciscans from three fraternities learned how to embrace God’s Loving Gaze and come to know others more fully during a meaningful day of prayer, discussion, Mass, and fellowship. The San Damiano Fraternity appreciated Fr. Kevin and Reinaldo and all those who gathered to make it a Blessed Day!



Four new Inquirers were welcomed to the next stage of Formation in the Secular Franciscan Order on Feb 1, 2025. From left to right: Mary Walsh, Ann Verrilli, Lucy Rotunda, and Virginia Trotta. Far right is Formation Director Lynn Millikin.





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## St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity Boynton Beach, FL

On February 16th, St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity in Boynton Beach commemorated the 25th Anniversary of Profession of Lesley Vaitekunas OFS, with a Mass celebrated by Fr. Bob Benko OFM Conv, Pastor of St. Mark Church. A lovely luncheon and celebratory cake followed Mass.



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## Lady Poverty Fraternity Winter Park, FL

Lady Poverty officially has a newly professed member, Minerva Alicea! Minerva was professed on February 2, 2025, in a private mass with over 75 people in attendance. The fraternity feels truly blessed to have Minerva as part of their fraternity and Region.



On April 6 the fraternity welcomed Debra Bridges and Kevin Bryant with a ceremony and celebration. A sponsor ceremony was held in June for a professed member to walk with them in their formation process and help guide them.





On May 10 Lady Poverty Fraternity hosted a Peace Service at San Pedro for the second year. A peace pole was gifted to their second school, St. Andrews Catholic School, for placement on their campus. St. Andrews Catholic School provided their choir of seven students with their angelic voices and uplifting tempo to the service. The principal Latrina Peters-Gipson and their Choir Director Cecile Strudwick attended in support of their students.



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## St Bonaventure Fraternity Fleming Island, FL

Members of St Bonaventure Fraternity in Fleming Island spent the day at the Shrine of Our Lady of La Leche in St. Augustine. The Fraternity participated in the Plenary Indulgence offered at the site by the Diocese of St. Augustine as part of the Jubilee Year. St. Bonaventure Fraternity met at the Shrine as part of our monthly gathering in March. Members participated in confession and mass together as part of the indulgence. The gathering included walking the Stations of the Cross provided for at the site.



Below are pictures of the group in front of the shrine's entrance and in front of the great cross on the property.



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## San Damiano Fraternity Summerfield, FL

The San Damiano Fraternity (Summerfield) took up discussion of *Instrument Laboris* and held an interactive visioning session, in which members gave their collective views of what they would like to see the fraternity be 10 years from now. As part of their ongoing formation they discussed St. Francis' *Canticle of the Sun*. Fr. Jerome Wolbert OFM visited the fraternity in May and provided feedback on what they were doing well, as well as suggestions on what they could improve.

On June 4, 2025, the fraternity held its third annual Day of Reflection. Below is a group photo of the members and some guests. The speaker was Fr. Nick Mormando OFM Cap. His talks were very spiritual, deep, and plenty of time was permitted for reflection while the attendees walked the peaceful grounds. While the theme was "A Closer Walk With Jesus," Fr. Nick, inspired by the Holy Spirit, tailored his reflections to the group, to what the Holy Spirit told him they needed to contemplate at this stage of their spiritual journey as Secular Franciscans.





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## Saint Michael the Archangel Fraternity Tampa, FL

On January 11th, the Saint Michael the Archangel fraternity officially and joyfully welcomed Michael DiClaudio into his time of Inquiry, and Susan Bruno and Ray Kongwa into the fraternity with their Rite of Admission. Member Lynne Float led us in our annual Extraction of Saints, an old Franciscan tradition that takes place every year around the Feast of the Epiphany. Every professed member (and those in formation) received, for prayer and meditation over the year, a scripture passage, a patron Franciscan saint, and a fraternity member to pray for.

On March 20th, the fraternity traveled to Pasco County on a pilgrimage to Saint Leo Abbey. It is designated as one of the U.S. Holy Sites for the Jubilee Year of Hope. Saint Leo Abbey is listed on the U.S. National Register of Historic Places.



On July 5th, Marigelle Malapira professed her permanent commitment to the Secular Franciscan Order. She was accepted by their Minister Sandra Scionti. Their spiritual assistant, Fr. Alberto Bueno TOR, presided.



# 21st Quinquennial Congress

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**“The Easter of St. Francis: *Rekindle the flame*”**

Lexington Griffin Gate Marriott Golf Resort  
Lexington, KY



### DRIVING DISTANCE TO LEXINGTON, KY

CITY	DISTANCE
Louisville, KY	77 miles
Cincinnati, OH	82 miles
Knoxville, TN	172 miles
Charleston, WV	176 miles
Indianapolis, IN	189 miles
Columbus, OH	189 miles
Nashville, TN	214 miles
Cleveland, OH	331 miles
St. Louis, MO	337 miles
Detroit, MI	345 miles
Pittsburgh, PA	372 miles
Chicago, IL	373 miles
Atlanta, GA	382 miles
Charlotte, NC	401 miles
Birmingham, AL	404 miles
Memphis, TN	422 miles
Milwaukee, WI	469 miles
Washington, DC	512 miles
Buffalo, NY	515 miles
Baltimore, MD	538 miles
Charleston, SC	542 miles
Norfolk, VA	583 miles
Kansas City, MO	583 miles

