



SSS Grapevine

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Province of Saint Ann (USA)
Congregation of the Blessed Sacrament

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Florida Fun: Our Last 125th Celebration and Other Events

By John Thomas Lane, SSS, Provincial (Center in photo)

Blessed Sacrament Community Canonical Visit



Our local superior and provincial vicar is Father William Fickel SSS (*to my left in the photo*). Father Dominic Long Nguyen SSS, (*far right*) is the pastor, and Fathers Joselito (Lito) Hitosis SSS (*far left*), and my classmate Joseph Thai Minh Tran SSS (*my right*) are the parochial vicars assisting.

From Thursday, December 4, to Saturday, December 6, I had the privilege of hosting a community meeting at Saint Vincent de Paul in Holiday, Florida. Four men, two American province members, one Filipino province member, and one Vietnamese province member make up this special international community. It was a pleasure to hear how well the local SSS are doing, their affinity for the parish, and each one's hopes, desires, and challenges, since after meeting as a group, I met with them individually. One of our customs is to have a community meal together at a local restaurant, and we enjoyed our time at an Asian fusion restaurant.

1st Friday Gathering of Our Lady of the Rosary Aggregation

Once a month, the members of the Aggregation at Our Lady of the Rosary, Land O'Lakes, Florida, meet for prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament and a potluck social. I was fortunate that my visit coincided with their regular time to meet this local branch, some future members, and enjoy a lovely dinner together. Thank you for your hospitality,



faithful witness, and service each month! While not all were able to be present due to the holiday schedule, it was a joy to meet the core of long-time members and a few recently “promised” members. Next month, they hope to have the parish’s youth group join them for their prayer time together with exposition of the Blessed Sacrament.

Congratulations, Father Lito!



Just recently, after years of paperwork and good service in the United States, Father Joselito Hitosis SSS took the exam, made the oath, and became an American citizen. We are grateful for his service over the years in the Province of Saint Ann, for his services with a “convention of transfer” many years back at Hillcrest Hospital, Mayfield Heights, Ohio (part of the Cleveland Clinic network), Saint Paschal Baylon, Highland Heights, and in Hawai’i at the Philippine Province parishes there. We are grateful for Father Lito’s service in the local SSS community as parochial vicar and chaplain to the Filipino Community of the Diocese of Saint Petersburg.



Here is a group photo that all retreatants insisted we have

Saint Vincent de Paul Parish Enjoys Advent Retreat

On Saturday, December 6, 2025, the SSS parish invited me to give an Advent reflection with a special Advent Eucharistic Holy Hour. The theme of the Advent Season led me to share the importance of the season's traditions, the saints who make it special, and the readings and orations of the Mass that set a special tone for God’s Eucharistic justice.



While this was a parish event, it was wonderful to have so many of the parish's Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament members assist in the holy hour. Father Fickel presided at the holy hour while I was able to tickle the ivories.

Orlando Aggregation and LITE Team Meet for Mass, Lunch & Planning



On Sunday, December 7, at the San Pedro Spiritual Development Center for the Diocese of Orlando, I joined Father George Dunne, SSS (*a member of the Great Britain and Ireland Province and the one proclaiming the Gospel in the photo*), to preside at the center's regular Sunday morning Mass. Each Sunday, regular parishioners who attend this Mass also include our members of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament and Life in the Eucharist (*LITE*). I

asked our Aggregation and LITE members to raise their hands and invited the parishioner to consider their Eucharistic vocation to join with us.

After the Mass and some social time and luncheon, Mona Grigsby-Suarez, Director of the Center for Eucharistic Evangelizing (*CEE*), led the LITE Team in a planning process to begin "traveling teams" again for the Province of Saint Ann. Besides the Youth LITE Traveling Team at Saint Paschal Baylon, Highland Heights, led by Evamarie Cross, there has not been a traveling team for a few years. In response to requests to share a LITE retreat, members of the Orlando team have offered to travel across Florida or across the country. One of the goals of formation for new members of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament and also SSS men in formation is participation in a LITE retreat. There are two tracks of LITE retreats, one based on the sacramental aspects of the Eucharist and the other on scripture. Mona stated that in the coming year, a third track, based on service and the Eucharist, is also in development. With this LITE team and Aggregation hosting many service projects, there was a lot of great brainstorming to plan for successful travels and new possibilities. Please get in touch with Mona in the CEE to schedule your upcoming LITE retreat after these upcoming ones in January at Corpus Christi, Houston, Texas (*Spanish track*), and at Saint Joseph, San Antonio, Texas (*both Spanish and English tracks, February 27 and March 7*). Mona and I were very grateful for the outstanding organization and hospitality of Diana McGinty, who presided over our time together with the group.



Executive Team of the Province's Aggregation Council Meets to Dream



On December 8, 2025, the executive team leaders of the Province Aggregation Council met for the first time. Over two years ago, the Aggregation Council was established by the former co-director of the CEE, Mary Muehle, Mona, and me. Each branch of the Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament (*including the Aggregation in Waterville, Maine, with the Sister Servants of the Blessed Sacrament*) has an appointed person to represent its members. At first, this

council met almost every month. Now, it is every other month, serving as a resource, community builder, and support for the CEE and each branch of the Aggregation. The representative is either appointed by the local leader or superior or elected.

The executive team leaders include:

- Greg Dufour, President of the Council (Houston) (*left of Mona*),
- Jim Ziegler, Co-vice president (Houston) (*right of Father Fickel*),
- Alex Petrilak, Co-vice president (Tampa) (*in front of me to my right*),
- Ann Marie Nicora, Secretary (Tampa) (*center*)
- with ex-official members CEE Director Emeritus Father Fickel, Mona, the current CEE Director, and me (*Provincial*).

The goal of the meeting was to review the notes and proposals from the 2024 SSS Retreat, our current Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament realities, and set goals, dreams, and projects for the next year through the next five years. Since it is customary for the CEE director to make a presentation to the SSS men's chapter every four years, the executive team will also use the occasion to attend this chapter in August 2026 and hold a follow-up meeting then. We are grateful to the Saint Vincent de Paul parish and the Bobev Family for hosting us.

The Last 125th Celebration Caps an Outstanding Year of Remembrance and Hope for Our Future

On the 63rd anniversary of the canonization of our founder, Saint Peter Julian Eymard, December 9, the Florida Aggregation of the Blessed Sacrament (*all the branches in the Dioceses of Saint Petersburg and Orlando*) gathered with available members to celebrate a very special day of prayer, retreat, and celebration. Bethany Center in Lutz, Florida,



held the event with its beautiful facility and chapel.

Our time began with prayer in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament during exposition, with Father Lito presiding and Father George giving a homily as we prayed using the “four-ends” of Eymard’s method. Music from the

Taizé repertoire highlighted our adoration, reparation, thanksgiving, and entreaty praying styles.

After a break, we continued the day with a retreat talk by yours truly, focusing on the liturgical formation of Saint Peter Julian Eymard to the Aggregation and Pope Francis’ apostolic letter on the same topic *Desiderio desideravi* (*I have eagerly desired to celebrate with you – from Luke 22:15*). In small groups, folks were asked to focus on the Mass and the challenges it calls each one of us to witness. We also focused on what it means to be an Aggregation member, called to serve and witness, and let others see Christ and Eymard in each one of us.

Then we celebrated the Eucharist, with Father William Fickel giving the homily, and all the SSS religious priests serving in Florida concelebrated. Father Fickel touched on some key moments in Saint Eymard’s journey of faith and who we are to be as members of the Eymardian family through our gift of personality.



During the Mass, we welcomed six new members to the Aggregation from the Saint Paul and Saint Ignatius branches in the Diocese of Saint Petersburg. They are:

- Sue Babin, Saint Ignatius, Tarpon Springs
- Mar-ce Bennett, Saint Ignatius, Tarpon Springs
- Hanan Issak, Saint Ignatius, Tarpon Springs
- Rosa Stepanian, Saint Ignatius, Tarpon Springs
- Deborah Freshwater, Saint Paul, Tampa
- Marie Leonalda Baron, Saint Paul, Tampa

Their spirit, light, and joy were extremely evident as they proudly made their promise. (*The*

photo below shows the six with their formators, Gloria Jung, right of the banner, and Fr. Fickel)



Following the Mass, we had our 125th Anniversary Gala Social and Banquet. We had a presentation of a video prepared by our Emmanuel Media Resource Specialist, Kay Vincent, showing us the “faces of the Province of Saint Ann,” and enjoyed great appetizers and a special meal together. Scott Gongs from our

Advancement Office also joined the celebrations, visiting with our kind benefactors and donors to express our appreciation for their gifts.

It was an excellent way to end a truly outstanding and remarkable year: reflecting on our great past, all our present-day achievements, blessings with one another, and Eymardian commitment in the USA mission. We look to the future with profound gratitude and hope.

On behalf of the members of the Provincial Council, we are grateful for your many gifts and generous support. Whether through prayer, your donation of time, talent, or financial commitment, you have truly helped the SSS men through our formation to become novices, students, religious brothers, or religious ordained priests. You support us now in our ministries and in our semi-retirement, too. This has been a wonderful year to celebrate our many blessings with so much gratitude to God. With tremendous love, we are quite thankful for your thoughtfulness and appreciation. To the next 125 years – with your support and care, may God, Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament, and Saint Peter Julian Eymard continue to guide us. With all of us together with trust in our Eucharistic Lord, we will surely journey far and wide.

Here are some photos from the celebrations at Lutz, Florida:





**Our SSS Priests of Florida and I say: THANK YOU and Merry Christmas!
Pray for us and for vocations as we begin our 126th year!**

PS:

1. Don't forget to view *Emmanuel Magazine* and other items at <blessedsacrament.com>
2. Order your copy of the third printing (*with new photos*) of *Tomorrow Will Be Too Late*
3. Have you looked at your calendar for October 2026 to see if you can go on the Eucharistic Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of Saint Peter Julian Eymard? Contact Dimitri Bobev at (727) 403-8060 for details on this Pilgrimage:

<https://selectinternationaltours.com/product/eucharistic-pilgrimage-to-france-with-fr-john-thomas-lane-sss/>