



THE NATIONAL FRATERNITY of the SECULAR FRANCISCAN ORDER – USA

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EXECUTIVE COUNCIL

Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS
National Minister
ofsusaminister@gmail.com

Diane F. Menditto, OFS
National Vice Minister
Diane.menditto@gmail.com

Susan Ronan, OFS
National Secretary
ofsusasecretary@gmail.com

Claudia Kauzlarich, OFS
National Treasurer
ofsusatreasurer@gmail.com

Mary Frances Charsky, OFS
International Councilor
mfcharsky@gmail.com

Donna Hollis, OFS
National Councilor
donnaancerfeet@aol.com

Josh Molidor, OFS
National Councilor
joshuamolidor@yahoo.com

Cherryle Fruge, OFS
National Councilor
Cmfofs2@gmail.com

Fr. Marek Stybor, OFM Conv
CNSA President-In-Turn
ofs-national@olaprovince.org

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

New Year's blessings to you. The beginning of the liturgical year also means the start of the Advent Season. Notice I wrote Advent Season, not Christmas Season. Although the Church says the Christmas Season doesn't start for 3+ weeks, the rest of society doesn't buy it. Most of our friends, neighbors and businesses have jumped to Christmas already. By the time the Feast of the Nativity arrives, and the actual Christmas Season begins, many have moved on - ready to take down the decorations.

As Catholic Christians and especially Franciscans, I encourage you to resist the societal push to jump ahead. This year we have 24 days of Advent... savor the time. The season is about preparing our hearts – getting us ready for the celebration of Our Lord's birth – as St. Francis called it, the "Feast of Feasts." (Francis of Assisi: Early Documents. The Founder Chapter CLI, p 374)

It does not take much for me to get distracted from the reality that God is with us daily – especially when the noise of the commercial Christmas starts earlier and gets louder each year. The commercial Christmas can bring a type of joy – but I find that it does not last. Advent is an opportunity or invitation to reflect, dive deeper, into the meaning of the Incarnation – to sustain lasting joy. So, I do my best to resist jumping into the commercial Christmas season the day after Thanksgiving by focusing on the Advent Season.

We are in control of how we react to the noise of this time.

What special features will you build into your Advent experience? Will your fraternity focus on Advent in December?

When do you decorate your home? Brian and I put up the lights on the outside. Currently the main decoration on the inside is an Advent wreath. Do you have one in your home? We light the candle(s) during prayer time each day. This Advent, we're planning to reflect on the National Formation Commission's "Formation Friday" messages that will include

reflections on the Prayer before the Crucifix¹ and the daily Advent suggestions in the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Advent Calendar

<https://www.usccb.org/resources/Advent-Calendar-2024%20updated.pdf>.

In addition to the prayer and reflection time, I will try to be active with the message during this season – through sharing details (e.g. Jesus is the reason for the Season). I recently learned that an acquaintance is Buddhist. She mentioned to me that she decorated her home for Christmas. It gave me an opportunity to learn more about her situation as a minority trying to fit in.

There are many ways for us to participate in the Advent Season. Thank you for considering my request to spend time in Advent and not to jump immediately to Christmas. As you are transformed, may the light of Christ shine through you to family, co-workers, friends, neighbors and everyone you encounter. May our Advent help us to “testify to the whole world of God’s great power working everywhere.”²

Peace and all good,

Jane

Jane DeRose-Bamman, OFS

National Minister



Jane and Brian's Advent Wreath

¹ If you'd like to receive the Formation Friday emails, contact your Formation Director or the Regional Formation Director to be added to the email list. These are boosters for our vocation all year round. Formation Fridays are also posted to: <https://jdpofs.org/resources/formation-fri/>

² Liturgy of the Hours, Week 2, Thursday Morning Prayer, Psalm Prayer for Antiphon 1