



The Joyful Messenger

Winter 2026

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 Stamboulian, OFS
Regional Treasurer	Karen Rooney, OFS
Regional Spiritual Assistants	Friar Rodolfo Ramon Cabrera OFM Cap., Friar Randall Roberts 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
Electronic Newsletter Editor pro tem
Multi-Cultural Liaison
Youth / Young Adult Apostolate (YouFra)
Database Manager

Jolee Rinick, OFS
Larry Bleau, OFS – <i>need volunteer</i>
vacant – <i>need volunteer</i>
Janice Novello, OFS, PhD
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

Chapter Meeting and Election May 15-17 at San Pedro

There is a mandatory Chapter meeting for all local ministers on May 15-17 at San Pedro. Since this year is an election year all local fraternities and the Regional Executive Council must be represented. After last year's visitation, Father Jerome suggested we make this meeting mandatory for all. The roll call is early Saturday morning on May 16th, so it is important that delegates arrive on time and be present for the roll call. If your minister cannot attend, please be sure to send an elected delegate from your council. The first choice should be your Vice Minister. If that is not possible send another elected Council member chosen by vote of your Council, and be sure to include a letter of delegation for whomever you select.

We are presently seeking nominations for all Regional Executive Council positions: minister, vice minister, formation, secretary, treasurer, and eight councilmembers throughout the state. If you are unsure what the position requires, please contact a member of the Regional Executive Council and we will be happy to explain the responsibilities. If you can think of anyone in your local fraternity who would be a good candidate, please nominate them and send their names to our Regional Vice Minister, Sheila Solomon.

I have served you for 12 years as the Region's Vice Minister and then Minister. I want to take this opportunity to thank you for giving me the privilege to serve you during this time. You do not realize how your enthusiasm, love, and genuine caring have encouraged me throughout these years. I have grown spiritually being surrounded by all of you. You taught me a great deal about faith and perseverance. I watched as many of you endure challenges and struggles but saw these as opportunities to grow closer to God. This relationship we built, I now see as a gift. Many of you will be asked to serve a three-year term for one of these positions. Do not be afraid or think you cannot do this. Pray and discern. Let the Holy Spirit guide you as you decide.

Jeane Swaynos, OFS FFMR Regional Minister

Why a Shepherd

Why a shepherd? Sheep are stinky and have lots of bugs, and shepherds work hard, are paid little, and need to check their sheep every day. The sheep get flies, gnats, mosquitoes, and stink. Sometimes sheep are stubborn, do not follow directions, and are not the brightest of animals. Surely God could have come up with a better example.

My oldest child gave me a book this Christmas “The Way of the Shepherd – Seven secrets to managing productive people.” The only religious connection was the word “shepherd.” I read and reflected on it through the eyes of a Secular Franciscan.

Throughout the Old and New Testament, the Bible uses a shepherd to describe the relationship between Jesus with us. A shepherd knows the condition of his flock. He gets to know them one at a time and learns about their personal problems. He knows their strengths and weaknesses and what motivates them. He invests time in taking care of them and building a strong relationship with them. He is visible and checks on them every day; sometimes more than once. He loves them and they sense this love.

The sheep know their shepherd and will follow them just by the sound of his voice. Nothing assures them more than seeing their shepherd every day; they trust him with their life. If they stray from the flock the shepherd will find them. He communicates to his sheep his desires. The shepherd makes the pasture safe and counts them every day.

Sheep were domesticated 8000 years ago, and wool garments were worn in Babylon. A skilled shepherd can singly handedly move his flock of over 100 sheep to greener pastures with the use of his voice and his staff. He gets in front of the herd and gently nudges the lead sheep in the right direction, and the rest of the sheep follow. A successful shepherd leads by his staff, and his sheep do not fear him but trust his direction. If he sees the sheep heading in the wrong direction, away from the herd, he uses the other end of the staff and curves it around the sheep’s neck and pulls him in the right direction in alignment with the rest of the flock. The staff

represents the shepherd responsibility to encourage his flock. Sometimes it used to stock the side of his head or pull him closer to his side.

The shepherd also has a rod. The rod is sometimes needed to protect the sheep and keep them away from harm's way. It is also used to discipline the sheep if the sheep is far away and heading for trouble. At the end of the day the rod is used to count the sheep as they enter a safe area. The shepherd uses it also to inspect the wool. If the wool is long, it is harder to detect problems with their skin.

The imagery of Jesus as a shepherd serves as a powerful reminder of His role in the lives of those that believe. It encapsulates His guidance, protection, and unconditional love, assuring followers that they are never alone and they have a caring shepherd who leads them through life. This metaphor not only highlights Jesus' divine nature but also His intimate relationship with those who follow His intimate relationship.

Jesus isn't just calling Himself a shepherd, but a good shepherd. This is extremely important. By calling Himself good, Jesus was claiming to be the promised Messiah. He says that "there is only One who is good" and that is God (Matthew 19:17; Luke 18:19).

Now when I look at the manager, I have a better understanding of the role of the shepherd.

Shepherd me, O God, beyond my wants, beyond my fears, from death into life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

- As a Secular Franciscan, do you see yourself as one of the sheep?
- When do you see yourself as the shepherd?
- Describe your flock.

Meet Our New Regional Spiritual Assistant

Fr. Alberto Bueno TOR

Father Alberto F. Bueno, a Third Order Regular of St. Francis, was born in 1955 in Havana, Cuba. He attended high school at Bishop Ireton High School in Alexandria; earned his bachelor's from George Mason University in Fairfax; and his master's from the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto. Fr. Bueno joined the Franciscan community in 1979, professed his first vows in 1981, and made his solemn profession in 1985. He spent internships at St. Francis Prep School and at Sacred Heart Church in Spring Grove, PA, and served his deacon internship at Holy Spirit Church in Mitchell, SD. He was ordained in 1986 by the late Bishop James Hogan of the Diocese of Altoona-Johnstown. He served in campus ministry at Franciscan University of Steubenville, OH, and in hospital chaplaincy in Fort Worth, TX. He became parochial vicar of St. Thomas Church, Fort Worth, in 1990, and after further graduate study at Washington Theological Union in Washington, DC, he served on the faculty of Conwell-Egan Catholic High School in Fairless Hills, PA. He became assistant pastor of St. Lawrence Church in Tampa, FL, in 1996, and in 1998 became chaplain of the New College of Florida, Ringling Arts and Design College, and Manatee College, all in Sarasota, FL. In 2003, Fr. Bueno returned to the Fort Worth Diocese as pastor of multiple parishes. In 2009, Fr. Bueno served as parochial vicar of St. Joseph Church in Herndon, VA. In 2020 he was assigned as parochial vicar at St. Patrick Church in Tampa, where he currently serves. He is also Spiritual Assistant for the St. Michael the Archangel fraternity in Tampa. We welcome him to our Region.



Greccio Celebration

Orlando, FL

Members from around the Region – nearly 50 of them – gathered at the Basilica of Mary Queen of the Universe in Orlando on January 10 to celebrate the miraculous event that took place at Greccio over 800 years ago. After joining in the noon Mass they shared lunch, after which Faith Libbe OFS gave a presentation about the towns of Greccio and Bethlehem, with vivid pictures of each. The group then processed back into the church and recited prayers before a life-size reproduction of the creche scene. Many thanks to Faith for her work and members of the Lady Poverty Fraternity, St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Francis of Assisi, and Mother of the Living Gospel, who helped put together the luncheon and the event.



Franciscan Days of Reflection

“The Seven Crosses of St. Francis”



Fr. Francisco Arredondo, OFM Cap, will lead two Days of Reflection. He will speak on “**The Seven Crosses of St. Francis**” from the *Legends and Sermons* by St. Bonaventure. The talks will be held in two different locations.

- **March 14, 8:30am to 3:00pm**, at **Prince of Peace Catholic Church in Sun City Center, FL**. This will be sponsored by the **San Damiano Fraternity (Ruskin)** and will be their 13th Annual Day of Reflection. Arrive by 8:00am for check in.

For more information contact Pat Wolfert OFS at 813-210-5902 or
patwolfert1942@gmail.com .

- **May 7, 9:30am to 4:00pm**, at the **Warren Willis Methodist Conference Center in Fruitland Park, FL**. This will be sponsored by the **San Damiano Fraternity (Summerfield)** and will be their 4th Annual Day of Reflection. Arrive by 9:00am for check in.

For more information contact Larry Bleau OFS at 301-661-5597 or
larryofs88@gmail.com .



Holy Places

by Sheila Solomon, OFS

Catholics pray in holy places such as churches, shrines, and sites of pilgrimage to connect with God in a special way, often through a journey or at a location of particular spiritual significance. These sacred spaces, like the Holy Land, Assisi, Italy and local shrines, are seen as places where the veil between heaven and earth feels thinner, offering a tangible link to history and the divine. While Catholics are encouraged to pray anytime and anywhere, sacred places are particularly suited for worship, prayer, and reflection.

Why pray in holy places?

- Connect with the divine: Holy places are seen as where God's presence is more tangible, allowing for a deeper, more profound spiritual experience.
- Encounter history: Visiting sites like the Holy Land allows Catholics to walk where Jesus walked, preach, and minister, making the Gospels more real and alive.
- Experience fellowship: Pilgrimages and visits to shrines connect individuals to the communion of saints and the universal Church, both present and past.
- Seek healing and renewal: Many holy places, such as Lourdes, are associated with miraculous healings, while others offer a chance to seek spiritual or emotional renewal.
- Deepen faith through pilgrimage: The journey itself, with its inherent sacrifices and challenges, can become a powerful act of prayer, reflection, and trust in God.

Types of holy places special to Franciscans – Can you add to this list?

- Churches: Portiuncula, San Damiano, Our Lady of the Angels
- Shrines: Shrine of St. Anthony
- Holy Land: Franciscan Friars are custodians of the Holy Land
- “Thin places”: Natural locations where the spiritual world is believed to be more accessible, such as certain mountains or rivers.
- Local holy sites: Within one's own community, individuals can find holy places to visit for prayer and reflection, such as local shrines or places with historical significance.

Information for this article was taken from various websites. Assisted by AI.

News From the Fraternities

Our Lady of the Angels Fraternity Melbourne, FL

Joshua and Tara Jones professed into their fraternity on November 24. The couple's Mass of profession was held in St. John the Evangelist Church in Viera, FL. The pastor (at left) explained the significance of the ceremony to the attentive congregation. The Mass and the Rite of Profession were truly pure Heaven on Earth, and Franciscan joy filled the church and entered the hearts of all who attended. The Minister, Anna Marie Olivieri OFS (2nd from left), stood with joyful tears in her eyes and joy in her heart as she administered the rite to Joshua and Tara (beside banner). The simple invitation extended to Joshua and his wife several years ago to become a Franciscan was now a reality.



Espejo de Cristo Fraternity, FL Hialeah, FL

Members celebrated the Rite of Admission of their brother Héctor Bretón on Oct 24. For their apostolate, each member presented the seniors of Pollywog Creek Commons at LaBelle, FL, a gift, a food certificate, and cookies, and sang Christmas songs (see next page). It was a beautiful and memorable day.





St. Clare Fraternity Ave Maria, FL

St. Clare Fraternity celebrated the profession of Willian Saladino OFS on November 2, 2025. The first photo shows the Formation Director, Robert Schoenborn OFS, reading from the Rite of Profession to William. The second photo shows William receiving the Gospel from Janet Eidem Saladino OFS, his sponsor and wife. The Mass of Profession took place at Our Lady of Guadalupe Chapel on the campus of Ave Maria University.



Little Flowers Fraternity

Daytona Beach, FL

Rosemary Nielsen OFS recently celebrated her 100th birthday. She was professed in NY in 1978 and transferred into Little Flowers of St. Francis Fraternity in 1992. She held the office of minister and was active until she was no longer able to travel to the gathering. Currently she resides in an assisted living facility in Palm Coast and is visited regularly by the current minister, who happens to work there. Several members visited Rosemary to celebrate her centenary. They had a marvelous visit with many memories shared, an animated conversation, and prayers. Rosemary remains true to her profession and prays for her family and her fraternity daily. They wish her many happy and healthy years ahead.



San Damiano Fraternity

Summerfield, FL

In December the fraternity had a special visitor: Fr. Francisco OFM Cap., from the Immaculate Conception Friary in Kissimmee, where he holds the positions of Provincial Vicar, Guardian, and Director of Formation; a busy man! He sat with the members, talked with them, took part in discussions with them, and prayed with them. Members passed around a statue of the Infant Jesus and prayed silently; some shared their thoughts afterwards. Fr. Francisco then gave a closing blessing, after which they took a group photo (below). A joyful gathering indeed!

In January Richard Zoller was professed into the Order.



San Damiano Fraternity Ruskin, FL

On December 23rd the fraternity visited Cypress Creek Assisted Living in Sun City Center. Deacon Pat Frye discussed Advent and led into the Christmas season. The residents joined in with the singing of Christmas Carols and Santa songs as well led by Pat Wolfert. The Deacon complemented the songs with his use of Sign Language. Lynn Millikin read them the story Twas the Night Before Christmas. Many knew the words to this famous story as well as most of the songs. A grand time was had by all. A week before, fraternity members sent Christmas cards to all the residents. Such a wonderful Apostolate!!

