



LENTEN/HOLY WEEK BLESSINGS

I hope you all are having a very blessed and spiritually enlightening Lenten season. I. Also hope that you have a joyful Easter celebration with your family and friends.

Our region had a wonderful Lenten Retreat via Zoom in February. I found it to be very thought provoking and I feel we were all challenged to help each other to do our part in forming a better world by using whatever gifts God has given us.

I would like to thank Chris Blood OFS for the years she has been the Editor of our Regional Newsletter-The Clarion. She did an amazing job and spent countless hours creating a publication we can all be proud of. She has decided that she can no longer be the Editor since she has had to take on many new duties in her role on the National Council.

We are so pleased and appreciative of the fact that Chris Rice OFS from the Followers of St. Francis Fraternity has agreed to be the new Editor of the Clarion. His email is crice@nlecstl.org.

One of the new ideas for the Clarion is to feature a different Fraternity from our region in each quarterly edition. This will hopefully help us to get to know each other better. Joyful Servants Fraternity has graciously agreed to be the first Fraternity highlighted in our Spring edition. All other fraternities are certainly welcome add additional news articles

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and pictures. Please send them to Chris Rice.

I am certainly learning a lot in my new role as Regional Minister. If there is anything I can do for your Fraternity or for you personally please let me know.

I feel that our Region is thriving and pray that God will continue to bless us and guide us to where He wants us to be.

Connie Shanks OFS
Regional Minister- St. Clare Region

Secular Franciscan: A Sower through Gospel to Life: Life to Gospel Way of life
Annapoorna Mary, OFS
Regional Formation Director, St. Clare Region, MO, USA

In the jubilee year of St. Francis of Assisi, [Pope Leo XIV proclaims Franciscan Jubilee Year] 2026, when Pope Leo has called us to do the Listening and Fasting as Lenten observations, and when the National OFS Formation theme is focused on Proclaiming the Gospel, I begin to write a humble reflection on, Secular Franciscan: A Sower through Gospel to Life: Life to Gospel Way of life [OFS Rule 4].

It is the beginning of March; Spring is on its way. Blue sky above and travelling clouds along seems like heaven on earth. Warmth of sun and cool breeze embrace to comfort. Singing birds chattering all around bring delight of cheers. Dancing daffodils, magical Lenten roses, and Camilia blooms announce the beauty of spring. Emerging lilies, Tulips, and all the perennial plants bring hope every day in my garden. I set to sow the summer seeds with the reflection on Secular Franciscan as a Sower, in my heart and mind.

Seeds: I look at the seeds in my hand and hold them with the reverence of their potency of holding life in them and their capacity to grow into living plants. I selected the soil, which provides place to grow and nourishment. I selected the location with the dream of planting and fruits it is going to produce. Natural gardeners secure seeds from various sources of nature. In nature earth produces all kinds of seeds as a obedient servant to the command of God, "Then God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And so it happened:" [Genesis 1/11]. I am a gardener and I am setting to sow summer seeds with secular Franciscan reflection in mind. I ponder upon the Sower parable in the gospel [Luke Ch 8]. I think about Jesus narrating the parable. I think of seeds He spoke about. He explained that seeds are Word of God. As OFS, I understand that the Word of God is the seed we are called to sow. Our seed is Gospel, which we receive, sow, grow, and produce fruits through our OFS way of life.

Season: As I continue the reflection on Gospel, I am also thinking of seasonal sowing as I hold summer seeds to sow. Natural gardeners sow seeds as per the seasons. I noticed that there was no mention about the season of sowing in the Sower parable. I was wondering about the concept of season, as it is essential for an everyday gardener. Jesus not mentioning about the season, raises question in me, is there a season for sowing Gospel? Is the season doesn't matter at all for Gospel Sower? I started to think. From that

thought in my mind, I visualize Secular Franciscans as a Sowers. Does OFS need a season to sow? Are there specific seasons required for sowing spiritual seeds for OFS? I turn to the founding principle of OFS way of life, which is Gospel to life: Life to Gospel, for the answer. In the Gospel way of life, OFS receive the Gospel seeds and produce fruits and in return produce Gospel seeds as they go along with their secular life. So they have potency to produce fruits and seeds all through their life, irrespective of seasons. Eureka, I found the answer, therefore, all seasons are good for sowing Gospel seeds, as it occurs all along the life, not specific to a stage or season of life. If Gospel is received and lived that in turn will produce Gospel fruits. I use a declarative statement here, as the word of God will produce good fruits, “ So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; It shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it.”[Isaiah 55/11]; and it will produce fruits without fail, “ For the word of God will never fail[Luke 1/37]. So, I am settled solid with this eureka moment of understanding that secular Franciscans are Sowers of all seasons through their vocation of Gospel way of life.

Soil: Now I am heading towards the garden bed to prepare the soil to sow my summer seeds. I look at the bed, which looks rough with lot of weeds. I am beginning to clear the weeds, amending the soil, and preparing the soil to receive the seeds. As I am straightening the garden soil, my attention turns towards the types of soils Jesus emphasized in the parable, where the seeds landed, and their consequential results. The type of soils mentioned in the parable included path, which lost the seeds to trampling and birds, soil with rocks, which resulted in withering of plants with no produce, soil with thorns, which grew but choked with thorns not producing fruits, and good soil, which produced fruits in hundred fold[Luke Ch 8/5-8]. I simmer upon the thoughts on these types of soil. I question myself, what type of soil am I? I took an introspective assessment. As a result, I understand, in any given moment, one’s life may appear like this garden bed which is not perfect, which has weeds here and there that need De- Weeding time to time, stones here and there that need to be removed, thorns here and there that need to be removed, and some good soil here and there that need to be increased and amended time to time. Now I think, how can a secular Franciscan serve as a good soil to receive the Gospel seeds and produce fruits [Gospel to life]. One thing I am certain that an ongoing clearing and amending of heart, mind, and soul is a natural requirement, as preparing good soil in garden bed. An ongoing conversion?

In my reflection these are some ideas that come to my heart and mind, but not all inclusive and not limited to: Becoming/Serving as a good soil: is an ongoing process throughout life, as gardeners prepare and amend the soil frequently and regularly.

First, OFS by the call of Gospel way of life, when we read, reflect, and receive Gospel [Secular Franciscans should devote themselves especially to careful reading of the gospel, going from gospel to life and life to the gospel: Article 4] , we are sanctified by the Gospel truth. Gospel [Word of God] has dynamic powers [OFS Rule Article 7], the powers of sanctification, healing, and transformation etc..... are inevitable. The first reaction of the received Gospel is the sanctification of the soul and transformation of oneself/fraternity, by the conversion of heart [which can be witnessed in Mathew: Mathew 9 and Zacchaeus Conversions: Luke 19; Saul to Paul conversion: Acts 26] . Conversion will result in the transformation of individuals/ fraternities that in turn will result in turning into good soil. Sanctification happens individually and collectively [Fraternities]. This concept is located within Jesus’s prayers for the Apostles in John 17/17 “Consecrate them in the truth. Your word is truth” .

By our OFS call we are consecrated in truth. Through Our initial formation we prepare ourselves to receive Gospel way of life as good soil [heart, mind, life].

Second, OFS through our active Ongoing formation in Gospel way of life and our lives conforming to the

OFS Rules, continuously to prepare our hearts, minds, souls, and lives individually and collectively to become good soils to receive Gospel seeds every day and throughout our lives. Ongoing formation involves applying the Gospel and OFS rule on one's life individually [Articles 11-12& 19] in their family [Article 17], workplace [Article 16], fraternities [Article 15, Church, community at large [Articles10,13-15], and to the integrity of creation [Article 18]. Application of Gospel and OFS rule in day today activities that involves all the mentioned levels would result in becoming the fertile good soil, which would produce in hundred-fold.

Third, OFS by our call of Gospel way of life, we adhere to the sacramental life in the Church. We are nourished by Eucharist, cleansed by reconciliation, healed by sacraments throughout our life, which help to provide strength and sustainment of the OFS Gospel way of life [OFS Rule Articles 5-9]. As I said, reflection is not limited to the above three points. I move on to the next concept of sowing the seeds.

Sowing: Now I have completed the garden bed preparation. Soil looks so good, no stones or clumps, no weeds, and thorns, it looks even and fertile. It is a good soil, and it is ready to receive the seeds. I begin to sow the seeds with an expectational dream of produce to come. Mother earth receives seeds and produces fruits of its kind and in turn produces seeds of its' kind. Similarly, OFS hearts receive the Gospel seeds [Gospel to life] and apply Gospel in their life [Life to Gospel], which will result in producing gospel fruits and Gospel seeds all along their life. OFS sowing is an active, ongoing, lifelong process [way of life] that involves inward and outward sowings.

Fruits: Now I am reflecting upon the hundred-fold fruits. Fruits are produced only after the sequence of seed germination, growth, blossoms, and fruit. Eventually seeds die in the process, what a selfless life of these seeds in nature., " Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat ;r but if it dies, it produces much fruit." [John 12/24]. Similarly, OFS who live by Gospel called to lead a life of selflessness, life of humility, and a life of poverty. Once Gospel seeds have taken roots into one's heart, it begins to grow and it has power to transform OFS member to become Christ's redemptive instrument, in the hands of God and in the will of God. Gospel growth in a person creates more and more thirst for God's presence, which is depicted in St. Clare words of spousal admiration for Christ, "Most noble Queen, gaze, consider, contemplate, desiring to imitate Your Spouse." [Franciscan Media]. When Living Gospel is active in a soul, then the soul identifies Christ in its life rather self and becomes Christ centric and selfless soul. This selfless status of the soul is captured in St. Paul's saying, "yet I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; .."[Galatian2/20]. We can also witness the Gospel centric selfless life in the life of our Seraphic Father St. Francis of Assisi, and it is reflected in the instructional OFS rules as well. OFS Gospel way of life produces fruits of Holy Spirit, through humility, selfless life, and becomes an instrument of Christ's redemptive grace to one another.

Water: I complete the sowing process by watering the soil. Water is the activator of seed germination and growth. Every time I touch the water I think of Holy Spirit, thinking of scriptural citations indicating one of the symbols of Holy Spirit as water. Here the water activates seeds germination, similarly, Holy Spirit is the author, activator, and sustainer of OFS formation. Now my attention turns to the OFS formators as Sowers. According to FUN manual, all the OFS members are formators. Formation is a teamwork, in which individuals, fraternity, councils are members [agents of formation], but the Holy Spirit is the primary formator. Holy Spirit is the formator of Gospel to Life: Life to Gospel way of life.

"As you can see the work of formation in the Secular Franciscan Order is the work of all of the Agents of Formation. The Holy Spirit, The person to be formed, The Fraternity, The Council and the Minister, The Formator, The Spiritual Assistant. This is not, and should not be, your task

alone.” [FUN Manual].

What a great call we have in OFS Gospel way of life, by which we are called to be Sowers with Holy Spirit. I am struck with wonder and awe. I continue to ponder on questions such as: Do I receive and sow Gospel in me daily? Do I live Gospel and realize the OFS rules daily? Do I produce Gospel fruits in my life and what are they? Do I sow Gospel seeds all along my life? Do I serve as a Gospel Sower? I conclude this reflection of Secular Franciscan as a Sower, with the national theme, ““Go into the world and proclaim the good news” [Mark 16:15]. We are Sowers and we are called to sow Gospel seeds as good news to the world. Amen!

References

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2. Genesis, CHAPTER 1 | USCCB
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5. Luke, CHAPTER 8 | USCCB
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7. John, CHAPTER 17 | USCCB
8. Matthew, CHAPTER 9 | USCCB
9. Luke, CHAPTER 19 | USCCB
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**Joyful Servants Fraternity
A Reflection in the Spirit of St. Francis
by Debbie Noland, OFS, Minister**

Peace and all good!

I think St. Francis would rejoice to see how the Lord continues to plant seeds of the Gospel in the hearts of His people. Even now, long after his footsteps have faded from the roads of Assisi, the Spirit still calls brothers and sisters to live simply, to love deeply, and to serve one another with joy. Such a seed has taken root in what is now known as the Joyful Servants Fraternity of the Secular Franciscan Order.

In the year 2006, the Lord began this small work through one faithful sister, Maureen Gray, who had first professed the Franciscan way of life in Florida in 1978. With the loving sponsorship of San Damiano Fraternity in Dardenne Prairie, she carried the flame of the Franciscan charism into central Missouri. Like a small mustard seed, the fraternity began humbly—yet the Lord delights in small beginnings.

Today the Joyful Servants Fraternity is served and guided by a Council as follows:

Debbie Noland, OFS, Minister
Maureen Gray, OFS, Spiritual Assistant
Terrie Foltz, OFS Vice Minister
Mary Ann Puglis, OFS, Secretary
John Kemper, OFS, Treasurer
Becky Bouck, OFS, Formation Director
Kate Saltzman, OFS, Councilor
Connie Shanks, OFS, Councilor

Fraternity members: Deacon Joe Puglis, OFS, Linda Bukalski, OFS, Linda Shuster, Katherine Goodman, Paul Needham, Trey Trapani, Clare Briggs, Lisa Cluver, Luke Dalton, Connie Bolbecher

Our fraternity now gathers brothers and sisters from eight cities across central Missouri: Camdenton, Linn Creek, Osage Beach, Laurie, Jefferson City, Fulton, Columbia, and Rolla. Though the miles between us stretch across lakes and hills, distance does not divide those whom the Spirit has united. For true fraternity is not measured in miles but in love, prayer, and shared vocation.

Our brothers and sisters come together each month on the third Saturday in the lower level of the Cathedral Office in Jefferson City, where we gather for prayer, formation, ministry, and fellowship. There, as in the little places where St. Francis' own brothers once gathered, we listen to the Gospel and ask The Lord how we may live it more faithfully in our daily lives, our work, and our families.

The Lord has blessed our fraternity with growth. What was once a small gathering of ten has nearly doubled in the last year to eighteen souls. Among them are eight professed members, one candidate, six in initial formation, and two guests who will soon be welcomed into the journey. They range in age from twenty-three to eighty-two years—showing that the Spirit calls both the young and the seasoned alike to the path of Gospel living.

Some brothers and sisters who once belonged to our fraternity have moved to other places over the years and now live their vocation within other fraternities. Yet the Franciscan bond remains, for wherever a sister or brother goes, the spirit of fraternity travels with them.

A special grace was given to our community on September 26, 2020, when our fraternity was canonically established at St. Joseph's Cathedral in Jefferson City, Missouri. On that blessed day, Fr. Pio Jackson, Spiritual Assistant for the St. Clare Region, presided. He spoke words that echo deeply within the hearts of the Joyful Servants:

"A Franciscan understanding of joy is profoundly different from the world's. St. Paul tells us that 'we preach Jesus Christ crucified,' so your joy will be a crucified joy. It will be a joy that endures. It will be a joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. This joy is inseparable from sacrificial service."

Such joy, my brothers and sisters, is the joy we sought when we embraced Lady Poverty and followed Christ. It is the joy that grows not from comfort but from love freely given. It is the joy that appears when we serve Christ in one another.

Our fraternity continues to listen for the gentle voice of The Holy Spirit. We are prayerfully discerning an apostolate for our fraternity through the intercession of The Blessed Virgin Mary, whom St. Francis loved dearly and under whose protection He placed his brothers and the whole Order. For She is the humble servant of the Lord, the Mother who teaches us how to say "yes" to God and to carry Christ into the world.

And so our Joyful Servants Fraternity continues its journey—brothers and sisters scattered across towns and cities, yet united in heart. The distance from one another does not weaken our fraternity; rather, it becomes a reminder that the Gospel can be lived wherever the Lord has planted us. In homes, workplaces, parishes, and communities, we strive to be instruments of peace and humble servants of all.

May the Lord continue to bless our fraternity, increasing our joy and deepening our love, so that all who meet us may glimpse the light of Christ.

Lenten Reflection.....I Have a Bone to Pick With You.

This will reach you just before Easter and I hope your Lent gave you something to fill you with joy. When my daughters were 5 and 10, we lived in the country near Blue Springs in Florida. Just after Ash Wednesday I saw our youngest heading to the house with a bag; the kind we use for sack lunch. Our beloved Cocker Spaniel, Mackey, was following right behind; quite interested in the bag. "What have you got", I asked. She smiled up at me and said, "I've got all Mackey's bones, he's giving them up for Lent.

That might not be a bad idea, because sometimes sin in our lives can be like an old bone. We are sorry, we confess it, we are absolved; and then we go back and dig up the old bone and chew on it some more. Maybe it is a resentment from the past or a forgiveness we gave grudgingly. We sometimes get angry when others don't measure up to our high standards, only to find we are exhausted trying to reach the bar we have set for ourselves. We all have our old bones.

I hope Lent has been a time of prayer and reflection with opportunities for parish penance service, Adoration and Stations of the Cross. Time to give up a few bones.

Peace and Joy,
Maureen Gray ofs,
Spiritual Assistant Joyful Servants



St Peter Fraternity Council Elections

I presided this afternoon at the council election for St. Peter Fraternity in Belleville. The fraternity was well-prepared and participated with us in a fairly orderly process. Many thanks to Bonnie Sabin OFS, who served as the eclesial witness

Results are below,. All of the positions were uncontested with only one nominee.

Edith Barber - Minister

Pete Jorgensen - Vice Minister

Tom Louvier - Secretary

Richard Vojas - Treasurer

Peggy Overmann - Formation Director

Dave Overmann - Councilor

Kay McCully - Councilor

Mary Ellen Hermann - Councilor

San Damiano Secular Franciscans Visit to the Franciscan Connection

By Jan Parker OFS, Minister of San Damiano Fraternity

On March 22, 2026, a group of Secular Franciscans from San Damiano Fraternity took a field trip to learn about the Franciscan Connection, a ministry of the friars of St. Anthony of Padua Friary in St. Louis. The purpose of this visit was twofold: to build relationships with the friars and to learn how our fraternity might support their ministry. The day began at St. Anthony of Padua Church where seven members of our fraternity met with Fr. Bob Sieg, Br. Bobby Jo Ruzicka, Br. Tom Carroll and Javier Orozco OFS, who chairs the Franciscan Connection Board of Directors.

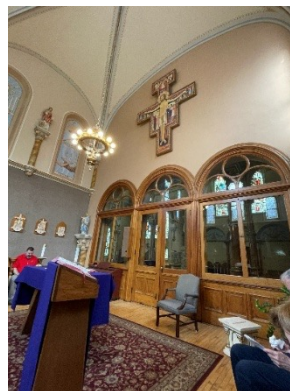
Most members of our fraternity are familiar with St. Anthony's, but two first time visitors spent time marveling at the beauty of the church and hearing a bit of its history. We then all carpooled to the 'Connection' where we met Bart Vatterott, a longtime volunteer, and Fr. Frank Coen. We were greeted warmly, and invited to a circle of sharing to learn a little about each other. The Friars shared some delightful stories, with bits of wisdom woven right in, so even before learning about the nuts and bolts of this outreach, we had already experienced a "Franciscan connection"— and 'connection' is exactly the point of this ministry.

Although the need for financial assistance with utility bills may motivate someone to walk through the door, what they receive at the 'Connection' is even more valuable — a warm welcome, a friendly presence and someone who is ready to listen and help. What could be more Franciscan? Each individual seeking aid is asked to fill out a simple form to provide basic information. At the bottom of the form, there is one question, "How are you feeling today?" which can be answered by circling either "good, fair or poor." This question helps the Friars and other volunteers start meaningful conversations with these neighbors. While the financial assistance provided is modest, clients receive guidance on other resources, and, most importantly, leave reassured that they aren't facing their challenges alone. Follow up is another important aspect of the ministry, and Connection volunteers reach out a few weeks later by phone to check in.

As ideas were shared as to possible expansions of this ministry, Javier noted the Board's desire is that the Friars continue to keep it simple and relational, as described in their mission statement: *Franciscan Connection expresses the compassionate presence of God to the disadvantage of south Saint Louis. We offer financial, spiritual, and emotional assistance to people who live in our service area. We build bridges between the disadvantaged, service providers, our benefactors, and the Franciscan Friars of the Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe.* During their visit, the members of San Damiano came to appreciate the value of this simple outreach which so exemplifies the Franciscan charism of poverty. As explained by Illia Delia OSF, "Poverty calls us to be vulnerable, open and receptive to others, to allow others into our lives and to be free enough to enter into the lives of others. While Clare (and Francis) call us to be poor so that we may enter into relationship with the poor Christ, they also ask us to be poor so as to enter into relationship with our poor brothers and sisters in whom Christ lives." (Clare of Assisi, Heart Full of Love, p. 11-12.)

Our day ended with Evening Prayer back at St. Anthony's. It was a special gift to pray together with our brothers in the Friar's chapel—San Damiano Chapel— where we felt right at home. Our visit was truly a blessing, and we are most grateful for the welcome and hospitality of all those involved with Franciscan Connection.

San Damiano Fraternity was established in May of 1993 at Immaculate Conception Parish in Dardenne Prairie, Mo., and has 18 members. This fraternity is bonded to the Capuchins of St. Conrad Province who have appointed Sr. Joann Nowak OSF, a member of the Franciscan Sisters of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, as Spiritual Assistant.



Formation With Joyful Servants

“The journey of formation, which should develop throughout life, begins with entrance into the fraternity. Mindful that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of formation and always, attentive to collaboration with Him, those

responsible for formation: the entire fraternity, candidate, the council with the minister, the director of formation and the assistant.”

Constitutions article 37.1, 37.2

Joyful servants follow the above articles and our fraternity is serious about formation: both initial and ongoing.

Our fraternity meets in Jefferson City, at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph. A room has graciously been given to us in one of the buildings belonging to the Cathedral. Our members reside throughout Central Missouri: Columbia, Fulton, Rolla, Jefferson City and the Lake of the Ozarks. We meet on the third Saturday of the month from 9 AM to 12 noon. We have initial formation after the gathering. We follow with formation due to the distance that many have to travel.

Our fraternity has one candidate, six inquirers and two guests. We are presently working on forming sponsorship for the candidates and inquirers. Leading formation are several of the professed members. We use the book “The Franciscan Journey” written by Lester Bach OFM Cap. Ongoing formation is a group endeavor. We meet during the gathering after our morning prayer. Every professed member has a vote or can make suggestions on the next book we will be studying. We encourage guests, inquirers and candidates to sit in and listen. This is a time of discussion so all are invited to participate or ask questions. The book we are presently using is “The Life of Saint Francis of Assisi A Compendium of Early Legends” compiled and translated by Bret Thoman OFS.

The books we have used in the past: “To Live as St. Francis Lived” written by Leonard Foley OFM/ Jovian Weigel OFM. “For all the Saints: St. Francis Five Point Plan for Salvation” written by Deacon Tom Bello OFS “Holy Half Hours Franciscan Young Adult Formation Program” compiled by Kathy Taormina OFS Our fraternity has almost doubled in size and without a formation team, it would be impossible to work with our new people.

Becky Bouck OFS
Formation Director

**St. Clare Regional Council
2024-2027**

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