



WINTER 2026

THE SERAPH

Newsletter of St. Bonaventure Province

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Christmas at St. Josaphat Basilica



FROM OUR PROVINCIAL

Fr. Paul Joseph

When Pope Leo XIV declared a Special Jubilee Year in honor of St. Francis of Assisi, he invited the entire Church to rediscover the simplicity, peace, and missionary zeal that shaped the life of “il Poverello” that is “the little poor one”. For us as Conventual Franciscans, this jubilee is a living reminder that the charism entrusted to Francis over 800 years ago continues to bear fruit through our friars, our ministries, and the generous people who walk with us.

St. Francis rebuilt the Church not with stone alone, but with mercy, fraternity, and a radical trust in God. This Jubilee Year calls us to renew that same spirit: to rebuild, to reconcile, and to accompany each other with humility and joy.

The Franciscan Mission Today

Across the Saint Bonaventure Province, the friars continue the work that began in Assisi eight centuries ago:

- Preaching the Gospel in parishes and retreat centers, helping people encounter Christ in everyday life.

- Forming new vocations, guiding young men who feel called to the Franciscan way of life.
- Accompanying our elder and infirm friars, who have spent their lives in service and now witness to the Gospel through prayer.
- Promoting peace, reconciliation, and care for creation, echoing Francis’ deep love for all God’s creatures.

These ministries are possible because of the faithful partnership of our benefactors and the wider Church. In this Jubilee Year, your support becomes part of the ongoing story of renewal that St. Francis began.

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Pilgrimage to the Basilica of St. Josaphat

On January 17, a group of over 50 pilgrims travelled to the Basilica of St. Josaphat and the Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe at Marytown to meditate on the beauty of the Eucharist. Participants were granted a Plenary Indulgence due to the Jubilee of St. Francis.

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A Time of Grace: The Plenary Indulgence

As part of the Jubilee Year, the Holy Father has granted the faithful the opportunity to receive a plenary indulgence, a sign of God's abundant mercy poured out upon the Church.

To obtain the plenary indulgence during the Year of Saint Francis, certain specific conditions indicated by the Church must be fulfilled:

- Sacramental confession to be in God's grace (in the eight days before or after);
- Participation in Mass and Eucharistic Communion in a state of grace;
- To visit in the form of a pilgrimage any Franciscan Conventual church, shrine or chapel, where one renews one's profession of faith, through the recitation of the Creed, to reaffirm one's Christian identity;
- The recitation of the Lord's Prayer, to reaffirm the dignity of children of God, received in Baptism;
- To pray for the intentions of the Holy Father, this may include an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be, or another suitable prayer;

- Conclude by asking the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saints Francis and Clare of Assisi, and all the Saints of the Franciscan Family to pray for us.

Those who due to serious reasons cannot leave their homes, can also obtain the indulgence by joining spiritually in the Jubilee celebrations and offering to God their prayers, pains, and sufferings.

Walking Together in This Jubilee Year

As we journey through this year of grace, I invite you to join the friars in renewing our commitment to the Gospel. Pray with us. Serve with us. Support the ministries that allow the Franciscan presence to flourish in communities across our province.

May St. Francis intercede for us and our loved ones, and may this Jubilee Year inspire us to live the Gospel life with authentic Christian charity shared with all those we meet.

Peace and all good!

Friar Paul Joseph

THE JUBILEE OF ST. FRANCIS

In 2026, on the 800th anniversary of the Transitus (death) of St. Francis of Assisi, a special Jubilee Year has been announced with attached plenary indulgences. The decree was given by Pope Leo XIV on Saturday, January 10, 2026, during an address to the Assembly of the Franciscan Family gathered in Assisi.

Read more here: <https://tinyurl.com/h8h28cbh>

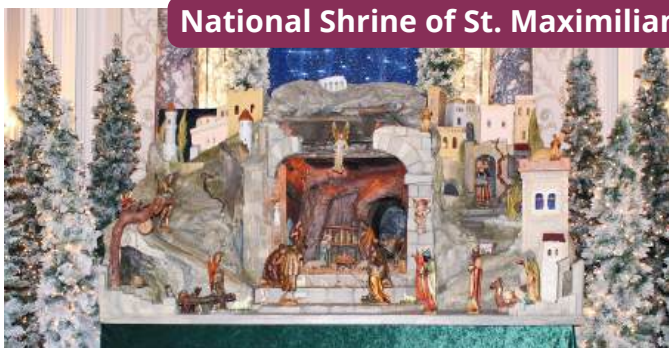


CHRISTMAS AROUND THE PROVINCE

The Basilica of St. Josaphat (Milwaukee, WI)



National Shrine of St. Maximilian Kolbe, 'Marytown' (Libertyville, IL)



Mary, Mother of God Parish (Chicago, IL)



All Saints Friary (Dearborn Heights, MI)



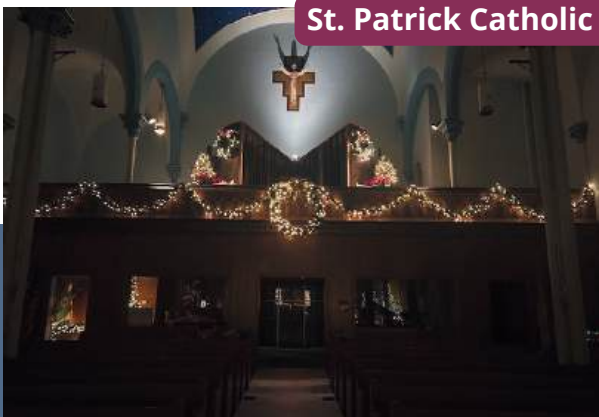
St. Anselm Parish (Dearborn Heights, MI)



St. Linus Parish (Dearborn Heights, MI)



St. Patrick Catholic Church (Minonk, IL)





'To the Heights' YA Retreat (Green Bay, WI)



Dec 2025 'Come & See' Weekend (Marytown, IL)

FROM THE VOCATION OFFICE

Since the last edition of The Seraph, there has been no shortage of events and engagements for the Vocation Office.

To summarize our activities over the past three months, we have been involved with two Diocesan Vocation Fairs (Green Bay, WI, and Joliet, IL). We have hosted Vocation booths at national and local events, including the Inheritance Conference, Milwaukee, WI; SEEK in Dever, CO; Local SEEK in La Crosse, WI; and the Great Lakes Catholic Men's Conference in DeKalb, IL. Br. Bernard Mary has assisted with the 'Busy Students Retreat' at the University of St. Ambrose, Davenport, IA, and the 'To the Heights' young adult retreat for the Diocese of Green Bay, WI.

During Catholic Schools Week (Jan 25-31), Br. Bernard Mary was invited to speak to students at St. Thomas Aquinas Academy, Marinette, WI, and Archangels Academy, Union, IL. Over the weekend of November 7-9, the Vocation Directors from the four Provinces held a common CFF 'Come & See' weekend at the Chicago House of Studies where nine men (three for SB Province) attended.

At the beginning of December (5-7), we hosted a local SB Province 'Come & See' weekend at Marytown where a whopping 14 men came to discern their vocation with us.

Through attending all these amazing events, and through our website, a good number of men have expressed interest in discerning a vocation to the Conventual Franciscan life; Br. Bernard Mary has put many hours into meeting with inquirers over Zoom or in person to discuss where they are at spiritually, and potential opportunities for them to connect further with the Friars.

We are so pleased to share that, through the grace of God, there are currently nine men currently undertaking the application process to enter into formation with St. Bonaventure Province as a Postulant for 2026-27, with a good number of other men already in the pipeline for the following year.

The Vocation Office thanks you all greatly for your ongoing support and prayers, as we see the fruits of them now with this increased interest in our Conventual Franciscan life, especially with our Midwest Province of St. Bonaventure.



Archangels Academy Vocations Day (Union, IL)



Joliet Diocese Vocation Fair (Joliet, IL)

REFLECTION ON THE POSTULANCY PROGRAM

NOW THAT THE 2025-26 POSTULANCY YEAR IS PAST THE HALF-WAY POINT, JACOB POLINSKI REFLECTS ON HIS JOURNEY AND EXPERIENCES SO FAR.

This postulancy year has served as a great introduction to the Franciscan way of life, and has thus far created a solid foundation for me to further explore discernment of religious life. We live a balanced lifestyle in our formation house that involves a combination of active ministry, prayer, fraternal time, and formation (which includes one-on-ones, in-house classes, or special events). All four of these areas have been important in getting an understanding of life and how I fit into it, with much of our time spent on human formation. This aspect of formation really emphasizes focusing on building us into mature and responsible adults as a preparation for future formation with the friars. We have book clubs and classes that cover a number of themes like purpose, relationships, etc. all of which are discussed. There are also classes on matters pertaining to our faith, scripture, the sacraments, and Church teaching. These classes are taught by both our formators in house and by many guests whether they are friars in our community, or professional lay people.

I have also had the great opportunity to learn and practice the traditions of the Conventual Franciscan Order like Tuesday St. Anthony devotions, weekly prayer of the 'Franciscan Crown' rosary, and the reading of biographies of deceased friars. All of these make me feel connected to the friars of the past and present. One of my favorite traditions that I have encountered was participating in our Epiphany gathering; every Feast of the Epiphany friars gather to share fraternal time and take part in "extractions." Names of friars are drawn at random from a basket, then names of living and deceased friars are drawn for that friar to pray for. They also receive a scriptural/Franciscan quote, and patron saint for the new year.



It is a great tradition that I had the pleasure to experience at Marytown with dozens of friars from around St. Bonaventure Province, along with Kenyan, and Polish friars! The extraction of saints involved a lot of "oohing" and "ahhs" as well, which added to the humor and atmosphere of the event, it felt like a family gathering!

This gathering took place in the larger context of our 'Province Tours.' Every year the postulants take about 3 weeks to tour their respective provinces, thus my fellow postulants Josh, Craig, and myself got to travel across the United States visiting many friaries and meeting lots of different friars. Our journey started at Marytown as mentioned above and then took us through Terra Haute, IN; Mt. St. Francis in southern Indiana; San Antonio, TX; and Detroit, MI. It was a long journey, but it was also a great experience as I got to see the breadth of ministries that the Order has in the United States and got to meet many friars who were hospitable and fun to be around!

Overall, this postulancy year has been fruitful for me and has led me to grow much as a person of faith, it has taught me much about my relationship with God and with other people, and has equipped me with many tools for future success in my life!

NEWS FROM THE APOSTOLATES

THE BASILICA OF ST. JOSAPHAT, MILWAUKEE, WI

BISHOP CALLAHAN PARISH CENTER

Construction begins in the Bishop Callahan Parish Center. The work has begun on some much-anticipated renovations. Construction began in the basement, where the food pantry will be relocated in order to provide a street level entrance. Initial construction should be completed by the summer with the elevator completed in the fall.



CHRISTMAS NATIVITY PLAY

Religious Education program joyfully presented its first Christmas Nativity Play in many years—a beautiful and faith-filled celebration of the birth of our Savior.

GINGERBREAD BASILICAS

RGingerbread Basilicas - lovingly created by our talented parishioners. From the gummy bear Eucharistic procession to the crane lifting gingerbread bricks to the roof, every detail captures the joy and creativity of the season.



MARY, MOTHER OF GOD PARISH, CHICAGO, IL

PARISH THANKSGIVING

This past November, Mary, Mother of God Parish held its annual Thanksgiving Celebrations. Morning Mass was well attended as was the potluck luncheon afterwards. As is tradition, the Friars and Secular Franciscans, helped to set up, cook, and clean up the meal. We are also grateful to St. Mary of the Woods Parish for generously donating hundreds of pies for the occasion!



MARY, MOTHER OF GOD PARISH, CHICAGO, IL (CONT.)



CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES' ADVENT RETREAT (2025)

We had a wonderful turnout for this year's Advent Retreat. Fr. Alejandro Lopez, OFM Conv. lead a group of about 45 people (between both the English and Spanish sessions) for a half day of reflection to begin the season. The theme was the Canticle of the Creatures which was written by St. Francis of Assisi 800 years ago and continues to offer much fruit for the faithful today.

LORD OF ESQUIPULAS

The Guatemalan community of Mary, Mother of God Parish celebrated the Lord of Esquipulas on Sunday, January 18 at the 12:30 PM Mass at St. Ita Church. The Lord of Esquipulas is a darkened wooden image of Christ consecrated in the Cathedral Basilica of Esquipulas in Esquipulas, Guatemala. It is one of the most famous black Christological images in Latin America. Esquipulas celebrates its patron saint's day on January 15, when many pilgrims arrive from Guatemala and neighboring Central American countries.

CHRISTMAS CONCERT

Sunday, January 4, the Mary, Mother of God Parish Choirs presented their annual Christmas Concert. Representatives from the parish choirs and ensembles shared the sounds of the season with the assembled audience.

FOUR SAINTS CATHOLIC CHURCHES, CENTRAL ILLINOIS



PEORIA DIOCESE SEEK26 JOURNEY

The SEEK26 Conference was a powerful reminder that the Church is alive and thriving in the young people of our Diocese! Bishop Lou Tylka accompanied over 300 of our university students through these powerful days of conversion, mission, and formation. At a packed-to-the-gills meetup, hosted by the Office of Mission Support, Bishop Tylka shared his bold vision for our young people as the Church of today, not just tomorrow!

NATIONAL SHRINE OF ST. MAXIMILIAN KOLBE, 'MARYTOWN' LIBERTYVILLE, IL

MI MARIAN CONSECRATION RETREAT

On October 7-8, Fr. Patrick Greenough presented an inspiring retreat, which explored the deeper meaning of total consecration to Mary through the Militia of the Immaculata (MI), founded by St. Maximilian Kolbe.

NICENE CREED DAY OF REFLECTION

On October 9, Fr. Patrick presented a powerful reflection on the Nicene Creed, a foundational statement of Christian faith, widely recognized and professed by the Catholic Church, Eastern Churches, and many Protestant denominations. The Creed serves as a common profession of faith for all Christians, emphasizing core beliefs that unite them despite division, drawing its significant authority from the first two ecumenical councils held in Nicaea in 325 AD and Constantinople in 381 AD.

CONTEMPLATING MARY RETREAT

On December 6, Fr. Thomas Czek gave a retreat contemplating the symbolism contained in the stained glass windows of Marytown's Sorrowful Mother Chapel giving those who attended a new appreciation of the profound role our Blessed Mother plays in the salvation of her children.

MORNING WITH MARY

On Saturday, December 13, Fr. Arturo Felix gave a powerful Advent reflection on Mary as the model of faith. He was followed by a magnificent sacred music concert by Christopher Powell (Director of Sacred Music) & the Marytown Shrine Choir! A truly special morning dedicated to our Blessed Mother and the season!



WALKING TOGETHER THIS LENT

A JOURNEY OF PRAYER, CHARITY, AND FRANCISCAN HOPE

JENNIFER GEORGIS, DIRECTOR OF MISSION ADVANCEMENT

Each year, the Church gives us the sacred gift of Lent, a season that calls us back to what matters most: conversion of heart, deeper prayer, and generous love for others. For the Franciscan friars, Lent is not only a time of penance, but a time of renewed joy in walking the way of Christ together, as brothers and as companions to all who share in our mission.

This year, we warmly invite you our donors, friends, and prayerful supporters to walk with the friars on our upcoming Lenten Journey.

St. Francis understood that authentic conversion touches every aspect of our lives: our prayer, our actions, and yes, our relationship with material goods. He embraced Lady Poverty not as deprivation, but as freedom to give generously, to trust completely, and to love without reservation.

In the spirit of St. Francis, we will be offering a **Printable Lenten Almsgiving Calendar** focused on the Franciscan charism. Each day of Lent will invite reflection and a small, concrete act of charity, simple gestures that shape generous hearts and strengthen our bonds as a Franciscan family.

This calendar is not merely a guide for giving; it is an invitation into relationship.

A culture of philanthropy begins not with a transaction, but with shared mission. When you support the friars, you are not standing outside our work you are part of it. Your prayers sustain our vocations. Your generosity forms future friars. Your compassion makes possible our ministry to the poor, the marginalized, and those searching for God.

As you move through this Lenten season, we invite you to:

- **Pray with us**, for our friars, our vocations, and all those we serve.
- **Walk with us**, using the Lenten Almsgiving Calendar as a daily companion.
- **Share with us**, offering your gifts in gratitude for all God has entrusted to you.

Together, we become stewards of hope. In a world that often feels divided and hurried, Lent reminds us that holiness grows in small, faithful steps, and that generosity is a response to blessings already received.

Thank you for walking this journey with your Franciscan family. We are deeply grateful for your presence in our mission, today and always.

TO RECEIVE YOUR PRINTABLE
LENTEN ALMSGIVING CALENDAR,
SCAN THE QR CODE HERE:





SCAN THE QR CODE TO FIND OUT MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE UPCOMING PILGRIMAGE AND TO REGISTER YOUR INTEREST

or visit: <https://tinyurl.com/45dfsnh2>



2026 EUCHARISTIC MIRACLES PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY

**September 30 –
October 9, 2026**

**CLICK ON LINK ABOVE
for Full Details!**



In honor of the 100th Anniversary of the XXVIII International Eucharistic Congress in Chicago, which initiated the building of our Perpetual Adoration Chapel at Marytown.



Led by **Fr. Lawrence Zurek, OFM Conv.**
Rector of Marytown

Fr. Thomas Czeck, OFM Conv.
MI National Spiritual Assistant



Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command.
Amen.

UPCOMING EVENTS

FEBRUARY 18, 2026 | ASH WEDNESDAY - LENT BEGINS

APRIL 3, 2026 | GOOD FRIDAY

APRIL 5, 2026 | EASTER SUNDAY

APRIL 17-19, 2026 | 'COME & SEE' WEEKEND AT THE HOUSE OF STUDIES, CHICAGO

APRIL 27 - MAY 1, 2026 | SESSION ONE OF PROVINCIAL CHAPTER, MARYTOWN

JULY 20 - 24, 2026 | SESSION TWO OF PROVINCIAL CHAPTER, MARYTOWN

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Franciscans continue tradition of making habits by hand
Pages 12-13, 15



US cardinals weigh in on foreign policy
Page 3



Soul line dancers cheer on Chicago Bears
Page 4



Catholic schools announce open houses
Pages 14-19

FRIAR TAILORS MAKE THE NEWS!

Our very own Bro. Augustine Kelly and Fr. Boniface Muia were featured in a recent edition of the Chicago Catholic newspaper! The article highlights Religious communities who still make their own habits. Bro. Augustine is quoted: *"I, personally, when I begin a habit, I offer up the work and the time for all the intentions of the friar I am sewing for. It makes me feel like some of me goes with him in all of his ministry. And the friars know that."*

Read the full article: <https://tinyurl.com/yc2khs47>



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

6107 North Kenmore Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60660

franciscancommunity.org



info@franciscancommunity.org