



WINTER 2025

# THE SERAPH

Newsletter of St. Bonaventure Province

## NEWS & NOTEABLES:

- From Our Provincial - 1
- Christmas Around the Province - 2
- Culture of Philanthropy - 3
- News from the Apostolates - 4
- Epiphany Party - 7
- Vocations Ministry - 8
- Upcoming Events - 9



**Christmas (Navidad) in  
Cristo Rey Parish (Austin, TX)**



## FROM OUR PROVINCIAL

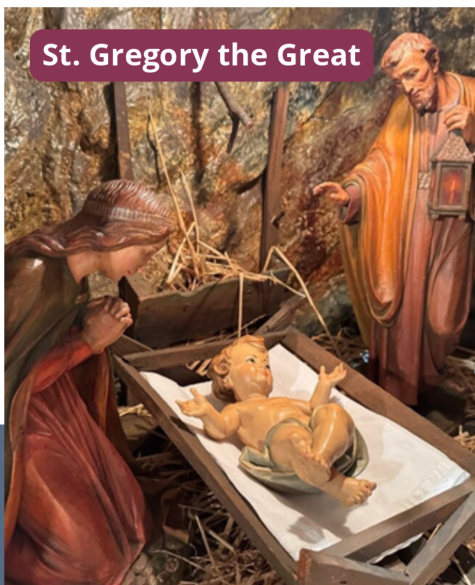
**Fr. Paul Joseph**

Many of us have been privileged to visit Assisi, the birthplace of St. Francis, and the beautiful Umbrian countryside that surrounds it. Viewing the breathtaking landscape from San Damiano church we get a glimpse of the inspiration from which St. Francis wrote his epic "Canticle of the Creatures" – the Centenary of which we as a Franciscan family celebrate throughout 2025. The view was likely even more spectacular 800 years ago when Francis was convalescing and wrote it. And, while we know he was almost completely blind by the time he composed it, Francis saw through the eyes of faith and gives us a glimpse of what being so intimately in love with God and all His creation should look like: an outpouring of love and mercy to all people and all creatures! Some scholars suggest The Canticle is the final expression and confession of Francis' life and summarizes his entire journey of conformation to Christ. In it, we can hear the song of praise of his faith in the fatherhood of God which proclaims the brotherhood and the sisterhood and beauty of all creatures.

This 21st century celebration of the Canticle of the Creatures should lead us to examine our personal relationship with creation... shifting from possessing it to caring for our common home. Each of us should take this year as a wakeup call to how much we consume and its impact on others. Let us renew ourselves to embrace an ascetic life as consecrated men in obedience to God and solidarity with the marginalized and poor. Each of us is called to radically witness the gospel values of peace, patience, and self-control in a modern culture that touts you can have it all! As Pope Francis reminds us, *"The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations."* (*Laudato Si'*, 66)

May our Centenary Celebration of The Canticle help us to approach each other and the world in which we live with a new sense of wonder and grace, so that we may embrace the bonds that unite us to all creatures.

# CHRISTMAS AROUND THE PROVINCE





## Christmas Cheer Franciscan Style

On December 7, we hosted this much-loved annual event at Marytown. This is a way for the Friars to say thank you to the shrine's supporters. Attendees enjoyed photos with Saint Nick, refreshments, and music performed by Christopher Powell, Director of Sacred Music and guest musicians.

## INTRODUCING THE CULTURE OF PHILANTHROPY: A VISION FOR THE PROVINCE OF SAINT BONAVENTURE

Dear Friends and Partners,

Since beginning this journey in October, I have been deeply inspired by the profound generosity of our benefactors and the shared dedication to advancing the Franciscan mission. Together, I believe we can elevate this support by nurturing a vibrant culture of philanthropy across the entire province.

### ***What is a Culture of Philanthropy?***

At its core, it's about fostering the belief that everyone — friars, staff, volunteers, and donors — has a vital role in advancing the mission through contributions of financial support, prayer, and purpose-driven service. It shifts philanthropy from being seen as merely fundraising to becoming a collective endeavor that mirrors St. Francis of Assisi's vision: serving others and inspiring unity within a fraternal society.

### ***Envisioning Our Path Forward***

Engagement Across the Province: Every role matters — whether you are a friar in ministry or a volunteer behind-the-scenes. A culture of philanthropy calls us to recognize, celebrate, and amplify the impact of our combined efforts and shared stories.

Building Stronger Connections with Benefactors: Through authentic storytelling and heartfelt gratitude, we can deepen

relationships with donors, making them true partners in our mission.

Collaboration for Greater Impact: Philanthropy flourishes when we work together. By collaborating across ministries, we can innovate, share ideas, and enhance fundraising efforts to reflect the heart of our work.

### ***A Journey Together***

I look forward to connecting with each of you, hearing your stories, and learning more about the incredible work you do. Together, we can explore new ways to weave this culture of philanthropy into our daily practices, inspiring greater support, and advancing our shared mission.

Thank you for the warm welcome you have given me and your continued dedication to our Franciscan mission.

In peace and gratitude,



***Jennifer Georgis***  
Director of Mission Advancement

# NEWS FROM THE APOSTOLATES

## HOUSE OF STUDIES (CHICAGO, IL)

The closing months of 2024 saw the five Postulants engaged in a number of formative experiences and milestones, including spending time with the Sisters of St. Francis of Perpetual Adoration (Mishawaka Sisters) where both postulancy communities underwent etiquette classes; attending “The Nutcracker” ballet thanks to a generous donation of tickets; serving at the Little Sisters of the Poor, St. Thomas of Canterbury Food Pantry, and St. Stanislaus Kostka Soup Kitchen. In January, they completed their respective 'Province Tours' with Friaries around the country.



## MARY, MOTHER OF GOD PARISH (CHICAGO, IL)

### *Christmas at the Soup Kitchen*

In collaboration with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, we hosted a Christmas Party for the guests of St. Thomas of Canterbury Soup Kitchen. The event included festive decorations and a catered dinner. Every guest was given a “Seat for Everyone” hoodie with a graphic designed by Fr. Alejandro Lopez. Thank you to the volunteers who helped organize, prepare, decorate, and clean up the meal. It was a wonderful evening for all!

### *Christmas Concert*

Sunday, January 7, the parish music ministry presented its annual Christmas Concert. Thank you to: The directors and members of our choirs, ensembles, and musicians for their fine work and dedicated service to our parish. Our Children's Choir parents, parishioners, and friends for being an encouraging and grateful audience. And Mr. Todd Gresick, for sharing his mastery and love of the pipe organ with our faith community.



## MARYTOWN: NATIONAL SHRINE OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE

### ***Morning with Mary***

On December 14, Marytown held its annual Morning with Mary. This year we were blessed to have special guest speaker, Rev. Francis J. Hoffman, "Fr. Rocky", Executive Director/CEO of Relevant Radio and a priest of Opus Dei. Following Fr. Rocky's presentation we were treated to a sacred music concert, performed by Christopher Powell, Director of Sacred Music and the Marytown Shrine Choir. The morning ended with Holy Mass.



### ***An Advent Day of Recollection on the Joy of Mary***

On December 17 and 18, Fr. Tom Czeck and Br. Jason Warrer presented an Advent Day of Recollection on the Joy of Mary. The presentation consisted of three topics: 1) The Seven Joys of Mary, 2) Mary's Joy: The Magnificat, and 3) O Antiphons. All those who attended also learned to pray the Franciscan Crown (Rosary of the Seven Joys of the Blessed Virgin Mary).



### ***Nativity Scene***

Celebrating the 801st anniversary of the first nativity scene created by St. Francis of Assisi. Visitors enjoyed the spirit of the Advent and Christmas Seasons by visiting our beautiful Nativity Scene.

The celebration of Christmas is a great opportunity to make room within ourselves for the coming of Jesus. To help us open the door of our hearts and welcome Jesus, we have the gift of the seven levels of acceptance which are based on Jesus' teaching about forgiveness. They are a journey of receiving His presence within us through the acceptance of ourselves, with our suffering and pain, and the acceptance of others, as they are. We encourage you to research the seven levels of acceptance to learn more.



### ***The Marytown Flood***

The Retreat Center and Gift Shop sustained significant water damage from a burst pipe. Thanks be to God nobody was hurt and thank you to all the friars and staff who jumped into action as the water rushed from the 3rd floor all the way to the basement.

This comes as a shock and disappointment after seeing the recently renovated retreat rooms. Our Lady's hand was in every aspect of those renovations, and she will see us through this restoration project. It will be restored to that beauty again.

Please keep this in your prayers as well as all those who are helping clean up the mess. And let us keep gratitude in our hearts thanking God that nobody was hurt.

## **BASILICA OF SAINT JOSAPHAT (MILWAUKEE, WI)**

### ***Christmas Time at St. Josephat's***

The Basilica continues to draw visitors from all over the country, especially during the Christmas season. In fact, Tripadvisor lists the Basilica as the city's most visited site some months!

### ***The Spanish Mass Grows (La misa en español crece)***

We are happy to share that the Basilica's monthly Spanish Mass continues to grow, drawing over 100 people. The friars are assisted by three Spanish-speaking deacons, who preach on a rotating basis.

### ***St. Josaphat Parish School***

Every second Sunday of the month at 4:30 PM, school families and neighborhood residents gather in the undercroft chapel for Mass and fellowship.



# THE ANNUAL EPIPHANY PARTY AT MARYTOWN



# VOCATIONS MINISTRY

Last year was a blessed year for our Province Vocations Office indeed. After the successful September Come & See weekend with seven attendees, the trend continued with the CFF Vocation Directors hosting a common Come & See weekend at the House of Studies in Chicago with men from around the US and Canada numbering nine attendees (three from SB Province). This was followed by another local Come & See hosted at Marytown in December, again with seven men attending.

Over these months, we have seen a good number of men inquiring with our Province to further discern their vocation, and I have had the pleasure of engaging with College Campuses, Young Adult groups, and Parish and Diocesan Vocation events to promote the Order and invite young men to consider a life of prayer, fraternity, and service as Conventual Franciscan Friars.

At the very start of this new year, I found myself in Salt Lake City, UT attending the SEEK Conference hosted by FOCUS, who are responsible for running amazing Catholic Centers on college campuses around the country. Estimates suggest there were around 20,000 young people in attendance, all there to deepen their faith, engage with other likeminded people, listen to fantastic Catholic speakers, and encounter Religious Congregations and Catholic Vendors. The CFF

Vocation Directors facilitated a booth at the event and had countless interactions with young men earnestly discerning where the Lord might be leading them. Even as I was flying home to Chicago, I had a providential encounter with a young man sitting beside me on the plane who, once learning I was a Franciscan Friar, engaged in conversation with me for the duration of the flight and expressed a great interest in wanting to stay connected.

As things stand, there are currently six men from our Province with applications for Postulancy 2025-26; please pray that they may persevere in their discernment and the tediousness of completing forms and the required examinations. As applications are submitted and decided upon, I look forward to introducing you to our future Postulants.

I have already received multiple invitations for upcoming Vocation events, and I hope to facilitate another Come & See weekend most likely in early April. I want to thank you all for your prayerful support and encouragement of our Vocation ministry, and invite you to reach out and ask the question to the young men in your circles - "Have you ever thought about being a Franciscan Friar?"

*Br. Bernard Mary Fonkalsrud*  
Vocation Director







# Jubilee 2025

PILGRIMS OF HOPE

May the grace of the Jubilee  
reawaken in us, *Pilgrims of Hope*,  
a yearning for the treasures of heaven.  
May that same grace spread  
the joy and peace of our Redeemer  
throughout the earth.  
To you our God, eternally blessed,  
be glory and praise for ever.  
Amen

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### ***CFF 800TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CANTICLE OF CREATURES RETREATS***

January 26-31, 2025 in Winter Park, Florida

July 20-25, 2025 in Detroit, Michigan

September 1-6, 2025 in Santa Cruz, California

October 26-31, 2025 in Mesilla Park, New Mexico

***APRIL 4-6 — COME & SEE WEEKEND IN CHICAGO***

***MAY 5-8 — CFF MEETING INCLUDING THE DEFINITORS AT MOUNT ST. FRANCIS***

***JUNE 1-12 — 203RD GENERAL CHAPTER IN ROME***

***JULY 15 — WELCOMING OF NEW CLASS OF POSTULANTS***

***SEPTEMBER 14-16 — SOLEMN PROFESSION OF VOWS AND PROVINCE ASSEMBLY***

***OCTOBER 14-24 — PILGRIMAGE: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ST. PAUL***



**Franciscans of Saint  
Bonaventure Province  
Friars Minor Conventual**

6107 North Kenmore Avenue  
Chicago, Illinois 60660

[franciscancommunity.org](http://franciscancommunity.org)



[info@franciscancommunity.org](mailto:info@franciscancommunity.org)

# CFF Retreat

## *Celebrating the 800th Anniversary of The Canticle of the Creatures*

**San Pedro Retreat Center**  
Winter Park, FL  
January 26-31, 2025  
Fr. Michael Perry, OFM

**St. Paul Passionist Retreat Center**  
Detroit, MI  
July 20-25, 2025  
Fr. Robert Williams, OFM Cap.



**Villa Maria de Mar Retreat Center**  
Santa Cruz, CA  
September 1-6, 2025  
Fr. Bill Short, OFM

**Holy Cross Retreat Center**  
Mesilla Park, NM  
October 26-31, 2025  
Fr. Greg Friedman, OFM

