



September 2026 Newsletter

by Franciscan Federation / September 25, 2026

Update

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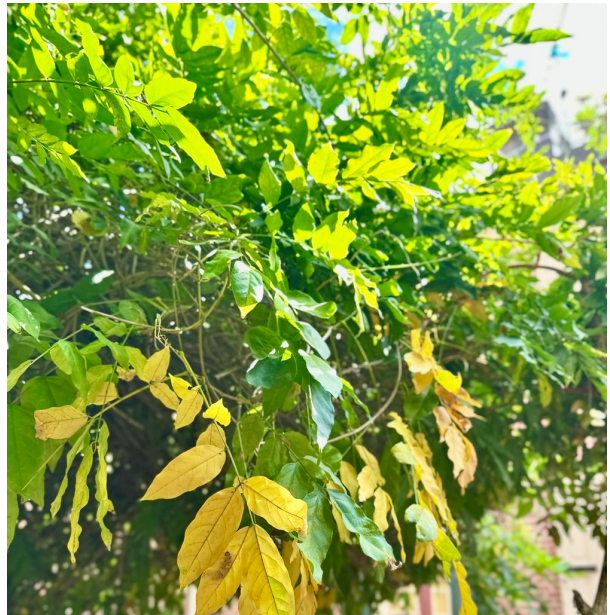
by Franciscan Federation / September 25, 2026

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Greetings Fran Fed Community,

Every year around this time, I find myself reminded by the changing season to slow down.

Cooler temperatures. Trees letting go. Leaves changing color. The sun slipping away a little earlier each day. These are quiet reminders to pay attention, to notice, to be still, and to rest.



As the leaves begin their descent, they blaze with color. There is a kind of brilliance even in letting go.

“How is there so much beauty in death?” I asked the trees.

“May you know for yourself the brilliance of your own unburdening,” they whispered.

—Emory Hall, “October Entered”

Nature has its own liturgy, and right now it is praying in a quieter voice.

My Enneagram 7 brain doesn’t always know what to do with that.

I’m wired for excitement, possibility, stimulation, and what comes next. There is so much happening in our world, and so much happening in this Franciscan space that gives me energy and hope. There is so much to build, so much to imagine. I want to do everything all at once!

And yet the season keeps nudging me toward a different pace. One that asks me to listen more deeply. To move more intentionally. To be present to what is here rather than always reaching for what comes next.

I’m also learning what it means to live lighter.

Not because there isn't enough in the world to weigh us down. There is. People are hungry and without homes. People are living through war. People are lonely. There is injustice and suffering that can keep us up at night.

But perhaps there is another way to carry these realities.

Howard Thurman wrote about finding a "quiet center," a place within us that can remain steady even when everything around us is in motion. I'm learning that caring deeply about the world does not mean I have to carry all of its weight inside of me.

There can be grief and joy.

There can be urgency and contentment.

There can be a deep awareness of what is broken in the world alongside a willingness to notice what is beautiful.

Francis knew something about this. His call to "true and perfect joy" was not a denial of hardship. It was a way of moving through hardship without allowing it to take away our joy, our freedom, or our capacity to love.

Maybe this is part of what it means to live Franciscan spirituality. Not simply to talk about peace, joy, simplicity, compassion, and human dignity, but to practice them in the way we move through the world.

October is almost here, [**Franciscan Month**](#), and I'm grateful for the invitation it brings. An invitation to learn more about Franciscan spirituality, to share this movement with others, and perhaps most importantly, to embody what we say we believe.

To slow down.

To pay attention.

To live lighter.

To carry the Light.

To hold both the beauty and the pain of this world, and to keep choosing love, peace, joy, and hope anyway.

Maybe the changing season is reminding us that we don't have to hold onto everything. Some things are meant to be released. And sometimes, in that unburdening, we discover that we have more room to live.

Peace and all good,

Brady Young

Manager of Member Engagement & Communications

Franciscan Federation

New Board Member Profile: Twirling Forward with Sr. Deborah Lockwood

I am Deborah Lockwood, a Franciscan Sister from Redwood City, California, and began my term on the Franciscan Federation Board in August, 2026. What is this new beginning for me?

There is a story in Chapter XI of the Fioretti that tells of Masseo, twirling like a child as instructed, for Francis to understand the next step God intended for his journey.



Granted this can have dizzying effects and decisions usually have many things swirling around in our minds. There is a parallel in this for my decision to follow a call to become engaged in the Franciscan Federation Board.

The primary lure is Francis himself – his being, his relationship with all of creation, his simplicity, his peace, his love. I have been steeped in that grace since my youth, such a blessing! My eyes have been opened and my heart widened, both of which I consider graces.

This journey with Francis and Clare calls me and twirls me around, setting me in a direction of seeing and responding in love to those whom I encounter. My experience: people yearn for the message of Francis (which primarily is the message of Jesus) and we followers of Francis, formally or informally, have the blessing to be it and invite others to the twirling.

Franciscan Federation is a way for all of us to come together to be that for our world and I am excited to be a part of a growing and evolving awareness of the Franciscan charism some 800 years strong. The Piazza is alive and well with all sorts of twirling in pondering newness, expressing opinions, uniting in causes, wondering together, planting seeds, praising as one – twirling to know the next step of the journey as Francis did.

We don't have Masseo — we have each other as support on this journey as we learn and envision the next steps together. This energizes me to twirl with you, my sisters and brothers of the Franciscan Federation, for what and how we will be called, perched as we are, on the cusp of the ninth centenary of being the Franciscan charism for our world.

Deborah Lockwood, OFS

The Grace of Gathering

Written by: Julianne Wallace

As many of you know, the Franciscan Federation is a fully remote organization. Most of our meetings, planning sessions, and daily encounters happen over Zoom. There is much to appreciate about this reality: it is convenient, cost-effective, and allows us to work closely with people across the country without the demands of constant travel.

And yet, I must admit that connecting through a screen is not quite the same as sharing a room.

As a high introvert, I understand the temptation to remain behind the screen, to conserve energy,



attend to the next task, and keep moving through the work that needs to be done.

Gathering can require something of us: time, travel, attention, vulnerability, and the willingness to enter a space where we may not know everyone. But this summer, I was reminded again and again that gathering is not simply a break from the work. In many ways, it is the work.

In the Franciscan tradition, we might call this the grace of the Piazza. While The Piazza is the name of the Franciscan Federation's digital gathering space, it is also more than a platform. It is our guiding vision for community: a commitment to create spaces, online and in person, where people can encounter one another, share their stories, notice one another's needs, and grow in relationship.

The Piazza reminds us that we belong to one another. Francis, Clare and early Franciscans understood that the Gospel is lived not in isolation, but in relationship with God, one another, and all creation.

This summer, I spent a good deal of time on the road, but two gatherings in particular deepened my excitement for the Franciscan Federation's National Gathering in June 2027.



First, I had the opportunity to attend the Secular Franciscan Quinquennial Congress, affectionately known as “the Q.” Approximately 500 Secular Franciscans from across the United States gathered to pray, learn, celebrate, and renew their shared commitment to the Franciscan way of life. It was my first Q, and I found it to be a remarkably relational experience.

I met in person for the first time several people with whom I had spent months on Zoom calls. What a joy it was to discover that the relationship picked up right where the screen had left off. We were, almost instantly, in-person companions.

There was also the gift of meeting new people, people whose stories of finding and living the Franciscan charism were as varied as they were inspiring. We each come to Franciscan life by a different path, yet we recognize something familiar in one another: a desire to live simply, faithfully, joyfully, and in service to a world in need of peace.

I was also grateful to share the Q with my dear friend, Fr. Tim Daly, a retired diocesan priest from Orlando and a professed Secular Franciscan. Fr. Tim and I go way back, but this was the first time we were able to share the joy of Franciscan life in such a meaningful way. There is something especially beautiful about gathering with people who know your story and also share your spiritual home.

My second experience of gathering came at the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) annual assembly. This year's gathering was especially poignant as more than 1,300 women religious from across the

United States came together to celebrate the 70th anniversary of LCWR. The assembly focused on synodality, and for several days we practiced, in very real ways, the art of being a listening Church.

Listening is not always easy. It asks us to slow down, set aside our prepared responses, and make room for another person's experience. Yet it was deeply rewarding to see the relationships that formed in such a short time because people chose to listen before speaking. In a world that often rewards quick answers and strong opinions, the practice of listening became its own kind of witness.

The Franciscan Federation also hosted a wonderful reception during the gathering. By the time the evening was over, there was no food left-which, I think, is a very good sign! Women religious, and some special guests, from many different congregations came together for an evening of fellowship, conversation, and shared Franciscan spirit. The room was full of energy, connection, and the warmth that comes when people recognize a common bond.

Both of these experiences felt like a preview of what our Franciscan Federation National Gathering can be.

From June 3–6, 2027, we will gather at the Chicago Marriott Naperville for **“Rooted as Franciscans, Healing Our World.”** Together, we will celebrate the stories that have formed us, draw strength from the wisdom of our Franciscan roots, and explore how our identity calls us to be peacemakers, bridge builders, and caretakers of our common home.

The National Gathering Committee, led by Sr. Susan Marie Pleiss of the Oldenburg Franciscans and Katherine Giorgio of the Little Falls Associates, is already hard at work shaping an experience of prayer, learning, relationship, and renewal. In the coming months, we will announce keynote speakers, issue a call for breakout-session proposals, and share opportunities for exhibitors and sponsors. Registration will open in early January.

We look forward to seeing the familiar faces of the Franciscan Federation: friends and companions whose presence has sustained this community over many years. At the same time, we are intentionally inviting young adults and lay employees of Franciscan organizations to join us. If you are a young adult, work in a Franciscan ministry or organization, or are still finding your place within the Franciscan family, please know: this gathering is for you, too.

This will be our first National Gathering since 2023. I am excited to imagine us coming together once again; not simply as individuals attending a conference, but as a Federation reignited. We will gather with wise

spirits and new faces, long-time companions and first-time participants, stories of faithfulness and hopes for what is still possible.

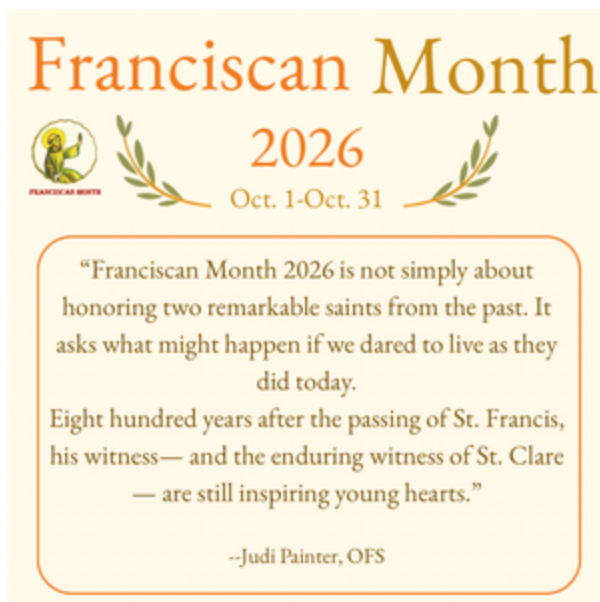
May we come ready to meet one another in the Piazza: to listen deeply, to share generously, to celebrate joyfully, and to be renewed for the work of healing our world together.

Julianne Wallace
Executive Director
Franciscan Federation

Young Hearts, Timeless Mission: Shaping Franciscan Month 2026

Written by: Judi Painter, Franciscan Month Coordinator

“More than words, it is this joy that evangelizes.” – Pope Leo XIV



What if St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi walked onto a college campus today?

They would recognize much of what young people are experiencing—the search for identity, loneliness hidden behind social media, anxiety about the future, division within society, and a deep longing for meaning and authentic relationships.

And perhaps the invitation would be the same one they offered more than 800 years ago:

Follow Christ. Live simply. Love generously. Build peace. Care for creation. Never lose hope.

That invitation is at the heart of Franciscan Month 2026.

Franciscan Month did not begin in a boardroom or emerge from a strategic plan. It grew from the dreams of young people who believed that the lives of Francis and Clare still have something extraordinary to say to today's world.

They envisioned an October celebration open to everyone—not only Franciscans or Catholics, but people of every faith tradition and all people of goodwill. They imagined a month when faith could be lived, relationships strengthened, creation cherished, peace pursued, and service offered joyfully.

From that grassroots vision, Franciscan Month was born.

Launched in October 2023 at St. Francis College in Brooklyn, New York, the initiative has continued to grow. What began on a college campus is becoming a nationwide collaboration among Franciscan colleges and universities, parishes, retreat centers, religious communities, Secular Franciscans, ministries, schools, and Franciscan organizations.

And 2026 carries particular significance.

As the Church celebrates the Jubilee Year marking the 800th anniversary of the passing of St. Francis, Franciscan Month 2026 invites us not merely to remember history but to continue it. Francis and Clare did not seek comfort or recognition. They sought Christ. Their lives became a living Gospel rooted in humility, joy, reconciliation, courage, and love.

That same spirit shapes every day and week of Franciscan Month 2026. The journey invites participants to meet St. Francis and St. Clare in faith, open their hearts to God's love, care for creation as our sacred home, live the Gospel through compassion, and embrace a life of purpose and service. These are more than weekly themes—they are a way of life.

One of the original student visionaries captured that spirit beautifully:

“Franciscan Month is an incredible initiative! I love that it's open to everyone, regardless of religion or background... Walking around campus in October, you can really feel the spiritual energy. Every part of it is a beautiful reminder of the importance of simplicity, unity, and justice.”

Another student's comment points to the need for peace on earth:

“The Peace Run, where the college community walks and prays for peace, has brought joy to the St. Francis College campus, as well as the Interfaith Appreciation Breakfast where people from different faith traditions gather in fellowship, prayer, and mutual respect. He describes that unity among people of different religions and beliefs as “a beautiful thing to witness and experience.”

This student’s reflection reveals something important.

Young people are not simply asking to hear about Francis and Clare. They are looking for opportunities to live what they taught.

They are searching for community in a culture that can leave people isolated. They are seeking peace in a world filled with conflict. They want authentic relationships across religious and cultural differences. They want their lives to have meaning.

Franciscan Month gives them a place to begin.

That youthful vision continues to shape the movement. Through franciscanmonth.org and its growing digital presence, the October journey offers reflections, videos, prayer, service opportunities, and resources that invite people to live the Gospel through the example of Francis and Clare—one day, one week, and one action at a time.

The growing enthusiasm for Franciscan Month 2026 was especially evident at the 21st Quinquennial Congress of the Secular Franciscan Order (OFS-USA) in Lexington, Kentucky, where more than 500 Secular Franciscans gathered for prayer, fraternity, formation, and mission. Participants enthusiastically embraced Franciscan Month 2026 and its potential to introduce new generations to the Franciscan charism.

The Congress was also blessed by the presence of Archbishop Gabriele Caccia, Apostolic Nuncio to the United States, who conveyed the Apostolic Blessing of Pope Leo XIV to those gathered.

What began as a dream in the hearts of young people is now being embraced across generations. Franciscan colleges and universities, the Secular Franciscan Order, religious communities, schools, retreat centers, ministries, and national Franciscan organizations are joining in a shared mission: to make the spirit of Francis and Clare visible and relevant to a new generation.

Pope Leo XIV offered young Franciscans a powerful challenge during his recent visit to Assisi. He called them to become “artisans of peace”, to resist division and prejudice, and to help build a “civilization of love.” He reminded them that following Christ means simplicity, fraternity, closeness to others, reconciliation, and joy.

Then he offered words that seem written for Franciscan Month 2026:

“More than words, it is this joy that evangelizes.”

Franciscan Month 2026 is not simply about honoring two remarkable saints from the past. It asks what might happen if we dared to live as they did today.

What if we became bridge builders instead of wall builders?

What if we cared for creation as God’s sacred gift?

What if we noticed the lonely, welcomed the forgotten, forgave one another, served generously, and became artisans of peace?

Eight hundred years after the passing of St. Francis, his witness—and the enduring witness of St. Clare—are still inspiring young hearts.

The success of Franciscan Month 2026 will not ultimately be measured by events, website visits, or social media posts. It will be measured by transformed lives—lives choosing peace over conflict, hope over fear, compassion over indifference, and love above all else.

Perhaps that is what Francis and Clare would ask of young people today.

And perhaps these young people are already answering.

Judi Painter, OSF

Franciscan Month Coordinator

franciscanmonth.org

Meeting Rimini: Encounter, Friendship, and Unity

Written by: Ken Thomas, Advisor to the [Franciscan Central Archives](#)



I had the privilege last month of visiting Rimini for the 47th Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, held each August on Italy's Adriatic coast. Little known in this country, the Meeting has drawn crowds since 1980: a week-long encounter of faith and culture — talks, exhibits, performances, and sport — organized by the lay movement, Communion and Liberation.

This year's theme comes from Dante's *Divine Comedy* — ***“the love that moves the sun and the other stars”*** — a verse that could almost be Francis himself, who praised God through Brother Sun and the stars in his Cantic of the Creatures. It drew 90,000 participants and nearly 800,000 digital encounters. The Meeting welcomed Pope Leo XIV.

Our Christian faith generates culture, good works, and friendships — and from the beginning, the Meeting has sought to be a place of encounter and dialogue. When Pope John Paul II visited in 1982, he entrusted those gathered with a task: ***to build, through this friendship, the civilization of love.*** Forty-four years later, Pope Leo XIV took up that same appeal.

What inspired me most were the friendships of encounter — especially among the youth. In the crowded exhibit halls, where families and young people were everywhere, the Church is definitely alive! Pope Leo treasured the exhibit, ***“In the Footsteps of Augustine.”*** For us as Franciscans, Augustine's community of one heart on the way to God is the fraternity and unity that animates our life.

And in his address comments, Pope Leo called the Meeting ***“a crossroads for the Church and for society...an encounter that gives rise to further encounters”*** — and told young people that ***“the future is a promise, not a threat.”*** ([Read the full address here.](#))

Rimini's exhibits seemed to draw participants in, rather than merely inform — exactly what our ministries do when we make our stories of faith visible. The Franciscan Federation's new **Piazza** app is another wonderful place of encounter. Like an Assisi town square, the *Piazza* multiplies encounters — a place where religious communities and lay faithful can meet to share, learn, and grow, bringing our own digital expositions to life.

Several digital spaces already point the way on the *Piazza*: Connection Circle, Main Square, and an ambitious upcoming project with the Franciscan Central Archive, the new archives and library being planned in Frankfort, Illinois. The planned Center will be a place for collections preservation, research, and storytelling of the lives, ministries, and witness of fourteen US Franciscan Sister Congregations. the *Piazza*, as digital space, may help us bring these stories to life beyond the walls of the new building itself.

Being in Rimini, also reminded me to give a shout out to the **Francis Effect** podcast (francisfxpod.com) — an encounter of its own, where Dan Horan, Heidi, and David discuss culture & politics from our shared Franciscan and Catholic faith. It's the podcast's 10th year!

I would especially encourage communities — religious, lay, and interfaith — and each of you to consider what you can bring to the *Piazza*. Clare and Francis lived out stories of the Gospel and carried them from persons to persons — Augustine sought unity and Pope Leo urged encounter at Rimini. How might the *Piazza* deepen our friendships and give rise to further encounters — new pathways across ministries, distance, and the whole Franciscan community?

Ken Thomas

*Franciscan Renewal Center
Scottsdale, AZ*

The Power of the Network

Written by: Sr. Eileen McKenzie, FSPA

Originally published by the [Franciscan Network for Migrants](#)

St. Francis is attributed to having said, “Start by doing what’s necessary; then do what’s possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” While he never probably said this, I think it’s a good approach to taking action in a situation that feels overwhelming. I would also add: WORK WITH OTHERS.



The seemingly impossible recently came to light in [a story](#) about Jose Enrique Ojeda Duarte who was apprehended by ICE in Chicago, Illinois, transferred to various detention facilities in the United States over the course of several months, deported to Venezuela, then returned to his family in Chicago after the U.S. government admitted he was deported “in error.”

There exists power and hope in Jose’s story, grounded in a web of relationships. Many people were involved in his unjust apprehension during [Operation Midway Blitz](#), as were in his release; one person at a time, connecting with another, facilitated by grace, perseverance and a passion for justice, brought José home. I know Ceci Herrera, a member of the Franciscan Network for Migrants, and Steve Raseman, the coordinator of St. Anne Migrant and Refugee Ministry in Barrington, Illinois, both of whom dedicated countless hours accompanying and advocating for José and his family. As I speak with Steve and Ceci and reread Jose’s story in the [Chicago Tribune](#), my reflection turns toward the power of networks and how God works through our relationships.

My part in this story is minimal, tangential and simple. I met Steve about a year ago at a workshop on immigration advocacy in Chicago where we shared some commonalities and exchanged contact information. I have yet to meet Ceci in person, but know her through our membership in the Franciscan Network for Migrants (Red Franciscana para Migrantes).



I have never met José. Around Christmas time last year Steve emailed me, explained that he was accompanying Jose’s family and was concerned that José was in a detention facility in Texas. Steve asked, “Do you have any contacts in El Paso who would be willing to visit him?” I had none that I knew of, but I had the FNM WhatsApp chat, where I simply posted the need and waited for a response. Within the hour Ceci responded, and I connected them via email. That’s where my part ends.

What’s not mentioned in the newspaper article is the way Steve and the migrant ministry accompanied José’s family during this nightmare. It doesn’t share how Ceci visited José regularly in El Paso, called his wife, or contacted lawyers. It simply can’t mention all that was done through the network of relationships that both Steve and Ceci have who offered legal expertise, visited the family, made grocery runs, contacted people in other states as José was transferred to different detention facilities or any of the other innumerable outreaches that a caring community performs when someone needs help. Of course, mentioning all of these

details would make the story in the newspaper unwieldy. At the same time, the story would not have happened without all the small acts of kindness, informational meetings, messages of moral support, phone calls advocating for José and countless other activities that over time wove a web of support that brought José home from Venezuela.

As I reflect on this story, and all the stories that aren't contained in it, two things come to mind. One is the marvel of God and the mysterious ways that God works in and through us without us knowing. I have no doubt that God was accompanying José closely through this ordeal and continues to accompany him in the many people that surround him and support him as he recovers from this trauma. I doubt most of them are aware of the way that Divine Presence is working through them. I certainly wasn't.

The other thing that comes to mind is the power of networks. "Networks are powerful because of the belonging and trust they foster. They are so influential that marketing expert Seth Godin calls connection the "asset of the future." Not only that, as a Franciscan, I understand networks through the lens of *fraternitas*, that we are inherently related to each other by virtue of being part of the body of Christ; we are all sister and brother in God's one family of Creation.

"Start by doing what's necessary; then do what's possible; and suddenly you are doing the impossible." What necessary action are you taking to help your sister and brother in migration who needs you?

And who else is working with you?

Sr. Eileen McKenzie, FSPA

Upcoming Events

WNY Franciscan Day

October 10, 8:30am-4pm ET

All Franciscans and Franciscan-hearted people in Western New York are invited to join us on October 10 for a full day of reflection, prayer, and

community as we honor the 800th anniversary of the death of St. Francis. The program features Michele Dunne, OFS, Director of the Franciscan Action Network, along with speakers from across the region, and will conclude with a student-planned vigil Mass at 3pm.



WNY Franciscan Day

Saturday, October 10, 2026

8:30am-4:00pm

Buffalo Academy of the Sacred Heart

Individual Ticket: \$25

Table of 8: \$175

Scholarship opportunities are available

Francis: An Oratorio

Continue the celebration on Sunday.

Saturday, October 10, 2026

7:30pm

Sunday, October 11, 2026

2:30pm

Kleinhans Music Hall



Contact: franfedoffice@franfed.org

Register now at <https://franfed.org/wny-franciscan-day/>

Tickets for Oratorio available through BPO at <https://bpo.org/event/francis/2026-10-10/>

Registration includes a light breakfast and lunch, with individual tickets, table options, sponsorships, and organizational tabling available. **The deadline to register is October 1.**

Following the WNY Franciscan Day gathering, participants are invited to attend *Francis: An Oratorio* at Kleinhans Music Hall, premiering October 10 at 7:30pm ET and October 11 at 2:30pm ET. Composed by Richard Danielpour with a libretto by Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF, this 70-minute performance brings key moments from the life of St. Francis to the stage and highlights the role of women in his vision of authentic Christian life. Tickets are now available for purchase [here](#).

[Click Here to Register](#)

Franciscan Connection Circles

Monday, October 12th

4pm PT | 7pm ET

We start with a short prayer and meditation, move into a volunteer-led reflection, and then share in conversation together. These gatherings offer a



warm, welcoming space to connect with fellow Franciscans. All are welcome. Join through [the Piazza](#) or [click here for the Zoom link](#).

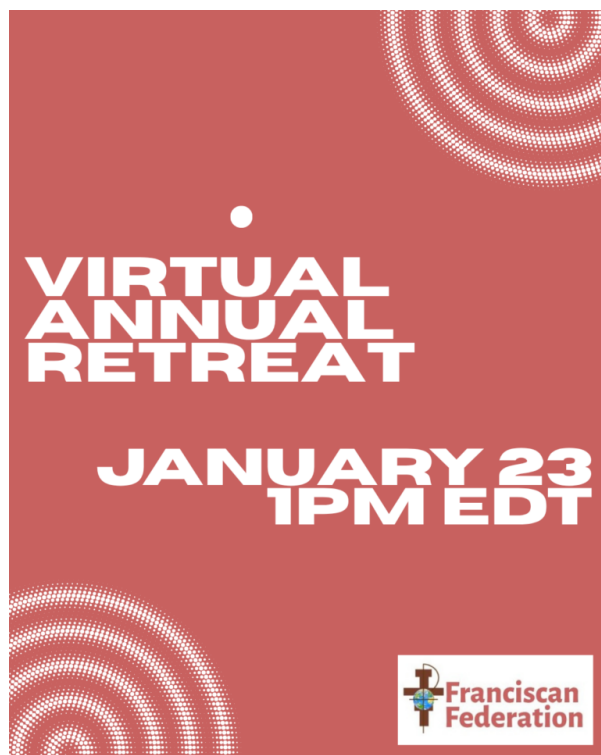
We're still looking for someone to offer this month's reflection. If you're interested, please email brady@franfed.org. We're also seeking an ongoing volunteer (or small team) to help hold the space for future gatherings.

2027 Virtual Annual Retreat

Saturday, January 23

10am PT | 1pm ET

Our 2027 Virtual Retreat, *Messengers of Healing and Hope*, will take place on Saturday, January 23 at 10am PT / 1pm ET. This year's retreat will explore the deep Franciscan commitment to healing and compassion across generations, with a special focus on St. Marianne Cope and the creative ministries she built in response to cultural, spiritual, and societal pressures. Her witness invites us to meet our own callings with courage, imagination, and hope, alongside reflections on other women and men whose lives continue to shape our response to the cry of the poor.



We're grateful to welcome **Sr. Margaret Carney, OSF** and **Dr. Cynthia Zane** as our retreat speakers. Registration will open in early November. If you'd like to receive updates, you can fill out the interest form on our website.

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