



The Joyful Messenger

Spring Summer 2026

SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER

Five Franciscan Martyrs Region

REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Regional Minister	Rachel Ahern, OFS
Regional Vice Minister	Sheila Solomon, OFS
Regional Formation Director	Margie Sweeney, OFS
Regional Secretary	Kelly Otero, OFS
Regional Treasurer	Larry Bleau, OFS
Regional Spiritual Assistants	Friar Alberto Bueno TOR, Friar Randall Roberts OFM Cap., Friar Rodolfo Ramon Cabrera OFM Cap.

REGIONAL FAMILY COUNCILORS

Miguel Cruz, OFS
Willie Guadalupe, OFS
Victoria Martinez, OFS
Janice Novello, OFS
Frank Pate, OFS
Kathy Ramsey, OFS
Margaret Wendel, OFS
Jean Ziegler, OFS



STANDING APPOINTMENTS

Webmaster	vacant
Electronic Newsletter Editor	Jack Ditch, OFS
Multi-Cultural Liaison	vacant
Youth / Young Adult Apostolate (YouFra)	Janice Novello, OFS, PhD
Database Manager	Pat Wolfert, OFS
Prayer Requests	Pam Nagle OFS and Deacon Ric Nagle 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 Rachel Ahern, OFS

FFMR Regional Minister

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I step into the role of Regional Minister, I realize the level of trust in me that you have expressed. I am grateful that I have so much help and support in a role that, frankly, came as a surprise! The Holy Spirit is already working in mysterious and wonderful ways. Having served three years on the Regional Executive Council (REC) as a Regional Councilor was a wonderful blessing. Working with Sisters and Brothers all over the State of Florida and beyond was an experience that I thoroughly enjoyed.

I feel a close bond with many of you already and I see the potential that this Region has in its members. In community/fraternity, you share the talents and skills that you have developed and honed in your home and work lives. The diversity in this Franciscan family is a gift with which we have all been graced. It is said, “God equips the called, God doesn’t call the equipped.” That God does not call those thought to be the smartest or the most experienced is perhaps why the Call to serve is so often accompanied by Humility. As Secular Franciscans, we must live out, at work and play, a humility that is rooted in Trust. Adopting an attitude of joy is where our Franciscan charism comes in. Serving well always gives joy. That joy can be as simple as shared laughter with a brother or sister with whom you are working or whom you are helping . . . or simply resting in fatigue at the end of the day, knowing your tiredness will allow you to rest in His arms. . . . Imagine yourself entering Heaven and being greeted by Jesus with these words from Matthew’s Gospel: “Well, done, good and faithful servant!”

I’ve had some wonderful role models in our former leaders, some of whom still serve on the REC. Our former Regional Ministers have left me a vibrant Region with unlimited promise. I take seriously the admonition to “guide and animate” the Regional Fraternity, but I’m not so quick to do as I used to do: set goals and fill calendars. I see that these next three years will unfold in ways that I cannot now imagine or discern.

My thanks to Jeane Swaynos, former Regional Minister, who served and guided the Region in several capacities for a baker’s dozen of years, bringing many ideas to fruition, always in tune with Franciscan ideals. As we are ALL called to serve, please take inventory of your own strengths and see where you may be able to serve in the coming years. Attend Family meetings and the Annual Regional Meeting whenever possible. Any meeting outside your normal sphere is a golden opportunity to learn, be enriched, and be inspired.

“Praise and bless my Lord, and give Him thanks, and serve Him with great humility.” I notice three components in Francis’ admonition: the turn towards God (Daily Conversion), Humility (with God, all things are possible), and Mission (love all, serve all). I have put my trust in our God to equip me to serve you well.

With Love and Thanks,

Rachel M. Ahern, OFS, Regional Minister
Five Franciscan Martyrs Region
Secular Franciscan Order / USA

From Margie Sweeny, OFS FFMR Formation Director

It is with great delight that I look forward to being your new Formation Director. Many thanks to all for your vote of confidence. May the Good Lord grant me the grace and humility to be a good servant leader.

First, I would like to introduce my Regional Formation Team:

Larry Bleau, OFS - Minister of San Damiano Fraternity in Summerfield and Regional Treasurer

Willie Guadalupe, OFS - Formation Director of San Damiano Fraternity in Summerfield, Spiritual Assistant to Mother of the Living Gospel Fraternity, and Regional Family Councilor

Janice Mary Novello, PhD, OFS - Minister of Portiuncula Fraternity and Regional Family Councilor

Kelly Otero, OFS - Formation Director of St. Maximillian Kolbe Fraternity in DeBary and Regional Secretary

Magdy Pavletic, OFS - Vice Minister of Mother of the Living Gospel

Karen Rooney, OFS - Member of St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity in Apopka

Maria Elena Sisco, OFS - Secretary of St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity in Gulfport and Formator for San Pedro de Alcantara Newly Forming Group

Jeane Swaynos, OFS - Treasurer of St. Francis of Assisi in Apopka

The Formation Team will be brainstorming new ways to serve our Region. Your suggestions are welcome!

My first initiative is grouping emails by topic so as to minimize email fatigue. I hope to only be sending emails to you at a maximum of three per week. Mondays I will send out information on various formation topics when they become available and will title it Marathon Monday using the analogy of St. Paul running the race in keeping the faith. Marathon Monday - I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. (2Tim 4:7). On Wednesdays I'll send out information as it becomes available about workshops, conferences, retreats, etc. and will title those emails Workshop Wednesday - Feed my sheep. (Jn 21:17b). This references Jesus' command to Peter to care for his flock. And, of course, Fridays are dedicated to Formation Friday, formation materials sent to us by NAFRA.

I hope this makes email management better for all knowing when to expect certain materials to arrive in your inbox. Again, thanks for your vote of confidence. May I be a worthy servant leader and may our Region bear much fruit!

Fair Share and Database Updates

Larry Bleau and Rachel Ahern

Each fraternity's Fair Share contribution is determined by their membership roster as reflected in the National Database on Dec 31 of the year. Only Active, Active-Excused, and Candidate members are counted for the National Data Base. The number of members on the National Database should match the number of members for which your fraternity submits payment. Therefore, changes to the database that affect the determination of Fair Share MUST be entered by the end of the Calander year (December 31st).

This is the reason each fraternity must keep the Region informed of any changes in membership. Particularly these: new persons added to the list, deceased members, and changes in member status. Accurate reporting by the Fraternities ensures the Region will maintain an accurate roster. Therefore, Local Minister should email changes to database@ffmr-ofs.org and clearly identify the fraternity, member, and the change. These changes should be made on the Fraternity database and sent to the Region as they happen. It is also a good idea to keep address and contact information up to date, and to review your roster every year.

Fraternity information such as increase or decrease in membership activity, should match the National Database because the Fraternity will be responsible to pay its Fair Share according to the number(s) on the National Database as of Dec 31st the year prior to the Fair Share payment which is due in February.



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So, I'm a 501(c)(3); What Does That Imply?

From Larry Bleau OFS Regional Treasurer

IRS allows a 501(c)(3) exemption to be given to organizations that are organized and operated exclusively for religious, charitable, scientific, testing for public safety, literary, educational or other specified purposes. Churches and religious organizations therefore may qualify and USCCB and the OFS-USA are religious organizations that do qualify. Note we are not considered a charitable organization, as IRS has different criteria for charitable and religious organizations, even though they are both tax-exempt.

A 501(c)(3) may spend its funds in a manner allowed by its specific exemption. Since a fraternity is a constituent part of OFS-USA, its exemption is also based on religious purposes. We can use our funds to further specific religious ends and the operations that support those ends. While we can give funds to other 501(c)(3) organizations that perform charitable works, we cannot give funds directly to individuals. In fact, IRS states that “none of its earnings may be given to any private shareholder or individual.”

Think of 501(c)(3) funds in this way: once funds are contributed to a 501(c)(3) organization, they can be used for the exempt purpose or they can be transferred between such organizations, but not move outside the 501(c)(3) envelope.

The above legal sounding language leads to a few rules local fraternities must follow:

- Fraternity and personal funds should never be commingled.
- No funds from a fraternity can be given to an individual. Members can be reimbursed for expenses they incurred on behalf of the fraternity, but gifts, other than of a nominal value, are not permitted. Members may give funds to other members, but not with the fraternity as an intermediary.
- Funds may be donated to other organizations, but care should be taken to determine that they are bona fide 501(c)(3) organizations.
- Cash and noncash contributions to a fraternity may be tax deductible by the donor. Donations of \$250 or more must be acknowledged in writing.
- Dues are required payments; contributions are freely given. Dues cannot, therefore, be deducted. A member's Fair Share amount is freely given by the member, not required, and is therefore a contribution. (Each fraternity, however, has an obligation to support the next higher-level fraternity; this is also called Fair Share.)

Disclaimer: The above is meant to inform local Councils, not to provide specific tax advice.

News From the Fraternities

San Damiano Fraternity Summerfield, FL

Held its 5th Day of Reflection in Fruitland Park on May 6. The speaker, Fr. Francisco OFM Cap, delivered an informed presentation on The Seven Crosses of St. Francis. Fr. Francisco went through each of the seven crosses described by St. Bonaventure in his Major Legend of St. Francis. The Trinity was mentioned often and the three stages of Franciscan spirituality - purification, illumination, and unity - was also a recurring theme.

The Fraternity had two new guests, one of whom – Danial Gonzalez – just started his Orientation phase; the other guest is still discerning.



Nomber De Dio Palm Cost, FL

The Fraternity was blessed on May 2nd to have the Profession of three new Secular Franciscans. FR. Rob Trujillo officiated at our 8:30 AM Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church. The newly professed are: Susan Johnson, Ivette Esposito, and JoAnn Palermino. Our Formation Director is Sylvia Reyes and Spiritual Assistant Maggie Wendel.



Saint Maximillian Kolbe

Debary, FL

Participation in JPIC, the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, members of the fraternity attended the annual Nehemiah Action assembly at Our Lady of Hope Catholic Church in support of F.A.I.T.H., Fighting Against Injustice Through Harmony, a coalition of local congregations from various denominations, working together to address community issues. Members from the community spoke about concerns affecting lives, including: Affordable Housing, Flooding, Overdevelopment, and Mental Health Care. The spirit of unity was apparent as people came together to advocate for their neighbors.



St Joseph Fraternity

Fort Lauderdale, FL

On May 26, 2026, the Beloved Fraternity Sister and former Minister, Jessie Chiccone, OFS, went to be with Our Lord Jesus Christ, St. Francis, and St. Clare, at the age of 88. Jessie was Professed on October 4, 1987, and a member of the St. Joseph Fraternity for almost 40 years. Please remember her soul, her family and friends, and her brothers and sisters in the St. Joseph Fraternity in your prayers. "Well done faithful servant." Pax et Bonum.



On June 14, 2026, the Fraternity celebrated the 25th Anniversary of Ordination to the Priesthood for our Spiritual Advisor, Father Nick Mormando, OFM, Cap. They gifted Father Nick with a beautiful St. Francis of Assisi Chasable and Stole. The Fraternity is Blessed and very grateful to Father Nick for his Leadership, Spiritual Guidance and Support.



The Fraternity participated in the St. Carlo Acutis Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition, held at St. Andrew Catholic Church in Coral Springs, FL., from June 5-7, 2026. The Exhibition Custodian was Maria Castagna, who is a member of our Fraternity.



The St. Boniface Catholic Church Youth Group, from Pembroke Pines, FL., at the Exhibition's "Youth Day," which took place on July 5, 2026. At this event, Youth Groups from local Catholic Churches in Archdiocese of Miami came together at St. Andrews to view the Eucharistic Miracles Exhibition. They also engaged in discussions about the meaning and role of the Holy Eucharist in their lives and in the life of St. Carlo Acutis. The Youth Groups participated in creating artwork displays made from flower petals, depicting Eucharistic themes.



Saint Clare Ave Maria, FL

Taking Service to Heart

Two members of the Fraternity do not let their age stop them from serving! Both in their 80's, are regular volunteers at the soup kitchen run by Our Lady of Guadalupe Social Services (Catholic Charities) in Immokalee, Florida.

Gwen Worrell, OFS



Deacon Robert Kronyak, OFS



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San Damiano

Ruskin, FL

Each year in April and October fraternity members contribute household goods to the Mary & Martha House which provides shelter to women and their children. Members contribute and deliver items such as bed and bath linens, paper goods, and children's clothing.



On Good Friday morning members visited nearby Cypress Creek Assisted Living and conducted the Stations of the Cross service for Residents. They visit twice each year, during Lent and Advent, to offer liturgical services appropriate to the season. During the spring and summer months, they write personal notes to each Resident, letting them know we offer prayers for their wellbeing, regardless of their personal religious tradition.



The Youth Fraternity Coordinator, Patricia Wolfert, arranged to serve dinner to the Sunday high school youth group at St. Anne Catholic Church, Ruskin. As the teens enjoyed dinner, Ken Wolfert spoke to them about the importance of faith and service to others.



St. Padre Pio Fraternity

Jensen Beach, FL

Celebrated a spirit-filled Day of Recollection, in February, led by Fr. Nicholas Mormando, OFM Cap. Forty-two participants from various fraternities in the region along with seasonal residents of Florida. Several visitors joined to find out more about the Franciscan spirituality and way of life.

Maria Nancy Burger celebrated her Profession into the OFS on May 2, 2026. Maria was graced with the honor of crowning our Blessed Mother for our May Crowning celebration that day. We are very happy and greatly blessed to have Maria join our Secular Franciscan Family.



Lady Poverty

Winter Park, FL

The Regional Annual meeting in May for outstanding work in accompanying the youth and young adults as they begin their Franciscan Journey. The activity that was highlighted is their annual Peace Service that involve students from Catholic Schools.



Two peace poles with the message “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in multiple languages were donated by the fraternity to San Pedro Retreat Center to encourage prayers to end the war in Ukraine and all wars throughout the world. Clergy, adults, and students participated in the service by leading prayers for peace in multiple languages to show unity with the whole world. Each year a peace pole highlighting the Franciscan greeting “Peace and Good” has been gifted to a Catholic School.



The Peace Service includes a reenactment of the meeting of St Francis and the Sultan, Franciscan peace prayers, a student school choir with songs for peace, and a procession to the peace pole location where the students and adults pray for peace in multiple languages. At the end of the service Lady Poverty gifts a Peace Pole to a Catholic School to install on their campus to promote peace. The service ends with food and fellowship with the parents, students, and teachers.



St. Andrews School

Peace poles have been given to Bishop Moore Catholic High School in 2024, St Andrews Catholic School in 2025, and St John Vianney Catholic School in 2026.



Mother of the Living Gospel

Orlando, FL

Alexis Chaparro, OFS celebrated the Rite of Profession May 2, 2026 at Incarnation Catholic Church in Orlando with his family. Alexis has great care and love for others and is especially drawn to the Pro-Life movement. For his profession, Alexis chose these words from the Gospel: “And he called to him the multitude with his disciples, and said to them, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34)



St. Anthony of Padua

Boynton Beach, FL

The Annual May Crowning at their May 17th gathering. The procession was led by Tony Piccolino (holding a candle) followed by Nilda Heagy holding the crown for Our Lady. Spiritual Assistant Fr. Gregory Spuhler, OFM Conv. attended the ceremony and said goodbye to the fraternity members as he moves on to his new assignment in New York.



Martina DeBoise, OFS celebrated her 25-year Anniversary of Profession as a Secular Franciscan with the St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity at a Mass on April 19th. Martina was presented with a 25-year certificate at Mass and a lovely luncheon with the fraternity in the Madonna Room.



On May 2nd St. Anthony of Padua Fraternity and Members of St. Joseph Fraternity from Ft. Lauderdale made a Franciscan Jubilee Pilgrimage to St. Mark Church in Boynton Beach. After Mass the fraternities enjoyed a special luncheon and time to get to know each other. Fr. Robert Benko, OFM Conv. who celebrated the Mass gave a special blessing to Kathy Minnet, OFS on her birthday. Our fraternity was also delighted to see Eliana Cavarra, OFS, a former Minister of our fraternity, join us on this memorable day.



A double celebration for the Fraternity, on their Feast Day, June 13, 2026, they also celebrated the Profession of Gianilda Heagy, Anthony Piccolino, Dora Avallone and Frank Avallone at a Noon Mass held at St. Mark Church. Fr. Robert Benko, OFM Conv. and Pastor of St. Mark Church was the Celebrant of the Mass and Profession Ceremony.

