



Dear Brothers & Sisters

Secular Franciscan Fraternity

During COVID-19 we are gathering through Zoom or through partnering with a specific fraternity member.

Council Members

Minister

Stephanie Heavey, OFS
minister@nwfranciscans.org

Vice-Minister

Sue Gribbon, OFS
viceminister@nwfranciscans.org

Formation Director

Jackie Leo, OFS
formation@nwfranciscans.org

Secretary

Tim Panzica, OFS
secretary@nwfranciscans.org

Treasurer

Kathy Fischer, OFS
treasurer@nwfranciscans.org

Spiritual Assistant

Jerry Stecker, OFS
sa@nwfranciscans.org

Councilor-at-Large

Kay Crnich, OFS

For privacy, all personal addresses, phone numbers, email, prayer intentions, and (for non-council members) last names are removed from this web version.

A BLESSED NEW YEAR 2021 !

Fear, uncertainty, inability to control the future, isolation, our world turned up side down, conflicting information, anxiety, depression, grief, doubt – all of these have been our daily fare this past year.

*Could there ever be a better time for giving to God our faith, trust and surrender in **The Prayer of Abandonment** of Blessed Brother Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916).*

This prayer expresses an openness and intention to give up ALL control of our life to God and trust that His will for us is best even when we do not understand Why.

THE PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

Father, I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me
and in all your creatures—
I wish no more than this, O Lord.


Into your hands I commend my soul:
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father. **T**

Monthly Gathering

The fraternity members in the Zoom group, led by our **Spiritual Assistant Jerry**, will gather virtually on **Monday, January 11th at 7:00 p.m.** Those members who are partnering will decide on the best way to connect with each other in January for ongoing formation.

Formation will be: Reflection and Discussion of the Epiphany of the Lord

Prayer will be: Liturgy of the Hours

At the end of this newsletter is the document for discussing the Epiphany of the Lord. 

2021 Partial Calendar

Below is the Fraternity Calendar of Events for the first quarter of the year. Subsequent monthly events will be determined by the guidelines for preventing the spread of COVID-19.

January

11: Formation by Zoom/pairing (Liturgy of the Hours
Formation will be a discussion of the Epiphany of the Lord


February

08: Formation by Zoom/pairing (Liturgy of the Hours
Formation will be a discussion of the first half of Pope Francis' *Fratelli Tutti* *

March

08: Formation by Zoom/pairing (Chaplet of Divine Mercy
Formation will be a discussion of the second half of Pope Francis's *Fratelli Tutti* *

TBD: Council Meeting (Stephanie's home)

* Go to **secularfranciscansusa.org**. Click on Guidelines, Forms and Other Resources. Click on "For initial and on-going formation, click here". Click on center column – ongoing formation. 

And So We Pray...

PAPAL INTENTIONS FOR JANUARY

Intention for evangelization – *Human fraternity*

May the Lord give us the grace to live in full fellowship with our brothers and sisters of all religions, praying for one another, open to all.

Throughout our lives, we have all prayed for the Grace to Live in Love as Jesus did – and as secular Franciscans, as Our Father Francis did. We have easily prayed in love for our relatives, for those who are ill, dying, grieving, homeless. We may have tried praying in love for the "lepers in our lives", for those who absolutely refuse to see things the way we do, for the addicted, the unwanted. But it is so hard to love everyone freely and totally and to pray for everyone freely and totally.

We have been taught that God is Love and that we are made in His Image. So we, too, are Love.

Beginning to Live

Love alone of all things is sufficient unto itself. It is its own end, its own merit, its own satisfaction. It seeks no cause beyond itself and needs no fruit outside of itself. Its fruit is its use. I love simply because I am love. That is my deepest identity, what I am created in and for.

For me to love others "in God" is to love them for their own sake and not for what they do for me or because I am psychologically healed and capable. Our transformed consciousness sees another person as another self, as one who is also loved by Christ with me and not an object separate from myself on which I generously bestow my Christian favors.

If I have not yet loved or if love wears me out, is it partly because other people are seen as tasks or threats instead of extensions of my own suffering and loneliness? Yet are they not in truth extensions of the suffering and loneliness of God?

When I live out of this truth of the love-that-I-am, I will at last begin to live.

Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, author

Image and Likeness: The Restoration of the Divine Image

Special Fraternity Events – 2021

Our fraternity is scheduled for: Rite of Profession in the Spring – and - Fraternity Elections in September. The normal guidelines have had to be amended by NAFRA to embrace the requirements of social distancing. They are listed below.

Because of these restrictions, there is no set date for either event. Our fraternity council will make every effort to schedule the ceremony for our candidates as soon as it is okay to do so.

It will be up to the Regional Council to determine our Election Date since some elections that were to be held in 2020 had to be put on hold. However, it is not too soon to begin thinking about the members of the fraternity whom you feel would form the best council. Please note that the term for minister is limited to six years and that the minister cannot follow that term by nomination for vice-minister. Fresh ideas are needed for vibrancy of a fraternity. ☒

CIOFS Guidelines for Fraternity Life During Social Distancing

Rite of Profession

The Rite of Profession needs to be delayed until the fraternity can gather for two reasons:

1. According to General Constitutions, the Council needs to decide *by secret ballot* on admission to profession of each candidate
2. The Fraternity needs to be present to witness the profession

Fraternity Council Elections

Fraternity members, the appointed Presider and Ecclesial Witness must be physically present for an election. Elections involve voting by secret ballot, and this cannot happen by teleconference phone or email.

Mail in ballots are not acceptable for the following reasons: the reading of the ballots must be overseen by the Presider and Ecclesial Witness, and there are multiple elections and a changing slate. Elections that cannot be held safely must be postponed. ☒

Anniversaries

Jan. 11, 2010	Dcn. Lou, Stephanie
Jan. 11, 2016	Tim
Jan. 14, 2008	Sue J., Bonnie

God's abundant Blessings be Yours! ☒

Serving Those in Need

Even though we have been socially distanced from each other as fraternity for much of 2020, as fraternity we have not forgotten those who are in need.

During this past year, **Two Complete Welcome Kits** were filled by our members and taken down to Franciscan Outreach in Chicago. Each basket included all the necessities for setting up an apartment as a person transitioned from being homeless to having a place to call home.

In May, we responded to the desperate need of the Little Sisters of the Poor at St. Joseph's Home for donations for food for the residents as COVID eliminated the usual sources of donations of food the sisters depended on. Our members very generously donated **\$770**.

In September, our members responded to the need for **coffee** at St. Joseph's and **15 cans were donated**.

This past December, donations from members were matched with funds from the fraternity's Common Fund. JOURNEYS/The Road Home was given **\$1,250.00** to use to pay for rent and food for the homeless who are begin kept safe and healthy through an arrangement with local hotels and the organization. The following is an excerpt from the Thank You letter we received:

On behalf of the Staff and Board of Directors please accept our heartfelt thanks for your generous support of JOURNEYS/The Road Home. Your support is crucial to our neighbors in need as they find their way home. Your donation of \$1,250.00 is greatly appreciated.

Whatever you did for the least of one of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it for Me. (Matthew 25:40)

The Epiphany of the Lord: Look for God among us

Jan 1, 2021

by [Mary M. McGlone](#)

[Spirituality](#)

[-BOLIVIA-FEAST-EPIPHANY-600387 jan 3.JPG](#)



A family carries figurines of the Christ Child outside St. Francis Church during celebrations for the feast of the Epiphany Jan. 6, 2019, in La Paz, Bolivia. (CNS/Reuters/David Mercado)

Humanity has long been fascinated with the heavens — especially the night sky. Abraham saw the promise of untold progeny in the stars. According to some folklorists, "Follow the Drinking Gourd" was an Underground Railroad anthem, helping escaping slaves orient themselves by the Big Dipper and North Star. Then of course we have today's Gospel about the holy people lured by a star to an encounter with the child Jesus.

The Epiphany of the Lord

[January 3, 2021](#)

Isaiah 60:1-6

Psalms 72

Ephesians 3:2-3a, 5-6

Matthew 2:1-12

It's not unusual to hear people try to prove or disprove the existence of that star and the Magi's visit. That's one way of trying to deal with the truth of the Scriptures. But the very fact that the seekers were following a star hints that the mystery of this story is far richer than any factual data we might be able to produce.

Matthew's tale begins with the Magi, a name which designates the sky-gazing pilgrims as religious people who read the signs of the times via the stars. Although Matthew mentions their three gifts, he says nothing about how many participated in what could have been a whole caravan.

Following the theme of the heavens, the Magi came "from the rising of the sun," i.e., the east. Their interpretation of the stars told them that a "king of the Jews" had been born. Unwisely, the pilgrims decided to consult the current ruler, the notorious King Herod. In a tragically ironic twist, Herod turned to local theologians to ask where a Messiah would be born. Culpably incurious about the signs of their times and what God was up to among them, the religious leaders simply reported the results of their Scripture study: Bethlehem of Judah was the designated birthplace for the ruler who would shepherd Israel.

In what sounds like a comic twist, the Magi — whose quest had already taken them more than 1,000 kilometers — heard Herod ask them to "search diligently for the child." Of course, he did so only for malevolent purposes. But because they were God-seekers, the Magi were too attentive to signs from heaven to end up being accomplices to Herod's evil.

There is no doubt that this is a great story and that it adds a wonderful diversity of costumes and exotic animals to our Nativity scenes. But what else are we to take from it?

Of all the evangelists, only Matthew, the one who wrote most directly for a Jewish audience, tells us about the Magi. Whereas Luke, who wrote for a broader public, highlighted the Jewish characters of the shepherds and the elders Anna and Simeon in Jesus' birth story, Matthew spotlighted foreigners, people with no awareness of the faith and promises of Abraham. Thus, Matthew reminds his readers that they are a "chosen people" so that they would become, as Isaiah said, a light to the nations. Israel's centrality in the divine plan was all about their vocation to make God known to the whole world.

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The title of today's feast is the Epiphany (Revelation) of the Lord. The truly tragic irony in Matthew's story was that pilgrim pagans journeyed far from home because they believed God was doing something new while the leaders of the chosen people read their scriptures, but no longer expected God to reveal anything new. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had worked out an uneasy but relatively peaceful accommodation with the Roman Empire. Rome allowed the clergy to function as long as they did not rock the boat; therefore, the Jewish people enjoyed some degree of freedom to practice their religion. In today's terms, they were living in something between accommodation and complicity.

The Magi, on the other hand, intuited something that awakened their dreams enough to shake them out of a settled existence. They may not have had the promises of Abraham or a sense of

the God of Israel, but they did believe that life could be more than what they already knew where they were. Without knowing details, they believed in a God of revelation.

As we begin this new year, the Magi might be inviting us too to read the stars, to look for epiphanies of God among us and to allow mystery to shake us out of our status quo and beyond the borders of our comfortable relationships and thought patterns. In *Fratelli Tutti* (Paragraphs 126, 127, 128), Pope Francis invites us to learn from COVID-19's vivid demonstration of our intimate connectedness across the Earth. Francis calls on us to establish effective networks of international relations of solidarity — something that could be a specialty of the worldwide Catholic Church.

Like the Magi, we may not know exactly what we are looking for, but if we set our sights high enough, God will not hesitate to lead us into new epiphanies where we will meet God among us in unexpected and wildly rich ways.

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