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Divine Mercy Regional Newsletter

"Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible."
St. Francis of Assisi

REGIONAL SPRING GATHERING

Saturday April 25, 2026
Saginaw Center for Ministry, 802 Weiss St.
Saginaw, MI 48603

Theme: Dilexi Te (I have loved you)
Reflections on Pope Leo XIV's Apostolic Exhortation, Dilexi Te of the Holy Father Leo XIV to All Christians on Love For The Poor.
Speaker: Fr. Julius Milton, OFM Cap

Please read Pope Leo's exhortation in preparation for our gathering:
https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/apost_exhortations/documents/20251004-dilexi-te.html

Schedule:

8:30 am Continental Breakfast
9:00 am Gathering Begins with Sessions 1 & 2
12:00 Noon Lunch
1:00 pm Conversions 1 & 2
4:00 pm Mass: 4th Sunday of Easter, Celebrant Fr. Johan Paul Gill, OFM Cap.

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER by April 10: [Spring Day of Reflection Registration](#) (If you need assistance to register, call Theresa Brown at 248-335-1703)
Payment: \$25 (Additional \$50 for Friday night room) NO REFUNDS AFTER APRIL 20.
Check payable to: Secular Franciscan Order, Divine Mercy Region
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If your fraternity is celebrating any new professions or jubilarian anniversaries this year, please send the names and your fraternity name to the Newsletter Editor, Barb Scott, OFS, bscott3315@gmail.com for publication in the next quarterly issue.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

Embracing the Apostolate: A Franciscan Call to Direct Service

Guidance and Reflection for Fraternities from Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM,
OFS Animator, OFM Province of Our Lady of Guadalupe

Fr. Jerome Wolbert, OFM emphasized in correspondence with me the importance of the DMR fraternities taking seriously their commitment to apostolic work. He underscored the need for these communities to move beyond viewing their gatherings merely as opportunities for prayer, study, or social interaction. Instead, he called for a more profound engagement in apostolate activities, urging fraternity members to discern concrete ways to serve both the Church and the world—especially through direct, personal contact with people who are poor, distressed, or marginalized. By embracing this deeper apostolic mission, fraternities can more fully embody the Franciscan charism and offer authentic witness to the Gospel.

Here are Br. Jerome's reflections:

An apostolate involves "going out" to serve others, particularly those in need, rather than simply supporting charitable causes from a distance or having our own personal outreach work.

I believe it is a critical dimension of our Franciscan charism to embrace the leper. Fraternities are not prayer-and-study groups. Even if you add a social dimension. Therefore, a fraternity discerns an apostolate to serve the church or the world, with preference, of course, to in-person contact with people who are poor, distressed, or marginalized in some fashion. When we practice loving service of those we are uncomfortable around or who live in a way or condition that we ourselves do not fully understand or share, then this service is indeed formative. I think frequently of St Francis' recollection in his Testament: "there was no one more bitter for me to be around than lepers, the Lord led me among them, I showed them mercy, and what was bitter was changed to sweetness."

What if a fraternity considers itself too widespread to have a fraternity apostolate. I suggest they consider how they might connect in groups of at least 3 (preferably 4) who would together serve in an apostolate nearer their homes or wherever might be convenient. Then they might have several cells of flexible membership. One example could be a group that serves a local food pantry, serving together on the same day. They would report to the fraternity, and all would pray for their apostolate. Perhaps if one cannot make the usual time, another fraternity member would make the drive once to cover. There are many ways to mark this as a fraternity apostolate, but when people (clients and other volunteers or staff) recognize the group isn't just people who know each other, but that they serve as a mission or apostolate of their Secular Franciscan group, then the members become a living vocation poster and share a common witness to their fraternity, not only to the Gospel service of the apostolate.

MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER CONTINUED

Fraternity members may struggle to understand what is an apostolate, and they take refuge in writing checks and collecting items for the poor (important acts of charity and generosity, but not a "going out," the root of the word apostolate). Maybe other actions that avoid reaching out to help rebuild the church or to serve the world yearning for Christ. The illustration of the separation of sheep and goats (Mt 25) gives a list of opportunities.

Some low-key apostolates are leading Rosary or Liturgy of the Hours in a parish church...as a group, advertised and regularly meeting so that others can join them; this only works if the group attracts several others to join them, and this is probably not a prized type of apostolate since it doesn't connect with those on the margins so much. I strongly recommend working with other established programs.

This understanding encourages direct engagement and personal involvement in outreach and ministry.

A Call to Renew Our Franciscan Commitment

This is the moment for every fraternity to reflect deeply on its dedication to the Franciscan charism and to actively engage in apostolic service. The Divine Mercy Regional Executive Council (DMREC) encourages fraternities to carefully consider Fr. Jerome's insights, asking themselves key questions about their current apostolate. Honest self-reflection is essential to fully embracing our Franciscan calling:

- Are all members involved and aware of the true nature of an apostolate?
- Does the chosen ministry allow direct, personal service to those who are poor, marginalized, or suffering?
- Have conversations taken place to discern the reasons for or against adopting such a direct apostolate?

The DMREC looks forward to witnessing each fraternity's renewed commitment, whether by deepening existing apostolates or taking steps to expand. By moving beyond comfort zones and engaging with those most in need, fraternities not only live out the Gospel but also become a visible sign of the Franciscan vocation in the world. Let this be the time to renew and strengthen our apostolic mission together.

Let us answer the Call!
Kathleen Carsten, OFS

Pope Leo XIV has proclaimed the Jubilee Year of St. Francis of Assisi from January 10, 2026 through January 10, 2027 to commemorate the 800th year since the death of St. Francis of Assisi.

FROM OUR ECUMENICAL-INTERFAITH DIRECTOR

The Convergence of Lent and Ramadan

By Mike Carsten, OFS

This year, 2026, presents a rare and beautiful "providential convergence of calendars." For Catholics, Lent began on Ash Wednesday, February 18. Strikingly, the Islamic holy month of Ramadan began at almost the exact same time, on the evening of February 17. This shared period of fasting, prayer, and almsgiving offers a tangible, immediate opportunity for interreligious encounter across the diverse landscape of the Divine Mercy Region.

Article 19 of the OFS Rule reminds Secular Franciscans that they are "bearers of peace which must be built up unceasingly," called to "seek out ways of unity and fraternal harmony through dialogue, trusting in the presence of the divine seed in everyone." Living this out across Michigan and Ohio provides a profound framework for action during this unique season.

Detroit and Toledo: Neighbors in Faith In Metro Detroit, the Catholic community shares its surroundings with one of the largest and most vibrant Muslim populations in the country. This proximity has fostered beautiful local models of coexistence, from joint Muslim-Catholic dialogue panels to shared community service initiatives feeding those in need.

Looking just a bit south to Toledo, the Islamic Center of Greater Toledo stands as a tremendous regional example of this openness. Long known for its welcoming spirit and deep commitment to interfaith understanding, it demonstrates that true dialogue often begins simply by getting to know one another as people devoted to God and to serving the less fortunate.

Grand Rapids: Solidarity in Action Across the state in West Michigan, the landscape of dialogue takes on its own dynamic character. Grand Rapids has become a powerful hub for interfaith collaboration, supported by local Catholic parishes and championed by organizations like the Sylvia and Richard Kaufman Interfaith Institute. Through community events like the annual Grand Rapids Interfaith Iftar and ongoing partnerships with local mosques such as Masjid At-Tawheed, the community actively builds bridges. Whether participating in public dialogues to counter anti-Muslim bias or joining together in faith-based charity to support refugee resettlement, these networks demonstrate how people of different traditions can find common ground. Fasting and giving alms during this Lenten season means standing in spiritual solidarity with Muslim neighbors doing the exact same thing.

Living the Call Whether it is reaching out to a Muslim neighbor in Detroit, attending an interfaith Iftar in Grand Rapids, or volunteering alongside members of an Islamic Center in Toledo, this convergence of Lent and Ramadan is an invitation. It challenges all Franciscans to step out of their comfort zones and practice the fraternal harmony St. Francis modeled, trusting in the divine seed planted in the hearts of all.

Q News

OFS-USA Quinquennial Congress, Lexington, Kentucky, July 29 through August 2, 2026 Event

For short it is called the "Q". The event is being held at the Marriott Lexington Griffin Gate Golf Resort & Spa, 1800 Newtown Pike, Lexington, KY 40511.

The 2026 "Q" theme is **The Easter of St. Francis: Rekindle the Flame!** Read more about the "Q" at <https://www.secularfranciscansusa.org/21st-quinquennial-congress-q2026/>

A Quinquennial Congress is a national gathering of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS) in the USA, held every five years to foster community, formation, prayer, and celebration. Based on the Franciscan tradition of a "chapter of mats," it unites members from across the country to strengthen their vocation, featuring keynotes, workshops, and service projects.

From our region, Jim Graczyk, OFS is a Co-Chair of the 2026 Quinquennial Congress and serves on the Q Vendor Committee with Theresa Brown, OFS. Together they seek profit and non-profit organizations interested in reserving a vendor table at the Q to advertise or sell their products.

If you plan to attend the Q and have a profit and/or non-profit organization, you can advertise or sell your product(s) at the Q. Please email Theresa Brown, OFS at dmrfratdata@gmail.com.

As part of the Q Committee, Jim and Theresa know who are registered to attend from the Divine Mercy Region and are offering to help those in need of coordinating a roommate and/or carpooling. If you would like to cut costs and carpool or share your hotel room, please email Theresa Brown, OFS at dmrfratdata@gmail.com.

FORMATION OPPORTUNITIES

Shalom Spirituality Center is offering this year to commemorate the 800th anniversary of the Easter of Francis. This series is presented in collaboration with the Franciscan Federation. This is a 4-part virtual series (though the first session was in January). The 3 left are:

Sr. Kathy Warren, April 15 – on the encounter with the Sultan

Sr. Margaret Carney, July 15 – on how Francis and his early followers addressed the economic realities of their time

Dan Horan, PhD, October 7 – on the Cosmic Community of Creation (the Canticle)

For information/registration for the April 15 session (includes links to the other two) go to:

https://shalomretreats.org/stec_event/the-cosmic-community-of-creation-exploring-the-eco-spirituality-of-st-francis-in-the-canticle-of-the-creatures-with-dan-horan/

Those who register will receive the recording of the session – except for Sr. Kathy's. These are well-known Franciscan presenters that could be used for on-going study and formation.

Fraternity News

St. Francis Fraternity in Sterling Heights is very proud of our Vice-Minister, Theresa Wilson. A very nice article about her appeared in the Detroit Catholic (on-line publication only) on January 22, 2026.

The article and interview describes very aptly Theresa's many gifts and assistance to her parish, St. Rene Goupil. She serves her parish community serving the poor, sacristan duties, funeral home evening services, helping with altar linens, and decorating committee. She also serves as a Secular Franciscan, including with outreach programs. And she is a doting mom and grandma.



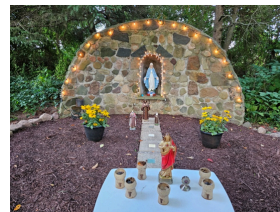
Theresa Wilson, OFS

Read the article here: [St. Rene Goupil parishioner dedicates her time to giving back to community- Detroit Catholic](#)



The St. Louis the King Fraternity, White Lake has been busy...

In August, 2025 the St. Louis the King Fraternity celebrated its 60th Anniversary at the Papuga Homestead in White Lake. Father Socorro Fernandes of St. Patrick parish led the Renewal of OFS Commitment at the family's grotto for those members in attendance. Everyone received Holy Water Fonts designed by potter, LisaYates.



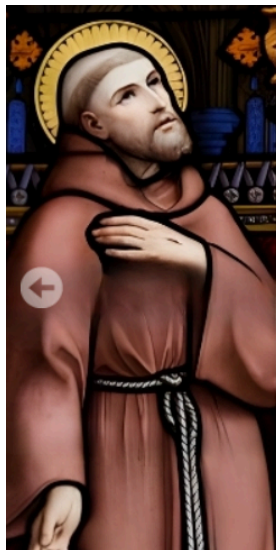
Through the months of November and December, 2025, winter accessories, socks, and miscellaneous items were collected. In February, 2025 & 2026, hygiene kits were made. All donations were given to Franciscan Ministries in Detroit.



Rose Carranza, OFS had her 45th Profession Anniversary. It was celebrated at Trini and Carmen's in Waterford in January 2026.



Name	Professed Fraternity	Location	Date Entered Eternal Life
Peggy Counts	St. Louis the King	White Lake	October 1
Arlene Shepherd	St. Francis	Jackson	November 5
Judy Lukassen	Mary Queen of Apostles	Sand Lake	November 14
Francis Thompson	St. Isidore	Grand Rapids	January 19
Annette Dolan	Our Lady of Mt. Carmel	Gaylord	February 3



Jubilee Year of Saint Francis

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January 10, 2026 - January 10, 2027



Learn more about the Plenary Indulgence



Find a pilgrimage site



Learn more about Saint Francis

[Learn more about the Plenary Indulgence](#)



Order of
Franciscans Secular

Lower Peninsula of
Michigan and
Toledo, Ohio

Whenever you have membership changes, please email member updates: information on new candidates/contact information and admission dates, profession dates, change of addresses, dates of deaths, lapse or withdrawal dates, or completed transfer forms to the Regional Database Manager at dmrfratdata@gmail.com. Please remember the National database information must match your fraternity's Annual Report information! Accuracy is imperative! Thank you!

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PLEASE
PLACE
STAMP
HERE