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PACE E BENE

SUORE FRANCESCANE MISSIONARIE DEL SACRO CUORE

FMSC IN MISSION

IN TIME OF PANDEMIC

INDEX

IN COMMUNION WITH THE CHURCH

Pope Francis in Cyprus	p. 2
A service, an encounter, a story	p. 8

JOURNEYING WITH THE FRANCISCAN FAMILY

200 years of the birth of Father Bernardino da Portogruaro	p. 10
Lord, make us instruments of your peace	p. 20

LIFE OF THE CONGREGATION

The grateful memory of November 19, 1872 – 2022	p. 24
VX Chapter of the Province “Saint Francis”- US	p. 26
XVI Chapter of the Latinamerican Province ‘San Antonio’	p. 31
In the outbreak of the Covid. Limassol 2022	p. 37

FMSC IN MISSION

In mission: attentive to the signs of the times	p. 40
Bicycles for the school of Maigaro	p. 42
Letter Writing Ministry: the “Shepherd’s Corner”	p. 44
I chose you ... to go and bear fruit	p. 45
Finally together for the Feast of Saint Francis	p. 47
Get up, I make you a witness to what you have seen!	p. 49
Divine Providence continues to accompany us	p. 51
Love tends to expand	p. 52
The True Joy is in giving	p. 54
Pygmies... the joy to be children of God	p. 56
How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News	p. 59
FMSC Lay Associates in Pamarru -India	p. 61
Feast of “Immaculate Conception” in the Juniorate in India	p. 62
Transitus of our Founder, Venerable Father Gregory	p. 63

**APOSTOLIC JOURNEY OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE FRANCIS IN CYPRUS
2 - 4 December 2021**

The plane, an Ita Airways Airbus A320, landed at 3.00 pm at Larnaca airport. Pope Francis has arrived in Cyprus. It is a journey “*to the ancient sources of Europe*”, as the Pontiff himself defined it in the video message to the two peoples to which he is going to visit: Cyprus and Greece. On his thirty-fifth journey, Francis crosses the Mare Nostrum and his destination is still the border places, the meeting places between East and West. “*I will have the opportunity to approach a humanity wounded in the flesh, of so many migrants in search of hope*”. A journey full of symbolic and ecumenical significance “*to the dear peoples of those countries rich in history, spirituality and civilization*”. For us too, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, Pope Francis’s visit to Cyprus is a favorable opportunity to return to the sources of the promising Church and the faith of the apostles, of fraternity and unity among Christians of different confessions. In fact, not only that, the Pope’s visit finds our Province at the dawn of the 150th anniversary of the missionary presence of our congregation in the Middle East. The Catholic communities of the island are small but



the Pope’s meetings were rich and very important because they emanated the fragrance of dialogue and charity. This means synodality and this is how fraternity grows. Upon the arrival of Pope Francis, there were two significant events: the conference with the religious men and women, deacons, catechists, associations and ecclesial movements in the Maronite Cathedral of Our Lady of Grace in Nicosia and the meeting with the authorities in the Presidential Palace.

All of us sisters from the three communities of the island were present at the meeting in the Maronite Cathedral. Welcoming the Pope at the entrance are the Maronite patriarch, Cardinal Béchara Boutros Raï, and Archbishop Selim Jean Sfeir who has given him the holy water and the cross that the Pope kissed.

The jubilant assembly reflects the image of fraternity that the Pope will recall several times in his speech.

The message that Francis dedicated to the Catholic community of Cyprus is a message that extends to the whole of Europe: “*To build a future worthy of man it is necessary to work together; overcome divisions, tear down walls and cultivate the dream of unity*”.



Francis reminds us of unity in the Church, a place of “relationships” and “coexistence of diversities”.

“We need a fraternal Church that is an instrument of fraternity for the world”. A fragmented world that therefore needs strong signals, starting with the Church. It is precisely from the Church of Cyprus that *“has these open arms: welcomes, integrates, accompanies”*.

The Pope encourages us to overcome the temptation of fear and remembers the *“many spiritual and ecclesial sensitivities”* that outline the Cypriot Church: *“various stories of different origins, rites and traditions”*. He emphasizes the work of evangelization of the Maronite and Latin Churches, present for ages, and that today, thanks to the many migrants, *“presents itself as a multicolored people, a real meeting place between different ethnic groups and cultures”*. He also expresses his gratitude especially for the educational work carried out by the religious in the schools. *“This face of the Church reflects the role of Cyprus in the European continent: a land of golden fields, an island caressed by the waves of the sea, but above all a history that is intertwined with peoples and a mosaic of encounters. So is the Church: catholic that is universal, an open space where everyone is welcomed and reached out by God’s mercy and the invitation to love”*. Then follows a vigorous appeal: *“There are no walls in the Catholic Church and there must not be*

in the future: it is a common home, it is the place of relationships, and it is the coexistence of diversity”.

Francis asks the whole Church of Cyprus to exercise the virtue of “patience”, following the example of the Holy Apostle Barnabas. Above all, he emphasizes “the patience of accompaniment” which “does not crush the fragile faith of newcomers with rigorous, inflexible attitudes, or with too demanding requests regarding the observance of precepts”. *“We need a patient Church. A Church that does not allow itself to be upset and disturbed by changes, but serenely welcomes the newness and discerns situations in the light of the Gospel”*. The Pontiff proposes a simple program to carry out, welcoming “the new brothers and sisters who come from other shores of the world”. He invites us to *“cultivate a patient and attentive gaze, to be visible and credible signs of the patience of God who never leaves anyone out of the house, never anyone without his tender embrace”*.

His call is that of fraternity in the Church: *“One can discuss visions, points of view and it is worth doing it, it can do well! And discuss different sensitivities and opinions”*. This *“is an opportunity for growth and change”*.

We too found ourselves in the Gospel trail, that Francis traced as the path designed by the Holy Apostles Paul and Barnabas, in particular with the testimony of the Provincial Superior Sister Antonia Piripitsi.



Sister Antonia addressed Pope Francis with these words: *“We warmly welcome you to this island of Saints Barnabas and Paul, and many other saints who have contributed to the evangelization of the people of Cyprus. This evangelization was carried out through many men and women religious who preceded us and gave priority to the education of poor children. This mission continues to this day in Catholic schools, which are effective means of bearing witness to God’s love and inculcating human, Christian and religious values “.* Sister Antonia said there are three Catholic schools on the island currently in existence and in full operation, two of which *“open to boys and girls of all ethnicities, mentalities, cultures and religions”*.

They are “a truly ecumenical meeting place, without any discrimination, where bridges are built, where pupils learn to respect each other in their diversity, to love each other, to help each other, to dialogue, to collaborate together to build a better future, a future where everyone can live as brothers and sisters, regardless of race, culture, religion or language “. (...) *“The year 1974 marked a dramatic page in the centuries-old peaceful coexistence between the Christian Greek-Cypriot and Muslim Turkish-Cypriot populations.*

The division of Cyprus has radically changed not only the political and social structure of the island, but also our mission in the occupied area in the north. Despite various difficulties and dangers, the sisters, assisted by Maronite priests, have never stopped being present as poor among poor people, to support them spiritually and morally, and to ensure that the bells of some churches continue to ring “.

In communion with the Church

At the end of the meeting, to reconfirm our faith and our joy, all of us sisters suddenly gathered around the Holy Father, before his farewell.

Each of us was able to offer a greeting, a handshake, a caress asking for his blessing.

Pope Francis, with his penetrating gaze, was immediately able to approach and address a word to the elderly sisters, taking an interest in them, their age and country of origin.

He asked us to pray for him, placing the holy rosary in the hands of Sister Radia Matar.

The meeting was short but the intensity, emotions are still strong, and for us this is truly a sign of synodality!



Pope Francis begins the second day in Nicosia with a visit to the Orthodox Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos II, leader of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of the island, then speaking with him before the Holy Synod. His gestures are signs of the “cultivation of fraternity” and there is nothing more beautiful to open this second day. Alongside his “brother” Archbishop Chrysostomos, Francis asked the Christians of the two confessions not to indulge that “irreconcilability of differences” which is not in the Gospel and to go even in diversity “where the Church is mother”.

His appeal is to leave aside “abstract theories” and work together “side by side”, “in charity, in education, in the promotion of human dignity”. Because only in this way “will we rediscover our fraternity and communion will mature by itself”.

The Pontiff’s hand extended to his brother Chrysostomos II, Archbishop of Cyprus, is the hand of fraternal dialogue. In his speech before the Holy Orthodox Synod in the Cathedral of St. John the Theologian in Nicosia, Francis thanked for “the opening of the heart” and for the ecumenical commitment.

“Paul crossed Cyprus and later reached Rome”, thus

recalling the common apostolic origin of the Church of Rome and that of the island in the heart of the Mediterranean. “We therefore descend from the same apostolic ardor and a single way connects us, that of the Gospel. So I like to see us on the same path, in search of ever greater fraternity and full unity”.

Francis underlines three fundamental aspects of the biblical figure of St. Barnabas, “which can guide us on the path”. His name is Joseph, but he is nicknamed Barnabas by the apostles, which means at the same time “son of consolation” and “son of exhortation”.

“It is beautiful that both characteristics, indispensable for the proclamation of the Gospel, are based in his person. In fact, every true consolation cannot remain intimate, but must be translated into exhortation, orienting freedom towards good. At the same time, every exhortation in faith can only be based on the consoling presence of God and be accompanied by fraternal charity”.

“Thus Barnabas, son of consolation”, exhorts all of us to bring the Gospel to men, “inviting us to understand that the announcement cannot be based only on general exhortations, on the repetition of precepts and rules to be observed, as has often been done”.

However, Pope Francis reiterates, *“he must follow the path of personal encounter; pay attention to people’s questions, to their existential needs”*. *“To be children of consolation, before saying something, you need to listen, let yourself be questioned, discover the other, share. Because the Gospel is transmitted by communion.*

This is what, as Catholics, we wish to experience in the coming years, rediscovering the synodal dimension, constitutive of being Church”.

The Pontiff expresses closeness to the anxieties of Cyprus. He hopes that *“the chances of meeting each other; of getting to know each other better; of breaking down many preconceptions and of listening docile to our respective experiences of faith will increase”*. This *“will bring both a spiritual fruit of consolation”*.

Finally, he assures *“my prayer and my closeness and that of the Catholic Church, in the most painful problems that anguish you as well as in the most beautiful and daring hopes that animate you. Your sadness and joys belong to us, we feel them as ours”*.

The second aspect of Barnabas, for Pope Francis, is linked to his gesture: *“Owner of a field, he sold it and handed over the proceeds, placing it at the feet of the Apostles”*.

This gesture *“suggests that to revitalize ourselves in communion and in mission we also need the courage to strip ourselves of what, although precious, is earthly, to foster the fullness of unity”*. *“Let’s not allow traditions, in the plural and with a small “t”, to tend to prevail over Tradition, in the singular and with a capital “T”*.

It urges us to imitate Barnabas, to leave behind what, even if good, can compromise the fullness of communion, the primacy of charity and the need for unity “.

Referring to the third aspect of the figure of Barnabas, who on his return to Cyprus with Paul and Mark, found Elimas, *“magician and false prophet”* who *“opposed them with malice”*, Pope Francis condemns the false prejudices and deceptions *“that the past puts us in front of us and that hinder the path”*.

Because in *“centuries of division and distances”* we have assimilated, even involuntarily, *“not a few hostile prejudices towards others, preconceptions often based on scarce and distorted information, disclosed by an aggressive and controversial literature”*.

However, this distances us from the way of God, *“reaching out to harmony and unity”*.

The Pontiff then leaves the prepared speech and expresses his emotion at what Archbishop Chrysostomos said about the Mother Church in the opening remark of the meeting: *“We have faith in this Mother Church, which gathers all of us and who with patience, tenderness and courage carry on along the path of the Lord. Nevertheless, to feel the motherhood of the Church, we all must go there, where the Church is Mother. All of us, with our differences, but all children of the Mother Church”*.

In his speech, before Francis, Archbishop Chrysostomos recalls that the Christian roots of Europe as well as its spiritual sources are found right here in Cyprus: *“the door of Christianity to the world of the Gentiles”*.

A sad underlining: *“since 1974”* we have been *“going through the most difficult historical turning point”*.

Since *“Turkey has fiercely attacked us and seized 38 percent of our homeland by force of arms”*, taking away its inhabitants while the shrines of the Lord *“were set on fire”*.

He strongly denounces the confiscation of historic Byzantine churches, and the stripping of priests’ possessions *“with incredible and unprecedented barbarism”*.

The Primate of the Orthodox Church asks for the *“active support”* of Pope Francis in this *“national and ecclesial Golgotha, which we have been going through for 47 years”*.

He also reiterated that the Orthodox Church *“has excellent relations with all the Churches”* and is always in *“dialogue with all”* evidencing, *“the ongoing dialogue between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the Catholic Church of Rome”*.

Archbishop Chrysostomos firmly believes *“in the peaceful resolution of our disagreements”* through *“truly honest dialogue”*.





December 03, 2021, in Nicosia, Pope Francis celebrates Mass in the Neo GSP Stadium. To the approximately 10 thousand faithful present, he recommends that they be united in dialogue and walk together: the proclamation is not proselytism but witness, not moralism that judges but mercy. *“Go to Jesus to heal”, “bring the wounds together”, “proclaim the Gospel with joy”*. The three key words that Francis suggests based on today’s Gospel passage that narrates the two blind men healed by Jesus, distinctive of the ecclesial spirit: to think, speak, act like us, leaving individualism and the claim to self-sufficiency that make the heart sick “. Hence, the invitation is to renew fraternity, to “always be united, to “go forward with joy”. If we remain divided among ourselves, if each thinks only of himself or his group, if we do not huddle together, we do not dialogue, we do not walk together, and we cannot fully recover from blindness “.

For the Pope, the irrepressible joy of the Gospel is the other distinctive sign of the Christian. This joy “fills the heart and the whole life of those who meet Jesus, free from the risk of an intimate, serious and plaintive faith, and introduces the dynamism of witness”. *“Dear friends, it is nice to see you and to see that you live the liberating proclamation of the Gospel with joy. I thank you for that. It is not a question of proselytizing, please, please never do proselytizing, it is not a question of proselytizing, but of witnessing; not of moralism that judges, no, do not do it, but of mercy that embraces; not of external worship, but of lived love. I encourage you to continue on this path, like the two blind men of the Gospel, we too renew the encounter with Jesus and we go out of ourselves without fear to bear witness to those we meet “!* Francis invites the commitment to be “luminous Christians”, “who touch with tenderness the blindness of the brothers, who with gestures and words of consolation turn on lights of hope in the dark. Christians who sow shoots of the Gospel in the dry fields of everyday life, who bring caresses in the solitudes of suffering and poverty”. His final greeting is addressed to the Church of Cyprus, thanking them warmly for the welcome and affection shown to him, *“Here in Cyprus I am breathing a little of that atmosphere typical of the Holy Land, where the antiquity and variety of Christian traditions enrich the pilgrim. This is good for me, and it is good for me to meet communities of believers who live the present with hope, open to the future, and share this horizon with those most in need “.*



We sisters, present on the island, have breathed this climate of universal fraternity through the various services that we have carried out with such dedication. Beginning with the direct organization of the Coordinating Commission with the personal contribution of Sister Antonia Piripitsi Provincial Superior. Then the care of the sacristy and of the altar, participation in the choir with the preparation of songs in various languages, the accompaniment of the children of our school, the service to the Pope during his stay in the Nunciature in

Nicosia. Above all, we accompanied the Pope’s journey with daily prayer, with the sacrifice of the elderly and sick sisters in the infirmary and with the affection of those who were close to us even from a distance..



In the afternoon, during the ecumenical prayer in the parish church of Santa Croce, Pope Francis meets the migrants together with the faithful of various Christian denominations.

The faces of the migrants mark the conclusion of the Pope's visit to Cyprus by their testimonies of emigration, of rejection and hatred, of so many wounds that still bleed today.

In the Church, located at the edge of the green line, there is a good representation of those thousands of refugees kidnapped, exploited, sold, tortured ... it is the wounded flesh that Francis touches in person before taking his leave from the island.

The Pope's wish is significant: "May this island, marked by a painful division, become a laboratory of fraternity with the grace of God".

In his speech, he proposes the "concrete steps" to pass "from conflict to communion, from hatred to love". Very sensitive and moved by the testimonies heard, *"I had received your testimonies in advance about a month ago and they had struck me a lot, and even today they moved me. However it is not just emotion, it is much more. The emotion that comes from the beauty of the truth. Your testimonies are like a 'mirror' for us, Christian communities"*.

We make our Pope's call to wake us up from the "sleep of habit": *"let us look into the eyes of the discarded ones we meet, let us allow ourselves to be provoked by the faces of children, children of desperate migrants. Let us allow ourselves to be delved into by their suffering to react to our indifference; let's look at their faces"*.



We too, Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart of the Oriental Province of Saint Elizabeth, who celebrate the 150th anniversary of missionary service in the Middle East, are called to open our eyes, not to be silent and look the other way, not to favor culture of indifference, to fight the "barbed wire" of hatred.

May Pope Francis's visit strengthen the steps and commitment to achieve unity, belonging, national responsibility and peaceful collaboration in the entire island of Cyprus and among the Christian communities of the various confessions!

A service, an encounter, a story.

Having Pope Francis at home.

Six sisters from the various religious Congregations of the island were invited by the Franciscan fathers to the Nunciature in Nicosia, in view of the arrival of the Holy Father Francis in Cyprus. Of course, in addition to the preparations and the work to be done, given that time was running out, there was also the intense emotion that took over. We too, Sister Elsapola Pudussery and Sister Aurora Castardo, had to get busy. Just think, having Pope Francis a guest at home! That honor! And it doesn't happen every day to serve the Pope!

The Pontiff arrived in Cyprus on 2 December 2021 at the Larnaca airport and with him all the escort: the police, the guards, all his followers, collaborators and managers. Present are the Apostolic Nuncio of Jerusalem Adolfo Tito Yllana, Mons. George Panamthundil, His Beatitude Pierbattista Pizzaballa Patriarch of Jerusalem, Mons. Selim Sfeir Maronite Archbishop of Cyprus, the Custos of the Holy Land Francesco Patton. A beautiful image of the Mother Church of Cyprus, so important for the history of salvation. Upon his arrival at the Nunciature, right at the entrance, Pope Francis sees the barbed wire of separation in the last divided capital of Europe. A barbed wire that does not break ecumenical relations in this Church that integrates different peoples, cultures and traditions. A barbed wire that will not hinder the Pope from looking at the faces of migrants and refugees with his ecclesial sensitivity.

With immense joy, we welcomed and greeted Pope Francis, kissing his hand and extending the warm welcome, also from all the FMSC sisters who accompany us spiritually. We truly felt privileged to represent our Province as well as our Religious Family!

With so much Franciscan simplicity, we lived moments of communion alongside the Pope, short but intense moments full of meaning. Inside the Nunciature, where we served, we carried out the simplest work that all mothers do at home: serving at the table, taking care of the Pope's room, washing, ironing, arranging the environment. And we did all this with a lot of love and devotion. In Pope Francis' room, we have prepared a small tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament. His day begins at 4:00 am with two hours of Eucharistic adoration. And we knew that the Pope was there, in his room, in front of Jesus the Eucharist. His life, nourished by adoration and contemplation, was an opportunity for us to ask ourselves about the quality of our prayer life, about the evangelical witness we give to those who approach

us. The Pope is right when he says, "without adoration and proclamation we are museum Christians".



Furthermore, its simplicity, sobriety and confidentiality, which cannot remain unnoticed.

I, Sister Elsapola Pudussery, who was in charge of arranging his room, in the morning, I found myself in front of a well-ordered and already made bed and everything was in its place. Moreover, everything reflected the simple style of an even simpler and more discreet person.

At home, in the Nunciature, we often found ourselves in the kitchen helping the two cooks with table service. On December 3, 2021, after the Ecumenical Prayer with the migrants, on his return, Pope Francis entered the kitchen with his usual immediate greeting: “Good evening, how are you? How is work going? Are these two cooks good?” Moreover, not only that ... we were amazed and speechless when, with such simplicity, he asked for a piece of bread because he was a little hungry. Just a piece of bread. Just like at home!



We worked hard, but we were very happy to have been able to give our service and contribution so that the Pope would feel at home and with him all the people who accompany him. There was no shortage of his laughter and jokes, especially when he saw us a little hesitant about approaching him to take a picture. The atmosphere in the Nunciature was very serene and peaceful and this, thanks to the familiarity and cordiality that Pope Francis knows how to create wherever he is. Because this is his lifestyle!

On 4 December 2021, before his departure from the Nunciature, at 06:00 in the morning, the Pope celebrated Holy Mass in the Santa Croce Church. A private Mass in which we sisters were also able to participate. We also lived this last moment around the Altar in prayer, breaking the Bread of Life. We offered all our gratitude and gratitude for the days spent next to the Pope. The final greetings before the farewell, his smile, his gaze, his presence, the last words and that barbed wire of separation. However, Francis encourages us, to go forward always and with courage! The Lord precedes us! Thus, our service became an encounter, a story. We have personally experienced the simple and synodal style that characterizes the life of the Pope, the life of every day, life together with the most ordinary people. His sobriety of life is what we also see in public. The maxim is only one: love!

We wish to thank the Lord and our Provincial Superior Sister Antonia Piripitsi for choosing us for this service and for all the wonders, we experienced alongside the Pope. For us it has become a ‘gift’ opportunity, which in turn we want to share and give back to the brothers and sisters.



*With
fraternal affection:
Sr Elsapaola
Pudussery
and
Sr Aurora
Castardo*

Celebration of the 200th Birth Anniversary of Father Bernardino of Portogruaro

On 15 January in Portogruaro the 200th anniversary of the birth of Father Bernardino was celebrated. For the occasion, Sr. Paola Dotto, superior general was also invited to participate and present our “historical memory” on Father Bernardino, explaining, through documentation, his relationship with our Religious Family especially at the beginning of the foundation and the opening of the first missions.

The celebration was attended by Sr. Tiziana Tonini, delegate of the Superior General since Sr. Paola Dotto engaged in Chile for the Chapter of the Latin American Province, Sr. Miranda Sforza delegate of the Provincial Superior Sr Stefania Bandiera and Sr. Diomira Cavasin as the current person in charge of the historical office.

Brief history of the life of Father Bernardino da Portogruaro ofm

Father Bernardino da Portogruaro was born on January 15, 1822 in the province of Venice with the name of Giuseppe dal Vago. He felt his vocation at the age of 18 and in 1839; he wore the Franciscan habit in San Michele in Isola. Ordained a priest a few years later, he first became a teacher and then, at the age of 33, Minister Provincial of the Reformed Friars Minor in Veneto.



In 1862, he arrived at the Convent of San Francesco in Ripa Grande to fill the role of Procurator General of the Reformed Friars.

Seeing the impossibility of convening a general chapter, he was appointed Minister General of the entire Order of Friars Minor by Pius IX on March 14, 1869 and Pope Leo XIII confirmed him in 1881. He devoted himself with tireless commitment to the task entrusted to him for 20 years, in a very complex historical period, because it was necessary to rebuild the Franciscan Family dispersed by decades of government persecutions and oppression in Italy as well as in the various parts of the world.

As minister general of the Order of Friars Minor he founded the Collegio Antonianum, encouraged the critical edition of the works of St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, supported the spread of seraphic colleges, and promoted missionary action.

He guided and helped foundresses, founders, supporting and encouraging many Institutes of Sisters, especially regular Tertiary Sisters. He was a man of great vision, he spent his life in prayer, at the confessional, on the pulpit, teaching, in the government, never getting tired and always looking for the Good, Peace, and Unity.

He resigned in 1889 at the age of 67; several times, he refused to be bishop and cardinal, but at the command of Pope Leo XIII on 18 September 1892, he was consecrated titular archbishop of Sardica.

He retired to Quaracchi where he died on May 7, 1895, praising God for the goodness of having called him to live as an authentic son of the Seraphic Father St. Francis.

His body remained in the local cemetery until November 1960 when it was moved to Venice and then in 1961 permanently placed in the convent of S. Francesco al Deserto, on the homonymous lagoon island. Pope Benedict XVI, on July 3, 2008, authorized the heroic decree on his virtues.

We report here, the article, modified in some parts, by the organizing committee of Portogruaro sent to us as “news” and “press release” of the celebration of January 15, 2022..

Celebrated in Portogruaro - the jubilee day, the two hundred years of the birth of the venerable Father Bernardino

The Minister General Father Massimo Fusarelli and the leaders of seven women’s congregations related to his memory were present along with many Friars Minor on January 15 in his hometown.

The representatives of the Franciscan “universe”, together with the heads of various women’s religious congregations, gathered in Portogruaro on Saturday 15 January 2022 on the day of the two hundred years birth anniversary of the venerable Father Bernardino. In the early afternoon, the minister general of the Friars Minor, Father Massimo Fusarelli met in front of the town hall with the minister provincial of Northern Italy, Father Enzo Maggioni. Then later joined them the provincial of Sant’Antonio di Padova dei Minori Conventuali father Roberto Brandinelli, the representative of the Capuchin Minor Veneti and the Secular Franciscans of the city. Seven female religious congregations supported and encouraged in the nineteenth century by Father Bernardino, with sisters from different parts of Italy, who arrived in Portogruaro for the celebrations of the day, solemnly confirming the esteem towards our father who was a sure guide and orientation for their foundresses, founders, the first superiors general.

The congregations are, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary of Blessed Mary of the Passion (religious family of 5000 sisters scattered in 73 countries: represented by mother Françoise Massy superior general), the Franciscan Missionaries called of Egypt, of blessed Troiani (represented by Sister Paola Fortunio vicar general), the Daughters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, of St. Teresa Eustochio Verzeri (present from Cremona Sister Assunta Bressan, historian of the congregation), the Franciscan Missionaries of the Sacred Heart known as of Gemona (founded by a contemporary and brother of

Father Bernardino, the venerable Gregorio Fioravanti, represented by Sister Tiziana Tonini vicar general), the Stigmatine of the venerable Lapini (represented Rome by mother Encarnacion Lobato superior general), the Daughters of St. Ann of the blessed Gattorno (represented from Bologna by Sister A. Rosa Amatulli provincial), the Franciscan Tertiaries Elizabeth of Blessed Vendramini (Sister Maria Pardin, superior general present from Padua): all intervened with documented reports at the conference followed at 4 pm in the cathedral of Sant’Andrea Apostolo, where the portrait of the venerable Father was exhibited together with the act of his birth, and of his baptism on January 17, 1822.

After the presentation of the archpriest Monsignor Giuseppe Grillo, the mayor of Portogruaro architect Florio Favero and the bishop of the diocese of Concordia Pordenone Monsignor Giuseppe Pellegrini were present and greeted the gathering. There was also a message from the patriarch of Venice Monsignor Francesco Moraglia read by the canon of San Marco Monsignor Giuseppe Camilotto. “The figure of Father Bernardino - underlined the patriarch - is closely linked to the city of Venice where he carried out and completed his training, recognized and developed his Franciscan religious vocation”. Very significant and detailed is the letter from the Rector Magnificent of the University Antonianum in Rome, Father Agustin Hernandez Vidales, a friar minor, who recognizes Father Bernardino as his architect and father of the university. It was read by the provincial father.

The minister general, first in the highly appreciated speech during the conference, then in the homily of the Holy Mass concelebrated at 18.30 by twenty priests (including the friars of various convents in Veneto and Friuli and the archpriest emeritus of Sant'Andrea monsignor Pietro Cesco) and live broadcast by the Telechiara broadcaster, highlighted how, despite the physical weakness and poor health, Father Bernardino was able to put an extraordinary spiritual energy by grasping the signs of a new era, and knowing to transform difficulties into opportunities. "God knows - concluded Father Fusarelli - how much of this example our time needs, especially after the trial of the pandemic, and not only, and how much our Order of Friars Minor also needs it, which recognizes in the venerable friar a third ideal founder after St. Francis and St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio". Finally, he brought a greeting to the parish of Quaracchi, Florence, which has always nurtured devotion to the figure of the venerable father who passed there to God in 1895.

The professor, Alessio Alessandrini, in the introduction to the meeting he moderated on behalf of the citizen committee promoting the Bernardinian bicentenary, recalled the richness of Franciscan places and personalities that characterized the history of Portogruaro, since the early years of the movement founded by the Seraphic are about to start the celebrations of the

eighth century 2023-2026.

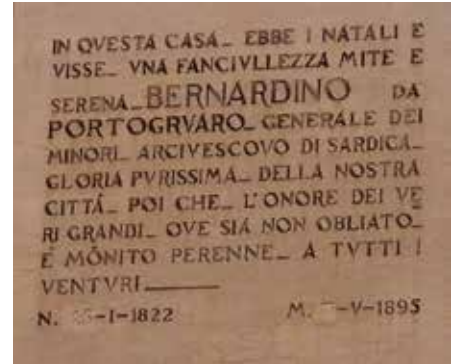
Mentioned with emotion the Capuchin Father Luigi Padovese, son of parents of Concordia and Summaga, bishop of Anatolia, who suffered martyrdom in Turkey on June 3, 2010: he had been a professor of the same present Minister General at the Gregorian University. In the tomb of the bishops in the cathedral, there are also the remains of Fra Fulcherio di Zuccola, an important bishop of Concordia from the 13th century.

In addition, present at the celebration were, from Rome the postulator general Father Giovangiuseppe Califano, from Pavia the vice father Claudio Bratti. Also on display for the occasion are the images of the mother foundresses and founding mothers of the invited congregations, including those were absent for justified reasons, Franciscan Missionaries of the Child Jesus of the servant of God Micarelli, Poor Clares, Franciscan Missionaries of the Blessed Sacrament of the venerable Farolfi, Missionaries of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Saint Frances Xavier Cabrini.

The closing of the important day was in music, thanks to the concert of the quartetto d'archi which substituted, the forced absence of the author of the proposed Franciscan pieces, the master Don Giuseppe Russolo, unfortunately passed away two days later.



Returning to the beginning, the walk along the streets of the city followed by the welcome (fraternal and suggestive moment crowned at the shrine of the “Madonna della Pescheria” on the Lemene river), Father Fusarelli, surrounded by brothers, mothers and general vicars, sisters, with the parish priest and the members of the committee first stopped at the birthplace of the venerable Bernardino in via Mazzini where the inscription on the facade was read.



Finally he met with the sculptor Giulio Bornacin, author of the monument built in the nearby garden of via Cadorna in 1999, who explains in six facades as many salient moments in the life of Father Bernardino:

Baptism in Portogruaro,
His early years in this city,
Franciscan life in Venice in the historic site of San Francesco del Deserto got liberated by paying a ransom,
In generalate as wished by pope Pius IX,
Visits to the friars in numerous countries of Europe,
Father Bernardino archbishop.

It was as if embraced in a circle by those present, an image of the embrace that Portogruaro gave on the jubilee day and will give again throughout 2022, with initiatives even wider than the city, to his illustrious and holy son.



Here followed the “historical memory” prepared for the occasion. that reveals to us the attentive, paternal, “special” relationship of Father Bernardino with our Congregation.

BICENTENARY of the BIRTH of FATHER BERNARDINO from PORTOGRUARO

(January 15, 2022)

FATHER BERNARDINO from PORTOGRUARO and the FRANCISCAN MISSIONARY SISTERS of the SACRED HEART (FRANCISCAN TERTIARY SISTERS FOR MISSIONS)

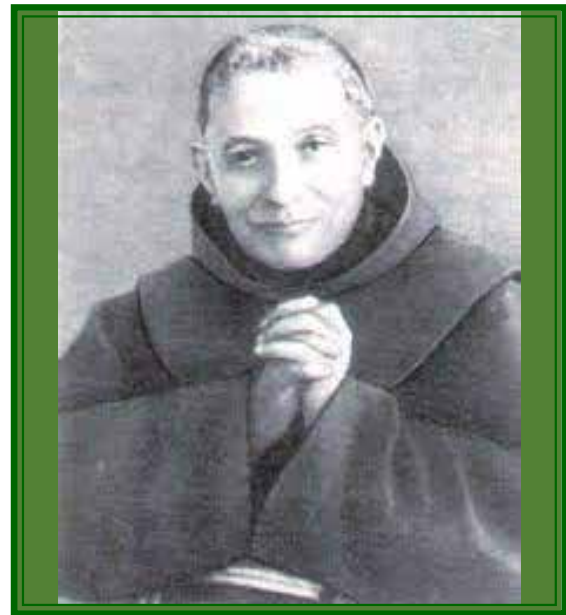
The brief presentation of the figure of the venerable Father Bernardine of Portogruaro in relation to our Congregation, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart is above all a reason for joy and gratitude to the Lord for the precious and inestimable gift of this venerable “father” whom the Lord has placed next to our Founder the venerable Father Gregory Fioravanti and of our first Mothers General and sisters to give life, in the Church, to a new Franciscan and missionary religious Family.

The drafting of this simple work also leads us to thank those who organized this event for the 200th anniversary of the birth of the Venerable Father Bernardino of Portogruaro.

The invitation to our Congregation to take part in it was a great opportunity to deepen the charismatic significance, the particular value and the truly significant and fundamental role that the person of Father Bernardino had in the history of the origins and development of our Congregation. The documents that are kept in our general archive and which have been a reason for study, especially for the canonization process of our Founder, in this new research have assumed a very particular value, making the figure of Father Bernardino emerge with more vigor and also emotion.

The words that as Minister general he addressed to all the sisters of our Congregation in one of his letters of 1877 clearly express the relationship lived with our Institute:

“To our venerable and most beloved daughters in Jesus Christ, the Franciscan Missionary Tertiary Sisters who are in the Mother House of Gemona, in the United States of America and in the Middle East, wishes and consolation in the Holy Spirit.



Among the care of our Ministry, Venerable Daughters, we have never lost sight of your Holy Institute, which indeed we were eager to take accurate news of it, and to give it, according to what was requested, or knew the need, appropriate warnings and care.”

Our Congregation of the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart at the time of Father Bernardino bore the name of Franciscan Tertiary Sisters for the Missions. The current title was given in 1905 with the definitive approval of the Constitutions.

The international and missionary Congregation was born in Gemona del Friuli on November 14, 1860 with the decree of foundation and on April 21, 1861 with the canonical opening in the Cathedral of Gemona by the Archbishop of Udine Mons Luigi Trevisanato.

It arose from the charism entrusted by God to the Founders, Laura Leroux de Bauffremont and the Venerable Servant of God, Father Gregory Fioravanti ofm, and took shape from the generous perseverance of the first sisters. (Constitutions n. 1) The Foundress Laura Leroux Duchess of Bauffremont sought and accepted the divine inspiration “to establish Franciscan Tertiary Sisters for the dual purpose, that is, to educate the poor girls of the places where they would have houses and to provide personal work to the Apostolic Missions”.

She manifested this project to the venerable Father Gregory who, after the approval of the Minister General, Father Bernardino of Montefranco and the Archbishop of Udine, took over the direction of the Foundation certain that “it was really wanted by God”.

The Foundress, after giving the main elements for the Foundation: the purpose of the Institute with its Franciscan, missionary identity; the place, Gemona del Friuli; the special protector, Saint Anthony of Padua, left the new religious Family to the care and wise guidance of Father Gregory and to the one whom she herself had designated as her vicar, Sr Margherita Lindner.

According to the documents we have, Father Bernardino is part of the history of our Congregation, already in the time when the superior was Sr Margherita, when she, together with Father Gregory and the fathers of the American mission in New York, organized the departure of the first three missionary sisters called to the German Parish in New York City.

From the historical archive we find many documents, especially letters from the Founder, (Fr. Gregory) from the first Superior Generals, from the sisters, especially from the American mission and other important persons who turn to Father Bernardino. There are his letters and replies that we find on the back of the letters written to him. Keeping in mind the quantity of the material, we can divide the time span from 1865 to 1895 into three distinct periods:

- As PROCURATOR GENERAL of the OFM ORDER
- As MINISTER GENERAL
- As the general DELEGATE for all TERTIARY SISTERS



As PROCURATOR GENERAL of the OFM ORDER

As already mentioned, Father Bernardino organized and followed the sending of the first three missionary sisters to the mission in the United States.

We are in 1865 and the Institute realizes its missionary charism by sending the first three sisters who left the mother house in Gemona to go to the United States.

Requested by Father Panfilo da Magliano at the suggestion of the Minister General Father Raffaele da Pontecchio, the three sisters were accompanied on their journey to the United States by Father Leone Pacilio from Naples. The latter writes various letters to Father Bernardino to narrate how the expedition and the entire journey were organized (letters dated 6 November 1865 - 26 November - 30 November - 5 December). Subsequent letters from the same father and also from Father Andrea Pfeifer referring to Father Bernardino about the beginnings of our mission and the first problems concerning the dependence of the sisters on Gemona and not on the fathers in America.

In the short period in which Father Bernardino was in charge of the missions, there is a letter from Father Gregory dated July 24, 1868 informing him of the departure of the second group of missionaries for the United States.

From this, it is clear that Father Bernardino followed our first mission in America from the very beginning and that his advice and indications were sought, by the Father Founder, by the Superior General Mother Angela dell'Angelo, by the Franciscan fathers in the United States who followed the insertion of the first missionaries into the new reality.

AS MINISTER GENERAL OF THE ORDER (1869 -1889)

During the period of his service as Minister General, Father Bernardino has constant contact with our Congregation.

The material can be divided as follows:

- Relationship with our Founder the Venerable Father Gregory.
- Relationship with our first Superiors General (Mother Angela Dell'Angelo and Mother Assunta Menard).
- Relations with missions in the United States and the Middle East.

Relationship with our Founder the Venerable Father Gregory

The venerable Father Bernardino and Father Gregory, contemporaries, were bound by a deep friendship, great esteem and mutual trust; the letters highlight this human and spiritual bond that guided them in the commitment that the Lord had entrusted to them.

Father Bernardino appointed Father Gregory, provincial minister of the "Sant'Antonio" Province twice in 1871 in 1875 despite the fact that he already had the great commitment to follow our Institute.

During the time of Father Bernardino as Minister General of the order, the exchange of letters between the two was constant and they dealt with topics of various kinds.

Our Founder referred to Father Bernardino for everything concerning the Congregation: situations of individual sisters, communities,

relations with the friars and bishops, the economic problem of the Monastery of the Mother House, the various activities in the missions, the choices of places of mission.

Father Bernardino welcomed every situation with respect and a strong sense of responsibility; and he responded with the prudence that characterized him and in search of the Holy Spirit to discern together with Father Gregory the Will of the Lord for this New Institute.

He was attentive to everything and nothing he considered insignificant.



He supported and encouraged our Founder with words full of faith and clarity of motivation:

"Come on, with the best for the souls and the good progress of the Community.

Courage! have holy patience: thorns are not lacking, but we must keep ourselves be prepared for everything". (10 April 1872)

"We do not need people, nor their fervor, but the grace of God alone (If one wants to be appreciated, pleasing to all, he could not call himself a Servant of God". (23 October 1878)

"God's goodness, seeing our helplessness, will move things to our advantage in that way, which perhaps we least think about; let us have confidence". (1 April 1880).

The constant openness of Father Bernardino to the action of the Holy Spirit and the search for the Divine Will nourished in him humility and trust in others.

When he understood that Father Gregory had direct knowledge of the situation, he told him with full confidence:

“Your paternity has it in your hands, you can judge better than me” (8 August 1873).

Relationship with the first Superiors General

During the time of him as the Minister general, Father Bernardino followed and guided Mother Angela dell’Angelo our superior general for a good 20 years from 1867 to 1887.

With her, the Institute was consolidated on a charismatic and organizational level both in Italy and in the missions in the United States and in the Middle East. Father Bernardino accompanied Mother Angela with clarity of his role as Superior General; he always guided the choices in respect of the Founder, of the charismatic identity and as a means of relations with the ecclesiastical authorities.

He himself nominated Mother Angela several times as Superior General, visiting the Mother House and listening to the sisters before reaching a decision.

The letter sent to all the sisters of the Institute on 11 September 1877 is testimony to this,

“After having known previously and in writing freely the wishes of most of the Sisters, after having conferred with the Mother Superior and with the Discrete gathered together with the Most reverend Father Gregory, our Commissioner at the Mother House, and had their unanimous sentiment, humbly invoked the light of the Holy Spirit, on this eleventh day of September, we have appointed and elected, and with this Decree we publish named and elected:

- ***as the Superior General of the Institute ... Sr. M. Angela of the Sacred Heart of Mary;***
- ***as the general councilors for three years...***



**Mother Angela
dell’Angelo**

Father Bernardino’s attention to the Institute was directed not only to these important decisions but also to the situations of the individual sisters, of the communities, to their spiritual life, which was to have priority.

Even, the search for a good confessor, was verified by Father Bernardino.

Thus he writes: ***“I have visited this community every year (Mother House), and I have always questioned and examined whether the Sisters were happy with the Confessor, and all unanimously gave me their satisfactions, and I can assert that I have not even found anyone who did not have the confidence in him necessary for a good confession, on the contrary, all praised his holiness, prudence and firmness”***. (1 October 1886)

He is careful to urge the superior general to pay attention above all to the spiritual life of the sisters: ***“I implore the Divine Infant to deign to spread over you, Most Rev Mother and on the individual Religious dependent on the Mother House of Gemona, the most elect heavenly graces and the abundance of His divine blessings.***

I pray you, above all, that you will to teach them ... the only science, which especially for the souls consecrated to God is of primary importance, that is, the science of the saints, that all consists in the spirit of humility and meekness.

This sublime science ... was brought to earth by the Incarnate Divine Word who became its Master first in the cave of Bethlehem, then throughout his earthly life until his death on the slopes of Calvary.

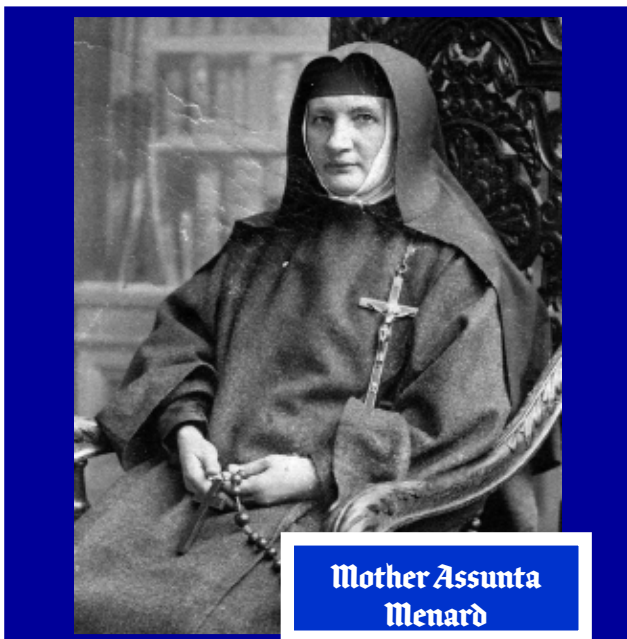
... We therefore look forward to, learning and putting into practice the lessons that the Holy Child offers us from the cathedra of the Crib and it will be Paradise for us, where we will praise God among the imperishable joys of the Saints. (28 December 1888)

His foresight was also able to give indications for the future, for the organization of roles and authority:

“With the growth of the Institute, it is essential to separate the general government from the local government: and therefore, when the new Superior General of the Institute is made, another Superior will have to be made separately for the House of Gemona”. (28 February 1872)

In her letters, Mother Angela expresses with emotion her gratitude to Father Bernardino,, *“sincere gratitude for all the loving care that is taken of the Institute and of the individual members of the same”.* 30 June 1873

As Minister general it is he who appoints the next superior general, Mother Assunta Menard who will also follow as General Delegate of the Tertiary Sisters..



Relations with the missions in America and in the Middle East.

It is not possible to describe in a few words the great help and attention that Father Bernardino has reserved for the communities initiated in the United States and in the Middle East (the first communities in Turkey).

He followed the beginnings and development of both missions; as it usually happened, he himself appointed a local commissioner to represent him, but his presence and attention was constant and he knew how to intervene decisively when the autonomy or charismatic identity of the Institute were not respected.

As we can understand from some interventions with the communities of the Middle East:

“The Institute of the Missionary Sisters has a mother house in Gemona and the Superior who is there is Superior of the whole Institute and together with her there is my general commissioner and general assistants. It is necessary that your paternity write there ... and I do not give my consent at all if the request is not answered first and decided by the superiority of the Mother House”. (8 January 1889)

Despite his burdensome commitments and the responsibility of the Order and other religious families, he even made himself available to follow the sisters individually, giving precise indications:

“It is good that the Sisters who are in America have the freedom to write to Gemona to the Superior, whenever they want. I do not have a Father, so as to assign him as Delegate to America at present, but soon I will have more certain information, and perhaps I will be able to find him. In the meantime, even those Sisters can write to me directly when they need to”.

(28 February 1872)

Father Bernardino followed the Founder Father Gregory in drafting the Constitutions which, as he himself writes, required more time as they had to be proved by experience and he approved them ad experimentum on May 22, 1888.

As General DELEGATE for all TERTIARY SISTERS

He also continued to follow the Institute as General Delegate. In 1890 on 24 August, he was in Gemona as President of the General Chapter of the Congregation.

On January 31, 1892, as General Delegate for all the Tertiary Sisters, it was Father Bernardino who presented Pope Pius IX with the request to give the Institute the “enjoyment of all the indulgences of the Franciscan Order of Observant Minors”.

The letter of introduction is for all of us a sign of the benevolence of the Lord; in fact, Father Bernardino introduces us to the Holy Father in this way: *The Institute of the Franciscan Tertiaries for the Missions, despite painful events it suffered, was blessed by God and could fruitfully expand, so that at present, in addition to the Mother house in Gemona and a branch in Solagna, diocese of Padua, it has 14 houses in the United States of America and four houses in the Middle East...*

In 1893 (13-15 November) not being able to preside over the General Chapter of the Congregation, he appointed as his commissioner, the Founder Father Gregory.

This brief presentation did not exhaust all the material that can narrate what Father Bernardino gave to our Institute; but it is a light that leads us to continue finding those signs of Holiness he has left in our history as well.

We like to listen to an exhortation that we keep in one of his letters:

We then implore you, Venerable Daughters, faithfully maintain the holy observances of your Rule and to form yourselves and diligently cultivate the Holy Spirit and the union with Jesus Christ and above all to be solicitous to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of mutual charity, and the God of peace will be with you.

So may Our Seraphic Father St. Francis, like us, bless you, with all the extension of the heart, recommending us to your prayers, we bless you. (11 September 1877)



We welcome Father Bernardino's Blessing, feeling it deeply ALIVE still today and pledging to share it everywhere to all those who are part of our missions in the world at the service of the Church and in the joy of belonging to the great Franciscan Family.

Sr Tiziana Tonini



**In prayer
in front of the
Sarcophagus of
Father Bernardine
on the island
of the desert
in Venice, during the
Extended General
Council 2019**

Lord, make us instruments of your peace...

Our community of Büyükada in recent months has had the joy of sharing together with the OFM friars of the Istanbul fraternity, two very important and very fraternal visits to this mission land, the visit of the Minister General, Fr. Massimo Fusarelli and the former Minister General Michael Perry.

From 26 to 28 October, returning from his visit to the Holy Land, the Minister General Fr. Massimo Fusarelli wanted to visit his friars in Istanbul and he also reached the community of friars in Smyrne in a single day.

For us it has been a great joy as fmnc to meet him again and to greet him! Fr Eleuthere Makuta, guardian of the fraternity, immediately included us in all the preparations for the welcome and also informed us of the agenda and the visits of the Minister General, as always we felt part of a large Franciscan family.

On his arrival, Father Massimo recognized us immediately, because in the past we participated in some courses or retreats he had done in the Generalate house in Rome; and then when he saw us he told us: *“Here are the Franciscan Missionaries of the Sacred Heart always with a smile!”*



Time was really short and therefore the most important thing for him was to get to know and see his brothers and so, he met them personally and in community but we had the opportunity to speak with him in a fraternal and personal way.

Father Massimo asked us about our presence and our work in this land, and it was Fr. Eleuthere who underlined the fraternal journey as a Franciscan family that has always characterized us: we are one fraternity!

And this is a beautiful witness in the Church today!

We are always present on every occasion and we try to walk with the local church and with the parish, giving a hand in everything that is needed!



We also had the opportunity to talk about the celebration of the bicentenary of our founder, Father Gregorio Fioravanti, because Fr. Massimo remembered well the invitation made by our mother general, and therefore he said he will be there with great pleasure!

On the occasion of the visit of the Minister General, we had the opportunity to celebrate the day of “The Spirit of Assisi” on October 27, because for two years and due to the pandemic, we have not had the opportunity to celebrate it.

Therefore, in the evening, we had a small prayer meeting with the dervishes of Istanbul, the Dede and some members of the group arrived, who met the Minister and talked about the journey made together with the friars of Santa Maria, also remembering our dear bishop Monsignor Rúben Tierrablanca for the enormous contribution he has made in interreligious dialogue.

After the meeting, the fraternity organized a dinner with some members of the parish community and with all the people of the Saint Pacifico Project.

It was an opportunity to present the project and the people to Fr. Massimo.

Then, Sr Miriam presented the journey that has been made and each of the young people who were present; they thanked in the person of the Minister General, all those who offer them help, for the support of the Catholic Church in Turkey and for the opening of Franciscan convents to date. *“You have given us a new opportunity and you have believed in us!*

For this we thank you”, were some of the words spoken to the Minister General by the youth and Fr. Massimo, with his excellent Spanish, wanted to know and listen to some stories, and in turn thank them because they are certainly the ones who teach us what it means to be Franciscans today!

Journeying with the Franciscan Family

On November 22, the Solemnity of Christ the King, we had a very special celebration in the parish. For almost ten months, one of the women belonging to the prison project had expressed a desire to make her First Communion and to receive the Body of Christ in her life.

Her name is Joyce Adong, originally from Uganda. Joyce has been living in Büyükada with us for almost a year, in a mini-apartment made available for her and her daughter Jasmin, whom she sees twice a year because she lives in a family home in Istanbul.

Joyce's story is a story of sacrifice, good will and a true conversion of her heart, when she arrived she immediately said to us: I want to change my life! And this is what she did in this time she lived next to us ... Joyce works ... she has three jobs and travels every day to Istanbul from the island, she earns her life with sacrifice and effort ... and she is always happy!

The Turkish authorities had informed us of the expiry of the Covid permit for all prisoners in Turkey and therefore, they should have returned to penitential centers at the end of November. For Joyce, her only thought was to make her first communion and then finally be able to receive the Body of the Lord ... so the fathers of Santa Maria decided to celebrate her feast on the solemnity of Christ the King!



For the occasion,
Father Eleuthere
had a wonderful surprise
the arrival of the former
Minister General, Father
Michael Perry, who,
happy,
offered to celebrate the
Eucharist
as it was
a very beautiful
and special occasion.

When Sr. Zita, Joyce's catechist, went to introduce Joyce to Father Michael, he, to our great surprise, spoke with her in the language of Uganda very similar to the language of the Democratic Republic of Congo, where Father Michael was a missionary for many years.

Also, during the Holy Mass, seeing that the vast majority spoke Spanish, including Joyce, she chose to celebrate in Spanish... with perfect Spanish !!!

The Eucharistic celebration was "perfect" Joyce told us, because the joy of Father Michael has infected everyone

...

After the celebration, like a true son of Francis, Father Michael wanted to listen to the stories of some of the boys and practice his Spanish during the dinner and the celebrations.



We have had the grace and the opportunity in recent months to have these two visits ... after a period of closure and a lot of loneliness due to Covid.

They have brought us joy and hope because they reminded us of the reason why we are here ... to be Church, to be together, to walk alongside with so many brothers and sisters... here in Turkey!

The grateful memory of November 19, 1872 – 2022

With a heart full of gratitude, our St. Elizabeth Province began the celebrations for the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first sisters in Turkey (November 17, 1872) and the start of their educational activity on November 19 of the same year, the day in which, at that time, the feast of our patron Saint Elizabeth of Hungary was celebrated.

Each jubilee is a point of arrival and a point of departure. Point of arrival because the Lord has granted us to live this jubilee event, to be able to make a grateful return to the past, to walk through our history, to discover all the wonders that He has worked through our sisters and to awaken faith and enthusiasm with which they gave themselves and sacrificed themselves for His glory and the good of souls.

For this reason, today we begin this special year of thanksgiving by expressing all our gratitude to God and to the sisters who preceded us, leaving us a rich charismatic heritage, an example of missionary life, sustained by the spirit of faith and sacrifice.

The starting point, as Father Salvatore Ferro said, must not be a tourist visit to a museum but a renewal in faith, an opportunity to renew our vocation, our yes and our belongingness. The desire to celebrate the jubilee, thought and meditated for a long time, began on the anniversary of this memory, prepared with great care. In the corridors, there are posters with photos that present the protagonists of this event and tell the long history of 150 years of missionary service in the Middle East.

The celebrations began on November 19 in the presence of priests from the island, the local superiors of the Province, the presidents of the committees, professors and all the school groups.



The procession of the eight priests was moving, preceded by two superiors carrying the pictures of the Holy Virgin and Saint Elizabeth, accompanied by the melodious songs of the school choir, previously prepared and strengthened by the participation of our young sisters.

On the walls of the theater were placed the photos of the Founders, Laura Leroux de Bauffremont and the Venerable Father Gregorio Fioravanti who seemed to follow us and want to guess the feelings that accompanied us.



The altar and everything as a whole were adorned with beautiful flowers in honor of all the sisters who have written their history over the span of 150 years, true heroines and builders of the Province. During the offertory, the jubilee candle, the globe symbol of the internationality of the Congregation but also of our missionary spirit, was brought to the altar, while the representatives of the classes placed their floral tributes at the feet of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Before the concluding prayer, the Provincial Superior Sister Antonia Piripitsi solemnly declared the opening of the 150th anniversary, lighting the jubilee candle that will burn throughout the year 2022 and immediately afterwards she thanked those present for their participation.

She briefly presented our charism and our history, thanking the Lord for His continuous assistance and His Divine Providence that have supported us throughout these 150 years.

With a short power-point, which gave a quick presentation of our history and activities, the first part of the celebration ended.

Afterwards, the guests and teachers had a rich refreshment, taking the opportunity to talk to each other, to give thanks for the work done in the school and express admiration asking for more information about our history. All the guests and pupils were edified but also amazed by this long history of which they knew very little.

During this jubilee year there will be an opportunity to make our history and our charism better known and to involve those around us in our educational and parish environment.

The Extended Council in the Provincial House began in the afternoon with the presence and contribution of Father Salvatore Ferro who accompanied the provincial assembly of the local superiors.

Father Ferro was able to deepen our guidelines so well, leaving us very satisfied and giving all of us new ideas for a renewed community journey in the sign of ecclesial synodality.

Sister Angelica Hadjihanni



PROVINCIAL CHAPTERS

VX Chapter of the Province “Saint Francis” Peekskill – US

After so much uncertainty due to the pandemic and restrictions, as soon as the United States reopened flights to enter the Country, the Chapter of “St. Francis” Province was immediately organized.

The superior general Sr. Paola Dotto and the councilors Sr. Tiziana Tonini and Sr Rose Thomas Palamthattel arrived at the provincial house of Peekskill on 10 November, a few days before the celebration of the chapter, scheduled for 14 to 18 November.

On the 13th, the sisters arrived from the two communities of New Jersey: from Farview and from Totowa.



The afternoon was dedicated to silence, prayer, adoration, in preparation for the Chapter.

The Sunday Holy Mass at 9.30 on November 14 was offered as the opening celebration of the Chapter; some lay associates were also present.

The Chapter Sisters then went in the “Sacred Heart” Hall where everything was ready to begin the XV Chapter of the Province “St. Francis “.

After the opening prayer and the welcoming greeting of the provincial superior Sr. Laura Morgan, the Superior General Sr. Paola Dotto officially opened the chapter with her discourse, in which she underlined the meaning of the date: November 14, as a congregational event: *“We begin our chapter meeting on a particularly significant day for our religious Family.*

On November 14, 161 years ago, the Archbishop of Udine, Mons Giuseppe Luigi Trevisanato, signed the Foundation Decree of our Institute and joyfully welcomed and recognized, as a blessing from the Lord, the birth of our religious family, wanted for the Apostolic Missions and for the education of especially poor girls.



God the Father has entrusted this precious 'gift' to our Founders, Laura Leroux and Father Gregory Fioravanti.

After five years, the missionary charism was embodied in our sisters sent right here, in the United States, to support migrants from various European countries, and upset by the fear and poverty of interminable wars. Finding ourselves here today is for us a sign of a renewed hope in the strength of the charism that wants to be open to the newness of the Spirit and to His missionary creativity....."

Sr. Paola highlighted the importance of this day also as an ecclesial event: *"Today in the Church, by the will of Pope Francis, we also remember the fifth day dedicated to the poor. We can also consider this a sign for us.*

The symbolic embrace took place in Assisi two days ago, between Pope Francis and 500 poor people from all parts of the world in representation of all the people living in poverty. With this gesture, the Pope reminds us that "it is time to restore dignity and the possibility of speaking of the poor" and that "the poor show us the face of Jesus and therefore no one more than them can tell us how to be Christian and consecrated."

Sr Paola appreciated the theme of the chapter: ***"Live our Franciscan life as we bring the light and life of the Heart of Christ to the world"***.

"The theme of this XV Chapter of the Province "St. Francis "is up-to-date and in line with the Chapter program. "Living everyday life in the simple, humble and happy passion of St. Francis is the most direct and concrete way to bring Jesus everywhere to people and help them discover His presence in them too"

Before the official opening declaration, she presented the great challenge of synodality to the assembly: *"The Spirit tells us that it is time to "walk together". It is the time of synodality!*

We must help each other in the awareness that it is time to meet, to share, to welcome the beauty of the novelty that each person is and can give.

Together, as sisters of the same Family, we live this ecclesial challenge by walking together with the people of God, with the whole world."



The assembly then carried out the commitment of the preliminary procedures. In the afternoon the report of the Provincial Superior Sr. Laura Morgan was heard, entitled: “Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow”.

The days of 15, 16 and 17 November (morning) were dedicated to the reflection and discussion of some very important issues in the Province and to the revision of the Statutes..

On November 17, the Feast of St. Elizabeth of Hungary, patroness of the Franciscan Third Order and of our religious Family, the elections for the New Council took place during the afternoon session.



Here are the sisters chosen for the new council.

Sr Anne James Guerin
Provincial Superior

Sr Anna María Not
1st Councilor and Vicar

Sr Clare Poothakuzhiyil
2nd Councilor

Sr Laura Morgan
3rd Councilor

Sr Gloria Aranguiz
4th councilor

In the chapter, the work of reflection, discussion and approval continued for a provincial journey that, despite the numerical poverty, entrusts itself to the provident love of the Lord.

Before the official closure of the Chapter, the Superior General donated to the Province a cover for the lector of Saint Joseph with Jesus and to the chapter sisters the objects with the image of Father Gregory prepared for the 200 anniversary of his birth, which falls on April 24, 2022.

The Province also presented the gifts to the Superior General and to the councilors as a sign of gratitude and communion.





Sr Paola then closed the chapter with words of hope and the desire for good for this first Province of our religious Family. She concluded: *“With great affection, and counting on your renewed commitment to consecrated life, with hope, I wish you all to resume the journey with the challenge and courage of Love, which always knows how to generate novelty”*.

In the days after the Chapter there were two very important events:

- Praise the Lord for the 50 years of consecrated life of the Superior General, Sr. Paola.
- The Thanksgiving Day.

The sisters wanted to express their affection with a moment of prayer and celebration for Sr Paola, with simplicity but also with solemnity. A truly special occasion!

The Thanksgiving Day.

For Americans, Thanksgiving (November 25 this year) is the most important holiday of the year, along with Christmas and July 4th: it has always been every fourth Thursday in November.

Thanksgiving Day is commonly traced back to 1621, when in the city of Plymouth, Massachusetts, pilgrim fathers gathered to thank the Lord for the good harvest. In 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln proclaimed the celebration of Thanksgiving, that from then on became an annual holiday and gradually lost its Christian content.

Today it represents one of the most important holidays for North Americans.

In the Church in the Provincial House in Peekskill, fruits of the earth have been placed under the altar: vegetables and fruit as a sign of thanksgiving to God for all the “gifts” that are constantly bestowed on us by Him.

The prayer was centered on “giving thanks” and on caring for the poor and sharing the blessings received with them.



A small group of lay associates of the Province was also present during the day dedicated to Sr Paola. The pandemic did not allow everyone to participate in the celebration, but some wanted to show their closeness and affection on behalf of all.

Always following the due attention required by the pandemic, they were able to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist and during dinner, they had a somewhat separate place.

For them it was an opportunity to demonstrate their sense of belongingness to our religious Family, gratitude for everything they receive and above all the joy of sharing this event with the sisters.

The lay associates in the “Saint Francis” Province have always been very active and generous especially now with the small number of sisters, they are present by donating their time, their skills, their human and spiritual sensitivity.

Sr Paola as superior general thanked everyone, expressing her joy for their presence and their concrete affection in so many occasions.

These days too were “providential” and significant occasions to conclude the time spent in this first mission of our religious Family.



XVI Chapter of the Province 'San Antonio' Santiago del Chile

The pandemic that has been spreading all over the world for two years has caused many uncertainties and forced to change programs and even important events such as the provincial chapters. For the Latin American Province "Sant'Antonio" the alternation of more contagious periods with restrictions and rules has forced the provincial chapter to be postponed several times until it reaches the time of one year, in fact, from the date scheduled for January 2021, it has been possible to celebrate it in January 2022.

The Superior General Sr Paola Dotto accompanied by the general councilor Sr Gregoria Suarez and Sr Bernarda Alvarez, delegated to the chapter, went to Chile on January 1st to be able to spend a few days with the sisters before the Chapter scheduled from January 9th to 18th. With them was also the junior sister Sr Paola Cascamayta who returned to the province after completing the formation course of the international juniorate. The journey to reach the provincial house was truly an adventure with all the documents to be prepared, the checks, the test before departure and upon arrival, the health rules to be followed even during the days of quarantine; this not only for the sisters who came from Rome but also for all the delegates to the chapter who had to arrive from various countries: Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico.

At the beginning of the retreat days, two delegate sisters were missing; one would have come later, while the other, positive for Covid, was not present.

The pandemic did not allow celebrations and meetings in the presence during these two years and therefore the sisters of the Provincial Council took advantage of this occasion and the presence of the superior general to celebrate the jubilees of consecrated life 25, 50 and 60 years.



The day dedicated to this celebration was January 8 and it was presided by Monsignor Pedro Ossandon Buljevic, military bishop in Chile.

The Holy Mass was very solemn with the participation of the sisters, the choir of young sisters led by Professor Juan Carlos Vergara.

The pandemic did not allow the presence of lay people who normally participated in these events.

The bishop's reflection was centered on gratitude to the Lord for the life of each sister, for the vocation received, for the history lived by each of them, for their perseverance in the love of Christ.

Joy and gratitude filled the whole day and was expressed not only in the Eucharistic celebration but also at the time of lunch and fraternal recreation.

The Provincial Chapter began on 9 January with a 2-day retreat led by the Preacher: Father Juan Rovegno OFM who helped the chapter members to reflect on their personal situation in relation to the theme of the Chapter and the responsibility of being part of the Chapter assembly.



The official celebration of the opening of the Chapter took place on 11 January with a moment of prayer in the chapel to entrust this important time of grace to the power of the Holy Spirit. From the chapel the sisters then went into the hall singing in procession and each carrying a lighted lamp.



The Superior General then declared the opening of the Chapter by exhorting the sisters with her speech, of which we report brief significant points:

“Let us therefore entrust this special time to the Spirit of the Lord. With humility and courage, let us allow ourselves to be illuminated by the light of His grace to look at our life and our realities of fraternity and mission with the eyes of the Father: He knows our desire for Good that goes beyond our limits and our frailties ... let us put this meeting in His Heart, “open to God’s surprises”.

I have meditated and reflected several times on the logo you have chosen for this Chapter and on the icon that represents Francis's encounter with the leper:

"In minority and in joy we return his mercy to God in order to go joyfully to meet the brothers and sisters".



This is a very significant theme for us today and the Pope continually emphasizes it to help us to live according to the Father's Love the human brotherhood, the acceptance of diversity, the embrace of those who are rejected, the fear and the vigilant hope of migrants... So many sufferings surround us! St. Francis in the Testament writes: "The Lord gave me, Brother Francis, to begin to do penance in this way: when I was in sins, it seemed too bitter to see lepers; and the Lord Himself led me among them and I showed mercy to them ... And moving away from them, what seemed bitter to me was changed into sweetness of soul and body" (Franc. Sources 110)

St. Francis writes: "I used mercy". From the encounter with the leper, the feeling is born in him that is concretized in the attitude of 'using mercy', like the good Samaritan of the Gospel.

Conversion to mercy is an evangelical challenge for us too !! ...

This journey traveled together will help us to renew our mentalities and our community and pastoral-missionary ecclesial structures in order to live God's call for the Church in the midst of the current signs of the time. (from the Synod Vademecum)"

The initial procedures of the Chapter followed until 11.30 when the whole assembly went to the Church for the opening Eucharistic celebration presided over by the Apostolic Nuncio of Chile Monsignor Alberto Ortega Martin..



In the following days the Chapter Sisters were engaged in reflection, sharing and decisions guided by the chapter theme “IN MINORITY and JOY, RETURN HIS MERCY to GOD to GO WITH JOY TO MEET the BROTHERS”.

The election of the Provincial Superior and councilors took place on January 15 after a time of adoration lived in the Church of the Provincial house.

Through the Chapter Sisters, the Lord has chosen for this service:



**Sister Alejandra Vallejos Araya
Superior Provincial**

**Sister Elena Bilibio Durigon
1st Provincial Councilor and Vicar**

**Sister Roxana Zapata Bustamante
2nd Councilor**

**Sister Ana Ruth Ayma Quispe
3rd Councilor**

**Sister Claudia Muñoz Lehue
4th Councilor**

At 12 noon after the election of the Provincial Superior and before the choice of councilors, all the sisters gathered in the Church for the Eucharistic celebration presided over by Cardinal Monsignor Celestino Aós Braco of mcap archbishop of Santiago.



In the following days the chapter works continued, but the Covid-19 virus was already beginning to enter unexpected and insidious.

On January 17, the first sister was found to be positive and therefore it was necessary to do the test to all to verify the infection; unfortunately 13 sisters tested positive, including the superior general Sr Paola. They immediately proceeded to quarantine and organize the service to the infected sisters, the distance to protect the others and the network connection between the chapter room and the isolated sisters in their rooms in order to proceed with the chapter sessions that was almost at an end.



The work was completed on January 19 and the Chapter closed on January 20. The superior general Sr. Paola, who has always led, supported and encouraged the assembly also in the online connection, concluded this chapter event by addressing the sisters with these words, part of her closing speech, always centered on the chosen theme:

“So let’s aim together to live in minority in accepting ourselves as we are, with a lifestyle made up of small deliberate steps that bring us closer to evangelical simplicity, fill our hearts and leave no space, leave no hidden corners for superfluous things, for ambitious relationships, for thoughts that cloud our gaze.



Minority, desired and sought after is the humble lifestyle that allows us to open our hearts to love, sensitivity, the feeling of compassion that generates mercy towards ourselves and towards others. Jesus made himself minor to come to save us, he gave His life in the silence of ordinary life, he accepted what the Father allowed in order to use mercy on us, .. He, who could boast kingship and power; who could make great life plans, .. He trusted the Father’s style, to show us mercy. “Christ, being rich that he was, made himself poor for you” 2Cor 8,9. ...

Sisters, I have great confidence in all of you, in your strength of communion, in spontaneity, in closeness and in joy. May the Hope in you and with you continue and always go further!”

The closing Eucharistic celebration was presided over by the community chaplain: Father Domingo Tapia Gutierrez OFM.

A celebration of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord for the four years of the outgoing Council, for the journey towards the New Council and also because all the infected sisters, without too many symptoms, were gradually overcoming the positivity.

A “trial” that prevented “external expressions” but increased communion, fraternal spirit, the desire to walk together as the Church urges us with the great value of synodality.



Before the Covid contagion began, the Superior General managed to give to the sisters the gift of the images, rosary, etc. of our Founder the Venerable Father Gregorio Fioravanti to celebrate the 200th anniversary of his birth (April 24, 2022).



The Superior General Sr. Paola Dotto went to visit the sisters in the infirmary that she unfortunately could not see precisely because of the pandemic

Short but intense moments, strong in a communion which, unable to be expressed through gestures, becomes deeper and more rooted in the Love of the Lord, in belongingness to the same Religious Family.

IN THE OUTBREAK OF THE COVID LIMASSOL 2022

Covid-19 also entered our home for the first time, without any warning. It was a surprise when you least expect it. In Limassol, in the atmosphere of the Christmas holidays, everything was ready for the Spiritual Exercises. The sisters from the different communities and the preacher father from Lebanon had already arrived at the Provincial House. The joy of finding ourselves and being able to be together was great also because everyone arrived with the negative result in hand and therefore we were tranquil!

But “Mr. Covid” has turned our plans upside down in his own way. Already on the second day of the Exercises, the alarm of the first coronavirus positive sister went off. She inevitably was immediately isolated in the room but after the test carried out on the whole community, another sister has been found positive. It seemed that we could keep the situation under control with the two positive sisters... The following day, however, two other young sisters tested positive. And here the restlessness has risen to the maximum. A quick decision had to be made. The Provincial Superior Sr. Antonia Piripitsi immediately suspended all activities. Fear began to circulate in the house. We started to disinfect the environment but the speed of the invisible guest was amazing and we were unable to keep up with him. Already the following

day the number of positive sisters increased. The Lebanese sisters with their preacher father anticipated their return as they were negative in the PCR test and so the sisters from Larnaca also returned to the community. The greatest anguish that assailed us was the thought for the elderly and sick sisters in the infirmary. The long and tiring days began in Limassol, especially for the sisters who were at the service: bringing food, disinfecting the environment, assisting the sisters in the infirmary, who were also positive for the virus. The Provincial Superior had to face the situation firsthand, ensuring safety for the ten isolated sisters in the rooms and keeping the balance with the few negative ones left standing. The spread of Covid-19 has caused great uncertainty and has upset our habits. No community prayer, no Eucharist, no common life. It was not easy to keep the elderly sisters still and isolated, who cling to community life and circulate here and there to continue to carry out their services properly. In a certain sense, we have experienced poverty in a way never imagined before: distancing ourselves, depriving ourselves of relationships and affections, communicating through the closed door, always wearing the double mask that prevents verbal expressions, experiencing the extreme fear of contagion.



*Beginning
of the
Spiritual Exercises
And...
beginning of
the contagious
experience
of Covid-19*

This new form of poverty has made us understand what it means to be close and to serve brothers and sisters in need and in particular those who are sick. Above all, we have experienced the joy of gratuitousness in favour of the other. We appreciated the availability of the two Sisters from Kormakiti, Sr. Anita Orphanou and Sr. Yiannoulla Petri and Sr. Gracy Puthiyadath from Bulgaria who remained to help in the Provincial House. The few negative sisters did not spare themselves but had a personalized way of approaching each one, according to the needs, troubles and health problems. We have seen them tour equipped with protective aprons, masks, gloves and disinfectants. Like good Samaritans, they also worked hard because the two nurses were among the first positive.

They always had words of encouragement and solidarity. We are experiencing this power of love in an absolute way in the time of contagion.

We realize that it is indispensable to weave authentic relationships of fraternity based on dialogue and confrontation, especially in difficulties.

Our thoughts also accompanied the Sisters of the Menjez community. They too, upon returning to Lebanon, tested positive and had to remain isolated.

This is to say that “Mr. Covid” respects neither spaces nor borders. Several times, we have been reminded of the scourge that struck the sisters in the Mother House in Gemona and with a grateful heart, we thanked the Lord who has saved us from grave dangers.



After the ten days of quarantine, one at a time, the sisters came out negative and slowly returned to normal. Being in a family gives serenity and security especially to those who are weaker and more vulnerable. Our hours and days are less isolated and they all work together to “make a family”. Even now, the tension remains very high, we must be very careful because we are surrounded by children in the school and at this moment the infections among the very young are drastically increasing.

We wish to sincerely thank the Provincial Superior Sr. Antonia Piripitsi, the sisters who remained on the field exposing themselves to danger, the sisters of our Religious Family who supported us with their prayers and affection and those who were close to us during the experience of the contagion. But above all our gratitude to God the merciful Father who does not abandon us and always remains faithful. With a grateful heart and with renewed hope we repeat: God tries but does not abandon!!

Some sisters share their experience:

It was like a lightning when I tested positive and had to lock myself in the room, anxiously awaiting the negative result. I cannot find the words to describe what I've experienced. I am an open character and I like to be in company with the sisters and with the people. As soon as I entered the room I cried a lot, I asked for the help of the Lord and of Our Lady to have the strength to live this time as an opportunity for purification and personal renewal. Therefore, I organized my space for prayer and spiritual growth. Isolation has increased my trust in God and the awareness that, despite my 85 years, I still have a lot to do for the goal of eternal life. I asked the Lord to end the pandemic and to assist those affected by the virus.

sister Patrick Frantjià

The great and unforgettable trial, I can say, during isolation due to the infection was an opportunity to evaluate my faith in God. I tested positive with all possible symptoms and although it was hard for me, in a way I accepted it. Being locked in the room, not being able to see anyone, and just hearing the voices and the chirping of birds outside cost me a lot. However, in solitude the Lord gave me the grace of healing. With the help of the sisters of the community, with the prayers of the sisters scattered around the world and with the encouragement of friends, with a grateful and sincere heart, I express my gratitude to everyone. May God grant you the hundredfold. God tries but does not abandon!

sister Yvette Kimvunzila

When I arrived at the airport in Lebanon, I had a strange presentiment. In fact, I brought Covid with me. The experience was not pleasant at all, I was in pain everywhere but the possibility of praying more for others is priceless. Above all, I offered my prayers for the conversion of souls and for those affected by Covid. I begged for the gift of new vocations for the Church and this gave me so much serenity and peace because I was able to offer in suffering.

sister Bernadetta Visentin

The days of asymptomatic isolation were also precious moments for me: united with Christ and with the prayer of the heart I accompanied those suffering from the pandemic..

sister Martina Volpato

"I would like to go and visit my family and then be calm for the Spiritual Exercises".

These were the words I said over the phone to the Provincial Superior.

However, my dream did not last long.

On my return to Menjez, I carried the virus with me that kept me company for long days. During my isolation, the Lord gave me time to pray and meditate in silence, not to make plans but to accept His will and have patience.

I understood the suffering of those who live for years in isolation and without hope.

I admired those who took care of me and I learned to say thank you!

sister Beatrice Skorti

In mission: “Attentive to the signs of the times”

The life of the mission asks us to have an open gaze to the needs and urgencies of the place. Our school, born as a “Technical teaching college” and dedicated to the training of girls, was commissioned by the bishop emeritus Mgr Armando Gianni.

The College was opened in 1995, after two years of presence of the “Fr. Gregory” community, in an area where, at its birth there was only one small house, but today it has become a populated village thanks to the presence of the school and hospital. From 1995 to today, the life of the Church in Central Africa has grown. The Bishops had appealed to various congregations to help this young Church, which, like a child in its birth, was asking for care and attention.

Our school has formed many young people from different areas of Central Africa. Many students have had the opportunity to enter university and have good jobs today.

Over the years, the different religious communities have developed their works. They have created preschools, primary schools, dispensaries, and for some years also high schools. Given the development situation we have gradually closed the boarding school which today is reduced to 13 girls, and we have opened the door to the boys and girls of the villages around us who due to the distance and the non-functioning of public school, they dropped out of school easily.

The dormitories have been transformed into classrooms with a renovation where Sr. Antonella Lago became also a manager as well as director.

In our reality there are no real construction companies! We had asked for help from Italy, then from France, but because of the insecurity due to political instability and the covid, no one was able to come, so we organized the work with local people of good will.

The elementary school, which had opened in 2000, found temporary classrooms scattered throughout the large college building. Now with the work done, the classes are well grouped in the wing of the former dormitories.





Furthermore, given the difficulty that children encounter upon entering the first grade of primary school, we asked for permission to open the kindergarten which has found place in the area not used by the girls of the boarding school. The renovations continued a bit slowly due to the pandemic and the war, but with the patience we have reached the goal!

On December 6, the kindergarten was finally able to open its doors!

The parents accompanied the children on their first entrance to the nursery school, helping them to wear the new uniform. At first, the children were a bit shy in front of a new environment, and new people, but this shyness soon left them! The joy of the young teacher helps them in this new path of life, the smile returns, the joy of meeting other friends, of discovering and experimenting conquers them. The parents who accompanied their little ones look in amazement at the new environment prepared for them and exclaim: it is really beautiful!

The school has renewed its structures, in the hope of forming young people capable of acting for the good of the country, free from the corruption that unfortunately has become common practice.

We hope for a better future for these younger generations.

We hope in times of peace.

We hope that the country can be reborn and experience true freedom.

Even today too many arrive in this country to get riches: gold, diamonds, wood, but who will benefit of them?

In addition, the presence of the rebels in some areas of the north west and east of the country causes many people to flee, many villages have been emptied. Many children cannot access education. Crops are trampled by oxen in transition, and growers cannot even complain, otherwise they risk losing their lives.

As a result, crops are scarce ... how to feed the children?

Most of the children who arrive at our school do not eat anything before leaving the house and there are some who also walk 10 km.

They are really to be admired!

To the children of the nursery school we also offer the cutouts of the hosts that the Poor Clares of the monastery of Bouar kindly offer us.

Here the pandemic seems to begin t, but it is not the worst evil. What is really scary are the anti-personnel mines that cause insecurity, injuries and innocent deaths.

We continue to hope, we continue to pray and hope in times of Peace.



Sr Alessandra Sartor

Bicycles for the school of Maigaro

The Notre Dame school of Maigaro compound, where we carry out our educational mission alongside young people and children, is over ten kilometers from the city of Bouar.

This distance is favorable for the tranquility of the place, the natural silence that almost always envelops it.

The classrooms are located in the innermost area of the rectangular courtyard so the noises of the street and the village arrive as if muffled, except on days of celebration or mourning when loud music and incessant rhythms of tam tam follow each other for several days and nights.

The distance from the city penalizes us, however, due to the fact that pupils and sick people who want to come to Maigaro for treatment or for school have a long distance to cover, often on foot. However, this does not prevent a good number of patients and students from reaching our mission. It should be noted that the violence of the rains, abundant in the summer months, and the total lack of maintenance by the State, have transformed the road into a motocross or rally track. We must adjust to it.

To overcome this inconvenience, some parents buy their children a bicycle, but they are few. The majority continue to come on foot, even the little ones in first grade.

What a pity to see them arrive, their dusty feet, with cheap slippers sometimes without heels as they are so worn out.

Many leave home without having eaten anything, yet they have to face a morning of lessons, up to 1.30 pm those of elementary school and up to 3 pm those of high school.

These brave walkers are forced to hit the road in the dark to reach school at around seven in the morning and all be in class at 7.15 am

The day starts early in Africa, where night and day last an average of 12 hours and the dawn and twilight constitute an interlude of less than 30 minutes. School is really important to them, considering the sacrifice they make to achieve it.



Now, as Providence lives at home here, the Polish caritas, just before Christmas, offered 40 bicycles to our students from over ten kilometers away from the school.

The initiative starts with Polish drivers who collect funds every year to offer means of transport to the poor countries and, preferably, bicycles.

Sister Renata, a Polish Franciscan sister, serving in Bouar, therefore presented the project in favour of our school. What a surprise and what a joy!
For now, only 40 students have received this great gift, but we hope that the initiative will be repeated next year.



The new bicycles, added to those that already arrived in the courtyard, are now parked one on top of the other, in bulk, to create problems among the boys.
Others remain exposed to the scorching sun of almost 50 degrees for hours and hours, with evident damage to the tires and inner tubes. The solution?
Covered parking.

This is what we are creating, with a straw roof, less expensive and which guarantees a cooler shade than metal sheets. The racks will be made with concrete blocks. The length of the building is 23 meters by 4.5 meters and the planned bicycle spaces are 120.

With joy and courage, the children brought buckets and buckets of earth to fill the base. Now it will be necessary to pump and throw buckets and buckets of water onto the still soft earth to compact the soil, before casting in concrete.



To complete the work of settling the soil, all 430 elementary school pupils need to be placed there, beat a few tam tam to the rhythm of dance ... until the earth, beaten and trampled by hundreds of feet, finds the right settlement, in the absence of a roller compressor...

sister Antonella from Maigaro

Letter Writing Ministry: the “Shepherd’s Corner”

I never thought of letter writing and phone calls as a ministry until recently.

Our Constitutions tell us that “the sisters...translate the prophetic mission of Christ...in the service of charity to the abandoned, the sick and the elderly” and they “consider all types of correspondence as a means of good relationships and, in some cases, as aids in the apostolate.”

We had several Sisters, now with the Lord, who did just that.

They took time once each week to write letters/notes and make calls to people who were ill, lived alone or simply needed support. This “Shepherd’s Corner” ministry consoled and encouraged many persons for a long time.

Sr. Anne James asked me to revive it in May 2021. I reached out to four parishes and received a response from Church of the Holy Spirit in Cortlandt Manor.

Four parishioners- three women and one man- said that they would very much like to receive letters. After obtaining the pastor’s permission, I began writing to them in early July. Since then I have been privileged to not only receive responses from one of the women, but to visit one of our Riverbend (condominium complex) neighbors and bring her the Eucharist.

The parishioner from Holy Spirit always sends notes that are filled with gratitude to God for His blessings.



Although our neighbor has difficulty getting around, she has confident trust in His love and care.

He has truly used these experiences to remind me that we are never alone on this journey of faith; they are a light in the darkness of these very challenging times.

Sr Lisa Grace Carlone

I chose you ... to go and bear fruit

Little did I dream of how profoundly developing my ministries as a Junior Sister would affect me. The three ministries are:

- 1] Volunteer at Fred's Food Pantry in Peekskill;
- 2] Spiritual Guide to men in early alcohol/drug recovery at St. Christopher's Inn in Garrison NY;
- 3] RCIA (RITE OF CHRISTIAN INITIATION OF ADULTS) Coordinator of English-speaking adults at The Church of the Assumption, Peekskill..

1] I returned to Fred's Food Pantry after the Covid shutdown. Changes are many.

- Numbers of people receiving food doubled, from about 100 households to 200 households.
- Before Covid, food was given out once a week. Now, food goes out twice per week.
- People receive bags at the door rather than personally selecting items.
- People had to register for the service; now anyone can come and need not apply.
- 20 volunteers helped receive food.

Now, 5-6 people, including me, show up to unload and pack items.

These changes at the Pantry deepened my gratitude for all the blessings and graces our good God provides us as FMSC sisters: faith in God, daily Mass, companionship, food, shelter, lack of common worries.



It is humbling to realize so many people live with uncertainties and difficult choices of how to provide necessities for their families.

People's needs are more intensely expressed in my prayer life. It's a joy for me to take donations to the Pantry from our community or our Lay Associates for sharing with the people of Peekskill.

2] St. Christopher's Inn helps men in the first 90 days of recovery from alcohol and/or drugs.

The Franciscan Friars of the Atonement founded and have continuously operated the facility for more than 100 years.



One of the services they provide is spiritual guidance as that gives the men a greater ability to stay sober.

I am one of five Spiritual Guides.

The program is ecumenical, respecting the God, faith, or lack of belief of each person.

I listen, ask questions, and make observations about what they share so dependence on their personal understanding of God is seen to aid recovery. Conversations are strictly confidential so men are comfortable in talking about life experiences.

What an honor and privilege it is to sit and listen to the recovering alcoholic.

Some have faith in God, while others have pulled away. All have troubles beyond belief.

Many had traumatic experiences as children, making trust in anything impossible.

The saying repeated by all, “I am a good man worthy of love and respect” helps the healing of the men. The movement of the Holy Spirit is visible here because rawness of emotions and weight of life crashing down onto the individual opens them up to sharing what is in their heart and mind. Evident is how personal choices affect life and help or hinder following God’s path. A few men returned for more sessions with me, allowing me see changes in their spiritual life. However, Covid has affected this ministry as the disease closed down the facility to outsiders several times since October.

Completion of the 90 day program during shut-downs means I don’t know what developed for the men who spoke to me.

Trusting in God’s providence; acknowledging the worth of each person to God, themselves and me; identifying that I would have done the same given the exact circumstances, opens my heart to greater compassion and tapping into God’s deep well of love. Being awed by experiences and outcomes told me in confidence and sometimes with tears, leads me to appreciate God’s skillful leading of his children to salvation, while always respecting personal choices.

Receiving thanks from an individual humbles me because I receive graces undeserved. Praise God from whom all blessings flow!

3] RCIA Coordinator for English-speaking adults at the Assumption Parish.

This ministry had been dormant for several years. Parishioners help – those formerly part of it, those who joined the team, and those who recruit other helpers.

When asked by my Spiritual Director, Fr. Carlos Limongi, then Vicar at the parish, if I was interested in the RCIA, my heart leaped for joy. There are many aspects in development. Learning the Rite’s rubrics, the Archdiocesan guidelines and parish traditions is one.

Developing a team is another. Assessing the inquirer’s needs/situation a third.

Networking with other RCIA Coordinators and team members. Meeting the Diocesan Director

of the RCIA who trains and evaluates me and our parish RCIA process. Imparting knowledge of the Catholic faith systematically.

We have one person who will be a catechumen, one coming into the fullness of the Catholic faith, and two completing reception of their initiation sacraments.

There are five team members including myself. Since beginning, there’s been a lot of work, but it is rewarding and fulfilling.



We, the inquirers and team members, have developed community and trust. Personal relationships with Jesus blossom and grow.

Desire to learn more about the Catholic Faith and Mother Church increases.

Thoughtful questions are asked and answered. Even Covid has not dampened the quest to grow in the faith!!! To see the initial response of inquirer or team member grow into an ever-stronger flame is breathtaking.

The Lord works in personal relationship and that is evident in our RCIA.

Everything is opportunity for spiritual growth, including when one inquirer made the decision that God was leading her down a different path. Acknowledging and respecting her personal choice was an important teaching moment for everyone.

I am ever grateful that our Provincial Council determined these ministries were for me.

Sr. Tess Kusiak

Finally together for the Feast of Saint Francis

The pandemic period we are experiencing has changed our habits and our way of living, we have been forced to change our projects, our plans, we have felt weak, limited ... and this has also done us something good.

The lay associates of the Community of Le Mans have taken Pope Francis' indications seriously and, animated by faith, hope and charity, are committed to helping the poorest people in the parish and in the neighborhood.

And if since the beginning of the pandemic it has not been possible to hold meetings with all the members of the two fraternities, this has not prevented both of them from participating in the singing of Vespers and in the Eucharist Celebration with the Sisters of the Community and also to form small groups to pray and to share in Franciscan simplicity and joy.



Then finally the favorable opportunity: THE FEAST of SAINT FRANCIS.

“After a year without meetings of the two fraternities, the lay associates responded positively and in large numbers to the invitation of the community of sisters, to live together the celebration of the Transitus, and the feast of St. Francis.

The celebration of the Transitus has been moving, for the evocation of Francis' passage from this world to the Father, assisted by his brothers, in total abandonment to the will of God, faithful to the end to his vow of poverty, humble and naked, confident and open to praise, acknowledging all the joys experienced, and offering the sufferings and hard battles he has fought.

Through the songs, the prayers, the passages taken from his biography, we always get a little closer to the mystery of the life given to him, to the depth and challenges of Franciscan spirituality.



For my heart, it is a renewed invitation to keep watching; watching without rest to bring to the heart of my life in the world a little more fraternity, simple joy, praise, trust and hope.

On October 4th , the feast in honor of St. Francis begins!

After the Eucharist, the joy of gathering together, lay associates and sisters of the fmSC community, to share the meal made up of the specialties brought by each of us. Some additional guests let themselves to be part into this joyful company, surprised and happy to experience this unexpected moment. Franciscan welcome!

I notice the radiant smiles, I listen to the animated conversations, the laughter ... the warm sharing of the news, joys and sorrows that we will bring in our prayers.

A warm conviviality, which fully expresses the joy of being among brothers and sisters, free and true. Thank you Lord, thank you St. Francis, thank you all."

(Claire Nogaret)

"Each time it is the same HAPPINESS of meeting between lay associates and the Sisters, with my husband Marco who has not made any promises and who is happy to be able to render service materially, we truly find our Family!

The Sisters are always very welcoming, showing particular attention to each of us, discreetly inquiring about our health, work, family ...

A word, a smile, all this is very good for us!

I particularly appreciate the fact of starting our meeting evening in the chapel for the time of

Prayer and Holy Mass, animated by beautiful joyful and relaxing songs. I perceive each time a profound communion, where we lay people are invited to become Church with the community of sisters through the songs, the reading of the Word of God, an intention of prayer ... Then comes the moment of celebration, very fraternal, of the shared meal, where the culinary skills of each one are put to good use and that everyone offers us around a large table, where we take our places among the Sisters with pleasure, in joy and in great simplicity. This allows us to exchange news and learn more about some of them that we encounter not so often.

What a Joy each time to find ourselves all together! It is a privileged moment in which we can share the happy or not happy events that pass through our lives with full days, these moments strengthen our Franciscan bonds in the trust and affection that give rise to joy and praise in the hearts of all, to thanksgiving and compassion with the promise to support one another united in prayer with the whole community of our dear Franciscan sisters.

After the difficult periods of isolation due to health reasons, I sincerely looked forward to reliving this moment of meeting with the dear sisters around St. Francis, where I truly recharged myself in PEACE and JOY". (Bernadette Marteau).

Praise and bless the Lord

the sisters of the "St. LUIGI IX "



“Get up, I make you a witness to what you have seen!”

Responding to Pope Francis’ invitation to live the diocesan stages of the World Youth Day (WYD) which will be celebrated in Lisbon in 2023, the young people of the Diocese of Rome set out and with them we too, some young sisters of the “Mary Immaculate” community of Centocelle. We joined two Capuchin Friars from our parish of San Felice da Cantalice.

The group was varied and numerous: some young people and young scouts, some volunteers and others who follow the formative journey of the parish.

The appointment to meet was in Saint John in Laterano.



We then joined the other young people of the Diocese of Rome, making the synodal journey more concrete through a simple pilgrimage walking through the streets of Rome, the very same roads that the Popes traveled to reach the Vatican, when they still lived in the Lateran.

We reached the Colosseum, Piazza Venezia, Via Vittorio Emanuele II and we arrived in Via della Conciliazione which led us to Piazza San Pietro where the imposing Basilica of Saint Peter stands with its colonnade that welcomes and embraces.

On these historic roads, the great saints lived an intense youth ministry, one of them St. Philip Neri, the saint of young people par excellence.

By walking together with other young people, the enthusiasm is revived, by becoming closer to them we open up to friendship, starting with a simple greeting and above all listening to them in their life story with their various activities.



Once in Saint Peter some young volunteers who animated the participants, distributed breakfast to us. After having breakfast, with the tickets they had given us in St. John in Laterano before leaving, we entered the Basilica to await the meeting with the Holy Father Francis, our Bishop who concluded the meeting with the Eucharistic celebration. The Pope invited us to reflect on the Word of God taken from the Apocalypse of St. John and the Book of the Prophet Daniel, contemplating Jesus, King of the universe who has the last word on our existence, which gives us hope, illuminating the night.



The darkness of life that we are suffering in our

time, needs bright eyes to give light to the darkness of our heart and around us and to have the courage to look up to overcome the temptation to remain in our fears. This is the invitation “Raise your gaze, get up!”, that the Pope launched to accompany young people on their way to the Lisbon WYD in 2023. He invited us to be able of dreaming, and capable of carrying on with courage our dreams, so as not to allow the great ideals of this world to be suffocated. The Holy Father was very grateful for the presence and contribution of young people in the Church who carry on their dreams with enthusiasm and courage. He repeated to us: *“Thank you, thank you for how you are able to carry on dreams with courage, how much you do not stop believing in the light even within the nights of life, however much you are committed with passion to make our world more beautiful and human. and be witnesses of God by attracting us to contemplate Jesus as king! “*

He said to us: *“Thank you for all those times when you work courageously to make your dreams come true, when you keep believing in the light even in dark moments, when you commit yourselves passionately to making our world more beautiful and humane. Thank you for all those times when you cultivate the dream of fraternity, work to heal the wounds of God’s creation, fight to ensure respect for the dignity of the vulnerable and spread the spirit of solidarity and sharing. Thank you above all, because in a world that thinks only of present gain, that tends to stifle grand ideals, you have not lost the ability to dream in this world! Do not live your lives numbly or asleep. Instead, dream and live. This helps us adults, and the Church as well. Yes, as a Church too, we need to dream, we need youthful enthusiasm in order to be witnesses of the God who is always young!”*

Sr. Annabel Alera



“Divine Providence continues to accompany us ...”

In January 2021, the “Laura Lérroux” Family Home in Frosinone received a small financial contribution, but of great “human” value, from the detained brothers, thanks to their craft handiwork. Surprised by this great and significant gesture, we responded with deep gratitude to these brothers for their attention to our children despite their situation of detention.

From this correspondence, a beautiful communication and a collaboration proposal was born.

The request was presented by the educator-psychologist of the Frosinone Prison through the director who required the presence of a religious with a commitment to listening and to give human - spiritual support for the prisoners in collaboration and on the recommendation of the inspector of the section, also cooperating with the psychologist and educator of the ward.

After an initial discernment with the superiors on this new service, it was considered important and fundamental to take this request as an inspiration from the Lord, as a call from Him to be at the service of the “least” of our brothers. And so, the “small economic contribution” of the prisoners to the children of the Family Home has become an instrument of Divine Providence, which, as our Founder says, the Venerable Father Gregory “has various and innumerable ways to reach its ends”.

“... I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you dressed me, sick and you visited me, imprisoned and you came to see me ...” (Mt 25: 31-46)

I like to start from this biblical verse to share the new service experience that I currently carry out at the Frosinone Prison every Tuesday for 3 hours, from March 2021.

It is an emotionally very strong and very beautiful service. It is an enriching human and spiritual experience to meet personally people - brothers detained to establish a human - spiritual dialogue. That is based above all on listening to their stories, their dramas, their inner sufferings, their repentances, their desire to feel forgiven and loved; giving them closeness, understanding, sharing, hope that there is a God who loves them and who is always with them and does not judge them for what has been done,

A fundamental value that I learned by being in contact with them, is precisely that it is important to enter into a relationship with them without prejudices and judgments, but having the awareness that in front of me there is a person loved by God and not a condemned person, a person who has hunger for hope and to feel loved, welcomed and forgiven by God.

These brothers await Tuesday with joy and anxiety to be able to talk to someone and above all to feel welcomed and accepted for what they really are and not for the crime they have committed.

I realize that meeting them is not only giving my time, my presence, the love of Jesus for them and for me, but it is a gift that I receive; it is an experience of the redemptive love of the Heart of Jesus that touches me first of all and it helps me to “look” at the wounds of humanity through that “wound” of His Side, where we all find Grace and Love.

Sr Federica Imperatore



*the group
of the detained brothers
during
a theatrical performance
as part
of the project
of human-psychological support
offered to them*

LOVE TENDS TO EXPAND

When Saint Francis discovered in Christ the meaning of his life, he felt the urgency of communicating with joy, the “treasure he had found”, because love tends to expand.

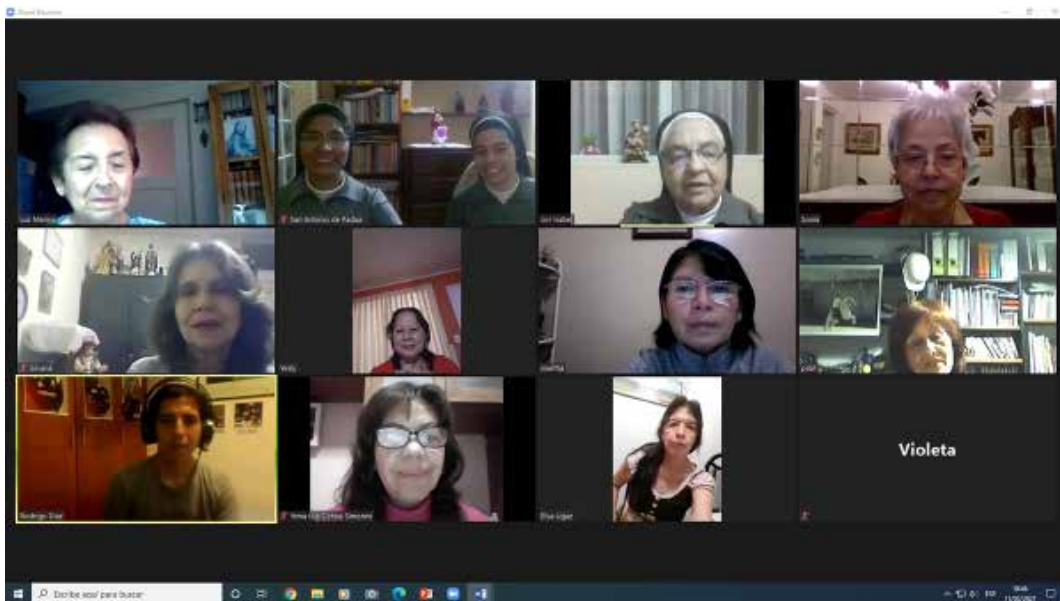
We too, Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, heirs of the spirit of Saint Francis feel the need to better integrate our life with the laity, offering them our charismatic richness as an instance of growth in love and an invitation to participate in our evangelizing mission.

The experience of the Christian mystery is inexhaustible in the Church: from the integration of the different charisms the face of Christ is manifested to the world.

Religious receive from the laity their sense of the reality, their peculiar way of living the faith, their human richness, and their vision of life. The laity, for their part, expect from religious motivations to deepen the meaning of life, proposals of lasting and transcendent values and an authentic witness of spiritual life.

Briefly, we present the life of a community of lay people associated with the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, in the city of Lima, Peru, accompanied by the religious fraternity.

During the time of health contingency, there has been an urgent need to develop visual material to deepen, by means of videoconference and other, the accompaniment and the space of formation of our lay associates, extending the invitation to other fraternities present in Latin American countries.



The visual audio material assumes the processing of texts and the choice of priests or other people for the presentation of the topics. In this way it makes good use of social networks, which, in the period of strict isolation, were the tool, as well as for prayer and for the emotional support and spiritual accompaniment of the members of the fraternity, who suffer losses, anguish, loneliness and in some cases depression due to fear and lack of interpersonal relationships.

As a very positive sign, in this epidemiological scenario, people receive the vaccine against Covid 19, which allows the reduction of restrictions, and allows to experience, for the soul and body, the benefit of the encounter in the presence, a true cause of joy both for the of the laity and for the religious fraternity. These gatherings give rise to mixed feelings, on the one hand the joy of seeing one another, of listening to one another, but also the great nostalgia for the physical absence of the members of the lay fraternity, called to the Father’s house.

As lay faithful, *“they are called by God to contribute, from within in a leaven way, to the sanctification of the world through the exercise of their tasks, guided by the evangelical spirit, and thus manifest Christ to others, mainly with the witness of their lives and with the radiance of their faith, hope and charity...”* (Cf. Christifidelis Laici n L 59)

The practice of this fraternal dimension enriches the path of formation and healing of the laity associated with the religious fraternity of Lima, under the protection of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, organised to support those most affected by the economic crisis caused by the pandemic.

Following the words of Saint Albert Hurtado, *“giving without ever getting tired”*, they share food, clothes, utensils and even money, delivered by bank transfer. In this way Divine Providence makes itself present and walks through the streets of Lima in the district of San Isidro, through the charity of so many people. The donations are shared with another religious congregation, whose apostolate is social pastoral care in the Villa Maria del Trionfo district, one of the most impoverished sectors of the capital, and also with many brothers and sisters without the necessary to live, who have manifested their need.



With the necessary precautions, the soul of the people is also nourished, with *“The Bread of Life”*, the Eucharist that reaches out to the sick and the elderly in the sector, when they ask for it. In this way, the communion of the Church with the most

vulnerable in the environment, who are the elderly and the sick, is strengthened.

Social networks have made it possible to bring the brothers and sisters closer together in the time of greater isolation, from last year until the present time. This is why gratitude flows to God, the Creator of all good, who moves hearts and inspires, through his Spirit, to do good. In this last period of the liturgical year in which the readings of the daily liturgy make present the second coming of the Lord and ask to be prepared, with a clean soul and hands full of good works, *“For I was hungry and you gave me food... sick and you visited me... come, blessed by my Father...”* (Cf. Mt. 25:35-44), every resource, well employed, gives glory also to God.

Nothing can paralyze the Spirit.

Evangelization continues its journey, often uphill, overcoming its own discouragement and lack of use of social networks. In this context, so painful, the wise words of our dear founder Venerable Father Gregory Fioravanti also shine: *“Marvellous are the ways of the Lord and no one has the right to ask why in this way and not otherwise...”* (F.1, p.16)



For the glory of God and the salvation of souls!

THE TRUE JOY IS IN GIVING...

The lack of resources to have daily bread is a reality in many corners of the earth, even in the southern of Chile, in the 10th Region of Los Lagos.

In the tourist town of Puerto Varas, there is a sector, a poor area, the city of Puerto Chico. The Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart have been present among the poor and suffering since 1954.

To meet one of the needs of the population, an Italian religious founded a canteen for the poor, whose name is “open canteen Sr Annapia”. Today as yesterday, to feed the hungry!

In Christmas time, when God manifests His Eternal Love, by giving us His Son, “*the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*” as Saint John transmits to us, He continues to appear in the manger of that table, in the manger of open and charitable hearts who share bread with those who have none.

This simple experience is like the star of Bethlehem that guides human beings to offer gifts to the Child God who manifests Himself in those who suffer. Every baptized person is called to proclaim Jesus Christ, to be a witness with life and with the word. How much more, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart, called by the Lord to reach the ends of the earth.



Today, the Puerto Chico district, a long-time marginalized population: inhabitants rejected by society, because life has tried them and they have fallen into crime and alcohol.

Thanks be to God, to the generous gift of religious women and many benefactors, their living conditions improve.

However, the scourge of alcoholic beverages remains present in the lives of men and women, as well as hunger, which destroys the intestines and touches the dreams and hopes of poor families, which today as yesterday populate the earth.

There is more joy in giving than in receiving says the Word of God and also the life of many men and women, who by discovering the Lord in those who suffer, share what they are and what they have, being, this, a source of joy.



In the open canteen “Sister Anna Pia”, with the help of some institutions and people, who collaborate from generation to generation, daily sustenance to people who come, is given.

Before the pandemic, the sharing was daily, now, for reasons of it, the lunch is delivered to them only three days a week, for the benefit of people without work and with scarce resources, of those who live in the street, alcoholics and drug addicts, low-income families, migrants and anyone in need. In general, about 60 people receive food, which includes a plentiful single dish, bread and dessert. Sometimes, when supplies are plentiful, they share more bread, basic food for the Chileans, and a bag with food for the rest of the day.

Everything is accompanied by spiritual food, singing, prayer, a short catechesis, and games that heat the cold air of the area, for constant rain and humidity, with their voices, laughter and applause to the winners, who receive juices, biscuits and a piece of cake.

Those who have nothing, are happy with so little, with simple food, insignificant for the world, but so significant for them; thus sweetens their lives!

Every day it brings a novelty, a new face of Christ to be welcomed and to smile at, to nourish and listen, to heal and love.

“We must help to recognize that the only way is to learn to meet others with the right attitude, which is to evaluate and accept them as companions on the way, without internal resistance. It is a matter of learning to discover Jesus in the face of others, in their voice, in their needs”. (Evangeliu Gaudium)

There is no greater treasure that we can offer our contemporaries than to follow the Lord every day, witnessing to His Gospel. learning from the humility of Christ who, following the will of the Father, came to serve, to “*give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mt 20:28).

PYGMIES... The JOY to BE CHILDREN of GOD

Pygmies are an ethnic group generally known to live in the equatorial rainforest of Africa.

They have a strong sense of community life, characterized by a lifestyle according to nature, unique. Their natural environment provides everything they need for their livelihood.

Generally they are easily identifiable by their unique physiognomy and low stature characteristics that differentiate them from many other tribes or clans.

They speak a common language known as “Bakar”.



Academic education is not part of their tradition: given the structures at their disposal and the great distances.

For these reasons many of them do not attend school, rather they have an informal and oral education. They have a natural symphonic and melodious way of singing, they use their voices excellently. Most of their songs speak of their traditions and history.

The Pygmies are surrounded by the “Banti”, (a name that refers to the people living in Central, Eastern and Southern Africa) with whom they are more often forced to confront in many areas and in many aspects.

The challenge of integration and mutual respect for cultures still leaves much to be desired. The real and lasting solution remains that of education.

Every culture needs to be educated and evangelized so that the more human and dignified coexistence can characterize the relationship between the pygmies and the “banti”. However, much has already been done in this field and much remains to be done, as the challenges are still open.

In the Sangha region, precisely in Sembe, we have both groups living in the

community, although with many challenges yet to be faced.

That is why pastorally, the local Church carries out initiatives that can help create an awareness of God’s love for humanity and for every human being, regardless of origin, race or nation.

It is in this light of encouragement to bring the love of God to humanity that the Diocese of Ouessou organized a musical concert between the pygmies of the different localities, which were to converge at Peke, around their Bishop, priests and religious and to all the population to sing praises to Almighty God who is the father of all.



Once we received the invitation of the Bishop, we Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the Sacred Heart who have been in Sembe since 1995, we immediately invited the children of our School, San Kizito of Lipoua and those of the neighbourhood.

We rounded up 21 girls and boys and immediately started the song rehearsal. All the members of our religious community, in the different labour camps, participated and encouraged.



The children were often escorted to their homes by car to reassure the parents that their children were actually with us. Very often Anita PUNCINI, a volunteer from Switzerland who has been living with us for many years, did this service.

After three weeks of rehearsing songs in which we enjoyed the wonderful voices and joyful expressions of girls and boys we felt so good and grateful to God that he used us as tools to convey his love and joy to his children, the pygmies.

It is time to leave for Peke, we will accompany: Mme Esther nurse of our hospital, Mme Nadia and Mr Jean Ndamo both teachers of our schools in EGNABI and LIPOUA, members of the parish choir and Dr. Buka, doctor in our hospital. Certainly the sisters could not miss: Sister Lucia Superior of the Community, sour Ritapia Director of the Hospital and Sister Blessing Head of our schools.

The new choir was named after: CORO SAN KISITO di LIPOUA - SEMBE. The choice of the name is due to the fact that the saint is a young African from Uganda who died because of his faith in God and that today he is a model of faith for young Africans.



On Saturday, November 13, 2021, we left for Peke in two minibuses. We felt that the emotion filled every person with joy.

We arrived at Peke at noon. Being the first exit and the first time that the boys reached the city of Ouessou, the capital of their region Sangha, we decided to take a few city tours to get to know some important places. They were so moved that some of them did not stop thanking the nuns for everything they do for them.

The musical concert began at 19.00, attended six choirs from various pastoral areas of the PEKE and other parishes such as: Peke, Palmeraires, village of Paris, Zoulabouth, Biessi, Lipoua da Sembe.

The choirs made their presentation in the presence of the Bishop of the diocese of Ouessou, Mons. Yves MONOT, the Bishop of the diocese of Imfondo Mons. Daniel NZIKA, of the Priests and Religious of various congregations and of all the faithful.



Our profound joy is based not only on the fact that our boys sang better than anyone, but on the expression of joy and freedom that we were able to grasp in the faces of all the Pygmies gathered for the concert.

Certainly through this experience they have been able to experience God's love for every man and even strengthen their belonging to the society in which we want to live as children of God.

The next day, we participated in the Eucharistic celebration in the new Church of Peke and then we undertook the return to Sembe.

This experience was unique and will remain as an unforgettable moment for us sisters because God has allowed us to share with all the other Pygmies of the Region the certainty of being brothers in Jesus.

We thank the Almighty for his boundless love.

The Gospel mandate resounds every day in our hearts: *“Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations...”* (Mt. 28:19a).

Sister Blessing Lukong

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Good News”

It was a long awaited dream of the Holy family province to have a team of sisters engage in full time evangelizing mission exclusively of our province. In 2021, “Fmsc Buona Novella Ministry” has taken its shape and a team of sisters started to go from village to village in various dioceses preaching the Word of God.

In spite of the lingering fear of COVID- 19 around, in every village in the parishes where we have our communities, a faith revival program was launched. It was aimed at restoring the faithful from their fading rather lost faith, to save them from their excessive fear and depression and to bring them back from their routine online Holy Mass to the celebrated Holy Mass in their Parish Churches.



It has also the aim to teach the faithful and to lead them to a holy life through receiving the sacraments especially of Baptism, of Reconciliation, Holy Communion etc.

Three days programs conducted in many village churches includes family visits, patient listening of their problems, counseling and prayer, preparing for various sacraments, preaching the Word of God, conducting penitential services, praise and worship, adoration and healing service.





The program was concluded with solemn Eucharistic celebration and an agape meal.

Responding to the invitation of parish priests from different dioceses, we covered many villages during the pandemic year 2021, conducted many camps prepared them to receive the sacraments and made many marriage rectifications.

It is indeed a risk, moving around and relating with each other in these days of pandemic.

However, the people thirst for God and we cannot resist the Divine Spirit leading us forward.

There are requests from many parishes and we are on our assiduous journey for the sake of our savior Jesus and His Kingdom.

We witnessed a good response and an intense participation from the part of the faithful. We thank the Lord for His constant presence in our ministry and for making us instruments to spread His message.

Everything is for His greater glory and making His name known to the world especially in this challenging period of the history.

As the apostle says, *“Indeed, preaching the Gospel is no reason for me to boast; it is an obligation that has been imposed up on me. And vow to me if I do not preach the Gospel”.* (1 Cor.9: 16)



FMSC LAY ASSOCIATES in PAMARRU

A new group of FmSC lay associates was formed on 30 January 2022, other than the already existing groups in St. Elizabeth Home Pasurupadu, St. Francis Convent Kalipatnam and St. Antony's Convent in Chennai.

The new group is formed at Little Flower convent Pamarru, with the members belonging to different diocese and parishes especially from where we have our communities.

Most of them are our ex-alumni who are now settled here and others are our workers who are good Catholics.

At their willingness to be part of our family FMSC Lay Associates, Sr. Suni Clare the provincial councilor accepted them by putting Franciscan 'TAU' on their neck as symbol of their membership in a prayerful gathering.

At present, the new members are fifteen in number. The venue was in Pamarru Assisi School premises and the meeting held in the 'ASWAS' social service Hall. They decided to have a meeting once in a month.



THE FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION IN THE JUNIORATE (INDIA)

*“When we speak the name of Mary ,
heaven becomes more beautiful, the earth rejoices,
the demons are terrified and vanish like dust”.*

December 8th 2021 was a day of rejoicing and exultation for the Holy Family Juniorate because on this day we celebrated the great feast of the Immaculate conception of our Blessed mother with great pomp and gaiety. We had solemn Eucharistic celebration in the morning. In the evening we had arranged a programme called Marian Night.

The purpose behind this programme was to intensify our devotion and love towards our Blessed Mother more deeply.

Our venerable Fr. Gregory was a knight of the Immaculate Mother. He loved her with tenderness and the secret of his heroism was Mary.

Treading in the footsteps of our beloved father we too are in great need of the love, protection and the constant guidance of our heavenly Mother today, especially in this crucial time of Pandemic, persecution, war and violence. All the nine juniors were divided into three groups and all of them were very enthusiastic to work hard to make this programme more meaningful, colourful and successful.

The juniors had collected many portraits of Mother Mary and displayed them very beautifully and artistically.

We started the programme with Marian Marchfast at 7 PM.

After that we recited Holy rosary singing in multiple languages. Then there was the Marian exhibition



made by them. All the sisters of our community and the inmates of Japamala Bhavan were present and appreciated the juniors for the great effort they have done for honouring our Blessed Mother so grantly on her feast of the Immaculate Conception. Prizes also were awarded to the best group. We concluded the programme by singing the beautiful hymn to our Blessed Mother “ As I kneel before You

Let us run to Mary our Mother, and as her little children cast ourselves into her loving arms with a perfect confidence.

TRANSITUS of our Founder Venerable Father Gregory

“Venerable Fr Gregory Fioravanti was a man of faith and was convinced that the Lord who watches, does not leave him alone.”

On 23rd January 2022, we the Sisters, Novices and Aspirants of the formation Community celebrated with great solemnity the 128th anniversary of the birth into Heaven of our Founder, the Venerable Father Gregory Fioravanti.

On this blissful day, we give thanks to the Almighty God for the great gift of our venerable Fr. Gregory as the Founder of our Congregation as we are very privileged to be the beloved daughters of him. We intercede his blessings and support for our journey of life.

We had a preparation for the celebration of this event well in advance.

In the previous days we organized time of study and reflection focused on his life especially in regard to our foundation.

From all the knowledge we acquired from this time of reflection, once again we became more aware of the blessings we received and the legacy he left for us.

We would like to share in detail the celebration of the transitus, in other words the commemoration of his birth into Heaven.

We moved in procession from our community hall with lighted candles and flowers to the novitiate chapel and placed them in front of the portrait of Fr. Gregory, which was beautifully decorated with flowers and candles.

After the superior Sister Karuna garlanded the portrait which was an explicit expression of our love, devotion and veneration to him.

The 33 years, he has spent with us, he lived them exclusively with deep faith to know the will of God with an unceasing trust in the Lord clinging only to the crucified Saviour.

In every moment and in every event of his life, faith shines in his words, sparkled in his works.



He exhorts “*detach completely from the affections of the things of this earth, after all it is nothing but misery so do penance for the sins and the sins of others, withdraw from the world and sanctify each day with the love of God*”.

We had a vivid and powerful presentation of the various events, teachings and Spirituality of our venerable Fr. Gregory through a Power Point presentation. His spirituality was an extreme fidelity with humility to the cross of Christ along with Mother Mary.

He was a man always open to renew, strengthen and reconcile himself with his problems, wounds and limits. In him we find simplicity and confidence in order to carry out his daily cross.

He always placed before God his hidden life, his silence, his poverty, modesty and meekness etc.

In the Power Point presentation, special focus are given about his teaching to the Novices “*The novices should remember that they entered into an institute that is dedicated to the missions and where the sisters meet sacrifices of all kinds so the novices always have to be ready to do it.*

If they have the virtue of abandonment to God’s will, it does not block them from doing the will of God in the commandments of authority or in their teachings or rules therefore, in the novitiate the novice must try to be active to offer herself and not cautious herself in the case of some sacrifice but to do for the good of the Community.

Abandonment to God’s will be a treasure, that should be locked in the heart of every novice and teach her that nothing can make her happy, except the will of God”.

After watching the presentation, the Novices expressed their joy; for it enriched their awareness about their journey in formation in the novitiate following the frame work of our Founder Fr. Gregory.

The community also expressed their joy and gratitude for being able to experience the life of our Founder, venerable Fr. Gregory Fioravanti.

*St. Joseph Novitiate Community
Carmel Nagar India*





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