

# FRANCISCAN NETWORK

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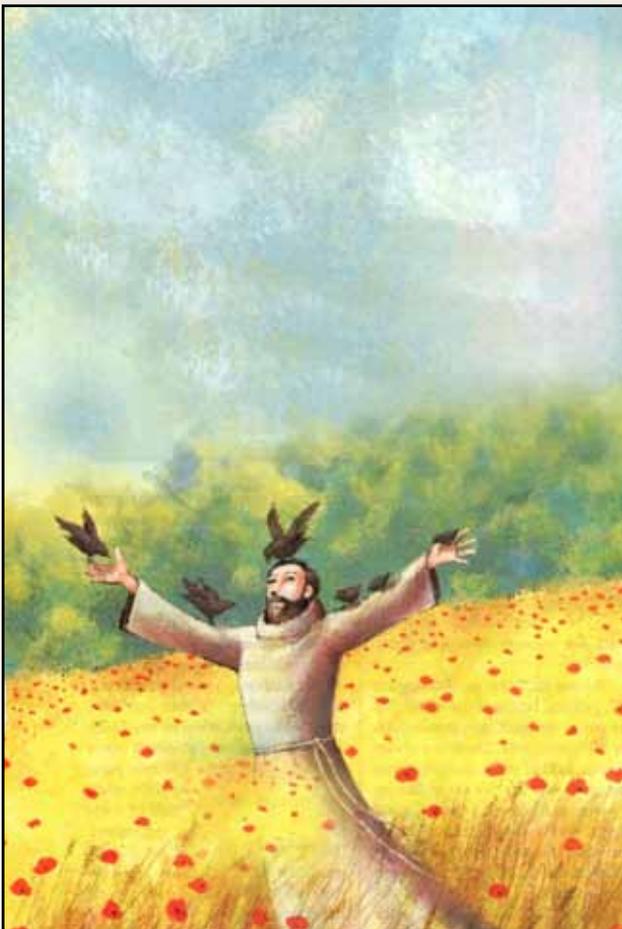
Dear Friends,

Immediately after Argentinian Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio was elected Pope, another Cardinal nearby whispered to him, "Do not forget the poor." Pondering these words, the new Pope thought of the little poor man of Assisi who was to become his inspiration and example. He is now known to the whole world as Pope Francis. Later he confided, "Francis for me is a man of poverty, a man of peace, a man who loved and

are better able to devote ourselves to building up that peace in all creation, which is inseparable from peace among all peoples.

We must be prepared to follow the example of Francis, and embrace the unique way of life that he copied from the Gospels. That is why his first followers climbed quickly to the spiritual heights and why in a very short time there were between three to five thousand brothers who had given up everything to follow in his footsteps. Remember - whatever our vocation might be, whatever we do, wherever we live, we are all called like Francis to observe the Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Sr. Liz



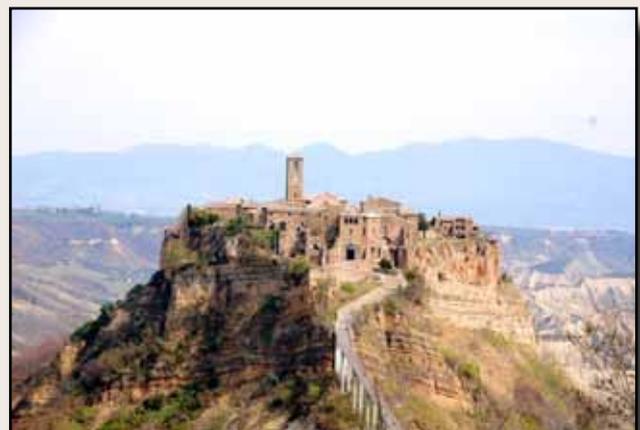
protected creation" and he added, "Right now, our relations with creation are not going well."

As we know, in 1979 Pope John Paul II proclaimed Francis as the heavenly patron of ecology, because he offered Christians an example of genuine and deep respect for the integrity of creation. He was a friend of the poor who was loved by all of God's creatures. Francis invited all of creation - animals, plants - even Brother Sun and Sister Moon - to give honour and praise to the Lord. He gives us striking witness that when we are at peace with God, we

## Saint Bonaventure

Bonaventure was born in Bagnoregio, not far from Viterbo, in 1218. At that time this region was part of the Papal States. Almost nothing is known of his childhood, other than the names of his parents - Giovanni di Fidanza and Maria Ritella. Bagnoregio lies atop a plateau of volcanic rock overlooking the Tiber Valley. It is in constant danger of destruction, as its edges fall away, causing the buildings to crumble and fall. The location of Bonaventure's boyhood house has long since gone over the edge to the valley below.

At the age of 22, he entered the Franciscan Order. After making his vows, he was sent to Paris to complete his studies, and became Master of the Franciscan school there. He was an intimate friend of St. Thomas Aquinas, and both these men enjoyed the friendship of the French King, Louis. At the early age of 36, he was



elected Minister-General. He did much for the Order, restoring calm where before internal dissensions had disturbed the peace of so many of the Friars. He staunchly defended Franciscan ideals, but insisted on the serious need for study, and hence the necessity to possess books as well as buildings. His own ideals of simplicity, frugal poverty, diligence and detachment from riches (as well as from the rich) were realized in his own life. (He also wrote a Life of Francis, which was officially approved.) He continued to steer his brothers on a moderate and intellectual course, so that it became the most prominent Order in the Catholic Church until the coming of the Jesuits.

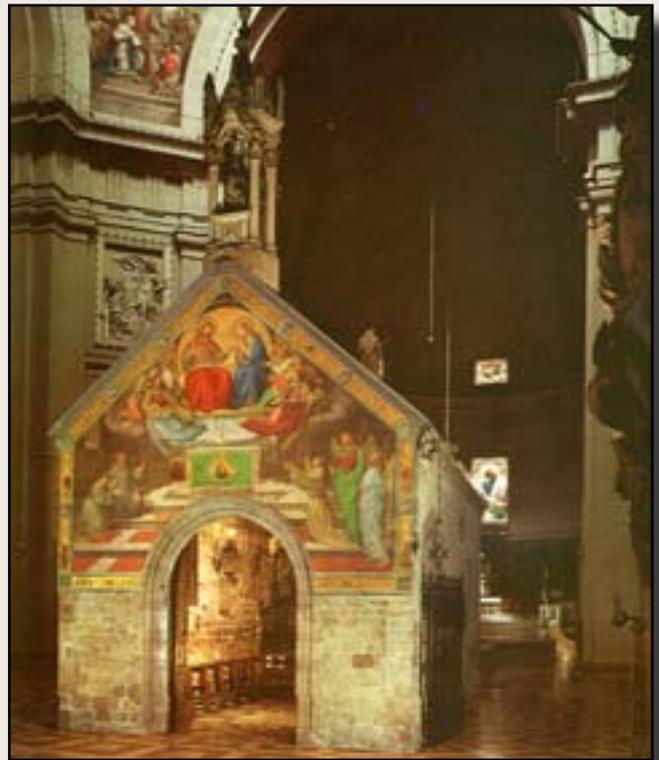
He was present in Padua when the body of St. Anthony was being transferred to its present location in the Basilica. When the coffin was opened, St. Anthony's tongue was found to be intact. It is said that Bonaventure broke out into song, praising God for the great gift of preaching that had been given to the Saint.



In 1265, he refused the nomination of Clement IV to become Archbishop of York in England. However, in 1273, Gregory X nominated him Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, with the command not to refuse. (He was washing dishes when the Papal messengers arrived and he asked them to please wait until he had finished his task!) Bonaventure took a prominent part at the Council of Lyon, but sadly died before it concluded.

His achievements in theology and philosophy should not blind us to his personal characteristics - gentle courtesy, compassion and accessibility to his students and brothers. He was canonized by Sixtus IV in 1482 and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1588. He is often referred to as the "Seraphic Doctor" and has been called the "Second Founder" of the Franciscan Order.

## Porziuncola



It could be said that this word derives from the "small portion" of land upon which the Church was built, pertaining as it did then to the vast patrimony of land belonging to the Benedictines. It had passed into their hands in the 6th Century, and they leased it to Saint Francis for the yearly payment of a basket of fish. Francis, in observance of his vow of poverty, would not accept ownership from the monks who wished to give it to him as a gift. It remains preserved almost as it appeared at the time of this great saint, and it lies at the centre of the Basilica of St. Mary of the Angels.

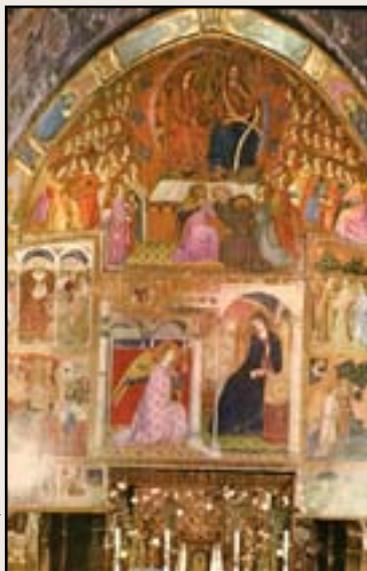
Here he stayed for three years with his first companions, but as the Order grew, he was forced to transfer to Rivotorto. He returned in 1211 and used the word "place" and not "convent", which to Francis bore too much of the suggestion of property and stability. Around the little church tiny huts sprang up, and it became the centre for prayer in common and for the singing of praises to the Lord.

The Poor Clare Order too has its origins here, for on the night of Palm Sunday, the young Clare, having fled from her paternal home, made her vows as a nun, initiating the Order of Poor Clares. In 1216, at the Porziuncola, after a vision, Saint Francis obtained from Christ the grace of a complete pardon for all those who after confessing and receiving Communion, visited the little church. The indulgence was

approved by Pope Honorius III, who fixed the dates of 1st and 2nd of August every year.

Pilgrims come here from all over the world to relive the wonderful experiences of Friar Francis who “humbly began here, virtuously progressed here, and happily ended his life here.”

(Written by his biographer, St. Bonaventure.)



## Diamond Jubilee

Recently, Sr. Noela Leamy (left) and Sr. Joyce Fenton celebrated 60 years of Religious Profession. Here, they share with us their reflections on this special occasion.



“Yesterday, Sr. Noela and I celebrated our Diamond Jubilee. What was the highlight of my day? It was the moment before I began the reading from Mt. 5:14-16, the theme of which is ‘You are a Light for the World.’ I looked at my Missionary Franciscan Sisters and felt so proud to belong to such a wonderful group of women. It gave me great joy to think that I too had been called to go forth to be a light for others.

“After the Eucharist, we moved to the Centre for High Morning Tea. There was a lot of sharing around the tables as we exchanged stories of the last 60 years, especially the exciting episodes that often took place. Naturally, there were hardships, but in community we formed lasting relationships, especially where communities consisted of only two or three sisters. As a missionary in Papua New Guinea for 48 years, I was called on to fulfil a variety of challenging ministries - nursing, teaching and pastoral work. The latter often called for long walks

and motorbike and Suzuki rides over rough bush tracks. Later I moved on from Primary to Secondary school, where I was involved in Religious Education and Home Economics - a ministry I found very fulfilling.

“I have never had any doubts about my vocation, and feel deep gratitude for being called to be a Missionary Franciscan Sister.”

- Sr. Joyce

“The occasion of a Jubilee is very much a call to reflection and review of the years. I recalled that not long before my mother died at the age of 94, she said that she had lived from the age of the horse and dray to the space age, and she went on to outline some of the extraordinary changes that had been called for during her lifetime. As I reviewed 60 years of Religious Life, I concluded that we too had lived through and adjusted to equally extraordinary changes in society, community life and ministry.

“Last week I opened a box in the archives that contained different editions of the Constitutions, and noticed a thin white booklet containing Statutes from the mid 20th century. I became absorbed in reading it, and found myself laughing at some of the entries which showed how far removed such a lifestyle was from community life today.

“Reflection on the vows highlighted the fact that Poverty and Chastity freed me to go, to do and to be, but it was the vow of Obedience that plotted a life path that I would never have chosen for myself. It opened doors and presented challenges that were very demanding, but which brought wonderful experiences, considerable joy and great fulfilment. Having been sent to missions ad extra, I was more than half the 60 years outside Australia, and another 20 living with other religious communities. However, in all my wanderings, I knew that ultimately I would come “home” to Kedron, where I have found great peace and the opportunity to share in active ministries through prayerful support.

“I have always appreciated the way the sisters on the home mission provided for me in many ways, and across the years have welcomed me during home visits. Now as I enjoy the fruits of their careful stewardship and wise forward planning, I am truly aware that I reap what I did not sow, and am deeply grateful for that.”

- Sr. Noela

## What was St. Francis like?

Friar Tommaso da Celano, the first biographer, gives us this portrait of St. Francis.

“He was beautiful, splendid, glorious in his innocence, in his purity of heart, his love of God, his charity towards his brothers, in his alertness, obedience and gentle ways, and angelic features. His loving treatment of others, his placid nature, affable talk, opportune manner of scolding, and loyalty in carrying out his tasks brought a gentle grace to all things. His serene spirit, sensible nature, deep contemplation and fervent prayer were an example to all. He was quick to pardon, slow to provoke, of good memory, prudent in making decisions and simple in all things. Severe with himself, he was indulgent with others and always discreet.



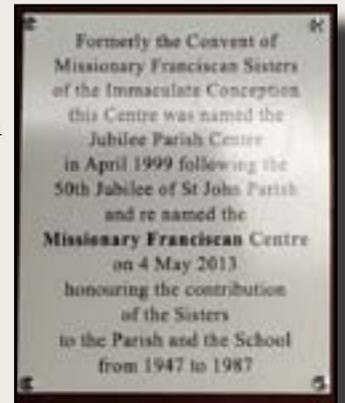
“He was very eloquent, with a happy expression, never lazy or haughty. Physically, he was not very tall, of medium stature; he had a round, normal-shaped head, a long face with a narrow, flat forehead, black eyes full of simplicity, black hair, straight eyebrows, a thin, straight nose and small ears. He had an ardent tongue, a voice that was clear and loud; even white teeth, small thin lips, a slender neck, short arms and fine hands with long fingers. His feet were small and his skin very delicate. He was lean and roughly dressed, and slept very little. He was gentle with everyone, adapting himself to the habits of each brother. He was the Saint of all saints, the sinner amongst sinners.” (1 Celano, 83)

## Dedication of Silkwood Convent

For almost 40 years, the Immaculate Heart of Mary Convent was home to the Missionary Franciscan Sisters. (It was actually on the feast of the Immaculate Heart - 5th June, 1948 - that the first sisters took up residence.)

Now, 63 years later it was being renamed “The Missionary Franciscan Centre” and dedicated as a place for the Parish to gather for prayer and other special events. Sr. Pauline Robinson and myself were invited to attend the ceremony on Saturday, May 4th. The Dedication took only 15 minutes - just before the 6 p.m. Mass - but it was

very meaningful, with special prayers and short speeches. Sr. Pauline read a short passage from the early Chronicles, the President of the Three Saints’ Committee, Mr. Fred Maccarone, spoke of the support given to the sisters, including the purchase of a car and I said a few words on our missionary work, including walking through the canefields on a Saturday with a packed lunch, visiting the migrant families who lived in barracks with few comforts and little or no English. Several past pupils from the very early days were present, as well as those from more recent times. The final part of the ceremony was the proud unveiling of the Plaque by Pauline and myself.



After Mass, we finished off the evening with a delicious supper under a giant marquee in the school grounds, catching up with our past pupils and old friends - all sharing stories from the early days down to the present. Although we closed our Silkwood ministry 26 years ago, the sisters are still remembered with great love and affection - our Franciscan spirit lives on, very much alive and thriving.



## Conclusion

Take care, my dear friends. I leave you with this reflection from Eckhart Tolle -

*Presence is needed to become aware of the beauty, the majesty, the sacredness of nature ..... to become aware of such things, the mind needs to be still. For a moment you have to put down your personal baggage of problems, of past and future, as well as all your knowledge: otherwise, you will see but not see, hear but not hear. Your total presence is required.*

Love,  
Sr. Liz