



# FIDDLESTICKS

Issue 156

Thanksgiving/Advent 2025



## A Historic Act of Restoration: FSPA Returns Arbor Vitae Property to Lac du Flambeau Tribe\*

October 31, 2025

In the spirit of relationship and healing, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration transferred the Marywood Franciscan Spirituality Center property to the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, the original caretakers of the land. The transfer closed on Friday, October 31, and is the first known return of Catholic-owned land to a Tribal Nation as an act of repair for colonization and residential boarding schools.

Located on Trout Lake in Arbor Vitae, Wisconsin, Marywood rejoined the land base of the Lac du Flambeau Tribe – serving as a site for Ojibwe culture and traditions, re-establishing vital lakeshore access, and potentially providing housing for healthcare workers. The property was sold to the tribe for \$30,000, the amount of cash the sisters paid for the property in 1966, just over 1% of its current market value.

The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa are a sovereign Tribal Nation located in northern Wisconsin, part of the larger Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) people whose traditional territories span the Great

Lakes region. Historically, their ancestral homelands covered vast areas of what is now Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota, rooted in a deep spiritual and cultural connection to the land and waterways.

Today, the Tribe’s reservation represents only a fraction of those traditional territories. Rebuilding and protecting Tribal land bases is vital to sustaining sovereignty — it restores the ability for self-determination, cultural preservation and community development. A strong land base supports essential services, creates employment opportunities and provides a foundation for long-term economic and social resilience.

*“This return represents more than the restoration of land — it is the restoration of balance, dignity, and our sacred connection to the places our ancestors once walked,” says John D. Johnson, Sr., Tribal President. “The Franciscan Sisters’ act of generosity and courage stands as an example of what true healing and partnership can look like. We are proud to welcome Marywood home, to ensure it continues to serve future generations of the Lac du Flambeau people.”*

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## A Historic Act of Restoration... continued

Since 1966, the FSPA community has stewarded Marywood as a place for spiritual renewal, contemplation and holistic living. Facing challenges to its viability as a spirituality center, the sisters began to discern a future for the land that was aligned with the community's three priorities: right relationship, joyful Gospel living, and the equity and inclusion of all.

"The return of Marywood is both a conclusion and a beginning," shares Sister Sue Ernster, FSPA President. "We honor the decades of FSPA ministry, and we see this transition as a hopeful step toward healing and right relationship."

The sisters have also been in a process of reckoning with the history of St. Mary's Catholic Indian Boarding School, which they administered from 1883 to 1969. As the community listened to more Tribal voices, they uncovered how Indian Boarding Schools were designed to break cultural continuity—separating children from their families, suppressing Native identity and paving the way for the large-scale seizure of Native homelands.

"It was painful to address our complicity, but we knew it had to be done," reflects Sister Eileen McKenzie, former FSPA president. "We wanted to leave a legacy of healing." With support from partners at Land Justice Futures, the community began to explore creative solutions for the property that might help heal the land and the past.

"Christian colonization has been the cornerstone of our modern property system for 500 years, authorizing a small elite to make decisions about the land," says Brittany Koteles, Co-Founder and Director of Land Justice Futures. "But we don't have to keep repeating the cycle of commodification and extraction. This historic act is proof that we can choose a different path forward."

Most Rev. James P. Powers, Bishop of the Diocese of Superior, called the transfer "a

tangible act of justice and reconciliation that flows directly from the heart of our Catholic faith. Following in the spirit of Pope Francis's own commitment toward repentance, we pray this action will help build on a future of mutual respect and trusted relationships with the Lac du Flambeau Tribe, acknowledging their connection to this land."

The sisters hope that the example continues to ripple outward. "We hope to model, especially for Catholic religious congregations, that it is possible to pursue alternatives to conventional land transitions," says Sister Sue Ernster. "The land now lives into its deeper purpose as a place of renewal and we trust and pray that it will plant seeds of cultural renewal for generations to come."

The Lac du Flambeau Business Development Corporation is assisting the Tribe in the purchase and return of this historic property. "Land is the foundation of sovereignty, and this moment represents both respect for the Tribe's history and a path toward a stronger, more self-sufficient future. Through Tribal ownership and LDF Business Development Corp management, this property will create opportunities for growth, employment, and community benefit, ensuring it continues to serve the people of Lac du Flambeau for generations to come," says LDF Business Development Corp., CEO Larry Turner.

President Johnson adds, "The Lac du Flambeau Tribe extends heartfelt gratitude to the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration for their commitment to healing and justice. This land, known to our people for centuries, carries the songs, stories, and spirits of our ancestors. As it returns to our care, we honor their memory by continuing to live in harmony with the waters, forests, and all living things that make this place sacred. The circle is being made whole once again.

This news release was written in collaboration with Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration and the [Lac du Flambeau Business Development Corporation](#).

*\*Reprinted with permission from the FSPA Newsletter*

## Brushes, Barbers and Beggars: Lessons from Brother Martin

by Stephen Weiss



As the crisp November air creeps in and our thoughts turn toward the faithful departed, the Church also gifts us with a little-known miracle-worker, barber-surgeon, solace-giver and improbable saint: St. Martin de Porres. He gives us an invitation, wrapped in humble clothing and trimmed hair, to reflect. So, settle in: I promise no trimming of ears or shaving of beards in this article (though if you happen to be a barber, you might mentally relate).

Born in Lima, Peru in 1579, Martin was the son of a Spanish nobleman and a freed African slave-woman. At a young age, he apprenticed to a barber-surgeon — because in his time “barber” meant more than “trim the fringe and tidy up.” Later he became a lay brother in the Dominican Order. Although he was not initially admitted as a full professed religious, his life exploded into holiness anyway — a reminder that the Church’s “VIP status” is less about titles and more about service.

Martin dedicated himself to the poor, the sick, and yes, the animals — cats, dogs, mice included. So, in short: barber to the broken, friend to the forgotten, saint for the surprising.

November tends to tilt our thoughts toward mortality, memory, and mercy. We remember the saints, we remember the faithful departed, we remember that our own finish line waits somewhere ahead. In that mood, Martin is perfect. He shows us: you don’t have to be an archbishop, a cardinal, or wear golden vestments to be holy. You just have to show up. He turned the ordinary tasks of caring for bodies and souls into extraordinary holiness.

If I were to imagine Martin strolling through our modern church world, I can hear him muttering under his breath: “So, you’re worried about your

title and your profile, and I’m the guy who wrestled mice in the infirmary and patched a slave’s wound.”

The beauty of his life is the intersection of the ordinary and the sacred. Barber-tools as instruments of mercy, scrubbed wounds as places of God’s presence. Stray animals as companions instead of nuisances, he shrugs off prestige and embraces presence.

In our culture — yes, even in the Church — we often fall into the trap of “look at me” holiness: speaking loudly, posting photos, claiming titles. Martin flips the script. He says: > “How about just showing up for the least, the overlooked, the unglamorous?”

And he did. With humility, with humour (though our sources don’t state he cracked jokes, I suspect he would have), and with relentless charity.

Maybe you’re not a founder of a mission hospital or a well-known preacher. Perhaps you’re a volunteer, a cleaner, a teacher, an office worker, a parent. Like Martin, your “ordinary” tasks can become holy when done out of love. The poor, the sick, the marginalized — Martin’s radar was tuned to them. He didn’t wait for “nice conditions.” He didn’t wait for recognition. He saw need and responded. In November, when we recall our mortality, let us also recall our obligation to the living needy as part of our own spiritual economy.

From cats and dogs to mice (yes, mice), Martin treated creation like it mattered — because it does. In a world fraying under climate stress, consumerism, and neglect of the environment, the spirit of Martin prompts us: “Hey, even that stray cat outside the parish hall... yes, it matters.”



(Continued on page 4)

Brother Martin... continued

So next time someone brags about their fancy vestments, their new "leadership role," or "We're the most dynamic parish in town," remember: Martin didn't need any of that. He had a razor, a bowl of water, a towel, and a heart for the wounded. He didn't say: "Let me analyze the metrics of evangelization." He said: "Patch the wound. Feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. And by the way, my mouse-friend here wants a crumb."

As the autumn leaves drift down and we prepare for Advent's hush, remember: holiness is not a closed vault reserved for the mighty. It's a barber's bowl, a patient's bed, a stray kitten's food dish. "Brushes, barbers and beggars," that's Martin's legacy. It invites us in. No pomp. No big fanfare. Just faithful presence.

So, if you'll permit me in a Franciscan-twist, let's tie our own sandals, take up the humble towel of service, and join Brother Martin in the marketplace of mercy. And if someone comments on your habit of chatting to the parish cat? You'll just smile knowingly and say: "Ah yes! Martin taught me well."

May the prayers of St. Martin de Porres accompany us this November, and may our lives reflect his quiet, humorous, consistent compassion. Amen.



## United Church of Christ

### Prayer for Victims of Hurricane Melissa

Dear Friend(s):

On October 28th, Hurricane Melissa made landfall in Jamaica as a Category 5 storm, one of the most powerful and destructive Category 5 storms on record in the Caribbean. Its devastation also impacted Haiti and Cuba.

Presently, 13,000 people in Jamaica remain in shelters and 34 fatalities have been reported – a number that is expected to rise as search and rescue efforts continue. Authorities in Haiti report 25 fatalities, with that number also expected to rise in the coming days.

At this time, we are issuing an appeal to help immediate and long-term recovery efforts in these Caribbean countries. The primary needs at this recovery stage are shelter, safe drinking water, sanitation, healthcare and food. Please consider making a donation to support our recovery efforts. Your generous support will be used by our partners in the areas of greatest need.

- Through ACT Alliance and Church World Service, the UCC is working to get resources for those who need them.
- Through Global Ministries, we are also in contact with our partners in Jamaica, Cuba, and Haiti and are working quickly to accompany and support their response efforts.

The UCC has posted a prayer and a short statement in response to the hurricane.

Please consider making a gift today. Thank you for your past support of disaster relief efforts that have rebuilt communities around the world. We do this work through your generosity.

Sincerely,  
Michelle Carver  
Philanthropy Director



Donate here: [https://support.ucc.org/HurricaneMelissa?inf\\_contact\\_key=e7d4859783dce0efa5d44047371dcc6af651f238aa2edbb9c8b7cff03e0b16a0](https://support.ucc.org/HurricaneMelissa?inf_contact_key=e7d4859783dce0efa5d44047371dcc6af651f238aa2edbb9c8b7cff03e0b16a0)



## Words From The Servant Council



Peace and All Good from your Servant Council,

We are four months in now. What have we been up to? We meet via Zoom every Sunday.

At what time? Well, for Kelly in Arizona, I think it is 2pm. For Juniper, in Winnipeg, I think it is 3pm. For Markie, in Indiana, it is 4pm. For Shoshanah, in Connecticut, it is 5pm. And for Neal, in Ireland, it is 10pm.

As a newly formed Council, we are still finding our unique way of working together. We bring our willing spirits and our different gifts, along with a shared passion and trusting hope that each of us, individually, and together as an Order, can faithfully bear Christ's love and light.

We pray for one another and for our Order daily. We ask you to pray for us as well. We have received thoughts and concerns from some members, and welcome more sharing and conversation at any time.

Our charge according to our Statutes (Article V. A) is "...to ensure the healthy and effective administration of The Order; to support The Order community in its Life and Witness, and to represent The Order to the wider Church and the world.

Servant Council Members are trusted to seek the well-being of the entire Order and are accountable to the membership." To this end, we have been in conversation and consultation with representatives of the Formation Team, Ongoing Formation for the Professed, and the Tech and Communications Team. Members have represented OEF at the annual Chapter meetings.

In the coming weeks and months, we look forward to more conversations with others serving our Order. There has been a notable shift in those serving on various teams. Some are continuing the good work they have been doing. Some are taking a well-deserved and needed respite. We offer our gratitude and encourage patience as each committee/team discerns their best work.

Going forward, we seek to strengthen our communication and deepen our understanding in order to better serve you. We look forward to an in-person Servant Council Meeting in January in Chicago. We will continue our weekly meetings.

As the world turns, and the seasons change, we wish you peace. Share your Light; love one another, always and everywhere.

Submitted by Shoshanah on Behalf of your Servant Team: Juniper, Kelly, Markie, Neal, and Shoshanah



## OEF Life and Witness Questions for Professed Members

Blessing and grace be with you. Your OEF Servant Council wishes you peace and all good as we pass from the recently celebrated season of Francistide and begin to approach Advent.

As a new Servant Council, we have initially prioritized our focus on these areas:

- Using our external voice via the tools of the internet.
- Improving our internal life by utilizing Google Workspace capabilities.
- Understanding how to build up each other as we speak the works of the Gospel with our lives where God has placed us.
- Understanding how to care for and support one another as we live our vocations within our "local" Christian communities, with the support and nourishment of our "local" church homes.

Some of you might be aware that your Servant Council is charged by our OEF Statutes in Section V. A.1.b.ii. to conduct an annual discernment on community *Life and Witness*:

*At any time, but especially during Lent, members of the Order are asked to prayerfully reflect upon the Life and Witness of our Order. Each member is invited to share these reflections with the Council. Taking these reflections into consideration, the Council will prepare a report on the same which will be presented annually at Chapter, with copies sent to the membership.*

This year, your Servant Council is trying a new approach to this discernment. We are starting early, not waiting until Lent. More importantly, we are explicitly inviting each professed member to share their reflections with your Servant Council. In doing this, we are augmenting the unsolicited sharing that the Servant Council typically receives with an official call for all of our Professed siblings to prayerfully respond to three questions. We believe these responses should provide the Servant Council with a better insight into our siblings' *Life and Witness*.

Those three questions are:

**1. How are you putting your Franciscan calling into action in both your faith community and in your community at large?**

**2. In what ways are you being called to "rebuild the church" in your life and as a witness of Christ?**

**3. What are some of the things OEF does or could do to help you in these callings?**

Please give these questions your thoughtful consideration. Then, all you need to do is hit "reply" to the E-Mail and type your responses to the three questions in that reply. Alternatively, you can just send your responses in an E-Mail to **[LifeAndWitness@OEFFranciscans.org](mailto:LifeAndWitness@OEFFranciscans.org)**.

Your responses are intended for the Servant Council's use and your detailed responses will not be shared without explicit permission from you.

**We are asking just the Professed, as we understand that those in formation are regularly writing and communicating with the Formation Team.**

As always, you can reach out to the Servant Council at any time - the best way to reach us is via our group E-Mail ID: **[ServantCouncil@OEFFranciscans.org](mailto:ServantCouncil@OEFFranciscans.org)**

Peace and blessings

Your OEF Servant Council (Shoshana, Juniper, Markie, Kelly, Neal)

Let us *consider*  
our callings,  
let us *reflect*  
on our  
responsibilities, and  
let us *follow*  
*Jesus Christ*

Thomas S. Monson

**Advent Reflection shared by Seaghan O'Murchu n/OEF**

**“ADVENT” BY THOMAS MERTON**

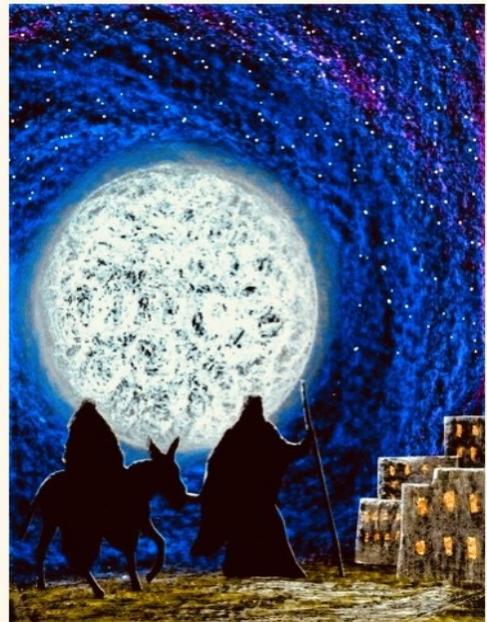
Charm with your stainlessness these winter nights,  
 Skies, and be perfect! Fly, vivider in the fiery dark, you quiet meteors,  
 And disappear.  
 You moon, be slow to go down,  
 This is your full!

The four white roads make off in silence  
 Towards the four parts of the starry universe.  
 Time falls like manna at the corners of the wintry earth.  
 We have become more humble than the rocks,  
 More wakeful than the patient hills.

Charm with your stainlessness these nights in  
 Advent,  
 holy spheres,  
 While minds, as meek as beasts,  
 Stay close at home in the sweet hay;  
 And intellects are quieter than the flocks that  
 feed by starlight.

Oh pour your darkness and your brightness  
 over all our solemn valleys, You skies: and  
 travel like the gentle Virgin,  
 Toward the planets' stately setting,

Oh white full moon as quiet as Bethlehem!





## Contemplative Practice as A Key to Sustaining Our Franciscan Charisms and Healing The World

Br. Coyote Nabhan



There are, of course, many forms of prayers, and Franciscan traditions, no doubt embrace them all. And yet, Franciscan writer Murray Bodo has made a valuable contribution by contrasting what he calls Franciscan Prayers for “Todas Cosas,” such as the Laudato Si: Canticum for All Creatures; and silent (wordless) Prayers of The Nada, such as contemplative practice of the Desert Mothers and Fathers embraced by contemporaries such as Thomas Merton, Richard Rohr, Ilia Delio, Barbara Holmes, James Finley and Henri Nouwen. We cannot underscore enough how daily contemplative practice is not antithetical to, but underpinning of Franciscan Action. If spiritually motivated activists burn out or slip into depression while fighting the Good Fight or making Good Trouble, we all lose. Instead, every Franciscan needs her or his well of peace and immersed presence in the Spirit recharged. The more one gives time to contemplative practice, the deeper, richer, lighter AND darker it may take you into the hands of the Creator. We know that Jesus of Nazareth devoted as much or more time to contemplative practice in the caves above the River Jordan, in the garden-orchards of Gethsemane, out in the Sea of Galilee or in the barrancas above Jericho, as he devoted to being a street preacher and healer.

And we know that our beloved St. Francis walked that same path by sequestering himself in the forest sanctuaries of Monte La Verna and Monte Subasio above Assisi as he spent engaging with lepers, Muslims, the poor, infirm or marginalized. Contemplation and ethical Christian action are two sides of the same coin, not diametrically opposed to one another. I ask you to practice both, and not privilege one

above the other. Of course, knowing full well that everything has its season, as does every precious moment of silence in a world dominated by infomercials, Zooms, podcasts, ads, and “heavy mental” music! Our Order of Ecumenical Franciscans always makes time at our Convocations for silent contemplative prayer, but that discipline must flourish in your daily life as well, so that we can hear our Creator, rather than incessantly petitioning Her, Him or Beloved Other for favors and dispensations. Taking silence seriously is as important as embracing Franciscan song, story, humor, and participation in the Blessed Sacraments that unite us as the Body of Christ.

The reason I ask you to reflect again upon something that you do in your own practice is simple: I am not the only one in need of healing right now; our world, from Gaza City and Kyiv to Portland, Chicago and Los Angeles are in need of healing from the wounds and divides in our worlds and within our ourselves. I do not sense I can heal deeply enough to be a good ally and Brother to all of you unless I take contemplative practice as the deepest daily gesture that we are gifted as humans to engage in; all else follows from that, because it is key to our direct relationships with Christ, the Virgin, Creator and Creation. I would ask you to pray for me at this moment when I’m suffering from multiple accidents and disabilities, but I would rather that you do not pray for “me” (whoever that is) in words and petitions, but in the silence of immersion in the Holy Spirit.

Yours, Brother Coyote, *Holobiont*



## A Double Ordination!

Dear all,

Peace. I am asking for your prayers as I {was} Ordained a deacon on Sunday, October 26, and will be ordained a Priest on February 7 in the Ecumenical Catholic Church USA. I have been in some serious discernment for over a year and found I needed to make a change.

Blessings to you all.  
Louis



**Congratulations, Br. Louis!!!**

*\* Stay tuned for an update from Feb. 7 in the next issue!*

## OEF Online Bible Study

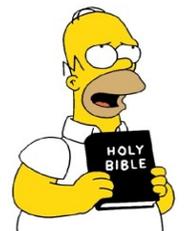
This is a recurring meeting every Thursday. Each week's Bible reading will be announced on the OEF-Chat.

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

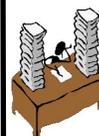
You will need a computer or a smart phone with a headset (and a camera would be good) to participate. I will give a brief ZOOM tutorial as we meet, and I can help people before the meeting gets connected. We can talk on the phone as we work things out.

You are most welcome to join!  
 Br. Juniper, OEF



## 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**





# A VISIT FROM BR'ER BRUCE

BY SISTER CHRIS, OEF



'Twas the day before Tuesday  
And all 'round this place,  
A flurry of activity  
There was no time to waste.



A hospitality opportunity!  
A Franciscan treat!  
A guest was expected.  
The house had to be neat.

A brother on pilgrimage  
To places out west,  
Would be needing a meal  
and a decent night's rest.



Provisions were laid in  
And menus were planned  
Something simple, I think,  
But certainly NOT canned!



The guest room was cleaned  
With a lick and a prayer  
That no one would notice  
the dust bunnies there.

Cat fur brushed away  
And cats banished elsewhere,  
Would cut down on  
At least one more layer of cat hair.

Guest bathroom was sanitized  
Quick as a wink  
With clean towels hung  
By the shower and sink.



The bathtub was scrubbed  
And off-limits to cat play  
Guaranteeing a fur ball-free  
Shower next day



Then a text was received  
Surprise, surprise!  
Bruce would arrive early  
A blessing in disguise!

I was forced to dispense  
with Martha and her chores,  
And be Mary,  
At peace with the unvacuumed  
floors.



Bruce arrived with a hug  
And immediately sat  
On a chair that was claimed  
As a bed by the cats!



Hastily offered a chair  
with less fuzz,  
With grace, Br'er Bruce opted  
to rest where he was.

We talked, then got Bruce  
settled into his room  
sweeping up bits of  
cat scratcher cardboard  
with a broom.

A short walk before dinner,  
To work out the kinks,  
Bruce returned to an offer  
of Bubly drinks



## A Visit From Br'er Bruce... continued



Then a meal - vegetarian!  
(I forgot Bruce was not.)  
but it was a decent meal  
And at least it was hot!

The evening was passed  
in fellowship and peace  
A little talk, a little reading  
And some chocolate treats!



The cats, still banished  
Stayed in Mom's room instead.  
Allowing Br'er Bruce  
An undisturbed bed.

Next day, Bruce woke early  
Rested and revived.  
And found plenty of breakfast  
To prepare for his long drive.



With a hug from Shoshanah,  
He was Sioux City - bound.  
Prayers for traveling mercies  
Were shared all around.

As Br'er Bruce drove off  
in his trusty old car,  
I couldn't help thinking:  
How lucky we are!



To have siblings - family  
Both near and far  
Who will welcome us  
And treat us with care where we are.



This OEF family  
Is a blessing, my friends!  
May we never forget to be grateful.  
Amen.



A thankful  is a happy 



*\*Disclaimer:*

*The "talent" displayed here  
was stolen, to be blunt  
From my father, who wrote  
Clues for Christmas scavenger hunts.*

*The rest was "borrowed" from  
Clement Moore's verse,  
Or caused by over-exposure  
To old Dr. Seuss!*



# *Lifelong Formation Station*



On September 7, members of the Lifelong Formation Team plus a few other interested people met on Zoom to determine the work of the team. There has, in recent months, been a good bit of discussion in the order about the need for lifelong companions—people to whom professed members are officially accountable. The Lifelong Formation Team was originally formed, we think, to make sure that each professed member is connected with a companion. The team also wanted to provide worship opportunities for the whole order—along with fellow Franciscans from other orders. The latter may have grown up during the coronavirus pandemic, when regional groups could not meet in person.

Somewhere along the way, the team began focusing on the worship gatherings and not the connections between Professed and their companions.

When concerns began to be raised about this gap in the team's responsibilities, the Lifelong Formation Team decided that we needed to go back to the drawing board. We knew that linking Professed members with companions needed to be the priority, but we also wondered if the worship gatherings were valued by the members. We sent out a question asking if the order wanted us to continue preparing worship gatherings, and we received a number of positive responses. We decided that we needed to do both.

At that point, we recognized that those two responsibilities called for two different skill sets. So we divided into two teams. The next step

was to discern our individual gifts and leanings, and to decide which team we felt called to join.

Ron Nuss-Warren, Dale Carmen, David Wirick, Samuel Loudenslager and I were present, with Reg Weeks trying unsuccessfully to join the Zoom meeting. Dale, Samuel, and David expressed their discernment that they were being called to oversee the assignment of lifelong companions.

Katie, Ron, and Reg expressed their feeling of being interested in continuing some form of online, international, inter-Franciscan worship services. With the Servant Council's blessings, the "companion" team and the "liturgical" team will now go their own ways.

If you feel called to either of these teams or have ideas about how we can go about our work, please let Katie or Samuel know.





# Hope, AI and Faith

by, Br. Salachar Bowman, OEF



*“... hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.”*  
Romans 5:5 NASB

Artificial intelligence isn't a guest visiting for a season, it has moved in and set up shop. It lives in our phones, churches, hospitals, and homes. It curates our playlists, predicts our spending, suggests our prayers, and sometimes even writes our sermons. Coexistence, then, is not optional. The question is whether we can coexist in a spiritually healthy manner, one that deepens our humanity rather than dilutes it.

To coexist faithfully means to let neither fear nor fascination rule us. Fear convinces us that AI will replace us; fascination tempts us to let it. Both miss the point. People of faith are called to live alongside technology with discernment and humility, resisting both the illusion of control and the despair of irrelevance.

For all its predictive brilliance, AI cannot pray, weep, or wonder. It can mimic compassion, but not surrender. It can analyze human emotion, but not experience it. The Franciscan imagination reminds us that creation, including the human-made world of code and circuitry, is still part of God's world. But only humanity bears the capacity for soul, for longing, for love that suffers and redeems.

Coexistence, then, is not a negotiation with machines, it is a spiritual practice among humans about how we use them.

## 1. Hope as Surrender, Not Optimism

Faith-based hope is not the same as optimism. Optimism is a weather forecast; hope is a

covenant. Optimism predicts outcomes; hope surrenders them.

In the Franciscan tradition, hope emerges not from certainty but from trust, trust that divine love continues to work even in confusion and disruption. As St. Francis taught, we find God not in control but in relinquishment. Hope, for Francis, was not a rosy confidence that things would turn out fine, but the willingness to walk barefoot into the unknown, trusting that God's presence would meet him there.

When we mistake AI's forecasts for faith's hope, we confuse data confidence with spiritual trust. An algorithm might predict recovery rates for the sick or estimate climate outcomes for the planet. These forecasts can be useful, even inspiring, but they can't teach us how to sit with grief, how to pray through uncertainty, or how to love what we may lose.

Hope begins where prediction ends. It is born when we choose faithfulness over control, willingness over willfulness. The AI age tempts us to measure everything, to optimize, to manage risk, to secure results. But the Franciscan path teaches that surrender is not passivity; it's the deepest form of participation. It is the art of letting God's grace do what our grasping cannot.

## 2. Solidarity as the Face of Hope

Hope in the Christian imagination is never solitary. It is, as the prophets declared, born in community. Hope is sustained not by certainty but by companionship. The Franciscan way calls this *being with* rather than *doing for*.

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## Hope, AI and Faith... continued

Solidarity is where hope breathes. It is incarnational, embodied in listening, touch, and shared presence. In this light, AI can make hope more accessible and actionable by connecting communities across distance, revealing hidden needs, or amplifying marginalized voices. It can process massive amounts of data to show us who is being left behind. It can remind us, through pattern and prediction, that our neighbor is closer than we thought.

But solidarity must remain human. A chatbot can send comforting words, but it cannot keep vigil at a bedside or shed tears that sanctify suffering. Yet it can free human caregivers from administrative burdens so that they can show up in love. When technology serves relationships rather than replaces it, it becomes a partner in the work of hope.

Francis of Assisi would recognize this: the holiness of proximity. To “be with” creation and each other is the heart of hope. Even the best-designed algorithm cannot incarnate presence. It can only point toward it. And perhaps that is its highest ethical calling, to remind us of what only we can do.

### 3. Prophetic Hope in Disruption

The Hebrew prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Amos—offered hope not in comfort but in collapse. They dared to believe that God’s newness could rise from ruins. Christian theologian Walter Brueggemann called this “the horror of the old collapsing and the hope of the new emerging.”

Our era’s disruptions: climate change, displacement, and digital isolation find a mirror in the age of AI. The prophetic task is not to resist technology outright but to reclaim its direction. Faith communities have a prophetic imperative to ensure that AI serves

justice, mercy, and shared flourishing.

AI can go beyond prediction when it feeds *real hope*: when it exposes injustice, reveals truth, or helps imagine new economies of care. Imagine algorithms that prioritize the hungry over the profitable, or systems that help restore ecological balance rather than exploit it. Prophetic hope transforms technology from a mirror of power into a window of possibility.

Yet prophecy always begins with lament. We must name the pain of our age, the loneliness, the disconnection, the temptation to substitute simulation for presence. In naming it, we keep it human. The prophets of Israel didn’t offer quick solutions; they offered faithful witness. Likewise, our hope for AI is not that it will save us, but that through it, we might rediscover what needs saving: our compassion, our humility, and our sense of shared destiny.

### 4. A Future Worth Coexisting With

To coexist with AI faithfully is to remember that intelligence is not wisdom, and power is not love. AI may analyze vast datasets, but faith invites us into mystery, the space where surrender becomes strength and community becomes salvation.

A spiritually healthy coexistence doesn’t idolize AI nor exile it. Instead, it consecrates the tools of our age for the service of God’s reconciling work. Technology, like fire or language, can both heal and harm. Our task is to keep it lit with compassion, humility, and justice.

This is not nostalgia for a pre-digital past; it is a call for moral imagination. Coexistence means insisting that progress must serve presence, that algorithms must bend toward mercy, and that the ultimate measure of intelligence is love.

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Hope, AI and Faith... continued

The Franciscan tradition, with its emphasis on humility and relationality, offers an antidote to the empire of efficiency. It invites us to see AI not as a rival intelligence but as a mirror reflecting what we value. The question is not, “Can AI love?” but “Can we?”

### **Conclusion: The Stubborn, Sacred Hope**

Artificial intelligence can calculate probabilities, but it cannot kindle hope. Hope is the province of the soul, the stubborn, sacred belief that life can be renewed even when the data says otherwise.

If we approach AI with humility, we may yet find that it sharpens our awareness of what is uniquely human: our vulnerability, our longing for connection, our capacity for grace.

In the end, coexistence with AI is less about technological control and more about spiritual formation. The future worth coexisting with will be one where our tools amplify love rather than efficiency, justice rather than profit, and wonder rather than fear.

Machines may forecast the future, but only people of faith can hope their way into it.

*\*Views and opinions expressed by authors and editors are their own and do not necessarily reflect the view of AI and Faith or any of its leadership.*

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HAVE  
faith  
GATHER hope  
SHARE love

**H.O.P.E.**  
HOLD ON, PAIN ENDS





*Fiddlesticks*  
*c/o Christine Petersen, OEF*  
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*\*Articles for the Lent 2026 Issue are being accepted immediately. The deadline is January 15, 2026*



## Advent Doxology\*

by Ken Sehested



*Oh, Blessed One, choired angels*  
*sing/*  
*Of life surrendered, offering*  
*The power to bless as blessed we*  
*are/*  
*To welcome strangers near and*  
*far.*



*Oh, Ancient Promise, tune thine ear/*  
*To pain and suff'ring, linger near.*  
*Cast off the rule of wail and woe./*  
*Thy tender love on us bestow.*

*O, Jealous One, of cov'nant vow,/*  
*Recast the sword from threat to plow.*  
*Remold Earth's fury by thy Word./*  
*All flesh observe thy grace conferred.*

*May all my ways through all my days,/*  
*Befriend thy justice, sing thy praise.*  
*Conformed no more to sin's distress./*  
*Thy sovereign reign uphold and bless.*

*When Advent's hour erupts o'erhead/*  
*And from below earth's terror spread,*  
*Let Mary's praise guide heart and mind/*  
*to scatter haught; the meek, unbind.*

*—Sung to the tune “Old Hundredth”*



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