

Winter Edition, 2025

Volume 7, Issue 1

The Troubadour

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



Keeping the Faith

Our **Saint Francis of Assisi** (1181/82–1226), born Giovanni di Pietro di Bernardone in Assisi, Italy, is one of the most beloved saints in Christian history. After a dramatic conversion experience involving illness, imprisonment during war, and a direct call from God (“Francis, rebuild my Church”), he rejected his wealthy merchant family, embraced radical poverty, and began living the Gospel literally.

In 1209 he wrote a short, simple rule of life based almost entirely on quotes from the Gospels (especially the sending of the disciples in Matthew 10), emphasizing:

- Living without personal or communal property
- Preaching repentance and peace
- Working manually for a living or begging when necessary
- Joyful fraternity and love for all creation

With this rule he went to Rome, and Pope Innocent III verbally approved it in 1209/1210. This marks the official birth of what would become the Franciscan Order. This is our beloved Seraphic Father, who gave us our spirituality of **Poverty, Humility, Joy, Brotherhood, Care for Creation, and Peace Making.**

In 1219, Francis preaches before the Sultan during the fifth crusade. In 1223, Pope Honorius III approves the official rule. In 1224, Francis receives the stigmata. In 1226, Francis dies singing Psalm 142 around the age of 44. In one of the fastest canonizations in Church history, in 1228 Pope Gregory IX canonized Francis of Assisi.

Sancte Francisce de Assisi, ora pro nobis.

Spiritual Director

Fr. Vit Fiala, OFM
Shrine of
Our Lady Comforter
of the Afflicted
Youngstown



Editor

Luis Guzman, TOF

Franciscan Quote for Winter, 2025



Canticle of the Creatures 1225 “Praise be You, my Lord, with all Your creatures, especially Sir Brother Sun, who is the day and through whom You give us light. And he is beautiful and radiant with great splendor; and bears a likeness of You, Most High One.”

Blessings of the Third Order Cluster for Tertiaries – Mary Tag, TOF & Sandy DeWaal, TOF

What is a Cluster?

A brief overview: A Cluster is a small group of *Isolated* Tertiaries who form a membership of like-minded Franciscans desiring to participate in the ongoing practice of living the Gospel boldly and supporting one another in our journey toward Christian perfection.

Guided by the Holy Spirit, the small fraternity of 3-5 Tertiaries develops its own charism, as each member brings unique gifts and experiences, steadily progressing in fraternal love and virtue.

The structure of a cluster meeting has three fundamentals: prayer, formation, sharing. The meeting begins with opening prayer, followed by *Lectio Divina* and personal reflection. One member then presents a brief formation talk followed by discussion of the topic, sharing spiritual progress and edifying each other in faith. The meeting then closes with specific prayers. While the format is always adhered to, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and corresponding fruits vary in each Cluster.

Sandy DeWaal and Mary Lynn Tag recently formed the St. Mary of the Angels Cluster. Our meetings take place on the phone at the present time, and we have agreed to be flexible with the time and day because of family commitments, but the ideal would be 3-5 participants. We meet once per month for an hour, but some Tertiaries might want to meet more often. In a short span of time, we have experienced many blessings, insights and graces. The focal point is prayer and trust in the simple way of St. Francis – the way to God’s Kingdom.

“Most Holy Lord, I want to love you. Dearest God, I want to love You. O Lord God, I have given up to You all my heart and my body and yearn passionately to do still more for love of You if only I knew how.” -- St. Francis of Assisi

Perhaps a Cluster?

For more information on joining or forming a Cluster, contact the Spiritual Director’s Assistant.

Franciscan Scapular Medals

Franciscan scapular medals are now available for purchase online. To order please visit the Patron Saint Medals website at www.patronsaintmedals.com and then search for "Franciscan scapular medal." These are sterling silver scapular medals. We will be ordering pewter scapular medals that will be available in the near future at the Shrine for a lower cost.

2025 Year in Review – by Pepe Ventosa, TOF

We give praise to the Lord, Our God, from Whom all gifts come!

- A joint meeting of each fraternity's Master of Formation was convened at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted in the Spring of 2025. The purpose of this meeting was to continue developing an Initial Formation curriculum that can be used by all fraternities. As of this time, the manuals for the Inquiry Period and Novitiate are completed, and the one for the Postulancy Period should be completed in the next few months. We thank the Formation team for their input and effort to get this endeavor completed.
- Our 4th Annual Pilgrimage took place on May 17, 2024 and was sponsored by the SS. Francis and Clare Fraternity. About 30 members from the local fraternities and Isolated Tertiaries joined us in the pilgrimage. We visited the Nativity of the Lord Jesus Parish and toured the Nativity Museum which contains over 400 Nativity scenes from all over the world.
- During the summer months our fraternities had their annual picnics.
- On August 22-24, 2025 we had our 2nd Tridua Retreat at the Shrine. We had about 40+ attendees. We had a special guest, Gordon Smith, Isolated Tertiary, who was on his way from Fiji to the Holy Land where he will be studying to discern a call to the OFM. We thank Gordon for making a stop at our Tridua to be with us. Many thanks to the members of St. Padre Pio Fraternity for hosting the Tridua.
- The Transitus was celebrated at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted in Youngstown and at St. Nicholas Byzantine Church in Barberton on October 3rd, 2025. Isolated Tertiaries celebrated the Transitus via zoom on the same date.
- The Annual Ministers Meeting took place in October. Ministers got together to discuss plans for next year.
- The Annual Day of Recollection took place in the month of November at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted. At the Opening Mass 4 Novices celebrated their Holy Profession and 7 Postulants and an Inquirer entered the Novitiate. We also had the investiture of a new Honorary member.
- On the Feast of the Immaculate Conception, December 8, 2025, we celebrated the 6th year anniversary of our Community of Franciscan Tertiaries of the OFM Province of the Immaculate Conception.
- The St. Pio Fraternity is running our "TOF store." We have Franciscan scapulars, ritual candles, cinctures, 12 Our Fathers Chaplets, and other items.
- Throughout the year, members of our TOF community were involved in multiple ministries, including:
 - Eucharistic Adoration
 - Providing care for the spiritual and material needs of the Friars and the Shrine
 - Praying for the spiritual needs of our Bishops, Diocesan priests/seminarians and the Friars of the Province of the Immaculate Conception
 - Spiritual support of local seminarians
 - Spiritual and financial support of seminaries in the Moshi Diocese in Tanzania
 - Donation of food items to local parishes' food bank
 - Praying for the unborn and their mothers at abortion centers
 - Working at prolife booth at local County Fairs
 - Providing Bibles for the incarcerated

- Providing food for the homeless
- Promoting the Third Order of St. Francis
- By God's grace our TOF community continues to grow with new members.

2026: Looking at the Year Ahead - By Pepe Ventosa, TOF

- Initial/Ongoing Formation leaders will meet again in the Spring to discuss and share resources for formation and update on the progress of the Initial Formation Curriculum.
- Our 5th annual pilgrimage will take place on May 16, 2026 and will be sponsored by the St Pio Fraternity. We will be visiting the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon.
- We will have our 3rd Annual Tridua Retreat on August 21-23, 2026. More details to follow. Save the date!!!
- Our annual Day of Recollection will take place again in November 2026. More information to follow.
- We are planning to start a Women TOF Prayer Group to meet via zoom. Watch for details coming soon.
- Currently each fraternity and the Isolated Tertiary community have a prayer chain. We are planning into combining each of these prayer chains into a "common prayer chain" so that we can pray for each other's needs across the TOF community. Please stay tuned for more information.

As in prior years, we will continue to build on our foundation with a focus on:

- The Eucharist: by fostering love and devotion to the Blessed Sacrament, the center and inspiration of our Franciscan way of life;
- Prayer: by fostering a spirit of prayer among our brothers and sisters, with the goal of constant remembrance of God;
- Formation: by continuing to develop a solid program of Initial and Ongoing Formation in the Franciscan way of life;
- Ministry: inspired by prayer, a response to our "call to rebuild the Church";
- Continuing to promote the Third Order of St. Francis, with the vision of Pope Benedict XV, "that in every city, town, and even in each village, the Third Order count henceforth a sufficient group of members, not of inactive adherents satisfied with the mere title of Tertiaries, but instead, of those who spend themselves with zeal for their own salvation and the salvation of their brothers." (Sacra Propediem, 14)

Isolated Tertiaries News – By Pepe Ventosa, TOF

Isolated Tertiaries (IT's) are members of our community of Franciscan Tertiaries who are not members of a fraternity. This is due to the lack of a local fraternity in their area.

In 2025 we had 11 novices that celebrated their Holy Profession. Currently we have 2 groups of Initial Formation with a total of 10 novices discerning profession in 2026. God willing, we will be starting the Inquiry Period of Group #6 in the Spring of 2026.

One of our Isolated Tertiaries, Gordon Smith, from Fiji, has discerned to join the Order of Friars Minor of the Province of the Custody of the Holy Land. Gordon professed into the TOF in 2023 while working as a nurse in Australia and started his formation with the OFM this past September. Please keep Gordon in your prayers. The Isolated Tertiaries continue to meet via zoom on first Thursdays and appreciate Fr. Vit's commitment in providing spiritual direction. Fr. John Rickert, FSSP, TOF, professed in 2025, now joins Fr. Vit in supporting the Isolated Tertiary community.

News from Our Lady of America Fraternity – by Margaret Sartor, TOF



Valerie Ferrante became a Novice in April 2025, and if she discerns, she will be professed on November 2026. Please keep her in prayer as she continues her formation. We enjoyed the TOF Pilgrimage to the Church of the Nativity in May 2025, and some even "dressed up " as Mary, Joseph and an angel, just for fun! Abby C. moved to the area from Los Angeles, attended our last Fraternity meeting and less than two weeks later joined us at the Tridua. Please pray for her as she discerns her path forward. Abby, Valerie and Margaret attended the Tridua. The fellowship, prayer and of course continued Formation in the Spiritual Life by Fr. Vit was wonderful. Looking forward to coming together with the other Fraternities again in November at the annual Day of Recollection. Pax et Bonum!

News from SS. Francis & Clare Fraternity – by Debbie Ventosa, TOF

The fraternity of Sts. Francis and Clare in Barberton Ohio held their annual "Come and See" event on August 11th, 2025 on the feast of St. Clare. We are pleased to announce that 14 individuals attended who expressed interest in learning about the Third Order. Virgil Daniel, TOF, introduced the Third Order to the attendees and Father Vit Fiala OFM spoke about the Third Order as a means to holiness. Our first Formation class will be held September 15th. Please keep our fraternity in prayer as we study and learn together this Franciscan Way.

We have 4 novices that will celebrate their Profession into the TOF at the upcoming Day of Recollection on November 8th.

Our annual fraternity picnic took place on August 17th. Many guests who came to the Come and See joined us as well, as did Frank Bihlman, Isolated Tertiary from Alaska. We prayed grace, shared a meal, prayed the Franciscan Crown rosary and enjoyed fellowship with our Franciscan brothers and sisters.

News from St. Padre Pio Fraternity – by Kara Sertick, TOF

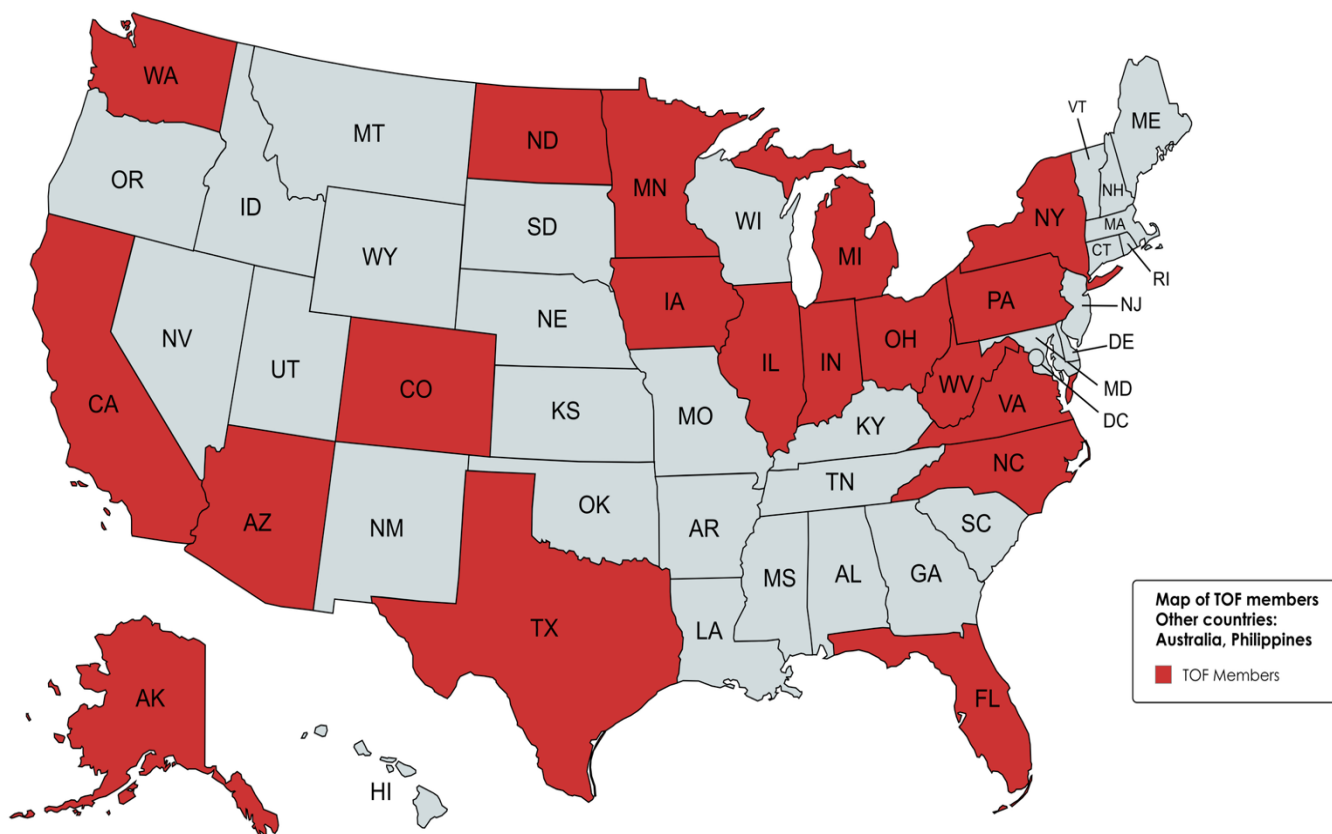


St. Padre Pio Fraternity of Youngstown, Ohio had a blessed year. In August, we hosted the 2nd Annual Tridua at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted to over fifty participants. Many in the group enjoyed sleeping under the stars on the spacious grounds. Daily Eucharistic Adoration, confession, Mass, fellowship, edification, and spiritual direction by Fr Vit and Fr Chris were appreciated by all. In November, the fraternity advanced 6 postulants to novices at the Day of Recollection Mass. Our fraternity has 3 postulants and 2 novices to be professed on December 13th and 3 entering inquiry in January."

Franciscan Tertiaries of the OFM Province of the Immaculate Conception

		12/2020	12/2021	12/2022	12/2023	12/2024	12/2025
Members in Fraternity	Professed	51	66	73	72	70	78
	Novices	14	3	1	4	7	8
	Total in fraternity	65	69	74	76	77	86
Isolated Tertiary Members	Professed	1	9	11	19	22	31
	Novices	0	0	5	4	10	8
	Total Isolated T.	1	9	16	23	32	39
Priestly Confraternity	Professed	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	3
	Novices	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	1	0
	Total Confraternity	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	3	3
Honorary Members		0	0	0	2	2	3
Total Membership		66	78	90	101	114	131

Postulants/ Inquirers	In Fraternity	0	5	11	17	17	13
	Isolated Tertiary	0	9	0	14	7	2
Total		0	14	11	31	24	15



Second Annual Tridua by Elizabeth Lemire, TOF

The 2nd Annual TOF Tridua retreat was held at the Shrine of Our Lady Comforter of the Afflicted in Youngstown, OH on August 22nd to 24th, 2025 with approximately 40 people including Inquirers, Postulants, Novices and professed TOF's from surrounding area fraternities, Isolated Tertiaries and Guests. Also in attendance was a former Isolated Tertiary, Gordon Smith from Australia, who is making his way to Jerusalem to become an OFM starting in September with The Franciscan Order that is charged with being Custodians of the Holy Sites in the Holy Land!

The excitement of the group gathered was palpable as attendees looked forward to renewing and initiating both former and new friendships. The schedule of the weekend allowed time and space for private prayer/reflection, spiritual reading, Spiritual Direction as well as Reconciliation, Mass, Divine Office and Lectio Divina. A Eucharistic Procession with lit candles followed the Opening Mass.

The theme this year from Fr. Vit Fiala elucidated *The Threefold Way, A Hierarchical Order of Spiritual Progress*, by St Bonaventure, also known as the Purgative, Illuminative, and the Way of Perfection (Unitive Way). The opening prayer used at the opening of the teaching, provides an overview of the areas touched upon in the presentations:

Prayer: Dionysius Mystical Theology (Taken from handout)

Most Holy Trinity, God beyond all essence, knowledge and goodness, the only guide of all Christians, lead us to your Divine Wisdom. Direct our path to the ultimate summit of Your incomprehensible, enlightened and exalted mystical knowledge. Lead us to a place where the pure, absolute and unchangeable mysteries of your wisdom are veiled by the overpowering light of Your secret silence. You shine brighter than any human brilliance with the intensity which lies beyond our perception and surpasses all beauty. Amen.

(Below Excerpted from the Handout by Fr Vit)

The Threefold Way—A Hierarchical Order of Spiritual Progress—St Bonaventure

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. Purgation | --Leads to Interior Peace |
| 2. Illumination | --Leads to the Splendor of Truth |
| 3. Perfection | --Leads to Charity |

The Purgative Way

Sting of Conscience (*synderesis*)

1. Stir up Conscience
2. Conscience is sharpened
3. Direct your attention towards a goal

The Illuminative Way

Threefold exercise to gain understanding

NB: Illumination is always joined with gratitude. If gratitude is missing illumination is not of divine origin!

1. Get Rid of Evil
2. Expand in doing good deeds
3. Reflect on reward that is promised

The Perfect Way

Threefold exercise to acquire the Flame of Wisdom

1. Concentration of the Flame of wisdom
2. Nourishment of the Flame of wisdom
3. Lifting up of the flame of wisdom

Knowledge coming from an experience gives true wisdom

Corollary (naturally results in)

It is clear how the soul arrives at the wisdom of Sacred Scripture from meditating along the purgative, illuminative and perfect ways. Also, it is clear that our reflection should not concentrate solely on the content of Sacred Scripture, but must also revolve around the matters discussed previously, namely: human deeds, the motives of a person, and the acts of God.

For more information on the Threefold Way, please see St. Bonaventure's book *The Triple Way* at <https://traditionalcatholicstore.com> It is \$12.95 plus tax and shipping.

The meals were planned by Kara Sertick and Debbie Ventosa and enjoyed by participants!

The annual Bonfire was accompanied by guitar music and song by Gina Love and was warm and relaxing basking in what we had learned. A beautiful way to close the whole experience of learning, relating, and love for one another, as other.

At the Closing Mass on Sunday, Elizabeth Lemire, TOF, from IN celebrated her Investiture Ceremony receiving the habit of the Third Order. Frank Bihlman, TOF, from Alaska, celebrated his Profession in the TOF. A celebration followed.







New Provincial Minister – by Pepe Ventosa, TOF

The OFM Province of the Immaculate Conception Chapter of 2025 took place in June 2025 in Ontario, Canada. At this Chapter, Fr. Patrick Boyle, OFM, was elected Provincial Minister. Fr. Robert Campagna, who had served as Provincial Minister for several years, was elected Provincial Vicar.

We are grateful for the support and guidance under Father Campagna, OFM, and thank him for his service and care for our community of Franciscan Tertiaries. We pray for Father Patrick Boyle OFM as he fulfills his new duties and ask our community to support him with our prayers.



TOF Community Prayer Chain – by Pepe Ventosa, TOF

We will be joining the prayer chain requests from each fraternity and isolated members so that all Tertiaries can join in intercessory prayer with each other. This prayer chain will be referred to as the "**TOF Community Prayer Chain.**" The procedure for sending a prayer request will stay the same: just send your prayer request to your community prayer chain leader. He/she will forward your request to the other prayer chain leaders. This community prayer chain is only for members of the TOF community (professed members and novices.) Prayer requests for non-members (Inquirers, Novices, family members, close friends) can continue to be forwarded to your local fraternity prayer chain leader as you have done in the past. Just know that these will not be forwarded to the TOF Community Prayer Chain. This is to avoid multiple emails/texts from other communities.

Please remember that each prayer request contains private and personal information, where a member requests our community to pray for them. As such, do not forward this prayer request to anyone or any other prayer chain outside of our TOF community.



ANNUAL TOF PILGRIMAGE



The St. Pio TOF Fraternity will be sponsoring our annual pilgrimage in 2026. We will be visiting the Basilica and National Shrine of Our Lady of Lebanon in North Jackson, OH. We will start the day with lunch at 1:00 PM on site and will end at 6:00 PM after Mass. Confession will be available before Mass. More details to follow

Save the date!!!

Save the Dates!

1/1/2026	Solemnity of Mary, the Mother of God
2/18/2026	Ash Wednesday
4/3/2026	Good Friday
5/16/2026	Annual TOF Pilgrimage
8/21 - 23/2026	Annual Tridua Retreat



Pope Leo XIII in Inimica Vis (1892)

“An error which is not resisted is approved; a truth which is not defended is suppressed. He who does not oppose an evident crime is open to the suspicion of secret complicity. For surely our whole life is involved in a constant battle in which our salvation itself is at stake; nothing is more disgraceful for a Christian than cowardice.”