



Eastern Canada OFS Update: Celebrating Our Franciscan Way of Life

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A Few Words from Your Regional Minister

We are pleased to send you this Advent issue of the Regional Update. We have received a number of contributions from several individuals and fraternities. They all touch upon the theme: **Let us Rejoice...I say again Let us Rejoice!** These words are paraphrase of St. Paul in his letter to the Philippians (4:4).

Collectively, the issue sets out to help us celebrate the birth of Christ with great joy. It also aims to highlight the cultural diversity of the fraternities in our Region. We are thankful for the colourful information regarding celebratory traditions from our Korean and Polish fraternities. We are also delighted to include personal greetings from the new Provincial, Br. Jean-Pierre Ducharme ofm, of the Holy Spirit Province of Canada, at this special time of the year.

It is our hope that you thoroughly enjoy this issue of the Update. May your Advent and Christmas celebrations in 2025, in the spirit of St. Francis, be filled with much rejoicing!

Fraternal regards,

Gerry Gabriel, ofs
Minister, Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada
(RFEC)



Image by Herbert from Pixabay

Greetings from the Minister Provincial, OFM of Canada

Dear brothers and sisters,



Most of you have not met me, yet. I was elected Minister Provincial of the Canadian Holy Spirit Province on April Fool's Day. Like "God's fool", St. Francis, I accepted. The months since have involved a process of learning how to be Provincial, and discovering a new milieu—our Provincial Office in Montreal. Over time, I will surely get accustomed to both but would anticipate the learning, the joy of discovery, to continue.

As we prepare for the coming of our Lord, we anticipate the joy of discovery. When an angel appears to Shepherds, with Good News, their response is joy. From Mary and Joseph to ox and mule, to stars and constellations, all of creation is taken by the joy of Christmas. May we, in our most Franciscan way, be taken also by this joy. May you and your family behold the precious joy of discovery this Christmas.

Have a Merry Christmas and a blessed new year!

Jean-Pierre Ducharme, ofm
Minister Provincial
Franciscans of Canada

Christmas is Indeed a Time to Rejoice!

Gerry Gabriel, Minister, Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada

The Christmas story is full of majesty, mystery and hope. There are angels, Magi, and of course the Christ Child. The cast of characters includes shepherds, the inn keeper and Herod, the evil king. Thanks to St. Luke, we are told the story in living detail. It is in his Gospel telling, that we become familiar with these historic events: the Son of God becomes man, to be with us, our Emmanuel.



Image by Herbert Aust, Pixabay

Over the years, the people of the world have celebrated this remarkable and joyous moment in time, where heaven and earth meet, where the Divine and humanity are connected for eternity. Our patron and spiritual father, St. Francis, was moved by this glorious reality: God assuming our humanity. He strove to bring this miraculous event to life for his neighbours and friends in recreating a living nativity. In the spirit of St. Francis, let us celebrate the birth of Christ with great joy this Christmas...let us truly rejoice that God has come to be with us!

Christmas 2025 – Why Not Make It Particularly Special?

From Your Regional Council

Many of us have celebrated numerous Christmases. No doubt some of these celebrations were more memorable than others. Why is that? Was it because of the people we were with? Was it because of the gifts received...or the gifts given? Or perhaps it was because of where we were at in our spiritual journey...making the celebration of Christmas more meaningful and alive.

It is good to look back and recall all the wonderful times we have enjoyed at Christmas. It is also beneficial to reflect on the question: how many more Christmas celebrations will I be able to enjoy before my earthly journey comes to an end? Given that perspective, we might be inclined to make each of our future Christmas celebrations as spiritually special as can be.

In that spirit, we raise the follow questions:

- What might our fraternity do to enhance the celebration of Christmas this year?
- What might I do to welcome the Christ Child in a special way this Christmas?

Korean Catholic Traditions for Advent and Christmas

Marcella Misook Hong, St. Mary of the Angels Fraternity, Montréal, QC

In the Catholic Church of Korea, there is a long-standing tradition called *Pan-gong Seongsa* (or simply *Pan-gong*): a special time of reconciliation in preparation for Christmas (and Easter). Historically, this tradition came about at a time when the Church in Korea was persecuted and priests were scarce and were able to meet the faithful only twice a year in Advent and Lent (fall and Spring). Because these occasions were rare and precious, *Pan-gong* became a joyful and festival-like event eagerly awaited by all.

Over the years, this tradition has developed into a meaningful spiritual practice. By spending Advent in prayer, repentance and reflection, the faithful can welcome Christmas with renewed hearts. Although no longer an obligation, the Church in Korea continues to encourage the faithful to celebrate *Pan-gong* reconciliation as a way of spiritually preparing for Christmas. Furthermore, to make the Advent season even more special, the Korean Catholic Church has designated the Third Sunday of Advent as **Charity Sunday. On this day we are invited to look back on how we have loved our neighbours, to share God's blessing with those in need, and prepare to welcome the Lord with great joy.**



Thinking back on love of neighbor and on sharing with those in need.

As the prophet Isaiah proclaims: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.” (Isaiah 9:1) In the same spirit we try to spend this blessed season in repentance, love and hope as we await the coming of the Saviour with joyful hearts.

A Franciscan Christmas Salutation: “Meet You at the Crib”

Tom Wilkinson, St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cornwall PEI and one of our former Regional Ministers

When St. Francis decided to create, for the friars and people of Greccio, a creche with live animals, it was a simple attempt to bring to life the pivotal role of the Incarnation. Francis believed that the birth of Christ was the greatest gift that humankind could receive from God, our Father.

I think that for Francis, the humility, poverty and circumstances surrounding Christ's birth triggered an indescribable outpouring of love for this "Glorious Gift" from God, so that he wanted this feast to be a central or core part of his life and that of his followers. As Secular Franciscans, we have a special opportunity to follow Francis's example and celebrate with joy this remarkable event in our human history.



Image by Myriams-Fotos from Pixabay

In my extended family, with many of us living in different parts of Canada and the world, we would write or say to each other: **"We will meet you at the crib on Christmas Day!"**

After Midnight Mass or before the crib erected in our individual homes, we would gather as a family and be united in prayer and thanksgiving for this gift of our Divine Saviour and for each other.

Francis does not ask us to perform dramatic acts but to start simply by ensuring our own spirit and focus this Christmas is on the eternal gift given to us at Bethlehem. Let us remember to pray for each other, our fellow OFS brothers and sisters and our family members. In this way, may we be united in love and gratitude for (as Francis often called him) the Babe of Bethlehem and in prayer for peace and joy throughout the world.

I promise to meet you at the crib this Christmas! May I take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and joyous Christmas and may the love of God permeate your hearts throughout the New year!

An Early Christmas Gift: Celebrating Profession into the OFS

Deacon Howard Gotell and Frank Allen, newly professed members of Blessed Father Frédéric Fraternity of Moncton, N.B.

It was early November 2025, and Frank and Howard received a spiritual gift ...a gift that they had been anticipating for several years! It was as if their personal encounters with the Christ Child came early this year. Here Howard and Frank share their formation experiences and their celebration of Profession with their OFS sisters and brothers:

Frank explains, "Many years of quiet anticipation, exploring a variety of Christian spiritual paths that seemed to have a purpose/direction, were all good and drawing me deeper in relationship with Jesus. In the Fall of 2021, I made inquiries of the Franciscan community of Halifax and was given a contact which eventually led to attending gatherings of Blessed Fr. Frédéric Jansoone fraternity in Moncton, NB. A challenging, affirming 2-year period of formation began for myself and my co-inquirer, Deacon Howard, that felt "right" ...finally I was at home!"

Howard shares that, "Having served as a Deacon for more than two decades, I had what I considered to be a strong and sustaining faith. What I encountered in my journey in my Franciscan formation was a time of renewal, sparked by the degree of welcome and an overwhelming sense of community. The depth of personal sharing at fraternity meetings and mutual support experienced at annual fraternity retreats, engendered new and reaffirming

spiritual growth. These encounters touched my heart and caused me to reflect: would that I had started this journey many years earlier!”

Frank says that “On Sunday morning of November 2, 2025, an unspoken personal desire of many years was fulfilled. Deacon Howard and I made our commitment (Profession) to Jesus, the Church and the greater fraternal community of Franciscans before our pastor, our Fraternity Minister and the congregation of All Saints Parish. Years of anticipation, culminating in joy, a sense of fulfilment and the excitement of new beginnings...feeds my experience of Advent this year leading to the celebration of Our Lord’s birth.”

Howard tells us that “The Rite of Profession went smoothly until the time of my public profession. Having a vision impairment, I had the ritual words on my trusty iPad. Then the words disappeared on the iPad and I had to speak my commitment to God and my fraternal community from the heart. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit and Saint Francis guided my words! A final highlight for me was the appearance of our eldest grand-daughter and our first great grand-daughter from Fredericton, N.B. This was a complete surprise that made the celebration truly multi-generational...God is good, all the time!”

Frank and Howard’s wish for all members of the Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada:

“May this Advent be filled with joyful anticipation of the Lord’s coming into your life at Christmas and always...blessings and peace!”

(Frank is second from the left, and Howard is fourth from the right in this fraternity picture taken at their profession)



Advent – A Reflective Time of Preparation for Christmas

Eva Maciasz, Minister, St. Brother Albert Chmielowski Fraternity, Montréal, Quebec

In “older” Poland, Advent was usually a time of prayer and fasting. During the week most Catholic people participated in a special early morning Advent Mass called RORATY (a name that comes from the opening words, *Rorate caeli desuper*, of the ancient Latin chant for the service that means “Drop down dew, ye heavens from above, Isaiah 45:8). This chant expresses the longing for the coming of the Saviour. The traditional Roraty Mass begins in darkness with only candles and lanterns and as the Mass progresses the church lights are turned on... symbolizing the world in darkness waiting for Christ, the Light of the World.

For the past two years, our fraternity at Our Lady of Czestochowa (where we have our meetings) has had a tradition of displaying home-made Nativity scenes. Parishioners bring custom-made figurines assembled as the scene of the birth of Christ. All can see the display table growing with more scenes until the finale – Christmas! In Our Lady of Czestochowa Church we also

collect goods for the poor, together with all the parishioners. This is an initiative of our Franciscan priests and all the parish contributes to share with those in need.

We have some traditional Polish dishes that we serve during Advent and they are also present at the Christmas vigil table. One of the very old dishes is called *kulebiak*, a Polish yeast-based bread roll filled with fried sauerkraut and mushrooms. This dish is a staple during Christmas Eve (Wigilia) served with other delicacies (marinated herring, fried fish, pierogis, and borscht).

The Christmas Eve supper is a very special evening where the whole family gathers to celebrate their special bonds and to wish each other “all good”. This special supper starts with a prayer and sharing of a wafer bread (*oplatek*), blessed by the priest but not consecrated. After sharing the *oplatek*, the whole family would enjoy the Christmas vigil meal, and then when it was over go to Midnight Mass, to celebrate the joy of the coming of Jesus.



Note: The sharing of the oplatek unites the entire family from the oldest patriarch to the youngest toddler in a symbolic display of love and the Spirit of Christmas.

In our little fraternity we also keep this beautiful tradition, and share *oplatek* at our January meeting, and we also bring some festive food to share, and we sing Christmas carols.

As a child, I can remember that after we all shared *oplatek*, grandpa would go outside for awhile. My grandma told me that he went “to share optalek with the animals”. This memory always stays in my mind as a symbol of respect that my grandparents had for the animals that were a part of the household. What a Franciscan way of respecting nature...and maybe it was an early root to my Franciscan ways now!

For every person reading this, I wish you all the peace of Christ in the coming year, as nothing is more important than to accept the coming of the Lord Jesus into our hearts. I wish you good health, success in all endeavours, and a little bit of happiness every day. Have a reflective Advent season that will lead you to a joyful Christmas time! Peace and All Good!

Remembering God’s Angels in the Christmas Story

Excerpts from St. Luke’s Gospel, Chapters 1 and 2, New Jerusalem Bible



In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God ...to a virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph...and the virgin’s name was Mary.

The angel went in and said to Mary, Rejoice, you who enjoy God’s favour. The Lord is with you...Look! You are to conceive in your womb and bear a son and you must name him Jesus...The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will cover you with its shadow. And so, the child will be holy and will be called Son of God.

...Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judea, to David's town called Bethlehem...in order to register together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that while they were there...she gave birth to a son...wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

In the countryside close by there were shepherds...keeping watch over their sheep. An angel of the Lord stood over them and said "Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you news of great joy, a joy to be shared by the world. Today in the town of David, a Saviour has been born to you, he is Christ the Lord...And all at once with the angel there was a great throng of the hosts of heaven, praising God with the words:



Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace for those he favours!

A Good Friend to the OFS

From notes of Eric Lasota (St. Patrick Fraternity, Montreal, QC) and Tom Wilkinson (St. Francis of Assisi Fraternity, Cornwall, PE)

We must now say goodbye to a Franciscan friar who has been a wonderful friend to the Secular Franciscan Order.



Father Georges Morin was born in Saint-Célestin, Diocese of Nicolet, Quebec, in 1936. As a Franciscan friar from Canada, he was a missionary in Korea from 1965 to 1991. He also worked in the Mission Office and on the Franciscan Missions magazine, and was involved in parish ministry. He was active in the Secular Franciscan Order, and served as Spiritual Assistant for a number of OFS fraternities in the Montreal area, including St. Patrick's, Immaculate Conception, and Saint Mary of the Angels. He dedicated an immense amount of his time to supporting our fraternities!

Father Georges was a deeply spiritual friar and a wonderful poet. His areas of interest included the spiritual interpretation of works of art of the great masters such as Giotto, Van Gogh, Chagall and others, classical music and the new evangelization through art and colour.

Father Georges' funeral will be held on **Friday Dec. 5 at 1:30 PM Eastern**. The location is 5655 de Salisbury St. at the Chapel of the Mother House of the Providence Sisters.

The Birth of Christ: A Sign of Hope

Gerry Gabriel, Minister, Regional Fraternity of Eastern Canada

As we know, Pope Francis declared this year (2025) to be a Jubilee Year of Hope. A special hymn entitled "Pilgrims of Hope" was commissioned for use during our liturgical celebrations throughout the year. We have borrowed words from the third verse of this hymn to begin this short reflection on the virtue of Hope.

*Raise your eyes, for the wind is blowing
For our God is born in time...
Son made man for many
Who will find the way in him.*

Can we imagine our lives without Christ? What would our day-to-day reality be like if Christ had not come to be with us? What would our understanding of earthly death entail without Christ's promise of eternal life?

Clearly Christ's coming instilled into our earthly journeys the flame of Hope. The Messiah came to teach us, to heal us and to love us into life. Our hearts can be filled with joy, thanks to Christ-being-with-us. **The innocent babe**, born in humble surroundings in a stable more fit for domestic animals, **shone the light of Hope into our human darkness...and this light of Hope prevails unto this day...**

Thus Christ, the Prince of Peace is also our Supreme Source of Hope. Christ is truly "our strength and our song". Christ enables us to lift our eyes towards heavenly heights and walk in confidence of His love and presence. Christ came to be with us...and He said He would never leave us orphaned. Let us Rejoice in His faithful, steadfast love and everlasting guidance... towards our Home.



Photograph by Frank Allen