



# FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 155

Post-Chapter 2025



## A Postulant's Experience of Chapter on Zoom

### Inside This Issue

A Postulant's Experience of Chapter on Zoom	1
Chapter 2025 Zoomie Style —Another Perspective	2
Words From The Servant Council	3
Thoughts on Chapter 2025	3
Formation Station	4
A Chapter Reflection	4
An Invitation From Br. Louis	5
Lifelong Formation Station	6
A Yes/And, Not Either/Or Approach to Diversifying Our Order	8
Chapter Honors Our 80+ Siblings	9
A Visit to The OLF Chapter	10
Canticle of June's Abundance	11
OEF Online Bible Study	11
Juniper Cup 2025!	12
A Parable of The Tender Tendril	14
A Few Good Reads	15
Anonymous Poem	20
Song: Let Us Go Back	20

It was truly a gift to see familiar faces and meet new ones. Being part of the Zoomies this year brought me joy, connection, and a deepened sense of belonging to our shared Franciscan journey. I am excited to continue walking alongside you all in our collective calling within the Order.

The sessions were both informative and, at times, uncomfortable—in a way that fosters growth. When we entered into conversations about the social and political challenges currently faced in the United States, I found myself listening with compassion, but also with a sense of distance. Living in Canada, I don't face the same direct threats.

Still, we are not untouched. We see the ripple effects of tariffs and inflation, and we sense the tension of border politics and rhetoric. The notion of Canada being eyed as a "51st state" is deeply unsettling. These realities impact our vulnerable populations in different ways, but they are real.

As a ham radio operator actively engaged with emergency communications in Nova Scotia, I have seen firsthand how disasters—natural or political—can fracture the very systems meant to protect us. My heart aches for those in Texas right now, and I pray fervently for justice, safety, and mercy.

I also want to acknowledge that I felt somewhat limited in my ability to fully participate in some of the group conversations. While I could listen and hold space, I did not want to speak over voices whose experiences are far more immediate. I hope I was present in spirit, if not in speech.

I was particularly moved—and deeply saddened—to hear that Sr. Petra and wife Karen made the difficult decision to leave the United States because they no longer felt safe here. It's a sobering reminder that for many, the so-called "melting pot" has begun to freeze over.

I continue to pray for all of you, and for friends of mine in the U.S. who are too afraid even to speak freely with me—fearing surveillance, deportation, or reprisal.

Despite the gravity of these reflections, I want to end by saying how grateful I am for our time together. I did my best to attend every session, and I am working on my passport so that, God willing, I might join you in person for a future Chapter—though I know that both finances and politics may make that complicated.

With humility, love, and a Canadian heart full of hope,

**Stephen I. Weiss**, OEF postulant





## Chapter 2025 Zoomie Style—Another Perspective

By, Sr. Deb Snider-Scott, OEF



First of all, we are so grateful to Arch Audio's Victor and Jeff who made our Zoom experience solid, clear, and enjoyable. We thank Br. Salachar for making our Sunday morning available. There are a few others from The Order who assisted with tech support as well. I'm reluctant to name the ones I know because we don't want to leave any one individual unacknowledged. So, thanks to all the helping hands who kept those of us who could not travel in touch as the next best thing to being there.

I counted 37 on the registration list (thank you Nancy) that signed up for Zoom, outside of special guests who joined us for the Rites of Passage on Saturday evening. From that, approximately 24 Zoomies, as we began to call ourselves, came on and spent time together, in and out at various times, some more than others. We got to know 2 Inquirers quite well throughout the weekend.

Thursday afternoon began our time in break out rooms to share about our Rule of Life in the times we are in and what we are thankful for. Friday morning was a reflective time as we prayerfully discerned choices for our next Council and communicated with our proxies, but the afternoon and evening led to conversations among ourselves. Some new introductions were made, and we shared how being Franciscan in these volatile times makes a difference, right up to evening Worship time. It was then that it was decided that we, too, should share a meal together. We also decided to put our imaginations to work and take part in the Juniper Cup Saturday evening.

Once we got past the Chapter business on Saturday (phew), the Zoomies spent a lot of time together. We jumped right into a discussion on Civil Discourse, where and how we can find hope. We opted to stay together when asked if we wanted to branch off by phone to join an in-person group. We were blessed to have Ireland's perspective from Scott Peddie and Neal Dunnigan, and Canadian perspectives from Stephen Weis and Shilo Ninuk. A few take-aways was to focus on what is right in front of you with love.

Viktor Frankl's book, Man's Search for Meaning, was brought into the conversation with his description of focusing on a farmhouse light that gave way to hope, a light in the darkness and the practice of reframing things (tragic optimism); taking a negative and turning it to a positive. An example given: throwing trash out the window, what if everybody did that? Turn it around, pick up trash when you see it and throw it away properly, what if everybody did that?

There was focus on ways to stay centered: Art, Joy, and Hopefulness can all be ways of turning things around. We can get creative with ways of peaceful resistance. There was much more. I'm hoping others in that group will share.

On Saturday, the Juniper Cup entries were shaping up! Jeff Rubelmann of Arch Audio went above and beyond with two of the entries and set them up as a power point page. Stephen W. created the Lumilark, Sr. Paula Clare created the Brown Hooded Salamander, and Br. Jahiro created the Pollen Crown. By then, it was the dinner hour and a few of us remained and chatted while eating a bit of food. Before we knew it, it was time for Worship and the Rites of Passage. Welcome and Congratulations to Br. Henrik, Br. Speranza, Br. Russ, and Br. Seaghan!

The Zoomies were honored to have been able to share our creativity at the Juniper Cup that evening. It was a delightful icing on our cake for a tremendous day together.

Sunday morning brought a few of us in for that early morning prayer and closing Worship service. A few Zoomies remained for further time and conversation together.

We received a "last call" from Jeff reminding us that he will be picking up his laptop at 1:00 pm! LOL! No, we did not stay on until 1:00 pm, but it was an extra treat to linger a little while longer! I've never made it to a last call before, never, ever! It was so much fun for this introvert!

Needless to say, I think the Zoomies enjoyed and were absolutely blessed to have had such a positive experience at Chapter 2025!

Peace and Prayers Always

## Words From The Servant Council

Hospitality through a Franciscan lens...

The Council has been thinking about Franciscan hospitality alongside the Joint Committee on Franciscan Unity. Three stories come to mind. The first is Francis encountering the leper and said "yeak" and considering riding off on his horse because of disgust and fear. But he was moved by the Spirit. He got off his horse, greeted the leper and kissed him. He says in his testament that this was the threshold of entering the Kingdom.

The second is the Perfect Joy tale, where Francis and Leo are in discussion "what is perfect joy?" It was not great acts of healing, or being able to reveal the future, or preach and call everyone to love but it is to be rejected and beaten and pushed out hungry in the cold by your siblings in community. This is what Francis called perfect joy - accepting inhospitable behavior to partner with the Crucified.

The third was to be captured as a political prisoner for having attempted to creep behind the lines. And instead of being imprisoned or killed, Francis is taken to the most important person, the Sultan who welcomes Francis – hears what he had to say and then honors him, saying that if everyone was like you, we would all be at peace.

Hospitality is a sign of the presence of the Spirit and is a charism that every follower of Jesus in the way of Francis will want to embrace. It does not matter how ugly, dirty, smelly that other is or how offensive their views are, we embrace the gift of hospitality and treat the other as a beloved child of God. This is hard but worth it.

The Council along with the Joint Committee invites all of us to reflect on hospitality.

Br. Juniper for OEF Council



## Thoughts on Chapter 2025

by David Wirick, OEF

It felt like coming home. I've been away for a couple of years, pondering my relationship with this changing community. I came with no specific agenda, just mostly to observe, to listen, to become reacquainted with old friends. I feel I also made new friendships during our time together. In some ways it seemed like the same old gathering where we'd get bogged down in struggling to understand differing perspectives over minutiae and rehashing of decisions and recommendations made by servant council and others delegated to make those decisions. But in the end, there were way more blessings than not. Welcoming 4 new professed siblings was chief among those blessings. Worshiping together, sharing blessed meals, sitting in the ecology of fellowship called OEF... all were wonderful moments.

I've been a professed member of this community for 35 years. I've seen a lot of changes over the decades. I'm the 'daddy' (as someone labeled me) of the original 30 chapters of the formation materials. I've encouraged re-writes for a while now and am glad to see that happening in some ways. The old formation process seemed to me to be an attempt to make every member seem alike, as if the Body of Christ was supposed to be composed of all hands, or ears, or mouths. Just check out I Corinthians 12. We are not called to be homogenized as members of the Franciscan family. The Body has many parts. We are unique in many ways on the Franciscan family tree. We need to continue to find ways to celebrate the uniqueness of one another and encourage one another, especially in these discouraging days.

I'm grateful for The OEF. I hope I do not become a dinosaur as I continue to travel with y'all. I hope to make contributions to our common life and constellations of ministry. I never thought of COVID as a team building experience, but I surely seemed to become that as we dispersed to our homes, and yet it has stimulated immeasurable loving support amongst one another as a consequence. I look forward to seeing everyone next summer once more in Missouri, healthy and joyful and ready to share stories of sowing gospel seeds, making good trouble, and more as we follow our Risen Savior, Jesus the Christ! Peace and all good, dear Sibbs!



## Formation Station



### Introducing:

#### Greetings,

My name is **Shilo Minuk**, she/her, and I hail from the Chilliwack, in the beautiful British Columbia, Canada.

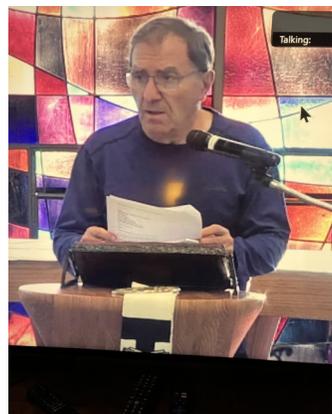
I have a varied spiritual background that includes Judaism and Druidry, but I always get called back to the Christian path, and have happily found my home in a little Anglican Church that embraces diversity, and encourages asking questions. I love reading Thomas Merton, Cynthia Bourgeault as well as various fiction genres, I'm a big Doctor Who fan, and I share my home with three sons, one loving partner, two dogs, two cats, two bunnies and 6 guinea pigs. I have been drawn to St. Francis often throughout my life, and am happy to have found the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. I look forward to getting to know everyone better along this leg of my journey.

Peace,  
Shilo

---

### Congratulations to our newly professed Brothers:

- **Br. Speranza (Mike) Asbury**
- **Br. Henrik Holben**
- **Br. Seaghán Murphy**
- **Br. Russell Rohloff**



Our new Br. Speranza



Br. Louis

## A Chapter Reflection

Immersed in a countercultural Gospel-based faction, attracting diverse and intelligent seekers from around the world, Chapter's a necessary annual model for consensus building, peace, patience, tinkering of rules to bend for circumstances (as Francis our Founder had to do as scrappy "fratelli" expanded exponentially beyond an inevitably romanticized band of humbled Umbrian brethren), and the promotion of compassion. The last a characteristic in my skillset's short supply, one reason I felt drawn to OEF though I'm no joiner. A loner's leap into Kierkegaard's faith? Pascal's bet? Moses' "Hineni." Daodejing's cautionary tale of our inarticulate heart's vain speech, our default setting.

A path shared alongside a new postulant, a flock of novices, three freshly professed beside me, amidst dozens of siblings who've preceded us. I decided in 2018, welcomed by you 2022, to peer at why I lean-in towards this oblique Franciscan search which beckoned my cradle-Catholic self. I ask for and offer sustenance on our common life's trek.

Blessings,

Br. Seaghán Murphy, OEF



The Whole Gang!



## **Please Join Us**

**World Day of Prayer for Care of Creation**

**Zoom Interfaith Prayer Service**

**Monday, September 1, 2025**

**7:00– 8:00 pm EDST**

**This marks the month-long**

**Period of prayer and action focused on  
the care of creation.**

**Music, Sacred texts, prayers are all part of  
the celebration**

**Contact Bro. Louis Canter at**

**[Franciscanministryofpeace@gmail.com](mailto:Franciscanministryofpeace@gmail.com)**

**For the link to the service**



# Lifelong Formation Station



Lifelong Formation Team Report  
Taken from minutes dated 07-12-2025

What a blessing it was for the Lifelong Formation Team to gather post Chapter and after a bit of a summer respite. It is always an uplifting experience to be with the siblings on this team.

First of all, we welcome Br. Jahiro to the team. Secondly, Dale Carmen is still on the team, so add her name in your Devotional Book for the Lifelong Formation Team. We always seek her spiritual insight and her historical recollections of The Order when we are discussing a service or, as in this case, shifting gears. She keeps us on track with the message to be shared and events of the past to draw reference from. She is our humble compass. We love you Dale Carmen!

Dale did share history about Formation Counselors and their roles in the Formation process, and how today she would call those Professed members who companion professed as “Formation Partners”, which would indicate a more personal ongoing relationship.

So that segued us into discussing how we can help people be connected and accountable. What can the Lifelong Formation Team do, beyond the seasonal services? After all, we are to be encouraging ongoing formation. A few summation words came forward: Engagement; Accountability; Connection.

In the case of fostering engagement, the idea of allowing Novice participation on the team

came into the conversation. It would be a way of getting to know each other more, allowing a real connection and building relationships with our Novices. The logistics of this will need further discussion and discernment from the Formation Team and Formation Companions of those who might be interested

When speaking of accountability, we noticed that there are some of us Professed without a Formation Companion, or as Dale would better phrase it, a “Formation Partner,” someone to share life as a professed member with. How is your Rule of Life going? Actually, how is life going as an OEFer? So the question posed: How might the Lifelong Formation Team be helpful in this?

The sum of it all is staying connected. No one left behind after Profession. What can be offered to keep an ongoing connection, for our introverts, our seniors, our members abroad, our folks hard at work with social justice or environmental projects? And the list may be longer. What can we, as a team responsible for “ongoing formation,” offer up for more connectedness among us?

We were delighted to have Caritas present at our meeting this time as she will continue to be on board as a consultant and a partner in bridging Formation with Lifelong Formation, keeping a better connection between the two. We will be checking in with her and the Formation Team moving forward.



Lifelong Formation Station... continued

We did discuss the possibility of studying Pope Francis' Frutelli Tutti about Fraternity and Social Friendship. We questioned if we could offer sessions on our Principles, or even our Statutes and how we, as professed members, view them through a professed lens.

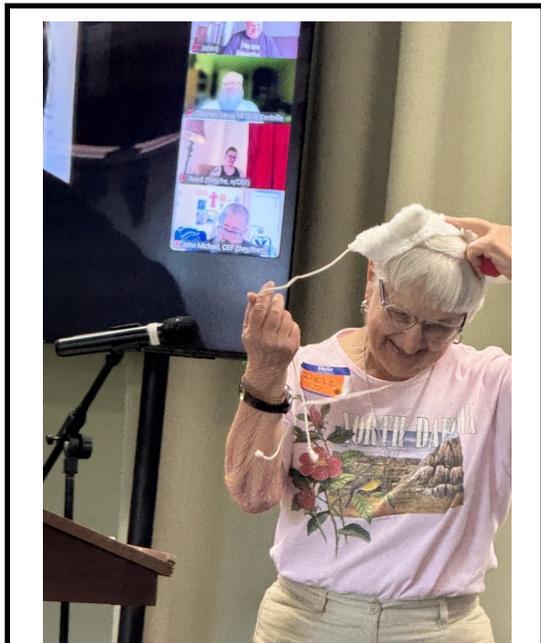
Should we only offer one seasonal service, feast of St. Francis or Advent? Stephan posted the question on our OEF Chat for feedback. Yes, there was a lot of conversation. We look forward to much, much more!

We also want to hear from **you**, the Order of Ecumenical Franciscans. Pray for us!

Pray for positive discernment on the life of the Lifelong Formation Team!

Remember, Engagement; Accountability; Connection.

Peace and Prayers Always—  
Your Lifelong Formation Team



Sr. Dale with sheep's ears

### ***More Whisperings From The Lifelong Formation Corner***

It's almost one month since our 2025 OEF Chapter/Convocation. We send blessings, grace and joy! Also, we write to share news: Who is stepping down? Warm and gracious gratitude to Br. Stephan and Sr. Deb to *thank them* for their hearts and their service.

Now for some homey news: Happy 50<sup>th</sup> Birthday, Br. Jahiro! A big Thank You to Br. Reg who never fails to "step up" and help a neighboring pastor. This last note confirms Lifelong Formation Team: Br. Jahiro, Br. Reg, Sr. Dale, Sr. Katie, and Sr. Caritas.

Lifelong Formation Team's recent evening's discussion ranged over the following subjects/topics:

1) In discerning purpose, the LFT offers these key terms for consideration:

- Engagement
- Accountability
- Connection

2) Fostering engagement, accountability and connection: Is there a statute prohibiting a Novice from participating on a team?

3) Gather responses specific to LFT offering the Annual Transitus Service. Interview suggestions: Wirick, Canter, etc. Please offer your suggestions.

4). What is the benefit to the Professed members of OEF in reviewing OEF's Principles, Statues? How can LFT support engagement, accountability and connection?

The Lifelong Formation Team invites your input, wisdom and questions.

Pace e bene!

## A Yes/And, Not Either/Or Approach to Diversifying Our Order

By Br. Coyote Nabhan, OEF

When Brother Michael Vosler and I conversed the other night, I reminded them that I am very bad at resolutions -especially ones for New Year or Lent--but I have a soft spot for manifestos Walt Whitman-esque litanies (if only because Walt may have been the only person who slept at least once with every member of a President's (Lincoln's) Cabinet! So my question to you is whether we can just have a lyrical proclamation on our website and in our communication with inquirers and other orders after we have a formal resolution passed, that would go something like this (with enhancements by all of you):

We welcome you to the Radical Center of Franciscan traditions,

Where we hope you will join us in the joy of knowing that the Creator

Is alive and well, in the diversity of humans, creatures and dreams,

Here on this Earth and in other spiritual realms not of this planet, so WE WISH

To re-affirm, celebrate and clarify our Orders's ethical obligations and charisms

For offering sanctuary and sacred refugia for all who are at risk or dispossessed

Whether they declare ambiguity in their identities or remain allegiant to one,

Inviting all genders and gender-ambiguous individuals to be part of our Order,

Just as Saint Francis did through his loving friendship with Brother Jacoba,

Arguably the first known (while others were likely also cryptic)

Gender-ambiguous individual on the wayward Franciscan path;

Just as care for the diseased, and dispossessed was a daily task,

Because Francis knew and deeply loved *neuro-divergent* individuals

With mental, emotional or social behaviors who also loved God,

Just as St. Francis and St. Clare expressed through the care of lepers, the ill

or impaired through his inclusion of many neuro-special individuals

in his First, Second and Third orders, and in his preaching in the fields,

Just as they Cared for Creation, for ants on the path, to wolves wishing peace,

Just as Francis found ways to sustain contemplative practice beyond churches

Cultivating the First Churches of the Wild in caves on La Verna and Subasio,

Well before the celebration of the Other-Than-Human World came to him

In his Canticle of All Creatures, and in his daily worship and pastoral care,

Just as he himself walked to the Radical Center to bring peace, in a time of war

Between races, religions, city states and nations as he did when he bridged

The values and faiths with an Arab Sultan Al-Malik al-Kamil, kin to Salah ad-Din

in Egypt and with other Muslims on his way to al-Andalus and the Maghreb,

Just as he cared for immigrants, refugees and broken soldiers while traveling

Not only across Italy but beyond, finding empathy for those under stress

Yes/And, Not Either/Or... continued

And just as he recruited then came to love those of various ethnicities and races,

Whether educated or of humbler capacities throughout his own lifetime.

We in our Order do not exclusively regard or reify Francis alone, or with Clare.

For we are aware that he deferred to the wisdom of many in positions,

Above, below and to the Far Side of him, laughing at his own foibles

As frequently as any human can bear to do without also weeping.

And so we welcome you and any of your charisms- gifts you freely wish to give

And give away, since for Franciscans, poverty is giving up all the things

That may trip us up in our Christocentric devotion to God incarnate in all Creation.



Br. Owusu

Chapter Honors Our 80+ Siblings



Let there be cake!!!



You cut it! No, you're the most important!



Sr. Dale does the honors





# A Visit to The OLF Chapter



I had the privilege and joy of representing OEF at the 2025 Chapter of the Order of Lutheran Franciscans. We met from July 25 to 29 at the Bon Secours Retreat Center in Marriotsville, MD. I enjoyed the rhythm of worship, meals, meaningful conversations, Sabbath time, and community deliberations. I was joined by Verleah Kosloske, TSSF and Br. Desmond Alban, SSF as the other official visitors.

Some highlights of my experience included singing lots of liturgical music during the offices and Eucharistic celebrations written by our own Louis Canter, OEF; morning spiritual practices including prayerful art explorations and centering prayer; and warm reunions with siblings I had met in 2018, the last time I was the visitor.

We engaged in some familiar activities, like sending cards to members who could not be present, and in some enjoyable experiments. The gathered Chapter traveled to nearby Ellicott City, MD to attend Sunday worship at a local parish. It was such an invigorating experience of public witness. We even encountered a gentleman who was ready to inquire just based on the joyful spirit of the group. It made me curious and excited about what that would look like at an OEF Chapter or regional retreat.

During the Chapter, OLF officially installed a new minister general, Br. Jeff Brown; a new formation minister, Br. Ryan Roberts; and a new bursar (treasurer), Br. Mark Molter. Four new Novices made their novice vows and two brothers made life profession during the annual celebration liturgy. There was also great attention to the ELCA Churchwide Assembly (Triennial Conference) taking place in Phoenix, AZ. OLF is now officially an Independent Lutheran Organization, with full legal status under the denomination's Churchwide offices. This is akin to canonical recognition in the Anglican or Catholic tradition. With this year's election of a new presiding bishop, they will be receiving a

new denominational relator and are hoping to participate in the consecration and installation of the new leader on Saturday, October 4, 2025 (a perfect day to celebrate humility and peace in transforming the church and world!).

We engaged in really lovely peer triads, taking turns throughout the gathering for check-ins, rule reports, life sharing, and holy listening with curious questions from the two listeners. (I would highly recommend this for a future Chapter, we have done this in the past.)

There were also small group JPIC conversations, where people could share joys and concerns about the many dimensions of corporate discipleship that come with a Franciscan vocation. (It's been too long since we've done this, and I'd love to see it again.)

I brought greetings from The Servant Council and the whole Order, sharing a bit about the history of OEF and OLF. (Their founders began their Franciscan exploration with us.)

While dates have not been settled on, next year's Chapter will be in Chicago, IL and I hope an OEF sibling nearby will have the time to experience this lovely community in person.

Please don't hesitate to ask any clarifying questions!

Peace and everything good,

John Michael, OEF



## Canticle of June's Abundance

*A Franciscan Reflection*

By Stephen I. Weiss

### I.

Brother Sun has kissed the fields,  
And Sister Rain, in joy, has danced—  
All Earth sings out in greenest praise,  
A hymn of life, in root and branch.  
O June, your breath is holy balm,  
You cradle us in nature's psalm.

### II.

From sparrow's wing to blossom's bloom,  
Each soul of soil and sky confides:  
"There is enough, there is enough"—  
When hearts beat with the turning tides.  
We gather not to hoard or own,  
But share what Love has freely grown.

### III.

Let us walk with barefoot grace,  
In fields where peace and plenty dwell;  
Each step a vow to live in tune,  
Each breath a prayer, Emmanuel.  
As Francis knelt where lilies grew,  
We bloom when we give all to You.



## An Important Reminder

**Reminder! Nancy Menning is the OEF Treasurer. Contributions can be made by sending a check to Nancy (made out to "Order of Ecumenical Franciscans") at:**

**Order of Ecumenical Franciscans  
c/o Nancy Menning, Treasurer  
3175 Duke Snider Ave.  
Eugene, OR 97402**



## OEF Online Bible Study

This is a recurring meeting every Thursday. Each week's Bible reading will be announced on the OEF-Chat.

Join Zoom Meeting: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89760718708pwd=N2R0THcrWUpWSzlyM2N3eEdGdEF0QT09>

Meeting ID: 897 6071 8708 - Password - oef

7:30-8:30 PM ET,

6:30-7:30 PM CST,

5:30-6:30 PM MST

5:30-6:30 PM Arizona

4:30-5:30 PM PST,

7:30-8:30 PM Ecuador

1:30 pm -1:30 PM Friday in New Zealand

12:30 m -1:30 AM Friday in Ireland

9:30-10:30 AM Friday in Japan

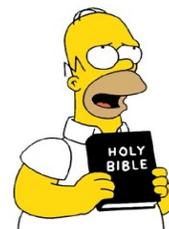
You will need a computer or a smart phone with a headset (and a camera would be good) to participate. I will give a brief ZOOM tutorial as we meet, and I can help people before the meeting gets connected. We can talk on the phone as we work things out.

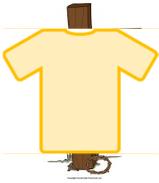
You are most welcome to join!

Br. Juniper, OEF

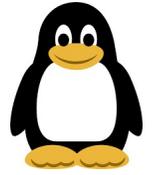
*\* OEF is opening a Google Workspace. I will shift bible study to this at the end of the summer. Please email [David@oeffranciscans.org](mailto:David@oeffranciscans.org) to set up your OEF Google workspace account*

*Juniper*





# Juniper Cup 2025!



Our mission this year was to create a mythical creature and explain how it would relate to St. Francis or St. Clare. Many imaginations were sparked by this challenge, and we had some delightful entries!

First up: Sr. Paula Clare

My creature is a mutation of an ancient amphibian...the brown hooded salamander is a little reddish brown creature who stays cloaked in the soft mud of ponds and rivers. When she sees a person walking near the river's edge, she comes out of her mud palace, and stands on her back legs and raises her brown hood to better see the bi-ped creatures.

She especially likes to see the occasional odd hooded bi-ped, whom she thinks looks a lot like her! They are brown and have hoods, too! They are often seen picking flowers and looking for heart shaped stones near the river.

She came to the river's edge when she saw a female bi-ped, with an odd shaved head...and her hood was around her neck not on top of her head. "Curious creature," she thought.

She brought people who were all bandaged up and walking funny, down to the river and bathed them! The little salamander felt her heart warm when she saw how gently the hooded woman was caring for and tending the bandaged ones.

The little salamander crept closer, and came to a rock beside the kind woman. Someone called her "Clare." She spoke very softly and smiled at the people she was caring for. She looked down and saw me sunning myself on a rock. "Oh no! Should I Run? Should I hide?!!!"

She said, "Well aren't you the odd little one? I like your brown hood! I like being beside the cool river streams, don't you?" The little brown hooded

salamander sat smiling, "I like the warm mud..." The woman smiled, and went back to her bathing and caring for the bandaged people.

The little hooded salamander thought it a wonderful thing to see someone with brown hood by the river helping other bi-peds. "Perhaps I will see her again tomorrow?" the little salamander said hopefully, and climbed back into the warm mud.



Juniper Cup... continued

Next, Stephen Weiss and the Lumilark:

## Featherlight Gospel

by the Lumilark

I perch where prayers are muttered low,  
not in stain glass or weens tting  
then lit the dark with songs unsung

I've follow saint wh do no teach  
I nest just out of sermon's ree  
and hum the dark with songs

I do not boast, I do not teach  
I neast just out of sermon's reach  
but I've danced in every tear yil

I flutter lmee, I do not teach —  
I've danced in every tear you knew  
but in the barefoit sacred fool

For Francis heard me long ago,  
but 've danced in every tear yu w  
and laughtd wan I'll lght your way

So when you dout.ne in the peu  
but I've danced in every tear there  
in crunbs of grace along the way

So when you doubt skia can  
hear, or feel to'd in every tear nere  
in crunbs in grace along the day.

— I' l dant d see me: I'll light your way



Then, from Br. Jahiro:

### The Pollen Crown

A flower of extraordinary luminescence, opened its petals each dawn in the vibrant meadows. Unlike its kin, who merely desired the sun's warmth and the bee's touch, Pollen Crown embodied a deeper desire. Its pollen, a glistening gold dust, held a secret — it carried fragments of forgotten dreams, whisperings of ancient magic that had long since disappeared from the world we once knew.

One day, a young Village boy named Francesco, known for his quiet solitude and a heart that yearned for wonder, stumbled upon the Pollen Crown. He was drawn to its magnificent glow, a

beacon in the dew kissed grass. As he reached out, a single golden speck of pollen detached and landed on his finger.

In that very moment, the world around Francesco glowed. The mundane transformed again. The chirping of crickets became an orchestration of pure melody, the rustling of leaves a comforting conversation. Francesco saw the hidden pathways of light that connected every living thing to one another, the silent stories held within the stones, and the laughter of the colorful wind itself. He understood the language of the earth, the joy of the rain, and the sorrow of the withering flowers.

With this newfound sight of the soul, Francesco became a bridge between the human world and the forgotten magical one. He would visit the Pollen Crown often, allowing its precious dust to touch him, to replenish his connection to the real world surrounding us all. He shared these dreams, not through grand pronouncements, but through quiet acts of kindness, through helping the lost find their way, and through reminding others of the beauty that lay just before them. The Pollen Crown, in turn, thrived, its golden dust spreading further with each of Francesco's compassionate and thoughtful steps, a silent testament to the power of a single bloom and the boy who dared to dream the dreams that sprouted from it.



(Continued on page 14)

Juniper Cup... continued

And finally,  
Sr. Katie & Sr. Chris:

Don't come too close. This creature, called "The Meep," is treacherous. He is an intergalactic criminal. We have him sedated, but Sister Chris is holding him, just in case.

Like many criminals, his story is a tragic tale. His homeworld, Meepdom, was a planet in a far galaxy. The Meep lived in the glorious light of a living sun, and all the Meep were as sweet as they were cute.

Then, one terrible day, the sun went mad and became psychedelic. The radiation mutated all of Meepkind into cruel beasts whose purpose in life was conquest and destruction. The Meep Army captured the Galactic Council, beheaded them and then ate them. Then Zaphod Beeblebrox, the president of the galaxy, sent special warriors from Endolia to fight the Meep.

The Endolians and the Meep fought for many years across the galaxy. The Meepish warriors chose to die rather than surrender, so this one, the leader, is the only one who survived. Do not be fooled by his cuteness; he was the most cruel and despicable of all. His real name is Beep, but he insists on being addressed as "The Meep" – not just "Meep," but "The Meep."

Our question is this: if The Meep had come across St. Francis, what would have happened?



The Meep



Would Francis have been able to tame him before being eaten?



A crude rendering

## A Parable About the Tender Tendril

By Sr. Deb Snider-Scott, OEF

Once upon a time there was a little Tender Tendril, lost (no vision) and couldn't grasp onto anything substantial! It seemed hopeless to the Tender Tendril! It could feel the warmth of the sun, the gentle breeze and the refreshing drops of rain on a hot day! But no anchor to be found. No guidance, just blindly grappling for something, anything! It knew time was running out.

Tender Tendril was stretching as far as it could, but there was only so far it could reach on its own. When all seemed lost and the Tender Tendril was ready to give way to the abyss of nothingness it felt a touch. It was an uncertain touch so fear set in with all of the what ifs.

What if, whatever that touch is, becomes forceful and snaps the Tender Tendril right in two? That would be the end of it. What if that touch is too rough in its attempt to make it grasp on and damages the Tender Tendril and it would never be the same?

Luckily for this little Tender Tendril the touch was gentle. The touch was respectful of its sensitivity and vulnerability. This touch slowly guided the Tender Tendril to what felt like a lifeline. This touch lingered patiently for the Tender Tendril to feel safe enough to relax and embrace the lifeline.

Even though there were no ears to hear, it has been told, that the touch whispered to the Tender Tendril as it let go, "Now you are grounded in certainty and can grow stronger! You are a part of something big! You have purpose! You are empowered! I'll be close by, watching and waiting if you need me, but I have every confidence that you are where you are called to be!"





## A Few Good Reads



For everyone, but especially Br. Speranza and others who engage in (or think they would like to engage in) the Braver Angels dialogues,

I encourage you to consider whether you have time to participate in this opportunity:

<https://homebrewedchristianity.lpages.co/democracy-in-tension-summit-info-page/>

Note:

- While there are some "livestreamed" conversations, all of the material is recorded, so you can engage with it as your schedule allows.
- You can pay anything you want to access the resources, including \$0, so cost is not a barrier.
- That said, you would still have to invest the time to actually watch the webinars, or you'll get nothing out of it (other than more email in your inbox).

I watched the first webinar this morning (by Robert Talisse on "Our Polarization Problem") and found it clear, wise, and helpful. (As always, your results may differ.)

Peace and all good,  
Nancy Menning, OEF

---

Two small books I chewed through this summer address issues about The Church, the 'church' institution and our faith practice.

The first is "Churchianity vs Christianity" by Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (2017, St Vladimir's Seminary Press, ISBN 978-0-88141-586-5) This little paperback, 133 pp, tackled a

rather famous interpretation of CS Lewis' differentiating Christians of a living faith from those more in love with the institutions of our faith. The Bloom book is a series of 9 talks he gave in 1990. Metropolitan Bloom never wrote a book, but many supporters wrote down his words to help bless the rest of us. "In these 9 talks, Metropolitan Anthony challenges us to move beyond mere "churchianity" to a true and living faith. He helps us to find our lofty calling in the familiar words of the creed, and he points to a path forward, both for individual believers and for our communities," (quoting the back cover) Indeed, he succeeds in inspiring us to have a balanced approach concerning religion and faith. We need the institution. We need what the institution conveys most of all. I encourage reading this little gem for your own encouragement, especially as you continue to see yourself heeding Francis' call to "Go, rebuild My church" and interpret that mission in the here and now.

The second book I've explored is "The Church Cracked Open" by Rev. Stephanie Spellers, an Episcopal priest. (2021, Church Publishing Incorporated, ISBN 9781640654242) The book is particularly aimed at The Episcopal Church but her insights, love and challenge can really apply to any 'old line' denomination struggling to keep its doors open especially since the COVID pandemic. The title includes this: "Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community". She explores the historic role of the church in endorsing the empire-oriented policies of the European church, the slave trade, oppression of indigenous peoples and their cultures in the name of Christ and how those ancient streams have contributed to the current decline of churches in the USA in particular.

(Continued on page 16)

A Few Good Reads... continued

After several depressing chapters, she points to signs of hope as the Church enters a process of kenosis (emptying of power after the example of Jesus Christ), developing solidarity with hurting humanity in need of healing and service, and discipleship as we walk in love. To be brief, I find her words to be a kind of call to greater service in the simplest of ways, not in grand programs designed to change the world, but in humble deeds of kindness and love. There is a workbook available for free that can be useful for this material in a group study setting. The book can be a painful read as the Church's complicity with the Pilates of the world is laid bare. Ultimately, the call to love is completely healing and reminds us all of the truth of Micah's prophetic words (6:8) "And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and the love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

David Wirick, OEF



***Andre Vauchez. St. Francis of Assisi, the Life and Afterlife of a Medieval Saint***  
(Yale U.P., 2013)

Scoured of romanticism and all the more relevant as a Pope soon after its publication selected this saint as his namesake, this new biography of Francis by an eminent medievalist skilled in the social construction of holiness signaled a welcome and timely arrival. Appearing in friar Michael F. Cusato's smooth translation from the French, its paperback reprint so rapidly may have attested to the alignment of the sudden shift at the Vatican with renewed interest, nine centuries later, about the Poor Man of Assisi. His career, centered in the same Italy and buffeted by conflicts from that same Rome, roamed as far as Egypt as he parlayed with Sultan Al-Kamir during the disastrous Fifth Crusade.

That bold foray reminds us of how a courtly young man from modest origins but social ambitions determined to realign power structures --to extend the conventional reach of Catholicism. André Vauchez stresses the need for detachment by modern observers from the legendary tales he analyzes which have been passed off as pious non-fiction since the thirteenth century. Any honest connection to Francis and his companions' irretrievable era, Vauchez admits, must first acknowledge the distance between the fervor and mindset of medieval believers and our own. Only then "does it become legitimate to ask ourselves what it is in the life and witness of the Poor Man of Assisi that still interests us". (xiii)

Around 1206, after a life of unspecified "sin" which featured a stint as a knight against Perugia followed by a year as a prisoner of war, Francesco de Bernardone fell ill and reflected. He resolved to live in the world but against it, appealing to the gospel call for radical evangelicalism. At twenty-five, he rejected his father Pietro's jurisdiction. To respectable Assisi, this cloth merchant's son appeared a well-raised ladies' man turned wayward madman, as he consorted with lepers and dwelt in a ruined stable by the swamps. Beyond the city walls, his rustic residence proved symbolic: Francesco chose to turn away his father as he turned around his loyalty. He placed himself--allegedly naked and symbolically then cloaked by the bishop's mantle--under ecclesiastical protection. No outlaw, Vauchez situates his subject within this "logic of exclusion:" Francis joins the outcasts.

Rather than fleeing the city, as hermits and monks, those restless and resentful of a Church more concerned with clerics than with the Gospel flocked to Francis. He marginalized himself, beside those inside as well as outside cities, socially displaced by economic expansion as

(Continued on page 17)

## A Few Good Reads... continued

feudalism gave way to capitalism. Francis never aimed to found a religious order, but others took notice. Voluntary poverty, Vauchez explains, drew nobles and the emerging middle class to Francis' idealism. Around 1209, they became "little brothers", Friars Minor approved by the pope as legitimate when fears of heresy by similarly countercultural factions had created papal crackdowns upon many who revived the ascetic directives of wandering bands and lay communes eager to imitate the wandering apostles. Allied with simple peasants and unlettered workers, a few rapidly expanded into thousands of friars. They, for a while, "restored to the Beatitudes a timeliness they had lost for centuries." (38)

Vauchez's interpretation of how Francis acted upon one of the harsher demands of the Gospels undergoes his scrutiny. Did Francis travel across the Mediterranean to seek martyrdom at the hands of the Muslims whom he and his fellow Catholics barely understood, or did he seek to convert the Sultan in Egypt and end the Fifth Crusade? Alternatively, did Francis advance, as Vauchez prefers to suggest, a peacemaker's role, aware of Jewish and Islamic differences, yet integrating them into tolerance? After all, from Francis' time onward, Franciscans continue to occupy Holy Land Shrines as chosen custodians, recognized by all peoples of the Middle East as appointed caretakers. While Vauchez appears to choose of the three rationales for Francis' mission the one meshing best with our contemporary ideals, he makes his case based on a careful reading of eyewitness reports proving that this dramatic exchange of mendicant and potentate occurred, cross-referenced in verified chronicles.

The tendency for gossip and adoration to inflate popular claims about Francis--as rumors of his piety spawned miracles straight out of the

Gospels and imitated heroism imported from saints' lives of wonder workers--means that separating hagiography from veracity frustrates any historian. The legend had already begun to overwhelm this physically unassuming but spiritually sincere man, who wore himself out with austerities and fervor. By 1219, leading his Fraticelli of little brothers turned international fellowship left an overwhelmed Francis seeking help from the Vatican. Gradually, this Ordo Fratrum Minorum turned into an organization. Inevitably, the early charism of its stunted, homely founder, who when he preached turned eloquent preacher, faded.

He had returned from the Holy Land diseased in more than one fashion, and from 1220 on, Francis delegated authority and served his brethren more by example than words, to imprint his example upon (or even shock) those whom he directed. He both tore down and built up his holy reputation. This "extreme tension" in Vauchez's analysis dominates the final six years of his life.

In an "upside-down world," Francis rejected money's reduction of all people and things to their exchange value. Instead, his "minority" invited all Christians to see the face of the Crucified One "in our poverty and our infirmity," as its founder reflected when he entered the ranks of the destitute.

Increasing solitude, the reception of that Crucified One's visible wounds as the Stigmata (an issue handled by his biographer with tact), heightened anxiety over the discipline of friars after what had been a casual acceptance in the early years of unsuitable candidates: these for Vauchez add up to Francis' opposition to his Order's "culture of results," A hierarchy of priests within its membership, and of bishops overseeing it, left the free-spirited nature of its origins compromised, if inevitably.

(Continued on page 18)

## A Few Good Reads... continued

Papal, legal, and clerical functionaries imposed restrictions and compromises, as all feared heresy.

Francis' death in 1226 was followed rapidly by his canonization. A giant basilica grew over his grave. Assisi figured to rake in pilgrimage profits while the commune grumbled over taxes. Rome maneuvered to capitalize on the saint's sanctity to counter competing Italian and European interests. This led to the cult of the saint, and the popularization of the Poor Man. Quickly after his death, his fellow citizens rushed to spirit his body into the walls of the city, so as to lay claim to a new patron.

O.F.M. soon signified a bureaucratic entity, faithful to the Church's bidding despite the friars' emergence defined by a fundamentally fierce rejection of any property. Rome required stability, fearing radical or non-clerical dissension. The Order decided against its founder's wishes for freedom loyal to the Gospel, to avoid attachment to any earthly goods. This would fracture the Franciscans into persecuted, dissident Spirituals with a strict observance, and the Community, a majority (some later to be called Conventuals) dwelling in convents, owning them and the goods they required. Even during the life of Francis--given The Order's need for training learned friars who used books and erected holy edifices, practical demands for possessing "immovable goods" clashed with its founder's desire to open a movement to all men and women, based on the itinerant and property-less Christ. The prickly distinction between owning vs. using material threaded this sharp needle, as papal control gave a sort of scholastic allowance or legal fiction to enable the friars to amass holdings and libraries for their urban renewal campaign.

The middle third of Vauchez's study examines the medieval aftermath of Francis'

life; his fanciful or sober biographers in a dozen accounts and his posthumous handlers shaped impressions which Giotto's allegorical, dreamlike murals for Assisi's basilica (this book lacks illustrations, diminishing its usefulness as a study of his "afterlife") commemorated for visitors, from around the year 1300.

"Whereas the rules and constitutions tended to fix and thus freeze Francis' spiritual experience and whereas the bulls of canonization betrayed it, the hagiographical account of his deeds calls for a creative assimilation of his message." (187) Despite conveying this aesthetic by text alone, Vauchez explains the transmission of a man with a stigmata, preaching among birds and to a wolf, and whose envisioned apostolate resembled in lore and depiction the deeds of his divine exemplar and predecessor. An idealized Francis as "alter Christus" (a "second Christ") had replaced whatever living memory had sustained as testimony to the Poor Man from Assisi.

This angered Protestants. A 1542 attack compared the Franciscan legendary texts to the Qur'an, both daring to supersede the Bible. Voltaire would favor noble Saladin over fanatical Francis. Goethe visited Assisi to see its ruined Temple of Minerva, but he never bothered with the enormous basilica.

Yet the Grand Tour popularized in the early nineteenth century revived sympathy for that city's patron saint and leading attraction. Another parallel emerged. Francis as a New Adam, a model of natural simplicity, appealed to intellectuals and artists seeking an alternative to clerical ideology and political conformity. By century's end, Paul Sabatier's influential biography consolidated two new versions of Francis. As proto-Renaissance "troubadour of genius," au courant with French chansons, and as an anticlerical proto-Protestant reformer,

(Continued on page 19)

## A Few Good Reads... continued

this humanist pioneer captivated more worldly Europeans.

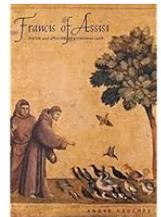
This part of Vauchez's study rushes by in seventeen pages. Far too little for far too great an influence. Tolstoy praised Francis; Antonio Gramsci denigrated him, but for both reactions, we barely hear why. We learn only in an aside the Peace Prayer attributed to Francis was never penned by him; it comes from the end of the nineteenth century. The impact of Francis on the environmental movement, and the recent ecumenical peace meetings held (at least until Pope Benedict's suppression after he was elected) at Assisi combine for but a page and a half of coverage.

Instead, this medieval historian explicates upon Francis' own writings. A simply educated layman, he never possessed a complete Bible. He centered his life not on learning, but around the spiritual transformation of those who wished not to reject the workaday realm but to live in it, renewed. "He does not flee the world; he plunges himself into it without prejudice or ulterior motive because, if it is necessary to renounce the possession of goods and creatures, it is legitimate for one to enjoy them on the condition that their enjoyment be referred to the One who has given such things to us for our own good." (282) He eloquently paraphrases the mentality of Francis. As here, Vauchez guides his secular or religious readers into the complexity beneath the birdbath statue, or the bearded brown-clad fellow.

Never reducing Francis to a homespun rabble-rouser pitted against a recalcitrant bureaucracy, Vauchez propounds Francis as not a social former, but a prompter of a "second conversion" of the world to the Gospel message, through which men and women would be able to recognize once again the infinite love which God had shown them, and consequently, to behave in like manner in their relations with each other

and creation." (287)

But the Church welcomed Francis and his upstarts without "really understanding the whole import and meaning of his message." (292) Vauchez places Rome's integration of his movement into its framework as the only way Francis' "intuition" could have been safeguarded and transmitted, so it endured. As Francis has been daringly or foolishly equated with Christ for at least eight centuries, this unsettling comparison may be oddly appropriate: it kept his followers, as well as his detractors writing about his astonishing gambit, to live as Jesus did, without goods or cares. For a time, it worked. Compromised, the movement survives. For Vauchez, this is better than the alternative. His presentation of this Umbrian knight turned "poor and begging" imitator of Christ, proves as fascinating and debatable as the Man from Galilee whom the Poor Man of Assisi tried to emulate.



P.S. This in-depth review complements the one in our penultimate issue (#151) about the concurrently issued biography by Augustine Thompson, O.P., which focuses upon the life rather than the afterlife. I went into detail on both to show the nuances of each scholar.



Hi, y'all!!!



*Fiddlesticks*  
 c/o Christine Petersen, OEF  
 934 Round Oak Ct.  
 Nekeosa, WI 54457  
 U.S.A.

***\*Articles for the Thanksgiving/Christmas Issue are being accepted immediately.  
 The deadline is October 15, 2025.***



## *Anonymous Poem*



If you will always assume  
 The person sitting next to you  
 Is the Messiah  
 Waiting for some human kindness,  
 You will soon learn to weigh your words and  
 watch your hands,  
 And if he so chooses  
 Not to reveal himself  
 In your time,  
 It will not matter.  
 - Author unknown



- Shared by Crystal Minugh-Brutscher, n/OEF



## *Song: Let Us Go Back*

*By, Vita Sackville-West*



Let us go back together to the hills.  
 Weary am I of palaces and courts,  
 Weary of words disloyal to my thoughts,—  
 Come, my beloved, let us to the hills.

Let us go back together to the land,  
 And wander hand in hand upon the heights;  
 Kings have we seen, and manifold delights,—  
 Oh, my beloved, let us to the land!

Lone and unshackled, let us to the road  
 Which holds enchantment round  
 each hidden bend,  
 Our course uncompassed  
 and our whim its end,  
 Our feet once more, beloved, to the road!

-Shared by Br. Juniper Robertson  
 & Br. Stephan Gerhardt