



Soldiers of Christ

Newsletter of the
Isolated Franciscan Tertiaries
of the OFM Province of the
Immaculate Conception

September 2025

Sandy Baden, TOF, Editor

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EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS **Feast Day: September 14**



The most important aspect of the Holy Cross of Jesus is not so much the emphasis of the wooden cross, but of the loving sacrifice our Lord Jesus Christ gave to us in His death on the Cross. The Cross was a cruel instrument of torture that our Lord bore for our sins, along with love and mercy coming from this sacrifice.

Emperor Constantine had the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher built in the year AD 327. It was built on the spot where excavations were made when he wanted to locate Calvary. In the process, the wood of the Holy Cross was found along with the crosses of the two thieves. Constantine immediately had the Basilica of the Holy Sepulcher built. The finding of the Holy Cross has been attributed to Saint Helena, the mother of Emperor Constantine. As the workers had found the three crosses, the Cross of Jesus was identified when they brought them to a dying woman. When she touched one of the three Crosses she was healed.

The date of the feast was given on September 17, by Pope John Paul II, which was also the dedication of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in AD 335. The Cross would be brought outside the church so the people could pray before the true Cross of Christ.



There are three events attributed to the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, the finding of the True Cross by St. Helena, dedication of churches built by Empire Constantine, and the elevation of the True Cross at Hagia Sophia in Constantinople in AD 629.

The Holy Cross represents many things for us as Christians: when we make the sign of the Cross it is a reminder of our Baptism and symbol of our faith, devotion to the Cross as we pray the Stations of the Cross, veneration when we kiss the Cross on Good Friday, and adoration of the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ as we meditate on His death resurrection into life.

Sandy Baden, TOF

Most High glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart. Grant me an upright faith, secure hope, and perfect charity. Fill me with understanding and knowledge that I may fulfill your command.

(Prayer of Saint Francis before the Crucifix of San Damiano)

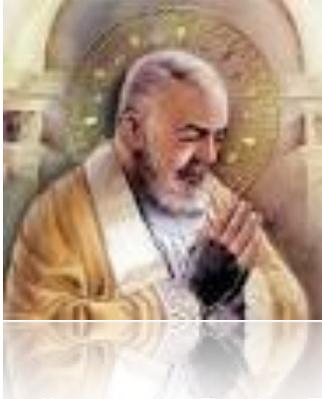


Feast of the Stigmata Sept 17th

We adore you Lord Jesus Christ, here, and in all your churches throughout the whole world, and we bless you, for by your holy cross you have redeemed the world.

(Saint Francis of Assisi)

ST. PADRE PIO, OFM, PIETREICINA, ITALY
FEAST DAY: SEPTEMBER 23
May 25, 1887 – September 23, 1968



“Pray, hope, and don’t worry. Worry is useless. God is merciful and will listen to your prayer... Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to the heart of God. You must speak to Jesus, not only with your lips, but with your heart. In fact, on certain occasions you should only speak to Him with your heart...” St. Padre Pio

The color pink seems to be attributed to Padre Pio. The Pink Closerie rosary is dedicated to Padre Pio and was first blessed by Pope Francis, and now has been blessed again by Pope Leo XIV. When a Pope blesses a rosary for a saint it means, “a special invocation of grace and connection to that saint’s intercession,” and “it transforms the rosary into a sacramental. It also connects the users prayers with the Pope’s blessing and the Church’s intercession.”



Padre Pio was ordained a Priest on August 10, 1910. He was assigned to Saint Giovanni Rotondo in 1916 and remained at the Rotondo until his death September 23, 1968. He is known as one of the greatest mystics of our time, and lived his life in prayer, sacrifice, and poverty.

In this article for September 2025, we will look at St. Padre Pio, OFM, as the man of prayer and in recognition of what he has said, **“I only want to be a friar who prays...”** and what happens when Padre Pio prays?

St. Padre Pio always had a rosary in his hand, which meant he was in constant prayer to the Blessed Virgin Mary and to Our Lord Jesus Christ. As Padre Pio has said, **“Prayer is the best weapon we have; it is the key to the heart of God.”** There are many examples of what happened when Padre Pio prayed for someone in his love of the many who came to him for confession or for petition to God for help. Here are just a few of answered prayers of St. Padre Pio intercessions during his life and after his death. 3

One of the famously known miracles is Gemma de Giorgio, who was born blind, and was able to see again after visiting Padre Pio. The astonishing part of this miracle is she was born with no pupils in her eyes.



In 1919, a fourteen year old boy had caught typhus when he was very young causing his back to become deformed. He went to confession to Padre Pio and he touched the boy with his hands. When the young boy stood up the deformity had disappeared.

Again in 1919, a gentleman came to Padre Pio from Fogiga, Italy. He was sixty-two years old and walked with two canes. He had a fall from a carriage and broke both his legs. He was told by doctors they were unable to help him because of the severity of the breaks. After his confession, Padre Pio said, **“Stand up and go away! You have to throw away these canes.”** The gentleman stood up and walked without the canes.

In 1950, a woman with breast cancer was taken to the hospital for surgery of the left breast. Then a few months later she was told they needed to perform surgery on the right breast as well. After the second surgery the cancer had metastasized. She was informed she had only four months to live, nothing more could be done. Her son-in-law immediately went to the Rotondo for confession to Padre Pio. He asked for healing for his mother-in-law, which Padre Pio had said **“We have to pray, everybody has to pray.”** After the second surgery and she had recovered, she went alone to San Giovanni Rotondo to thank Padre Pio. Smiling when he greeted her, he said, **“Go in peace, my daughter! Go in peace!”** She lived for nineteen additional years.

In 1953, a woman had intermittent abdominal pain. After x-rays it was determined she need immediate surgery. A friend suggested she write to Padre Pio for prayer, which she received a quick response. Padre Pio advised her in a letter, go to the hospital as scheduled and he would pray for her there. Before the operation she had x-rays again, and to the astonishment of the medical staff and the doctors the abdominal problem had been healed.

Consiglia De Martino and her husband Antonio Rinaldi are in the picture below, along with Pope John Paul II, after the miracle for the beatification of Padre Pio.



October 31, 1995. Her husband drove her to the Reunite Hospital in a Salerno, which two CAT scans were ordered. It was determined she had thoracic duct in her neck that had ruptured with two liters of lymphatic fluid. Surgery was then scheduled for November 3, 1995.

The five member Medical Committee of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints, at the Vatican, declared on April 30, 1998, “The healing of the traumatically ruptured thoracic duct of Consiglia De Martino on November 3, 1995, is scientifically inexplicable.”

Consiglia De Martino, is married with three children from Salerno, Italy. Consiglia began with acute pain and a fast growing lump in her neck, on

Consiglia began to pray to St. Padre Pio. She contacted the monastery at San Giovanni Rotonda and spoke to Fr. Modestino Fucci, a brother who Padre Pio had promised to help with intercessory prayers. He prayed at the tomb of St. Padre Pio on November 1st. On November 2nd the pain receded and the swelling in Consiglia’s neck disappeared. On November 3rd, the surgery was cancelled after an x-ray and a Cat Scan confirmed the results. The diocesan investigation took place from July 1996 to June 1997. The assembly of Cardinals and Bishops approved the case as a miracle on October 20, 1998, and set the date for Beatification on May 2, 1999. On June 16, 2002 Padre Pio was proclaimed a Saint by St. Pope John Paul II after another miracle for the healing of Matteo Pio Corella, which his process had ended on October 17, 2001.

St. Padre Pio’s devotion to prayer, especially in praying the Rosary, is an example to us to pray with faith, hope and love. Let us see what happens when we pray also with “our hearts,” and do not worry for that is useless.

Sandy Baden, TOF

THE FRATERNAL GATHERING

Submitted by: Ericka Witover, TOF

Peace and all good! This year, 2025, sure has been flying by, but it included great blessings for the TOF including eleven IT Professions! (Happy dance and thank you Jesus!) With these additions we are now at 35 Professed Isolated Tertiaries. However, at our last IT Fraternal Gathering on August 7th, only nine Professed were present. On average we have anywhere from 10-20 Professed members joining us monthly and twelve students. (Am I really that ugly?!)

I know things happen occasionally that are out of our control, we get sick, we get injured, the dog decides to come back into the house hopping on three legs, we get called into work at the last minute, (there's always just the listen option like I do!), or the neighbor unexpectedly stops by wanting your opinion on her fifteenth attempt at making Christmas fruitcake. But I'm still consistently missing a lot of faces month after month.

Let's do a quick review of the Rule and Constitutions that we promised to live by when we made our Professions. Rule XI-Second sentence: Let them convene at the monthly gatherings, which the Perfect has indicated. For us IT's, Fr. Vit is our Perfect, and our determined Fraternal Gathering date is always the 1st Thursday of the month at 7:00 PM Eastern time. With that consistency we have ample time to re-arrange our schedules to make it a priority to attend of 'second family reunion.'

How about Constitution 63-Tertiaries, even those who belong to other pious associations, shall do their utmost to attend the monthly meetings enjoined by the Rule. "Their utmost." This reminds me of one meeting where it was discussed that we are maximumists, not minimalists. Our utmost for His highest!

There are a lot of charitable works we can become involved with that meet on that same date, even in the Church (leading prayer groups, teaching classes, Ladies Guild, Men's group, etc). Although those things are very good and needed, our commitment to the Order should and needs to come first. When we habitually start to let other events distract us, (however good it may be) we run the risk of becoming lax in our commitment and begin to lose the merit we would gain by living our

promises. We are a spiritual family and together we walk the path of holiness with all its bumps and roadblocks together, until we rejoice in Heaven. Fr. Vit is in attendance more times than not and gives us the continued spiritual food we need to fight the battle. And how about setting that great example for the students that we are serious about in our journey together?

So, what is keeping you from meeting with your Franciscan family? Let's armor up Soldiers of Christ and rearrange those schedules! Knock my socks off and show me thirty-five faces on September 4th! If you can't make it, let me know if you would like the recording sent to you and I will be happy to send it your way.

Pax it bonum! Ericka Witover, TOF, and Tony the now 3 legged hopping dog.

VIRTUAL MONTHLY GATHERING SEPTEMBER 4, 2025

During our monthly zoom gathering, Virgil Daniel, TOF will be presenting us with the topic of Indulgences.



What is an Indulgence you ask? It is a remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, after the sin itself has been forgiven.

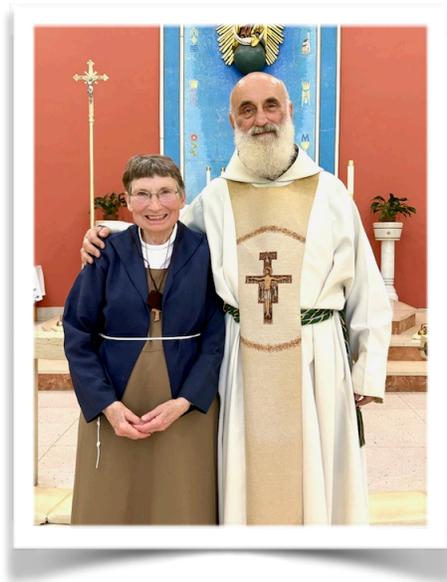
Virgil Daniel, TOF, is a member of the SS Francis and Clare Fraternity in Ohio. He is part our Initial Formation Team for Isolated Tertiaries, and is also on the team for the Mat Posts Committee.

Virgil does have three handouts, or rather attachments, which will be sent separately from this Newsletter.

“Congratulations to,” Elizabeth Lemire, TOF
in celebration of her Investiture Ceremony at
the Shrine of our Lady Comforter of the
Afflicted in Ohio, on August 24, 2025, with
Fr. Vit Fiala, OFM, as Celebrant.

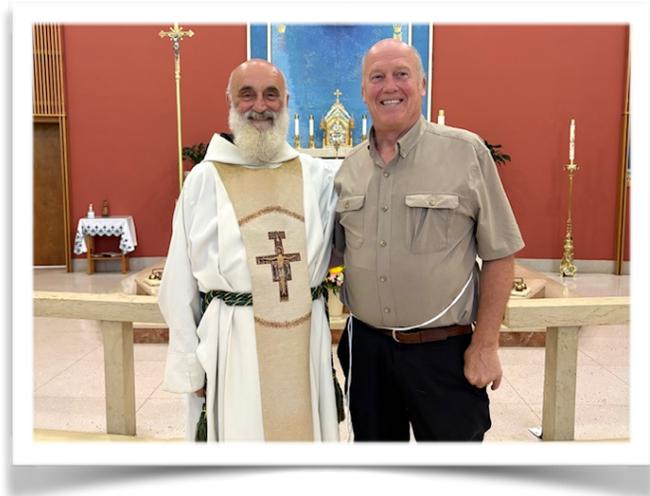
“Elizabeth has said, “the Rule of 1883
was much better suited for her needs
in this phase of her life. The IT gatherings
have given her the balance of a monthly
community gatherings where she learns and
is directed, then reflects on what God wants
her to do.”

Statement taken from Bio in July 2025



**“Congratulations to,
Frank N. Bihlman, TOF,** in his
Testimonial of Profession on
August 24, 2025, at the Shrine
of Our Lady Comforter of the
Afflicted in Ohio, with Fr. Vit
Fiala, OFM, as Celebrant.

“WOW”! “That’s all I can say
about my Profession! WOW,
WOW!!”



GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEW TOF, FRANK BIHLMAN

Submitted by Debbie Ventosa, TOF

Frank Bihlman traveled from Alaska to Ohio to spend time with his brothers and sisters in the area and to permanently profess into the TOF during the Tridua. The three days of the Tridua was a challenge as he continued to wrestle with this “Call” to the Franciscan way of life. Fatigue, frustrations, and a sense of unworthiness on the Saturday of the Tridua was replaced Sunday Morning with a sense of peace and of being at home. The support, encouragement, and prayers of the Franciscans fortified Frank as he Professed on August 24, 2025 at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted.

Frank was raised in a loving family of seven children, an Irish Catholic mother and a Catholic father who was a successful businessman and beloved by those who knew him. His father, Frank senior, tragically died at the age of 36 when the plane he was piloting crashed. Frank was in his second week of his sophomore year at Marion college run by the Benedictines. Frank’s father’s family lived on a lake with the aunts and uncles owning homes around the lake and all were involved in the family’s multiple businesses. Life changed drastically after the death of his father, and the injustices Frank had witnessed through the years have shaped who he is today. He has a heart for the poor, disadvantaged, and disenfranchised. Frank’s compassion and sense of justice naturally flows from his life experience. He makes visiting family a priority especially when he is on leave.

Family for Frank is not only the Franciscans but the daily Mass community at Little Flower Parish where Dennis Gacioch, TOF and Carolyn Gacioch, TOF, first established a friendship with Frank and then invited him to look into the TOF. He began classes as an Isolated Tertiary where he was a diligent student and deliberately and seriously pondered the process. The commitment to the TOF was not arrived at lightly. Frank shared that the ability to be ready to change and work on subtle changes consistently is attainable.

*The Profession ceremony with Fr. Vit took Frank by surprise when Fr. Vit said, “the two things that Religious do is strive for holiness and union with God, and to attract demons to themselves.” Frank replied, “What! I didn’t know that...now you tell me!!” There was no backing out! Embracing this new responsibility with the backing of the Holy Spirit and the power of the Sacraments gives Frank courage and hope. He is eager to respond to whatever the needs are in the community as a group. Frank laughs as he says, “I have a wife now.” His plan is to continue to move forward working on patients and forgiveness by seeking daily Mass when he is on shore and off the boat to be nourished by the holy Eucharist for his strength and remaining vigilant. “You never know when the thief will come,” Frank recalls. So Frank, remain in a state of grace and be ready to fight those Demons!! **Welcome to the TOF.***

“Deus Meus et Omnia—My God and My All” — St. Francis of Assisi!



"What wonderful majesty! What stupendous
condescension! O sublime humility! That
the Lord of the whole universe, God and the
Son of God, should humble Himself like this
under the form of a little bread, for our
salvation."

St. Francis of Assisi

EUCHARISTIC ADORATION ISOLATED TERTIARIES SCHEDULE

MONDAY

**Judith Inglesby, TOF
Nancy Caraballo**

TUESDAY

Linda Menser, TOF

WEDNESDAY

**Luis Guzman, TOF
Judith Inglesby, TOF
Paul & Mary Tag, TOF
Nancy Caraballo**

THURSDAY

**Bob Zupanek, TOF
Pepe Ventosa, TOF
Sandy DeWaal, TOF**

SATURDAY

**Ericka Witover, TOF
Peter Emau, TOF
Miguel Mahan, TOF**

SUNDAY

Linda Menser, TOF

Please pray for the intentions of our Pope, bishops, and priests. Also pray for the community of friars of the Immaculate Conception Province for an increase in religious vocations in their community and for all the intentions of the members of the Isolated Tertiaries Community.

ADMONITION XIII

Patience

*Study of the Admonitions of St. Francis of Assisi, Lothar Hardick, OFM
by: Sandy Baden, TOF*



“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt. 5:9). We can never tell how patient or humble a person (=servant of God) is when everything is going well with him. But when those who should co-operate with him do the exact opposite, then we can tell. A man has much patience and humility as he had then and no more.

*There are a couple of statements in this Admonition that stand out and are mentioned several times through this chapter. First, within this Admonition it states: **“We can never tell how patient or humble a person (=servant of God) is when everything is going well with him.”** This is so true, and it may be times we see this in ourselves and we can easily forget to trust in our Lord Jesus Christ with Patience and wait for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. We forget we must rely on God’s Will for us and not our own.*

*Second, two words that are basically related to each other...Patience and Endurance. **“In your patience you will possess your souls, and by your endurance will gain your lives.”** What are we talking about in these statements? We must be humble servants of God in our patience through the example we can gain from Our Blessed Mother as she exemplifies the act of keeping those things in her heart. As a humble servant of God, Mary lived her life in patience and love of her Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ. Mary being the perfect example, where does that leave us in our effort to obtain perfection in our journey as Franciscans? (Patience and Endurance in the will of God!) 11*



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God created us in His image, which is love, but at the same time we are so different from each other. Our souls are His to mold as He wishes, only if we allow Him by the choice of “Free Will” He has given to us. God is so awesome in His love for us that we only have to surrender and let our Lord Jesus Christ show us the way. Patience and Endurance in this journey of life will save our souls. How do we accomplish this in our chaotic world we live in today?



Imagine Christ outside of time watching us as we are in time. “Baffling” is the word that comes to mind. The only visual that might help us, is to envision floating above a football field and the beginning of time is starting at the goal line as our life is working its way up the field. As God watches, He sees time pass in our world, but He sees everything all at once. He sees every road we

may take and where it will lead us, good or bad. How it must sadden him when He sees the wrong road taken. So, what does this have to do with Patience or Endurance in this Admonition?

This deviation came to mind when thinking of “God’s Will” for us and how we endure the consequences of our choices in life. If we practice more patience and slow down the pace of our lives we could see God’s grace working within us. As Lothar Hardick, OFM reiterates, **“Patience is the strength by which man is able to go forward resolutely towards the kingdom of God and by which he can without hesitation accept everything that seems to opposed in this transient world to those who serve God.”**

This last sentence by Lothar Hardick, OFM states almost everything you would want to know about Patience and seems to be a summary of Admonition XIII. How could it be explained any better? Go no further except to pray for Patience and Endurance and rely on our Lord Jesus Christ and his loving and merciful Mother, The Blessed Virgin Mary.

Save the Date

SEPTEMBER 4: *IT Zoom Gathering: 7:00 PM Eastern Time, 4:00 PM Pacific Time. Discussion Topic: Presented by Virgil Daniel on Indulgences.*

SEPTEMBER 11: *IT Novitiate Formation Group 4: 7:00 PM Eastern Time, 4:00 PM Pacific Time.*

SEPTEMBER 14: *THE EXALTATION OF THE HOLY CROSS*



SEPTEMBER 17: *STIGMATA OF SAINT FRANCIS*

SEPTEMBER 18: *Initial Formation Inquiry Group 5: 7:00 PM Eastern Time, 4:00 PM Pacific Time.*

ST. JOSEPH CUPERTINO

SEPTEMBER 23: *ST. PIUS OF PIETRELCINA (Padre Pio)*

