



## December 2025 Newsletter

by Brady Young / December 19, 2025

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Friends and Members,

What a year it has been for the Franciscan Federation!!! In this December edition of *The Damiano*, you'll find a preview of our upcoming retreat, along with a brief reflection on the O Antiphons, the poetic prayers that draw us toward the mystery of Christ's birth. The end of the year also invites us into remembering, so I hope you will linger with our "year in review" as we recall some of the highlights of this past year and look with hope toward what is unfolding ahead.



**Julianne Wallace**  
**Executive Director**

This Sunday evening, we gather for our final Advent Vespers, a closing moment of light in this sacred season of waiting. Over these past weeks, we have reflected on the Women of Hope: women who said “yes” to God in quiet courage and steadfast faith. We began with St. Clare, whose own “yes” continues to shape our Franciscan call to live with hope. We’ve listened to Mary, who bore the Light into the world; to Rebekah, whose strength carried a promise forward; and this Sunday, we will walk with Ruth and Naomi, whose loyalty and love reveal God’s presence even in uncertainty.

Alongside these scriptural voices, four remarkable women have guided our reflections: Maggie Conley of Franciscan Mission Service, Jane DeRose-Bamman of the Secular Franciscan Order, Cecilia Flores of the Catholic Volunteer Network, and this weekend, Charlene Howard of Pax Christi USA. Each has shared her own witness of faith, women whose words remind us that hope is alive, light endures in the darkness, and peace is still possible.

As this Advent journey draws to a close, my heart is full of gratitude for the women who have led us and for each of you who have prayed, listened, and shared in this sacred space. If you haven’t yet joined us, I invite you to come this Sunday evening at 7 PM ET as we rest together in prayer and hope. [Click here for the zoom link.](#)

And finally, as Christmas lights fill the world around us, and we continue to wait in the gentle rhythm of Advent. If you, like me, are holding onto its quiet grace, I invite you to pray with a simple playlist I’ve created for the Franciscan Federation. These are songs for late Advent, melodies of hope, patient waiting, courage to say “yes,” and joyful expectation.

May this music offer a still point amid the noise, a reminder that even now, Emmanuel draws near. To listen, [here is a spotify playlist](#) (you’ll need a free

Spotify account). If you prefer another streaming platform, the song list is included in this image so you can recreate it wherever you listen.



Peace and all good,  
Julianne Wallace  
Executive Director

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## **Reflecting on the O Antiphons**

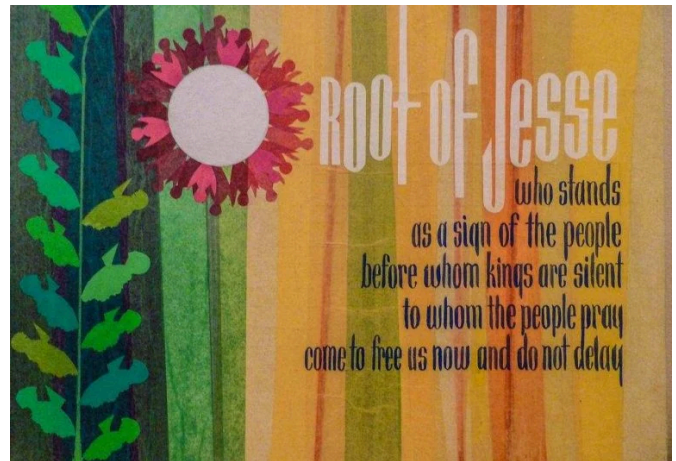
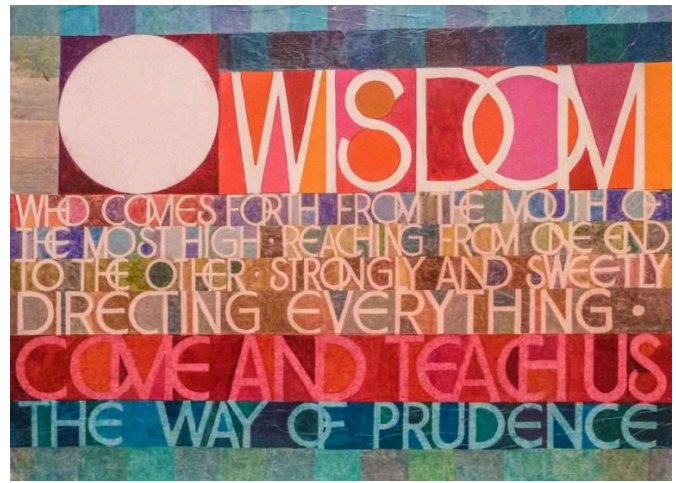
### **Sister Elise Saggau, OSF**

During Vespers on December 17, the Church begins to use each day one of the seven “O Antiphons” to introduce the reciting or chanting of the Magnificat. These antiphons may also be used to introduce the daily Gospel readings at Mass.

The O Antiphons have been used liturgically since the sixth or seventh centuries. Thus we know that St. Francis and his early followers devoutly used

these stirring prayers daily in the week before the celebration of the Nativity—a feast so dear to Francis.

The O Antiphons are inspired by Old Testament prophecies, especially from the writings of Isaiah. Each radiates the gift of hope. Each expresses absolute belief that the God of salvation is very much at work in the human situation to bring us into an unimaginable new life.



***On December 17, we beseech God for Wisdom, that exquisite gift that leads us into the ways of knowledge. On December 18, we ask for the ability to respect the divine Law that saves us from moral disaster. On December 19, we pray that the messianic descendent of the house of Jesse and David come and, as a sign of divine love, save us. On December 20, we beg to receive the key that will open the door of the selfishness that imprisons us. On December 21, we ask that the radiant dawn of eternal light come and illumine our natural darkness. On December 22, we ask that the One who rules all nations come and save us who are so naturally insignificant. On December 23, we pray the final antiphon. It is a simple appeal that Emmanuel, God's own ambassador, come and save us.***

These pleas are a recognition that, of ourselves, we are incapable of being lifted above the forces in our lives that weigh us down and defeat us. Each antiphon is a sign that we have already received into our hearts the gifts of faith and hope that make it possible for us to rise. These petitions signal that beyond the Incarnation there is a Resurrection—that God intends, for each and every one of us, a good ending to the journey of life.

It may not be our personal practice to pray the Divine Office. We may not be able to participate in the daily Eucharistic celebrations. But each of us who attends the Sunday Masses during Advent will surely sing at some point the O Antiphons as they are enshrined in a very popular Advent hymn—O Come, O Come, Emmanuel. This hymn, in its Latin version, first appeared sometime in the nineteenth century. John Mason Neale, an Anglican priest and theologian, translated it into its current, well-known version. It has since become a staple of Advent observance.

In whatever their form, the O Antiphons play a role in our preparation for Christmas. Reflecting on them consciously during the final week of Advent, our hearts focus on the greatest Christmas gift ever given—God-come-among-us-as-one-of-us.

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## **From Darkness to Light: Our 2026 Annual Retreat**

### **Maryann Mueller, CSSF**



*From Darkness to Light: Honoring the 800th Anniversary of the Transitus of Francis* is the theme of the Commission on Member Engagement's 3rd annual virtual retreat, commemorating the 800th anniversary of the Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi.

This virtual retreat will take place on **Saturday, February 7, 2026, from 1-4 p.m. Eastern Time (10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Pacific Time)**.

[Click Here to Register](#)

This retreat, which welcomes all who wish to participate, invites us to engage in profound personal and communal reflection on the enduring witness of St. Francis and the illuminating light he continues to kindle in our shared mission of love, service, and outreach.

The retreat aims to create a sacred space where we can delve into what it truly means to progress from darkness to light in our personal journeys, acknowledging the obstacles we face and the hope that guides us.

We are honored to have the Most Reverend John Eric Stowe as our featured speaker. A Conventual Franciscan friar and the Bishop of the Diocese of Lexington in Kentucky since 2015, Bishop Stowe was appointed by Pope Francis and has become a prominent voice in advocating for social justice and upholding a consistent ethic of life.

With a pastoral background spanning roles in Ohio, Texas, and Indiana, Bishop Stowe is well-regarded for his compassionate leadership and steadfast focus on human dignity and reconciliation. Throughout his career, he has inspired countless individuals to pursue social equity and to seek justice in their communities, encouraging them to live out the spirit of Francis in everyday life.

Joining him will be Katie Sullivan, the Executive Director of Franciscan Volunteer Ministry, who brings a wealth of experience and a deep commitment to service. Growing up in Washington, DC, Katie learned that service is not merely an act; she considers it is an integral part of her family's identity.

Her journey as a Franciscan Volunteer Minister, where she lived, served, and prayed with the community of St. Francis Inn in Philadelphia for two years, has profoundly shaped her understanding of community and compassion. Katie expresses her gratitude for her Franciscan family and the blessings that come from walking alongside others in their service journeys.

This three-hour retreat promises to be a transformative opportunity to start the New Year with Franciscan-inspired prayer and heartfelt moments of personal reflection. Participants will be encouraged to reflect deeply on the presentations, fostering a meaningful connection to the Franciscan spirit.

The retreat will also provide ample opportunities for both small-group conversations and large-group discussions, fostering vibrant dialogue and community engagement among participants. **We invite you to share your favorite image(s) of St. Francis by emailing [memberengagement@franfed.org](mailto:memberengagement@franfed.org) for inclusion in the retreat.**

We hope you will join us on February 7, 2026, from 1-4 p.m. Eastern to honor the legacy of St. Francis. Through shared stories, insights, and prayers, we will walk together on this journey from darkness to light and deepen the timeless message of hope, love, peace, and inclusivity that St. Francis represents, and which is so needed in our world today.

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## **Year in Review**

Thanks to the steady work of our commissions, volunteers, Convocation of Canonical Leaders, Associate's Network, board members, and so many others, this snapshot reflects just some of what we moved forward together this year. Celebrating our wins of 2025 and bringing that full energy with us into 2026!

# *Fran Fed Year In Review*

## **1 Virtual Retreat**

With Br. Bill Short, OFM, we gathered to sing a canticle of hope and praise, deepening our Franciscan spirit across the miles.

## **5 Times We Gathered in Prayer**

From lifting up prayers for the Conclave, to celebrating our Women of Hope Advent series, over 500 people showed up in spirit (and on Zoom!) to pray the Franciscan way.

## **4 Partner Events**

Our Franciscan presence grew stronger through partnerships with the Franciscan Action Network, AFCU, LCWR, and All Franciscan Day in Cincinnati. Collaboration? Check. Community? Always.

## **Here's to What's Next...**

## **3 Big Events**

## **350+ Franciscan Hearts**

From hearing insights from Keith Warner, Ilia Delio, and Pamela Wood, to virtually walking the steets of Assisi, to celebrating the legacy of the Franciscan Federation— we logged countless hours growing together in formation and friendship

## **10 Connection Circles**

Each month, 15–30 Franciscans gathered to share life, laughter, and love of our charism. Zoom squares became sacred spaces of encounter and joy.

## **2 Town Halls 1 Shared Future**

Members came together to listen, reflect, and dream big, paving the way for our 2026 Strategic Plan launch. The Spirit is moving!

## **\$40,000 Raised for a sustainable future**

Together, we raised over \$40,000 to sustain the mission and future of the Franciscan Federation— a testament to your generosity and shared hope.

As we close 2025 with grateful hearts, we celebrate every prayer prayed, story shared, and connection made. May 2026 be a year of renewal, rooted in the Franciscan spirit of peace, joy, and transformative love. Thank you for being part of this unfolding story ... one filled with hope, humility, and community.

# Upcoming Events

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## Franciscan Connection Circles

Join us on Monday, January 12th at 7:00pm EST / 6:00pm CST / 5:00pm MST / 4:00pm PST for our next Franciscan Connection Circle.

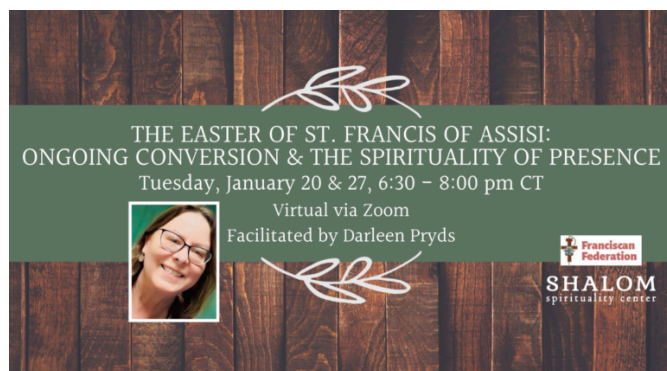
We'll begin with prayer and meditation, followed by the reading to guide our reflection and group discussion. These gatherings offer a welcoming space to connect and share with fellow Franciscans. All are welcome!



[Register for Connection Circles](#)

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## Announcing New Event Series: Easter of St. Francis of Assisi



**Session 1:** Tuesday, January 20, 7:30-9pm ET — [register here](#)

The Franciscan Federation is partnering with the [Shalom Spirituality Center](#), offering a four-part virtual series commemorating the 800th anniversary of the Easter of St. Francis.

The first two sessions, led by Dr. Darleen Pryds, are now open for registration. Through storytelling, meditation, and reflection, she will guide us into Francis' ongoing conversion and spirituality of presence.

**Session 1 cont'd:** Tuesday, January 27, 7:30-9pm ET

— [register here](#)

[Learn More](#)

Future sessions will continue in April, July, and October with additional guest speakers.

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## Other Announcements

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### Our Lenten Vesper Series: Share a Story of Conversion

While we are still in Advent, we are already planning for Lent! This coming Lenten season, we will gather for Sunday night vespers. We seek stories from our Franciscan family—moments of turning, deepening faith, or a fresh call from God—and invite those willing to share a 5–10 minute reflection to inspire us all.

Share your own story or nominate other people in your life (with their permission) whose journeys could bless our community. To participate, email [franfedoffice@franfed.org](mailto:franfedoffice@franfed.org) with the person's name and contact info. Self-nominations welcome!

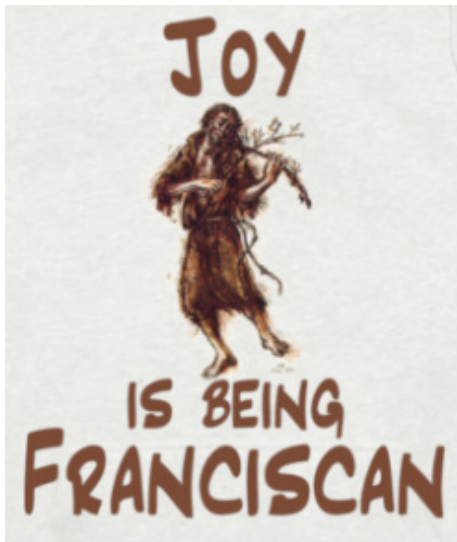
Please submit by January 15, 2026. Every response helps us prayerfully discern and celebrate the Spirit's movement among us.

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### Joyful Franciscan Gifts

One of our members, Julie Ferraro, has shared her creativity through a new 'Joy Is Being Franciscan' design available on t-shirts, hats, tote bags, stickers, and more.

As a kind offering, she has offered to donate 50% of the profits to the Franciscan Federation. A fun



gift idea for the season that also gives back to the Federation.

[Browse Items](#)

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