



The Joyful Messenger

Fall 2025

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

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 Stambouljian, OFS
Regional Treasurer	Karen Rooney, OFS
Regional Spiritual Assistants	Friar Randall Roberts OFM Cap., Friar Rodolfo Ramon Cabrera OFM Cap.



REGIONAL FAMILY COUNCILORS

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

STANDING APPOINTMENTS

Webmaster	Jolee Rinick, OFS
Electronic Newsletter Editor pro tem	<i>we need a volunteer</i>
Multi-Cultural Liaison	vacant
Youth / Young Adult Apostolate (YouFra)	Janice Novello, OFS, PhD
Database Manager	Pat Wolfert, OFS

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.

Message from Jeane Swaynos, OFS FFMR Regional Minister

Your Regional Executive Council will meet on Nov 21-23 at St. Leo's Abbey. We will finalize the annual report, which will be sent out shortly thereafter. Meanwhile, a lot has happened at the National level of our Order.

NAFRA Meeting

ELECTIONS, FUTURE PLANS

OFS-USA held its elections at the Sep 9-14 meeting. Our Minister, Vice Minister, Formation Director, Secretary, and International Councilor have remained the same. We have a new Treasurer. Our new Area Councilor is Christine Blood. She will preside at the FFMR elections in May.

The National Executive Council plans a forward looking agenda for the next three years. Among the items they will tackle are a revision of the National Statutes, new branding and vocational materials, updated guidelines and translations, preparations for the 2026 and 2031 Quinquennials, planning for the 50th Anniversary of the OFS Rule in 2028, a focus on youth and young adult vocations, and stewardship of a major bequest.

TAU DISTRIBUTION

If you would like to have a hardcopy of the OFS-USA newsletter, TAU, you must let your local minster know so it can be recorded in the database. The cost to NAFRA to send a single printed edition is \$40,000, so they want to make sure they are sent only when requested.

The TAU is presently available electrically at <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/tau-usa-newsletter/> . Some fraternities make sure those who need a copy receive one at the local meeting; a simplified copy for printing is available.

FANS SUPPORT

The NEC has voted not to support Franciscan Action Network (FANS) at this time. In order to change this policy, there will need to be 60% of the NEC in support of that change. The NEC will review this again next year. Members may still join individually.

Quinquennial Congress (Q2026)

The registration for the Q is online; read about it on the NAFRA website at <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/21st-quinquennial-congress-q2026/> for more information. The dates are July 29-August 2 and will be held in Lexington Kentucky. A discounted early registration is available through Dec 31.

End of Year Business

Your Annual Reports will be going out in November. Please schedule time for your Council to complete it and submit it by the end of January 2026.

Regional Elections

The next Regional Chapter of Elections will be held **May 15-17, 2026. Local fraternities must examine their schedules and ensure there are no meetings which conflict with these dates.** If there is a conflict, they must take steps to change this.

A Franciscan Approach to Peace of Soul and Body **by Margie C. Sweeney, MD, OFS**

Peace is a hallmark of our Franciscan spirituality. How do we obtain that “peace of soul and body” that St. Francis admonishes us we need? Please consider the Admonition, Scripture, and Rule below and then answer the two questions that follow for guidance on acquiring this peace. May God grant you His peace that passes all understanding.

Admonitions #15 - Peace

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (Mt 5:9)

Those people are truly peacemakers who, regardless of what they suffer in this world, preserve peace of soul and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scripture References

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. (Mt 5:9)

I have said this to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (Jn 16:33)

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:6-7)

Count it all joy, my brethren, when you meet various trials, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (Jas 1:2-4)

Article 19 of the Rule

Mindful that they are bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly, they should seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon. Messengers of perfect joy in every circumstance, they should strive to bring joy and hope to others. Since they are immersed in the resurrection of Christ, which gives true meaning to Sister Death, let them serenely tend toward the ultimate encounter with the Father.

Questions for Reflection

- How do you cultivate peace of soul and body out of love of our Lord Jesus Christ?
- How has the transforming power of love and pardon shaped your peace of soul and body for love of our Lord Jesus Christ?

Franciscan Family Gathering St. Elizabeth of Hungary Family

**Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Church, Eustis, FL
Fall 2025**

The St. Elizabeth of Hungary Family held its family gathering at Our Lady of the Lakes Catholic Church, Eustis, FL, on Sep 27. Twenty members representing five fraternities attended. Our speakers, Larry Bleau OFS and Kelly Otero OFS, shown in center, gave talks on ways in which *Instrumentum Laboris* can be implemented and Servant Leadership. If you'd like either of these talks given to your family of fraternities, contact your Family Councilor.



Call To Serve

by Sheila Soloman

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Article 22 of our Rule states:

The fraternity is to be established conically. It becomes the basic unit of the whole Order and a visible sign of the Church, the community of love. This should be the privileged place for developing a sense of church and the Franciscan vocation and for enlivening the apostolic life of its members.

Each local fraternity is truly a foundation stone for the region, the country and the world.

Last month, Jeane asked me to assemble a nominating committee to prepare a slate of candidates for our regional elections in May. I've been somewhat torn, wanting to be careful about inviting those who already serve in vital roles within their local fraternities. I don't want to weaken a local fraternity by drawing away one of its central members to serve at the regional level.

Many of us on the regional council also serve on our local councils. Therefore, I ask my brothers and sisters in the Five Franciscan Martyrs Region to be open to stepping into fraternity leadership if one of your council members is called to serve at the regional level.

That being said, if we are truly living our Rule as we promised at Profession, then each of us should be ready and willing to serve the Order—whenever and however we are needed.

We have just celebrated the passing of the Poor Man of Assisi, who served our Lord faithfully until his final breath. You are not being asked to walk barefoot to the Holy Land to meet Sultan al-Kamil, to climb Mount La Verna, or to live in solitude on an island without food or drink. Rather, we ask you to prayerfully consider serving on the nominating committee, or offering yourself as a candidate for a position on the regional or fraternity council.

St. Francis did what was his to do—please, do what is yours.

Saint Carlo Acutis

Reflections by Fred Schaffer, OFS



One of the two newly canonized saints possesses a profound Eucharistic devotion that merits discussion. Carlo Acutis (3 May 1991 – 12 October 2006), an English-born Italian Catholic adolescent, was renowned for his unwavering commitment to the Eucharist and his innovative use of digital media to foster Catholic devotion. Born in London and nurtured in Milan, he cultivated an early fascination with computers and video games, mastering programming and web design independently while aiding his parish and school with various digital initiatives. At 15 he died of AML leukemia, a cancer of the blood.

His baptism took place on 18 May 1991, two weeks after his birth, in the Church of Our Lady of Dolours, Chelsea. His paternal grandfather, Carlo, was his godfather, and his maternal grandmother, Luana, was his godmother. Neither of his parents was religious. Acutis's mother, Antonia, grew up in a secular family. She was confirmed while she was in college and was married in the church, but she did not attend Mass before Acutis was born. She testified that her son's faith and his insistent questions brought her back to faith. At the time of his death, he was an only child, but in 2010 his parents had twins on the anniversary of Acutis's death, which his mother attributed to his intercession.

Acutis showed an interest in the lives of saints, especially Francis of Assisi, Anthony of Padua, Francisco and Jacinta Marto, Dominic Savio, Tarcisius, Bernadette Soubirous, and Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi. He is said to have prayed to his guardian angel frequently and exhibited a special devotion to St. Michael the Archangel. When Acutis was 12 years old, he became a catechist in his parish, Santa Maria Segreta.

I hope there are more young people out there who have this exceptional devotion to Jesus Christ so that other young and old people may learn from them.

St. Carlo Acutis Evening Prayer Group by Sheila Solomon OFS, Regional Vice Minister

The spring of 2020 was a time of anxiety, confusion, isolation, and sadness. As the world faced the unprecedented threat of the COVID-19 virus, many of us were confined to our homes, turning to virtual mediums like Zoom to stay connected.

Amid this uncertainty, Robert Longo OFS, a member of the St. Joseph of Cupertino Secular Franciscan Fraternity in Maryland, brought together a group of thirteen Secular Franciscans to pray Evening Prayer daily via Zoom. Adopting the name, St. Carlo Acutis Evening Prayer group their numbers fluctuated, eventually including members from Maryland, Virginia, Florida, Colorado, and Minnesota.

This group demonstrates their Franciscan spirit by their enduring commitment to their prayer, fellowship, resilience and love. Now, five years later these faithful Franciscans continue to gather daily. Their unwavering dedication demonstrates the true meaning of being a member of our Order. We are bound not only to our local fraternities but to our brothers and sisters across the country and the world. With the faith of St. Francis, this group formed in prayer to weather the pandemic. Today, they continue to come together in faith to pray for a world in desperate need of hope and healing, lifting each other up through individual trials and even praying through the passing of three of their cherished members.

Thank you for being living examples in the spirit of St. Francis and St. Clare by reflecting the love of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. In the photo below are Paula, Bob, David, Lynne, Carol, Jeanne, Pat, and Pope Francis. Not available when this photo was taken is Jiga.



News From the Fraternities

Espejo de Cristo Fraternity Hialeah, FL

On August 9th, 2025, at Immaculate Conception Church the Fraternity St. Francis of Assisi – Espejo de Cristo with great joy celebrated the profession into the Secular Franciscan Order of our sister Ruth Morales, OFS. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Mormando OFM Cap and concelebrated by Fr. Alekha OFM Cap.

Family, friends, Br. Lombardo OFM Cap. (Spiritual Assistant), and Willie Guadalupe OFS (Regional Family Councilor) joined the fraternity for this delightful celebration. Peace and all Good.



San Damiano Fraternity Summerfield, FL

Members got together outside of their regular gathering for some fun. After a ride on the Glass Bottom Boat at Silver Springs State Park they shared lunch at a nearby restaurant.



The fraternity celebrated its 24th anniversary in September. Jackie Muscone OFS read from a short history of the fraternity, and longtime members shared their recollections of the fraternity's early days.



Last but not least, acting as a body, the fraternity completed the first phase of its *Instrumentum Laboris* activity and produced a vision for its future which encompasses all seven of the subject areas recommended by OFS-USA. They look forward to generating goals and a plan to implement them.

Blessed Solanus Casey Fraternity **Venice, FL**

Candidate Jane Greenwood professed into the OFS on Sunday, Sep 21, 2025, at Epiphany Cathedral's Santa Maria Chapel followed by a reception at the Magi Hall/Library. Around 30 attended. A joyful day, indeed!



St. Clare Fraternity Ave Maria, FL

Some fraternity members who are of Ave Marie Parish hosted the Fourth Annual Blessing of the Animals at Ave Maria Parish Church on the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi. Held in conjunction with two Ave Maria University Student Households, Mandato Dei and Keepers of His House, this treasured tradition began in 2021 and has grown steadily since inception. Gwen Worrell partnered with the pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Church in Lehigh Acres to provide each pet with a blessed St. Francis/St. Anthony medal. Over 100 pets were blessed, and there was nary a bark among them; very well behaved. Attendees also made donations of diapers and cash in support of the Leaders of Many Immokalee Outreach.



San Damiano Fraternity Ruskin, FL

The San Damiano Fraternity, Ruskin, conducted the Rite of Admission for new Candidates Ann Verrilli and Mary Walsh at their October Monthly Gathering. The Rite of Admission was conducted by Formation Director Lynn Millikin, Minister Kathy Vore, Deacon Pat Frye, and member Sue Rogers. Following the Rite of Admission, fraternity members celebrated with cake and fellowship.



Members also collected household items for one of its five Apostolates, Mary & Martha House, which provides alternative housing for women and their children in crisis. Donations included a cuddly teddy bear.



Our Lady of Guadalupe Fraternity Tallahassee, FL

On September 20 the fraternity held its triannual elections; below is a photo of the newly elected Council. Shown left to right: ecclesial witness Margaret Wendal OFS; J Frank Pate OFS (minister); Suzy Oligmueller OFS (vice-minister); Chris Constantino OFS (formation director); Claude Kenneson OFS (secretary); Mary Rozofsky OFS (treasurer); Charlene DeMarco OFS (Councilor); and presider Kelly Otero OFS.



On Oct 4, Ann Megargee (center, leaning on statue of St. Francis) professed into the Order.



On Oct 3 members celebrated Transitus with local TOR sisters who serving in campus ministry.



Our Lady of the Angels and St. Joseph's Fraternity Melbourne and Cocoa Beach, FL

The two fraternities held a joint Transitus Service at Ascension Catholic Church's Chapel on Friday, October 3rd, at 4:00pm. Deacon Sergio Colon OFS, a Secular Franciscan of over 35 years, led the beautiful service, which commemorates the passing of St. Francis from death to Life. The prayer service commenced with The Testament of Saint Francis, contained many beautiful readings, and concluded with the Canticle of the Creatures. During this service, Our Lord was on the Altar. Deacon had a beautiful Holy Communion service; it was such a beautiful experience to receive Our Lord in His Sacrament. Following Deacon's Sergio's blessing, they recited the words of Saint Francis:

May the Lord bless and keep you: May He make His Face shine upon you and be merciful to you: May He turn His Countenance towards you and give you His peace.

Later the fraternity went to a Saint Francis Day at Viera High School in Viera, Florida, for the blessing of the animals.

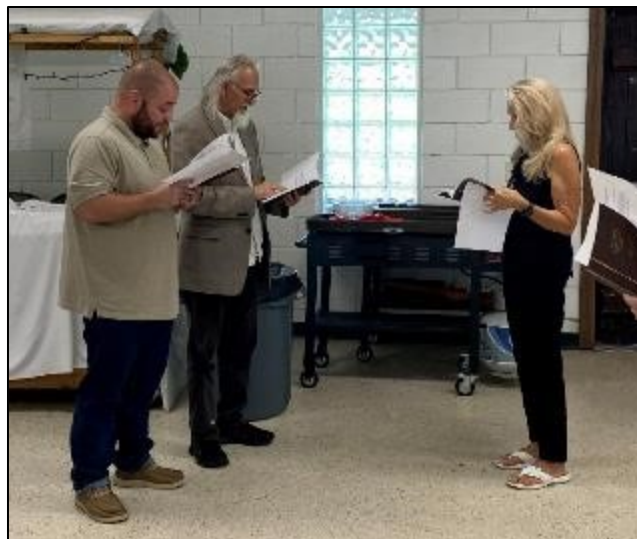


St. Bonaventure Fraternity Fleming Island, FL

Members of St Bonaventure Fraternity participate in the OFS LSM (*Laudato Si* Movement) Seed Project. Congratulations to Nani Lafont, OFS and candidate Kathleen Patneau (to be professed in 2026) for earning their *Laudato Si* Animator certificate. These two members and the St. Bonaventure Fraternity are working with the Diocese of St Augustine to promote *Laudato Si* and the Care for Creation.



Below, Vice Minister Leslie Armas, OFS presides over the Rite of Admission for Mario Sierra Jr and Ricky Neumann.



St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity Boynton Beach, FL

On October 3, fraternity members gathered at St. Mark's Church in Boynton Beach for a 7:00pm prayer service commemorating the Transitus of St. Francis. Along with the friars and fraternity, the parish community attended. It included Scripture readings, music, readings from the life of St. Francis, blessing and distribution of the St. Francis bread, and veneration of a relic of St. Francis. After the service, members provided refreshments and time for community.

