



TAU-USA

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Mission to Share the Vision

The TAU-USA, a publication of the National Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order of the United States, is a vital communication link between the OFS-USA leadership and all candidates and all professed Secular Franciscans throughout the United States. The articles within the publication, while sharing the Secular Franciscan charism and vision, are intended to inform, inspire, and challenge.



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TAU-USA email
tauusa.ofs@gmail.com

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National Executive Council

nec.ofs.usa@gmail.com

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OFS-USA

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER-USA

GOOD COMMUNICATION AS PART OF OUR COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

Diane F. Menditto, OFS, National Vice Minister

As Catholics and Secular Franciscans, we are called to shape society and our Order's future. We are called to be good communicators and users of the means of communication available to us.

When we hear the word “communication,” the first thing that probably comes to mind is media, that is, forms of communication with an “s.” Pope Francis mentioned this in his statement for the 2014 Communications Day when he said, “...media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. Good communication helps us grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity.” But he goes on to make the following points:

- “The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another.”
- “We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect.”
- “A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive.”

(Message of Pope Francis for the 48th World Communications Day, June 2014)

All the communications (media) in the world go to waste if we do not communicate who we are to others and seek to understand who they are.

How do we communicate? In the Later Rule, St. Francis inspires us, “*I counsel, admonish and exhort my brothers in the Lord Jesus Christ not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world; ¹¹but let them be meek, peaceful, modest, gentle, and humble (2 Tim 2:14), speaking courteously to everyone, as is becoming.*” ([The Later Rule: FA:ED, vol. 1, p. 102](#))

How we communicate makes a big difference, because true communication requires more than words. Start with an open heart. We should not prejudice what another person is going to say. People remember how we handle a situation and, justly or not, assume that the treatment they have seen us give to others in the past will be how we will treat them in the present.

Creating a supportive environment in our fraternities, our families, and our places of work begins with sharing our own story and listening to another person’s story. Once we start to share ourselves with our listeners, they become ready to hear what we say and feel comfortable sharing themselves.

Authentic communication for us as followers of Christ and St. Francis is how **others encounter the person of Jesus through us**. We should ask ourselves, “How would Jesus communicate with us if he were here now? How did he communicate with those he met here on earth? How did he show that he

Communication is Not Only Words

- ❖ Undivided attention and eye contact
- ❖ Body Language
- ❖ Empathy and mutual support
- ❖ Collaboration and sharing of your personal story
- ❖ Invitation and outreach
- ❖ No personal agenda
- ❖ Prayer with and for one another
- ❖ Personal example
- ❖ Relationship and trust

valued the identity of his listeners?” As we read Scripture, we find Jesus communicating with his disciples, with sinners, with those possessed by evil. He listened to everyone with great empathy. Think also about his physical contact with others: helping someone to stand up; touching eyes and ears with his saliva; realizing that healing power has gone out from him—**it’s not always words!**

Today, we are bombarded by media and people **talking at us**. We have stopped listening to each other in many ways, because **communications often drown out communication!** Overcoming this phenomenon should be one of our goals as Secular Franciscans. **But how?**

If we examine many of the difficulties we encounter in fraternity, family, and workplace, we will often find a lack of communication at the outset. Often, the issue is compounded by further misunderstanding because we don’t stop to understand where our brother or sister is coming from. **Every person deserves our respect** because they, like us, are **human beings with the Spirit of God within them**. We may not like what they are saying, but we are called to respect their dignity, so, we don’t demean or tear them down.

In our good communication toolbox, we find an excellent talk given by Fr. Eric Law, who spoke at the 2007 Quinquennial Congress. He used the acronym **RESPECT** to remind us of how we should communicate with one another. **R:** Take **responsibility** for what we say and feel without blaming others. **E:** Use **“empathic listening,”** meaning that we show the speaker that we are in tune with them and that they are valued and respected. **S:** Be **sensitive** to differences in communication styles. **P:** **Ponder** what you hear and feel before you speak. (Or before you send an email or make a post!) **E:** **Examine** your own assumptions and perceptions. **C:** Keep **Confidentiality**.

T: **Trust** ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong. Also, **trust** each other, and develop trust in your fraternity, family, and workplace.



We are called to demonstrate: **simplicity**—without pretense; **poverty**—confidence in the Father; **humility**—the truth of what and who we are before God; **minority**—recognition that we are servants, not superiors; an **abandonment to God**—trusting in God’s unconditional love. (See *FUN Manual: Vocations*; Article 30.2 General Constitutions; and *The Franciscan Journey*)

If these characteristics are present in us, we will be able and willing to **establish trust** with our brothers and sisters. We become better communicators, because our respect for others makes us **approachable**. We are **responsive**; **we keep our promises**; we say what we mean, and **we mean what we say**. We are humble enough to **admit our mistakes** or admit that not everything we say is the last word. Sometimes a lack of flexibility (stubbornness) can lead to a lack of trust and lack of communication.

Once we know who we are and how we can get along well on a personal level, we are ready to share who we are with others through a **good communications plan**. Our **national and regional websites** provide a welcoming environment for our members and those searching to discern a vocation. **We attract vocations** because visitors can tell that we love our Order and one another just by looking at the websites. We know that our **Facebook page** is not a place to argue or say controversial things. We try to share the best of who we are and who Francis and Clare are through quotes, formation pieces, wonderful homilies, and excitement over milestones attained by our fraternities. We use **Twitter as positive outreach** to the public, not to argue or tear down others, but to build up. Among ourselves and publicly, we highlight articles from the **TAU newsletter**, another communications powerhouse. **Local fraternities** should follow the example of the National and Regional fraternities. Examine how you communicate with each other and come up with a local plan to **spread the word**.

You probably have many communications ideas that you would love to share with us. Please do!

We are listening!



What Way are You Going?

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM

Stories help us see ourselves from a different perspective. That could be one reason Jesus often told parables. It's certainly one reason I seek out good movies and other programs. I recently found the Ukrainian comedy *Servant of the People* on YouTube (with subtitles in English). You might remember from news reports that the current president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, was a comedian and actor and that he starred in this comedy (2016-2019) about a history teacher who is propelled to become President of Ukraine.

In one of the episodes, the TV-president is "visited" by Ivan the Terrible, who insists on one way of dealing with opponents or enemies that was eerily similar to our polarized culture of today. During a four-way debate in which his very reputation is at risk, Ivan the Terrible appears to the President, urging this younger "Tsar" to root out his enemies—the many corrupt officials—by *torturous* death. "Death is not enough," says The Terrible. The TV-President rejects the title "Tsar," as well as the cruelty. The Tsar laughs it off as the way things are, with a retort for every argument or situation the President presents to make rooting out corruption without death or cruelty credible.

The Tsar will not hear reason, so the President simply says, "You're heading one way; we, another. Let's go in different directions, and we'll talk again in 300 years."

How do we deal with people who expect that what we know is both bad and not inevitable? The TV-President ditches his limo for the bus. He makes little changes where he can, and with the few loyal people in his orbit, catches criminals when they are greedy or self-assured enough to fall into traps or in some cases to trap themselves and each other.

I have spent the better part of the past two months trying to think of how to write about the polarization we all encounter in our nation and in the Church. Cardinal Angelo Sodano, preaching at the Mass on the first day of the conclave that elected Pope Francis in 2013, described the importance of the papal ministry of mercy and building unity in the Church. Also at the conclave, Cardinal Prosper Grech noted the risk of schism:

Between ultra-traditionalist and ultra-progressive

extremists, between priests who rebel against obedience and those who do not recognize the signs of the times, there is always the danger of minor schisms that not only damage the Church, but go against the will of God: unity at any cost.

Many of you know that I am a Byzantine Catholic. My sense of this means that I am standing on a bridge between the Latin West and the Orthodox East. Our liturgy and way of talking to and about God are like the Greeks, but we live in communion with Roman Catholics who speak and worship somewhat differently (though if you live in both traditions, you may also experience many similarities when each tradition is at its best).

The polarization in the Church is personally painful for me.

It happens when we are cruel and nasty to each other, demeaning or insulting because someone doesn't do it the way we want it done, or doesn't use the right words the way we expect (1 John 4:20-21, Matthew 5:21-22). "They'll know we are Christians" when we finally decide to love each other.

It happens when we decide we are more knowledgeable than the bishop or bishops and we can make our own decisions about faith or morals, apart from the history of the Church, and teach our view as the only "right" or "true" one. Non-specialists and academic theologians do this in different ways, but we are all susceptible to a kind of self-righteousness on this count.

Polarization happens when we decide that we can reach out to certain people and ignore others who are on our doorstep (Luke 16:19-31). Lazarus on our doorstep is not only the poor and visibly downtrodden, but anyone we choose to ignore who might benefit from a crumb of the faith we profess and yet struggle to live.

We're surrounded by polarization in our country, those who bemoan it and those who foster it, goading us to the fight. Dare we Christians have the courage to tell Ivan the Polarizer, "You're heading one way; we, another. Let's go in different directions, unless you also choose to follow The Way?"



“The Confirmation of the Rule”
by Giotto, 1297-1300, Assisi

ST. FRANCIS AND THE RULE OF 1223

by Bret Thoman, OFS

This year, 2023, the Franciscan Family will commemorate the 800th anniversary of the confirmation of the Later Rule. Also known as the Approved Rule, or the Rule of 1223, the papal approval of the Rule marks the culmination of a long and difficult journey for St. Francis. His journey can be an example to those of us who have professed a different rule, the Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order.

A rule is a commitment to live a particular religious form of life. It is conceived when one feels a calling. Then it is developed over time through prayer and discernment in fidelity to God, as well as in obedience to one’s superiors and the Church.

The beginning of the Rule of St. Francis can be traced to February 24, 1208. On that day, he received his calling to Gospel poverty. He was at Mass at the church of St. Mary of the Angels when the priest read from the Gospel of St. Matthew: “Do not take gold or silver or copper for your belts; no sack for the journey, or a second tunic, or sandals, or walking stick” (10:9-10).

Francis responded, “This is what I want to do with all my strength.” (See *Legend of the Three Companions*, Chapter VIII, 25.) His heart was set ablaze as he realized what he was called to do. Total, radical poverty was his charism.

If St. Francis was called by God to embrace poverty, how he would do so would be worked out over time. His charism was not given within a vacuum; it would be lived within the milieu of the thirteenth century and the canonical structure of the Catholic Church. Moreover, he would have to contend with the humanity of the other friars. Angels were not joining his order; men were.

Fr. Murray Bodo, OFM, narrates this dichotomy brilliantly and poetically. He introduces these two aspects in the title of his masterpiece biography of St. Francis, *The Journey and the Dream*. The “Dream” is Francis’ calling to poverty; the “Journey” is the struggle he faced as he dealt with the myriad challenges in implementing it. The journey would take 15 years.

Soon after receiving his calling, others from Assisi began following St. Francis. In the beginning, there was little guidance to direct the fledgling community. There was essentially one rule the friars had to abide by. It was directly from Scripture: “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me” (Matthew 19:21).

This verse was revealed when Francis’ first companion, Bernard of Quintavalle, asked to follow him. In the church of San Nicolò, the two opened the Bible at random and, guided by the Holy Spirit, came upon that verse. They opened the Scriptures two more times and read: “Take nothing for your journey”

(Luke 9:3) and “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23). (See *Little Flowers of Saint Francis*, Chapter 2.)

After this, according to Thomas of Celano, “Bernard immediately carried out all these things, without neglecting a single iota of this counsel. In a short time, many turned away from the weary cares of the world toward an infinite Good, returning to their homeland with Francis as their guide.” (*The Remembrance of the Desire of a Soul, Second Life*, Chapter X, 15.)



The Hermitage of Fonte Colombo where St. Francis wrote the Rule of 1223

When Francis had 12 followers, he discerned that his fledgling community needed more guidance. He wrote what is known as the Protorule, or primitive Rule, and went to Rome seeking papal approval from Pope Innocent III.

Thomas of Celano described the event: “When blessed Francis saw that the Lord God was daily increasing their numbers, he wrote for himself and his brothers present and future, simply and in few words, a form of life and a rule. He used primarily words of the holy Gospel, longing only for its perfection. He inserted a few other things necessary for the practice of a holy way of life.” (*The Life of Saint Francis, First Life*, Chapter XIII, 32).

This initial rule has not been preserved. It is believed that it consisted of the scriptural verses revealed to Francis and Bernard of Quintavalle, a promise to live the evangelical counsels, and a commitment to poverty. What is certain is that Francis did not take any of the existing monastic rules – which were essentially either Augustinian or Benedictine in the West. His form of life was radically new. He wished to base his life according to the Gospel life of Christ and the Apostles.

Pope Innocent III accepted Francis’ rule, though not without some hesitation. April 16, 1209, is given as the date on which the Franciscan Order was constituted and the Protorule was approved orally by the Pope.

Over the following years, Francis led the Order by example. The men who entered the Order did so in large part because of him, and the Franciscan way of life was modeled after the figure of St. Francis. However, it was increasingly apparent that more structure was necessary. Twice a year, the friars gathered in Assisi in what became referred to as chapters. They discussed “how they could better observe the Rule. [...] Saint Francis, however, used to give admonitions, corrections, and directives as it seemed to him to be according to the Lord's counsel.” (See *Legend of the Three Companions*, Chapter XIV, 57.)

In time, the Franciscan model began to change. As the Order grew in numbers and the known world was divided into provinces, men joined who had never met Francis or been to Assisi. Many had unique ideas and notions about the Franciscan way of life. When Francis was away in the Holy Land from 1219-20, the order moved farther from the vision of the founder.

For these reasons, Francis decided to formulate a much more comprehensive form of life. In a document consisting of 23 sections, he wrote the second rule – also known as the Earlier Rule, or the

Rule of 1221. However, it did not meet the expectations of the friars. Moreover, its regulations were ambiguous, and it was not presented in sufficiently legal terminology. Therefore, Francis set out to craft another rule once again.

In 1223, he went with Brother Leo and Brother Bonizo to a hermitage near the city of Rieti, known as Fonte Colombo. After praying and fasting for forty days, he emerged with the final rule.

St. Bonaventure described the moment:

Since he therefore wanted the Rule that had been taken from a more widespread collection of Gospel passages to be confirmed, he went up to a certain mountain led by the Holy Spirit, with two of his companions, to condense it into a shorter form as the vision had dictated. There he fasted, content with only bread and water, and dictated the rule as the Holy Spirit suggested to him while he was praying. [...] Fervently exhorting the brothers to observe this rule, Francis used to say that nothing of what he had placed there came from his own efforts but that he dictated everything just as it had been revealed by God. (*The Life of Blessed Francis, Greater Legend, Chapter Four*)

Pope Honorius III approved the Rule in a papal bull, *Solet annuere*, on November 29, 1223.

At first glance, the Rule of 1223 may appear technical or legalistic. However, it was unique, as it was different from the other traditional rules of the day. Moreover, it fully encompassed the vision St. Francis had for his Order, and he was fiercely devoted to it. In 1226, he wrote his Testament:

And I strictly command all my cleric and lay brothers, through obedience, not to place any gloss upon the Rule or upon these words saying: "They should be understood in this way." But as the Lord has given me to speak and write the Rule and these words simply and purely, may you understand them simply and without gloss and observe them with a holy activity until the end. And whoever observes these things, let him be blessed in heaven with the blessing of the Most High Father, and on earth with the blessing of His Beloved Son with the Most Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and all the powers of heaven and with all the saints. (38-40)

Shortly after writing the Testament, St. Francis died. As he lay dying, he said, "I have done what is mine; may Christ teach you what is yours!" He had a peaceful death, knowing that he had remained faithful to the charism he received when he was a young man. He lived his life according to the words God revealed to him, "Take nothing with you for the journey." Through tenacity and perseverance, his "dream" was greater than the obstacles and challenges he faced on the "journey."

As we reflect on St. Francis and his calling and commitment to the Rule, may we find inspiration as we consider our own calling.

Take a few moments to consider the following questions:

- When and how did you hear your calling to the Secular Franciscan Order?
- What was the "dream" like?
- How have you been faithful to your calling?
- What has the "journey" been like?
- What have the challenges been like?

May we, as Secular Franciscans, be confident we know and have done "what is ours!"

*INTRODUCING THE NEW MEMBER OF THE
NATIONAL ECUMENICAL/INTERFAITH
COMMITTEE*

by Donna Hollis, OFS , National Councilor



The National Ecumenical Committee has changed faces and set different goals during the many years of its existence. Our focus has been on the outreach and involvement of those on our Joint Committee (TSSF Third Order Society of St. Francis, OEF Order of Ecumenical Franciscans and OLE Order of Lutheran Franciscans).

In our Regions, we have many members who are also involved with JPIC, and this goes hand in hand with Ecumenism. When working with Justice and Peace, we inevitably work with those in different denominations and spiritualities.

One of our goals is to make sure all our regions that are in ministry with either JPIC or Ecumenism work together. We would like to hear everything that is happening in our different regions regarding these ministries and post any events or information on our new and updated website under Ecumenical Committee. We want to have more input and invite everyone to experience/participate in what our Brothers and Sisters are doing in our Order. It is important to support each other in our endeavors.

I took over as temporary Chair when our Brother Mike Carsten, OFS, completed his term in 2021. After the call for a new chairperson, the NEC chose a member from our Order to continue the leadership of the Ecumenical Committee.

I would like to introduce our new National Ecumenical Committee Chair, Ronald Lacey, OFS. He is from the St. Elizabeth of Hungary Region and attends the St. Anthony Fraternity in Roxbury, MA. Ron will share his experiences with Ecumenism and how it has affected his life. He will direct our Ecumenical Committee with the goals we have discerned in moving forward.

Thank you Ron, for accepting this role in our Order. We appreciate your leadership with humility and collaboration. The Team looks forward to working with you.

Ronald Lacey, OFS



I am honored to work with the members of the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee – Marie Bianca, Donna Hollis, and Carolyn Townes – and I am grateful to the National Executive Council for giving me this opportunity. As Franciscans, we are called to be instruments of peace. We are needed! We humans create many divisions – all sad – but perhaps none is so tragic as the division we create in the name of religion.

I was raised by a Roman Catholic mother and a Southern Baptist father, so I guess you could say that ecumenical awareness has been with me from the cradle. The two sides of my family have always gotten along peacefully, so I'm taken aback when I hear religious people (whether Christian or non-Christian) speaking disrespectfully of people of other faiths or denominations.

In college, I studied medieval history, with a special interest in religion and spirituality. One of my "concentrations within my concentration" as an undergraduate was Jewish studies. After receiving my master's in medieval church history from the University of Notre Dame, I taught Latin for a little while. For the past twenty years, I have worked in one of the libraries at Harvard University, where I have had the good fortune to take classes at the Harvard Divinity School, which is a major center of interreligious study.

I am blessed, in Boston, to live among many different Buddhist traditions, and I have studied meditation with several of them. From my living room window, I can see a mosque and, just past it, the steeple of an Orthodox church, where I sometimes go for Vespers. St. Columbkille's, where I often attend early morning Mass, is within walking distance from my house and next door to a yeshiva; the lads, with their hats, curls, and prayer shawls, running to school past the Gothic-revival belltower, create a scene to inspire Chagall.

So many ways to call upon God, all within a half-mile radius. This is, I believe, cause for great joy! I have found great wisdom in the traditions I have studied and neighbored. Who doesn't have something positive to share?

My hope for the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee is that we may help initiate dialogue and understanding where they don't yet exist and deepen them where they have already begun. I very much look forward to working with the Ecumenical and Interfaith Committee on these goals, and we look forward to hearing your ideas as well!



Marie Bianca, OFS

As a young person growing up in Northeastern Pennsylvania, I always had a strong pull to deep spirituality. I attended a Catholic college—Marywood College. There I majored in Religious Studies and Psychology. But more importantly, I started a life of ministry in high school that has followed me through the years. Each step along the way has drawn me further and further into a deeper relationship with our Creator. My family gave me a rich foundation to build upon.

Fast forward to the late 1990s—I became professed as a Secular Franciscan in 1994; the journey continued to reveal deepening layers of who and what I am. I have served at all levels of leadership—local, regional, and national. What I find to be particularly enriching today is learning from other faiths to be the best Catholic I can be. The practice of each faith I have had the joy to experience has taught me a beautiful facet of faith that enriches who I am and how I live. Locally, I have served on the Interfaith Alliance of the Southwest for four years. I have served on the National Committee of Ecumenical/Interfaith work for three years. During that time, building new relationships with my brothers and sisters has been the central focus of my work. The work can be teaching modules of a retreat, attending community events, scheduling important and enriching topics of conversation, writing articles for our newsletter, research and building community. We have been recently blessed with two new members to our committee and the work can now expand and develop foundational expressions of unity.



Carolyn Townes, OFS

My name is Carolyn Townes, OFS, and I currently serve as the National Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation. Ecumenism is a part of who I am and so closely linked with peace and justice, that it was a natural fit to team with the Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee. I grew up Baptist and Methodist, becoming Catholic as an adult. I was so moved by the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults process that I became a catechist in the process for more than 10 years. I also worked and served with an Atonement friar whose work was ecumenism, which further deepened my knowledge of other faith traditions. Serving as a board member on two Franciscan organizations as well as ministering to a third has also given me the opportunity to connect and minister with ecumenical Franciscans. It is truly a joy to work with our brothers and sisters who worship and pray differently but love with mercy just the same.



RETURN TO THE CANTICLE

Justin Carisio, OFS
National Formation Commission



St. Francis of Assisi was inclined to express himself in words, and we are fortunate that a number of his prayers, letters, and other writings have been preserved and passed down to us. They give us insight into his vision of the gospel life, and they help us understand what he thought and believed.¹

Among Francis’s writings is his magnificent outpouring of praise, “The Canticle of the Creatures.” Perhaps nothing that Francis wrote resounds in our world today as much as this great poem.² It echoes through the centuries as both a religious and literary text. We encounter it in many ways. As a written work certainly, but also adapted for hymns and songs and interpreted creatively in the visual arts. It underlies our association of Francis with nature, affirming for us his love of the created world and his understanding of how all of creation, by its very existence, praises the Creator. The Canticle also supports his designation as patron of ecology. More recently, Pope Francis’s encyclical subtitled “On Care for Our Common Home” takes its title from the anaphora of the Canticle, “Laudato si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praised be you, my Lord.”

It is further testament to the authenticity and originality of St. Francis that even though we encounter the Canticle often and in different ways, his song retains its power to inspire us. Even so, we should not take the Canticle for granted. Using our imaginations, we can bring fresh insights to the poem. We can find ways to keep his voice resonating anew for us. Consider a few thoughts along these lines:

- The Canticle captures Francis’s spirit and presents his worldview in a way unmistakably his own. G. K. Chesterton famously said that the Canticle “is a supremely characteristic work, and much of St. Francis could be reconstructed from that work alone.”³ In other words, if you would know the heart and mind of Francis, begin with the Canticle.
- Francis was a medieval man. His understanding of the cosmos and God’s creation was very different from our own. We are amazed by striking photos from the Webb telescope of innumerable galaxies billions of light years away. But in the world of the 13th century, there was no such comprehension of space and time. Francis would have believed the earth to be the center of the universe. He did not know the sun’s immensity or how it generated heat and light. He would not have known the physical nature of the moon, or that the stars were other suns. Because of this, Francis’s view of creation may have been more mystical and intimate than ours, which has been formed in part by the science of our time. As we enter the spirit of the Canticle, we can rejoice in our modern awareness even as we try to see the world through his medieval eyes.



- The creatures named in the first section of the Canticle (verses 1-9) are inanimate. Francis does not include any animals; he mentions plants (flowers and herbs) only in passing. We can speculate as to why he chose the creatures he did. There was nothing in his experience of creation grander than Sir Brother Sun or more strikingly beautiful than Sister Moon and the stars. None more useful than

¹ Thaddée Matura, OFM. *Francis of Assisi Writer and Spiritual Master*, (Cincinnati: Franciscan Media, 2005), 8
² The English text can be found in *Francis of Assisi: Early Documents* (FA:ED), edited by Regis J. Armstrong, OFM Cap., Wayne Hellmann, and William J. Short (New York, London, and Manila: New City Press, 1999), Vol 1, 113
³ Chesterton, G. K., *Saint Francis of Assisi*, (New York: Image Books, 1957) 90

Sister Water or more essential to life than Sister Mother Earth. Few were more mysterious than Brother Wind and Brother Fire.



- Each of the creatures he names exists in obedience to God. In “The Admonitions,” he reminds the friars (and us) that “all creatures under heaven serve, know, and obey their Creator, each according to its own nature, better than you.”⁴
- Although Francis is very focused on the literal attributes and physical reality of the creatures he names, keep in mind that as with any great poem, there are other meanings implied or symbolic. Regis Armstrong, OFM Cap, offers one such insight, “Brother Wind, Sister Water, and Brother Fire can obviously be seen as references to the Spirit... Each one presents a reflection in itself of the triune presence, thus pointing beyond itself to the power, wisdom, and goodness of God.”⁵
- If there is a single adjective that describes Francis’s view of creation more than any other, it may well be “beautiful.” Francis uses that word three times in the Canticle.
- Francis does not appear to be concerned with the idea of creation as much as with his experience of and relationship to other creatures. In this way, the poem prepares us for the awe that Francis reserved for the Incarnation – the Son of God assuming human nature in Jesus Christ, true God and true man.⁶
- Francis introduces people into verses 10 and 11, which he added during a time of unrest in Assisi.⁷ These verses speak to us in our own day. We should take to heart his hope that God will be praised by those “who give pardon for Your love,” “bear infirmity and tribulation,” and “endure in peace.”
- Verses 12 and 13 were composed as Francis lay dying.⁸ To see death as sister, “an instrument of God’s presence,”⁹ was one of Francis’s profound insights, and verse 12 is well worth contemplating again and again.
- Francis wrote the Canticle in the vernacular – his native Umbrian – and it is considered one of the earliest works of literature in Italian. Murray Bodo, OFM, tells us the Canticle “can only be fully appreciated in its original form, because the nuances, rhythms, and sounds of a great poem are the most exquisite articulation of its native language.”¹⁰ The Internet offers examples of the Canticle recited in the original form. Search for one and listen. Even those of us unfamiliar with Italian can benefit from its beauty spoken or sung as originally composed.



We do well to return to the Canticle repeatedly to share Francis’s joy, to join in his wonder, and to rediscover with him our universal kinship with creation. Let us continue to celebrate his beautiful “poetic praise of God.”¹¹

*These images are of a series of quilt hangings, by Cindy Wesley OFS, depicting **The Canticle of the Creatures**, located at the San Damiano Retreat Center, CA.*

⁴ See Admonition V, FA:ED, Vol 1., 131. Also, Robert J. Karris, OFM, *The Admonitions of St. Francis: Sources and Meanings*, (St. Bonaventure, New York: The Franciscan Institute, S. Bonaventure University, 1999), 81

⁵ Regis J. Armstrong, *St. Francis of Assisi, Writings for a Gospel Life*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1994) 211

⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2019) 116-117

⁷ FA:ED, Vol 1, 113-114

⁸ FA:ED, Vol 1, 113

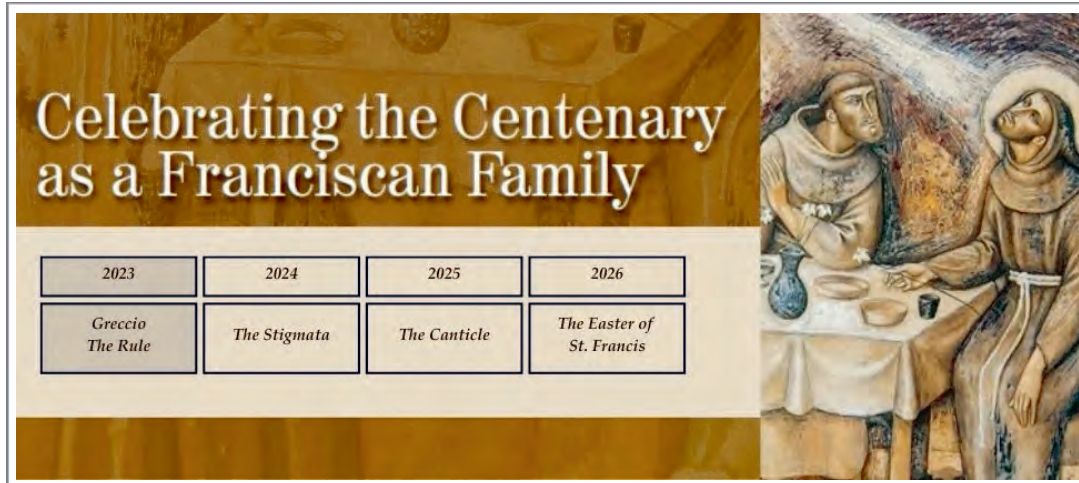
⁹ Armstrong, 238 Which one?

¹⁰ Murray Bodo, OFM, *Poetry as Prayer: St. Francis of Assisi*, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 2003) 58.

¹¹ FA:ED, Vol 1, 113. See also <http://franciscanseculars.com/a-visual-meditation-st-francis-in-art/>.

NATIONAL FRATERNITY CENTENARY TASK FORCE

By Vickie Klick, OFS



This is the third *TAU-USA* in which you have heard about the Franciscan centenaries being celebrated in 2023-2026. In addition to articles here, the National Fraternity has appointed a task force to help our celebrations to be as widespread and universal as possible. There are six of us on the Centenary Task Force; as you can see from our regional fraternities, we span the continental U.S.

Dcn. Terry Barber, Troubadours of Peace
Israela Garcia, Our Lady of Guadalupe
Vickie Klick (chair), Mother Cabrini
Terri Leone, St. Katharine Drexel
Patrick Martin, St. Margaret of Cortona
Carolyn Townes, Brothers and Sisters of St. Francis

2023 is going to be a busy year for us, with TWO centenaries to help celebrate, as well as planning our work. The NEC has asked us to plan a face-to-face event at Chapter and a Zoom event open nationwide each year and to create a common calendar of centenary events from across the country. We are also creating/collecting resources and ideas for centenary celebrations and posting them on our section of the website: <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/franciscan-centenary-celebration/>

We cannot do this alone, of course! We are asking for a representative/contact from each regional fraternity to collaborate with us. He or she will provide input for the shared national Centenary Calendar and in general will be a conduit of information to and from their regional fraternity. It will not be a big time investment, but it will be a good way to help everyone in your region participate more fully in the centenaries. If this interests you, please let your regional minister know.

It is important that these centenaries are being celebrated by the whole Franciscan family, not only the Secular Franciscans. One of the most important tasks for each region to undertake NOW is to reach out to the friars and sisters in their area to find out their plans and to see how we can participate, as well as to invite them to participate in our events. In most cases, we hope this can be facilitated by the regional spiritual assistant(s).

We are planning to offer a nationwide Zoom celebration of Greccio, probably the weekend before Thanksgiving. In subsequent years, however, we would like to partner with a regional fraternity each year to take their regional celebration "online." As you start looking ahead to celebrating the 800th anniversary of the Stigmata in 2024, if you think your regional event might be a candidate to be shared completely or partly online, we would love to hear from you.

Please watch our website for ideas and resources for regional and local fraternity events for each of the centenaries. We will be adding new materials regularly between now and the Easter of St. Francis in 2026.



JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS — ONE BROKEN SOUL AT A TIME

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS

National Animator, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation

The priorities for the National Fraternity for the next three years are **Vocations, Relationships, and Communications**. All are incredibly important to who we are as Franciscans. At a brainstorming session at our recent in-person National Executive Council meeting in St. Louis, Missouri, I shared my thoughts on the three priorities: “We must build **relationships** with better **communications** in order to bring in **vocations**.”

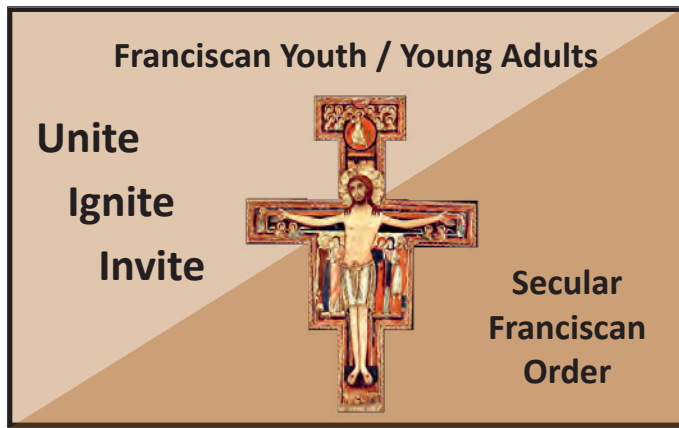
As the National Animator for Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation, I see many instances of broken relationships and a lack of communications, which will not lead to many vocations. This is not only with our Order, but with any religious order or community. If relationships are not built, nourished, and sustained, then we are merely a dying breed. As an outlier, I remain in this Order because of the beautiful relationships I have built and sustained over the past twenty plus years.

“A sense of community will make them joyful and ready to place themselves on an equal basis with all people...” (OFS Rule, Art. 13)

One dictionary definition of relationship is *the way in which two or more concepts, objects, or people are connected, or the state of being connected*. Another definition states: *“the way in which two or more people or groups regard and behave toward each other.”* I love those words: *regard* and *behave*. These are two basic ingredients of building relationships, creating connections. How would you regard and behave towards your supervisor? Your pastor? Another person in authority? Respectfully, honoring the dignity of the person as you actively and deeply listen to them. You exercise kindness and a certain reverence, knowing they are a child of the Most High God – just as you are.

So, why are there so many broken relationships – so much disrespect and unkindness, with people who don’t want to listen to one another? The truth of the matter is we have forgotten who we are in the Lord. We have lost that sense of connection with one another because we have lost that connection with who we are in Christ. You cannot behave kindly and respectfully toward another if you are not kind and respectful to yourself. After the global pandemic, many of us have become isolationists. It is all about me, myself, and I. The “we” has either been demoted or removed completely. We serve a relational God, who created us to be in relationship with one another as well as with creation. We are never meant to be alone on the journey. Although Jesus spoke of the narrow path, it is wide enough for two; since he sent us out two by two.

We must remember that we are all broken souls on this journey towards holiness – broken by sin, broken by grief, broken by illness, broken by life’s challenges. I believe we are so focused on our brokenness that we have lost sight of our connectedness. Relationships are also about our state of being connected. We are all connected because we belong to a triune God who models that connectedness; thus, we belong to one another. It is in that state of belongingness that we live and move and have our being. Our beingness informs our belongingness. We belong to one another because we belong to the God who first called us into relationships. Let us build those relationships as we continue to build up the kingdom of God. *“We are called to build a more fraternal and evangelical world so that the kingdom of God may be brought about more effectively” (OFS Rule, Art. 14).*



YOUTH-FRIENDLY FRATERNITIES LIKE A FAMILY MEAL

by Kathleen Molaro, OFS
Franciscan Youth and Young Adult
Commission Chair

The commission has spoken many times about the importance of creating youth-friendly fraternities. Why is this essential and what does this really mean? The simple answer to the first question is, it's essential because if a young person is interested in joining a YouFra (Franciscan Youth Fraternity), at this point they have nowhere to go with that desire, except to us—the Secular Franciscans. There are only a few official YouFra groups in the United States.

Many individuals and fraternities, however, are taking steps to reach out to youth and young adults. So until there are enough young people to form a YouFra, they need us to welcome them into our fraternities! Our Rule calls us to include our younger generation and “adopt appropriate means for growth in Franciscan and ecclesial life and encourage everyone to a life of fraternity” (Art. 24).

What does it mean to have a youth-friendly fraternity? That question is a little complicated. We all know the best way to draw people to us is by being present and visible; by living our charism authentically and with great joy; and by truly making our fraternity life vibrant and inspirational. This is especially true if a young person crosses our path or even walks through the door to join a gathering. Our younger Catholics live in a dangerous and sometimes depressing world. Our call is to spread hope, and to encourage them to see the good, beautiful creation around them and to seek Jesus in every face they meet. Our willingness to serve and sacrifice to make things better speaks volumes. Phew. That's a lot to ask, right? However, this is what we said “yes” to in our Profession Rite!

How do we build relationships with a different generation? We are an aging Order. Most of us at one time or another have expressed a wish that younger people would be joining us as Secular Franciscans. One of my Franciscan friends said recently, “I look around the table and the young people are missing.” I had to ask her, “When was the last time we invited them to a meal? Were they warmly welcomed? What did we serve? Most importantly, what was the conversation around the table?” Of course, she was metaphorically speaking of the Eucharistic table, but we can use the same analogy when defining a youth-friendly fraternity. We can invite them to our “family meal.”

When was the last time you invited a young person to a meal?

Our gatherings or other Franciscan events are like a family meal, right? Many friendships are forged or strengthened over a meal. Have we considered inviting others, including young people, to join us?



How visible are we? Do others, in particular the young people in our midst, know we are Secular Franciscans, or what that means?

Were they warmly welcomed?

Did we make an effort to connect personally with them? (As we do at a family meal?) Listen to their story? Let them know we were glad they came and invite them back?

What did you serve?

Was the content of our gathering nutritious, delicious, well balanced, and enough for everyone? (Like a plate of food?) Would they want seconds or trust it would be good the next time too? Would they want to invite a friend to come along?



What was the conversation around the table?

Was our gathering inspiring and meaningful? (Think of a conversation around the dinner table at a family meal.) Did we allow open, non-judgmental sharing and invite all to have a chance to speak? Have we learned how to dialogue respectfully when difficult subjects arise? Did we emanate joy and show how much we care about one another?

We all know that wishing doesn't just make something happen on its own. (I have often wished a family meal would just arrive automatically and that everyone would get along!) It takes creativity, determination, time, and initiative. Many fraternities around the country are setting goals in this area and really working to determine next steps.

We suggest you use this year's NAFRA theme as inspiration and simply "listen, discern, and go forth."

First, listen. Listen to the young people in your lives, and to one another in fraternity. Listen to the Holy Spirit. Is God calling your fraternity to have the courage and to take the time to reach out to our younger generations in some way? Remember—our mission isn't to grow our fraternities. Our mission is to share the gospel. How does the Lord want us to participate in this mission?

Next, discern. Start looking, as individuals and as a fraternity. Who are the young people to whom you have access? Are there young people in your Church? Are there already existing programs for youth and young adults nearby? Is there a college, Catholic school, or a catechesis program that is open to guests or outside speakers? Discern what age group you would best serve and who in your fraternity would be willing to take this on.

Finally, go forth. Once you determine who your young people are, you can brainstorm ideas for ways to immerse yourselves—even if it's only a few times a year—either into an already existing program as a support, or by planning an event of some kind that will give you the opportunity to mingle and build relationships with the younger generations.

Our Rule tells us in Article 24 that we are to foster communion among one another, especially with our youth and young adults, and it challenges us to "adopt appropriate means for growth in the Franciscan and ecclesial life." The commission is here to help. We encourage you to keep on moving forward. The fruit of your labor may eventually lead to the growth of the Secular Franciscan Order... but even if it doesn't, you can look back and know you've done what you were called to do. Enjoy your meal!

FRANCISCAN LIVING

How to Go Among the Saracens in Our Lives

by Francine Gikow, OFS

St. Francis is known as a peacemaker, and for the Peace Prayer, which, although not written by St. Francis, reveals his thoughts about peacemaking. However, I still have questions about how St. Francis actually demonstrated this in real life. What *did* he “do” to become an instrument of peace? How *did* he show love when hatred was all around him? How *did* he show pardon when he experienced injury and finally how could St. Francis travel to the Holy Land, which was occupied by the Saracens (who killed any Crusader they met) and live to tell the tale?

Our society also marginalizes and kills as Francis’ medieval society did long ago. Only our society marginalizes and “kills” in its expressions of anger, distrust and intolerance. We are quick to resort to anger, while demeaning, shaming, isolating, and depersonalizing others when they do not agree with the favored viewpoint. In fact, new terms and methods have arisen to describe this marginalization, such as “cancel culture,¹” “ghosting²,” and “gaslighting.³” Our society has become verbally and sometimes physically violent, disparaging and divided.

Unfortunately, since we are part of this society, it is too easy for us to fall into society’s mores and forget our own Franciscan values from our Rule: “...*trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone and in the transforming power of love and pardon.*”⁴

In his early rule, Francis outlined for us how the friars should go among the Saracens and other non-believers, and I believe it holds many lessons for Secular Franciscans living in our society: “**One way is to not engage in arguments or disputes but to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake.**”⁵

I believe there are three crucial points to consider from this initial way of going among the nonbelievers (or our enemies.)

Firstly, **we must not engage in arguments or disputes.** Arguing has

never changed a person’s mind. In fact, it just solidifies the person’s thinking. I am reminded of the old saying, “the devil is in the details.” Yes, the evil one *wants* us to engage in detailed arguments and disputes, because he wants to sow doubt, anger, error, and chaos into the mix. He wants us to forget about seeing the “divine seed” in everyone and the transforming power of love and pardon.

Secondly, **Jesus wants us to LOVE our enemies.** He wants us to show His compassion and love to them. If we are so involved in our arguments and disputes that pushes out His love and the chance for a relationship with the other. It is in this relationship—the give and take—that God can enter into the process. It has been truly said: “Compassion is the most effective response to hatred and violence.”⁶

Finally, peace in our relationships takes **humility:** to be subject to every human creature for God’s sake and know and realize that it is not all about “me” but rather it is “all about us” ...in Christ. We must meet the “other” as an *equal* brother or sister, without condescension, and with God’s compassion and love.

Remember the Peace Prayer? “Where there is hatred, let me sow love. Where there is injury, pardon, where there is doubt, faith... for it is in dying (*i.e., to self*) that we are born to eternal life.” Do we really mean what we pray and live accordingly?

I recently read the following, and it resonated within me.

“... we don’t really take Jesus seriously. We don’t love our enemies. We don’t turn the other cheek. We don’t forgive seventy times seven times. We don’t bless those who curse us.... We say: I am not a saint. We say: this Gospel stuff can’t be meant for everybody. We say: The Gospel is an ideal. But the Gospel is not merely an ideal.

*For the followers of Christ, the Gospel is the Way.*⁷

PAX ET BONUM



Giotto, *St. Francis Before the Sultan*

¹ [Cancel culture] is often said to take the form of boycotting or shunning an individual... who is deemed to have acted or spoken in an unacceptable manner.

² Ghosting happens when someone cuts off all online communication with someone else, and without an explanation.

³ the act of using psychological manipulation to get another person to question their own feelings, perception, or sanity

⁴ OFS Rule, 2 #17.

⁵ ER: XVI, 5-7.

⁶ Gerard Thomas Straub, OFS. *The Sunrise of the Soul.* Brewster MA: San Damiano Books, 2020. p. 158

⁷ Gerard Thomas Straub, OFS. p. 63.

SECULAR FRANCISCANS: TAU VS. HABIT

by Terri Leone, OFS, 1-800-Francis Coordinator

As in most families, certain topics “pop up” for discussion every so often and need clarification. Some topics are simply a matter of majority opinion; others are a matter of “tradition” and should we/can we change the tradition; but *some* are a matter civil or Church law. Whether or not Secular Franciscans “wear a habit” is a topic that falls into the latter category.

Seculars wearing habits has come up in conversations or emails with people considering joining our Order and in conversations with family members asking where they can purchase a habit for their deceased loved one who wanted to be buried in the Franciscan habit.

If someone asked you, “Do Secular Franciscans wear habits?” How would you reply?

If you are someone who relies solely on our “Governing Documents,” you’ll probably reply, “No, our current documents state that we don’t wear a habit but wear “a distinctive sign/insignia of membership in the Order.” Our (2000) General Constitutions article 43 states, “a distinctive sign of membership in our Order may be a TAU cross or other Franciscan symbol which the National Statutes may designate;” our (2007) OFS-USA Statutes article 16 states that **our** “distinctive sign” will be a TAU cross.

The 2007 General Constitutions also state in Article 5 that the Holy See (Rome/the Pope) is responsible for the authentic interpretation of the Rule and General Constitutions, but that the General Chapter is responsible for the *practical* interpretation of the Constitutions, and that the *presidency of CIOFS* may provide clarification of specific points between General Chapters.

Such an example is found in a General Chapter letter dated Oct. 29, 2011: The practice of wearing a “habit” is not in conformity with the Rule and General

Constitutions of the OFS, as already established.

The Chapter emphasizes that the distinctive sign of membership in the Order is the “Tau or other Franciscan symbol.” (GGCC 43). A “Franciscan symbol” is a small and simple insignia worn on the person (for example, a San Damiano cross). However, an OFS National Fraternity may determine in its National Statutes that wearing a “uniform” is an acceptable sign of recognition for Secular Franciscans of their own country, providing that the following mandatory criterion is followed: ...The Chapter states that the decision replaces all previous documents in this regard, and becomes in effect now and for the future. São Paulo, October 29, 2011

In a June 24, 2018, letter, our current Minister General, Tibor Kauser, OFS, discussed the idea of Secular Franciscans wearing a “habit.” He stated that we do not wear an outward garment called a habit but should wear visible signs of being a Secular Franciscan – of following St. Francis in Christ’s footsteps. The “visible signs” he cited were kindness, love of God, love of others, a readiness to serve, simple lifestyle, prayer life, sacramental life, commitment to our Order (a commitment to “learn, love and live” our Rule, General Constitutions and Statutes), commitment to one’s Fraternity (by attendance, participation and service - OFS Rule art. 22 - 25; OFS General Constitutions art. 30, 53.3), visibly live “from Gospel to life and from life to Gospel” (OFS Rule art. 4, 7; OFS General Constitutions art. 8, 9)



In conclusion, Secular Franciscans *don’t* wear a special outward garment called a habit, but *should* wear visible signs of a person on a “conversion-transformation journey” **and should visibly wear** some form of a TAU cross every day of our lives and be buried with one.

Postscript: In a recent email someone asked if we have a special prayer to recite as we put on our TAU cross. As an Order or National Fraternity. We don’t, but Diane Menditto, OFS, Natl. Vice Minister and former Chair of the National Formation Commission suggested,

“May I walk toward Christ in the footsteps of St. Francis today and always.”

Do you have a prayer that you recite as you are putting on your TAU each day?



CIOFS Presidency at work

This page appeared in the CIOFS publication, *VOX Franciscana*, and is available at the following link: <https://ciofs.info/news/vox-franciscana/winter-spring-2023/>

SERVANT LEADERSHIP



Tuesday's meeting began with Minister General Tibor Kauser giving a formation talk on servant leadership.

Leadership is tied to community; that is, a leader needs a team to move ahead with a project or strive for a goal. So, he said, a leader helps form and protect community, and helps members grow in their OFS vocation.

When looking at traits of leaders, one should recognize that leaders are not uniform. "Look at Moses, Jesus, St. Peter, St. Francis, St. Bonaventure..."

But some characteristics should be common to OFS leaders:

- Help form and strengthen the fraternity – it's the OFS home.
- Encourage and maintain communication, which brings people closer.
- Encourage collaboration, with mem-

bers using their charisms and talents.

- Serve the growth of everyone.
- Do not be afraid of new approaches.
- Be prayerful (be ready to be with the Holy Spirit).
- Live a sacramental and penitential life.
- Embody a spirit of service ("washing the feet of others").
- Maintain an overview; have vision.
- Be able to organize; and be ready to speak.
- Always be open to dialogue, and able to evaluate a situation.
 - What would Jesus do?
 - Listen. Consult. Discern. Decide.
 - Collective decisions are collegial when everyone respects one another.
- Love your brothers and sisters. (Mutual respect essential for servant leadership.)
- Be Franciscan.

MINISTRY OF SERVICE



Being a Secular Franciscan means being engaged in a ministry of service, Noemi Paola Riccardi reminded fellow members of the CIOFS Presidency in a Monday morning session.

"St Peter tells us what to do and how to do it: 'Let each one place the gift he has received at the service of others...' and '... whosoever does a service, let him do it with the strength that is given to him by God...'"

She went on to point out that in the OFS the function of "animation and guidance" is a collegial one. "Guidance and animation are entrusted to a set of elected persons, called to exercise co-responsibility and co-participation. We know well that with Profession we are all 'animators' or, at least, called to 'animate' the Fraternity, making available the talents/gifts God has

given us."

She noted some key traits of service, among them:

- Personal presence (a fundamental requirement).
- Witness of life (living evangelical life).
- Prayer (it is the fuel for serving).
- Collaboration (taking active interest in all service areas).
- Graciousness ("Pope Francis emphasised that, like Jesus, we must serve without asking for anything and reiterated that we must not take control of service 'by turning it into a power structure.'")

Noemi identified another important element of service – listening. Listen before acting or making decisions. She suggested following the advice of a Greek philosopher: "We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak."

OPPORTUNITIES TO SERVE

Do You Have the Gifts and Talents Necessary to Serve the Order?

or

*Have you observed these gifts and talents
in one of your brother or sister Secular Franciscans?*

WE ARE SEEKING APPLICATIONS FOR:

National Formation Commission Chair

Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation Commission Chair

Youth/Young Adult Commission Chair

Tau-USA Editor

Our OFS USA Family is seeking applicants for the above positions. Please discern whether your God-given gifts and talents will fill this need.

Please contact National Secretary, Susan Ronan, OFS, at ofsusasecretary@gmail.com, AND National Vice Minister, Diane Menditto, OFS, at diane.menditto@gmail.com, for an application form prior to May 22, 2023.

Applications will be due by June 9, 2023. (Extended deadline)

The qualities required for these positions include:

- Strong knowledge of our Catholic Faith
- Good writing and communication skills
- Ability to travel, as needed, including attendance at the annual National Chapter
- Experience conducting "Zoom-style" and "In-Person" meetings
- Ability to prepare and meet an annual budget
- Experience and skills relating to the particular position (e.g., leading a formation program or serving as a local or regional formation director; participating in programs to further justice, peace, or integrity of creation (JPIC) or serving as local or regional JPIC chair; participating in Youth/Young Adult activities to share the love of the Franciscan Order with the youth; producing a newsletter for fraternities, other volunteer work including use of specific software programs for newsletters).

Application forms for individual positions will be emailed to interested persons. The NEC will review all applications and determine whether virtual interviews will be conducted. The appointments will be made by August, 2023.

For additional information, contact
Susan Ronan, OFS, at ofsusasecretary@gmail.com
and Diane Menditto, OFS, at diane.menditto@gmail.com

OFS QUINQUENNIAL MUSEUM, PHOENIX, AZ.

Sharon Dale OFS, National Archivist



Last August's Quinquennial was indeed a special event. More than 600 attendees from all over the United States participated. We had inspiring speakers, stimulating breakout sessions, multiple opportunities for prayer and singing, perusing our many vendors for books, religious supplies, totes, pictures and what have you, and, of course, there was our OFS Museum.

Tom McNamara, OFS, National Historian, and I collected historical documents that spanned the 100 years we've hosted National Congresses. There were agendas, notes of special speakers, newspaper write-ups, and many, many pictures of Qs over the years. Our displays traced the development of the

National Association, the old Province system, and the new autonomous regions, as well as many of the people and events involved. One table showed our collection of TAU-USA publications, including one so old that it doesn't have an issue number on it! Tom also contributed minutes of early meetings from the St. Thomas More Region.

I drove to New York, where our National Archives are kept and sent more than 250 documents of early history, which included the establishment of regions. We also displayed a few old "habits" that early Tertiaries wore in their fraternity meetings.

Tom had a "mystery box," a special treat for anyone interested in archiving. It included the exact contents of a typical box arriving at our archives—no special order or organization, ratty-looking onion-skin papers, letters, and hundreds of old staples. That is what every archivist, whether at the local, regional, or national level, is challenged with. Each piece of paper has to be examined, sorted, and scanned into the computer for safe keeping.



A very special display was the beautiful 6-foot banner that was loaned to us from St. Carlo church in Saint Louis dedicated to the Third Order Franciscans. It was very old—we had a "no touch" sign on it because of its delicate nature.

We hope that all who visited our OFS History Museum appreciated the collections on display. It was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA

General Fund Assets

December 31, 2022

	12/31/2021	General Fund Income	12/31/2022
Bank Accounts - Checking & Savings	\$ 573,939.04		\$ 529,764.24
Certificate of Deposit	50,696.29		50,711.15
Deposits on Future Events	94,183.68		19,621.69
	<u>718,819.01</u>		<u>600,097.08</u>
Less Restricted Funds	(176,582.83)		(112,353.21)
Total Funds Available	<u>\$ 542,236.18</u>	<u>\$ (54,492.31) (a)</u>	<u>\$ 487,743.87</u>

**Statement of Revenue and Expenses - Actual vs Budget - General Fund
For the Twelve Months Ended December 31, 2022**

	Actual	Budget	\$ Over/Under Budget
Income			
Fair Share	\$ 195,245.00	\$ 204,900.00	\$ (9,655.00) (1)
Formation Sales	27,232.10	15,000.00	12,232.10 (2)
OFS-USA Bookstore	15,798.21	-	15,798.21 (3)
Interest Income	14.86	1,000.00	(985.14)
Miscellaneous Income	1,988.51	500.00	1,488.51
Annual Chapter Reimbursements	6,415.00	-	6,415.00 (5)
Total Income	<u>\$ 246,693.68</u>	<u>\$ 221,400.00</u>	<u>\$ 25,293.68</u>
Expense			
CIOFS Fair Share	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ -
TAU-USA Newsletter	30,379.04	52,340.00	(21,960.96) (4)
CNSA -Conference of National Spiritual Asst	8,000.00	8,000.00	-
Annual Chapter	84,236.92	55,335.00	28,901.92 (5)
Election Expense - International	3,451.30	6,230.00	(2,778.70) (6)
National Executive Council	27,244.02	48,790.00	(21,545.98) (7)
Accessibility Committee	7,469.49	11,290.00	(3,820.51) (7)
Communications Committee	13,802.44	23,095.00	(9,292.56) (7)
Ecumenical Interfaith Committee	2,834.42	9,480.00	(6,645.58) (7)
Formation Commission	6,529.14	17,995.00	(11,465.86) (7)
Historian	-	2,815.00	(2,815.00) (7)
Justice, Peace, Integrity of Creation Commission	4,107.08	15,220.00	(11,112.92) (7)
Multi-Cultural Committee	300.00	2,000.00	(1,700.00) (7)
National Archives	2,021.30	4,925.00	(2,903.70) (7)
Public Relations	1,388.05	4,145.00	(2,756.95) (7)
Vocations Committee	343.08	1,915.00	(1,571.92) (7)
Youth & Young Adult (FYA) Commission	8,525.23	9,605.00	(1,079.77) (7)
Quinquennial Planning	8,249.57	9,000.00	(750.43) (7)
Formation Printing - Special Projects	23,236.00	6,000.00	17,236.00 (8)
Formation Printing	13,447.00	14,000.00	(553.00) (8)
Formation Printing - Languages	10,632.00	12,000.00	(1,368.00) (8)
Royalties Paid	2,160.95	2,000.00	160.95
JPIC Outreach - Franciscan Intl	2,000.00	2,000.00	-
JPIC Award	3,000.00	3,000.00	-
Liability Insurance	5,250.00	5,700.00	(450.00)
Professional Fees	-	10,000.00	(10,000.00)
Bookstore	526.61	-	526.61 (3)
Other Expenses	2,052.35	5,000.00	(2,947.65)
Total Expense	<u>\$ 301,185.99</u>	<u>\$ 371,880.00</u>	<u>\$ (70,694.01)</u>
Net Income (Loss) General Fund	<u>\$ (54,492.31) (a)</u>	<u>\$ (150,480.00)</u>	<u>\$ 95,987.69</u>
Projected loss to be covered by money in savings		150,480.00	
		<u>\$ -</u>	

Note 1: Variance explanations on next page.

NATIONAL FRATERNITY OF THE SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER - USA
Restricted Funds Report
For the Twelve Months Ended December 31, 2022

RESTRICTED FUND ACCOUNTS	Beginning Balance 12/31/2021	2022 Contributions	2022 Disbursements	Ending Balance 12/31/2022	
CIOFS Solidarity Fund	\$ -	\$ 1,000.00	\$ (1,000.00)	\$ -	
Emergency Aid	3,665.86	7,760.00	(8,386.86)	3,039.00	(1)
Ecumenical - Interfaith Formation	1,138.20 200.00	- -	- -	1,138.20 200.00	
Formation Grant-Translation	-	4,600.00	(2,907.08)	1,692.92	(2)
Gifts of Appreciation	-	350.00		350.00	
H2O Lenten Project	6,692.53	7,823.00	(14,000.00)	515.53	(3)
CIOFS Management of Order	20,000.00	-	-	20,000.00	
National Events	1,225.84	-	-	1,225.84	
Quinquennial Congress	108,459.34	232,379.05	(289,080.54)	51,757.85	(4)
Regional Needs	868.61	-	-	868.61	
Regions Helping Regions	3,740.00	800.00	(2,200.00)	2,340.00	(5)
Undesignated Contributions	11,349.33	1,145.80	(4,877.04)	7,618.09	(6)
Youth Scholarships	453.05	477.00	-	930.05	
Restricted Duns Scotus Fund	18,790.07	135,000.00	(133,112.95)	20,677.12	(7)
Total Restricted Funds	<u>\$ 176,582.83</u>	<u>\$ 391,334.85</u>	<u>\$ (455,564.47)</u>	<u>\$ 112,353.21</u>	

RESTRICTED FUND NOTES:

- (1) Regions & individual members donated \$6,760 for Brazil floods. Funds wired to CIOFS for disbursement. Donation of \$1,000 from a region. Final disbursement of \$619 for Lebanon wired to CIOFS. Final disbursement of \$1,008 OTC meds for Venezuela made.
- (2) Grant from Duns Scotus received for translating Spanish and Korean rule. Disbursement for same.
- (3) Contributions from members, local fraternities & regional fraternities to provide clean drinking water to those in need. Donations: Mississippi Winter Rapid Water Storm Response \$5,500, CIOFS Well4Africa \$8,500.
- (4) Contributions for 2022 Quinquennial registrations, merchandise ordered, scholarship fund and service project. Disbursements were Quinquennial related expenses.
- (5) Region donations for struggling regions made with annual fair share. Disbursement to Ohana 'O Ke Anuenue.
- (6) Various contributions. Disbursements: purchase Canon camcorder, wireless mic to record National events \$2,861, YouFra 3rd International Assembly donation \$1,547, memorial ads in Q program & misc \$469.
- (7) Proceeds from sale of investments: \$135,000.00. Grants disbursed: Quinquennial \$125,000, Queen of Peace Region \$3,025, Translation \$4,600, Board meeting expenses \$488.

Note 1: Variance explanations for Statement of Revenue and Expenses - Budget vs Actual - General Fund

- (1) Membership continues to decline.
- (2) Sales have risen since the pandemic ended and fraternities are active.
- (3) Bookstore sales and expenses were not budgeted as this was a new venture.
- (4) Printing costs continue to increase as well as postage to mail the Tau-USA.
- (5) Chapter was held in a hotel which is always more costly than a retreat center. Reimbursements are from Observers attending and reduces the actual over budget to \$22,486.92
- (6) Due to visa issues, a Friar from the USA was appointed by CIOFS to oversee National elections so travel expenses were less than expected.
- (7) Zoom allows for fewer in-person meetings which reduces expenditures.
- (8) Over budget due to printing of Fraternity registers, National Journal, Brown Rule and Seeking the Gospel Life, Essential Documents. Cost will be recovered as the books are sold.

**Email any questions to claudiakauz.sfo@gmail.com

Respectfully submitted by Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS, National Treasurer - March 31, 2023

SHARING THE VISION



NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Daily Boosters for our Vocation through Email

In 2007, our sister, Kathleen White, OFS, of Our Lady of Indiana Regional Fraternity, started sharing daily emails about various OFS-related aspects with other Regional Ministers. After her 2nd term as Regional Minister ended, she learned that many still wanted to receive her daily posts. Thus, the Tau-Daily email list was born. At one point, there were more than 1,000 names on that list serv. A few years ago, Yahoo closed down the list serv features, so Kathleen opened a Google Groups list. Currently 472 have subscribed to receive the daily messages. Topics of the emails include, in monthly rotation:

- The Rule of the Secular Franciscan Order,
- the Admonitions of St. Francis,
- an article from the OFS General Constitutions,
- the USA National Statutes,
- Little Flowers of St. Francis,
- a Franciscan quote, and additionally,
- the Franciscan saint of the day.

To subscribe, send a **blank** email to: tau-daily+subscribe@googlegroups.com If you don't succeed there, send her an email request at kdwofs@gmail.com

If you change your email address, unsubscribe from your old address, then re-subscribe from your new email address.

To end your subscription, there is an UNSUBSCRIBE link at the bottom of each email.

Thanks to Kathleen for those daily boosts of inspiration for our vocations!

Chapter 2023

This year's annual chapter gathering will be held at the Pallottine Renewal Center in St. Louis, MO., from August 22 through 27, 2023. This is a fraternal and pastoral visitation for the OFS-USA. We will be welcoming Presidency Councilor Dina Shabalina, OFS, (Ukraine) and General Spiritual Assistant Fr. Carlos Campos Julve, TOR (Peru). Fraternal and Pastoral visitations are a wonderful opportunity to deepen our understanding of how to live our vocations. It is so good to receive feedback on what is going well and suggestions for doing some things differently. There are so many ways to correctly serve our Lord. It's such a gift to receive ideas on what is working well in other parts of the world. We look forward to sharing the experience with you in a variety of ways—Facebook, our website, and *TAU-USA*. Just like regional and local fraternity visitations, we have a visitation questionnaire to fill out for the visitors. We are just starting to work on that now. Thank you for your prayers so we may continue our journey to effectively animate and guide the OFS-USA.

National Fraternity Council Meetings

Meeting with the National Fraternity Council throughout the year: the NEC is continuing its practice of holding virtual meetings to stay in contact with the Regional Ministers. The National Fraternity Council met on February 8 and April 29, 2023. Virtual meetings allow us to continue the business of the Order throughout the year, as the Regional Ministers are a critical part of the National Fraternity Council.

Connecting with Our Members

Years ago, Jane used to listen to a radio show. The host had a segment when he'd throw a dart at a map of the U.S. He'd get a copy of the phone book from that location (remember phone books?). The next week, he'd call someone from that town during the live broadcast and ask questions to learn about the town. Jane really liked that idea. She also heard that Pope Francis has made random calls to people. So don't be surprised if you get a call from one of your National Executive Council members. We want to learn about you! 1-How you heard about the Order; 2-Your favorite Article of the *Rule* or aspect of our vocation that resonates with you strongest; 3-How you serve currently and in the past; and 4-suggestions for the NEC.

Ritual Update

A significant amount of progress is being made on an update to the brown *Ritual* book. In 2022, the OFS-USA obtained the copyright for the text and began the process for the update. The CNSA and Deacon David and Therese Ream, OFS, worked on the initial update. The NEC is now in the process of reviewing. We will keep you informed of plans for issuing the revised text.

Duns Scotus Board

Requesting applications for OFS members to serve on the Duns Scotus Formation Fund Board. There are two openings for terms starting January 2024-January 2026. Please contact Patricia Serotkin, OFS, DSFF Secretary, to apply by May 31, 2023. Pat's email: dunsscotustrustfund@gmail.com



Visit the Secular Franciscan Order - USA Website

<https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/>

Resource Links:

Formation & Spirituality

Justice, Peace and integrity of Creation Resources

Youth and Young Adult Resources

Franciscan Centenary Celebration

Ecumenical/Interfaith Committee

Duns Scotus Formation Fund (DSFF)

Guidelines Forms & Other Resources

Meeting Documents and Proceedings

Frequently Asked Questions

Sources for Secular Franciscan Books and Supplies

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Secular Franciscan Order - USA
Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation (JPIC)



by Jim Wesley, OFS

Early in the morning, when I sit on the front porch and look east, I have a clear view of the distant hills and trees. If I wake up early enough, I watch the sky just above these hills beginning to glow in various shades of yellow, orange, and magenta. A few birds flutter by, and some sit silhouetted in the trees. Even a small hummingbird pauses to watch the new day begin. As time passes, rays of light flare along the hilltops, and Brother Sun slowly appears with a glaring brightness signaling the beginning of a new day. After a short time of quiet reflection, it is time to head back into the house for a little breakfast.

What did I experience? Was it simply the morning sunrise signaling the beginning of a new day, complete with a spectacular light show, or was something else happening that my senses were unable to perceive?

When we refer to the word “day,” we are talking about the amount of time for one rotation of the earth on its axis. The sun doesn’t really rise, because it is at a fixed location at the center of our solar system. The sunrise is therefore, not the sun rising, but the earth rotating. In fact, what I experienced on my front porch was the sun being revealed as the earth rotated eastward. A very convincing illusion witnessed by humans for as long as they have inhabited the earth.

Another interesting fact is that my home is located along the western coast of North America at 35°2’33” north latitude. The circumference of the earth at this latitude is 24,861.5 miles; that is the distance my house travels each day as the earth rotates. If my house travels this distance in 24 hours, a simple mathematical calculation reveals a speed of 1,036 miles per hour. It may seem unbelievable, but it is reality. We don’t perceive this movement because of gravity, and because the atmosphere is also traveling at this same speed. This is similar to the sensation, or the non-sensation, we have on an airplane traveling 500 miles per hour.

There is even more to this perception story. Another scientific fact is that the earth is in orbit around the sun. This revolution, or journey, around the sun, a distance of 92.96 million miles, takes 365.25 days to complete, at an amazing orbital speed of 66,700 miles per hour. Again, we are unable to sense this motion. Yet it is happening. Sister Earth is constantly in motion.

Reality is often difficult to accept. Back in the 1600s, the mathematician/astronomer, Galileo Galilei, faced an interesting dilemma. After gathering and interpreting scientific data, he realized that a fundamental teaching and belief of his time was flawed. Through limited sensory observation, popular beliefs, and established theological teachings, the earth was falsely believed to be the center of our universe. One-hundred years earlier, Nicolaus Copernicus had stated that the sun, not the earth, was at the center of our solar system, and that the earth rotates on its axis. When Galileo scientifically proved that the heliocentric solar system was correct, the Catholic Church of that time considered him a criminal for promoting heresy and sentenced him to house arrest. The popular belief of the time prevailed, and it wasn’t until 1992, 359 years later, that Pope John Paul II finally exonerated Galileo, and in the year 2000, the Church officially apologized to Galileo for not accepting the scientific facts that ultimately corrected popular misinformation of the 1600s.

This little story brings us to the present time. To truly understand God’s creation, we need to look beyond the earth. One suggestion is to visit the Vatican Observatory, one of the oldest active astronomical observatories in the world. You can visit at the following link: <https://www.vaticanobservatory.org/>. Be sure to watch the video: *The Pope’s Astronomer*.

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