

Signs of life

The newsletter of the Franciscan Missionaries of our Lady

“A Path... A Life!”



It was in the small merchant town of Assisi that the man who would become Saint Francis of Assisi was born, in 1182. His father, Pietro Bernardone, was a wealthy cloth merchant who also owned other properties in and around Assisi.

Francis therefore came from a family of prosperous merchants. An enthusiastic young man, he took an active part in the lively social life of the town and was filled with an immense joy for life. His father, hoping that Francis would one day take over the family business, ensured that he received a thorough education, from arithmetics to Latin and French. Francis organised and hosted great parties, becoming a leading figure among the young people of Assisi. His mother, Lady Pica — a refined Frenchwoman — passed on to him the qualities that would shape his personality: gentleness, charm, sociability and courtesy. He was a young man overflowing with life and joy, open to human relationships, naturally gifted and endowed with the fine sensitivity of an artist and poet, deeply moved by the beauty of people and the splendor of nature.

At the same time, Francis had a strong and determined character. He liked to distinguish himself from others and made no secret of his desire for greatness or of his fanciful dreams: to enter the aristocracy or the upper classes and become a knight. Driven by his ambitions, he even took up arms for Assisi, but fortune did not favor him, and he ended up spending a year in prison. Once he had recovered, he tried his luck a second time, only to fail again.

His desire for prestige drove him to pursue his plans once more, but at Spoleto he heard a voice ordering him to return to Assisi. He obeyed, though reluctantly; from then on, Francis was no longer the same man. He began to feel something strange stirring within him. The great principles on which he had built his life had collapsed, and he began to experience the emptiness of his former way of life. Weakened by a long illness, he tried in vain to regain his strength by gazing at the surrounding countryside, those wonders of Creation that once amazed him. Indifferent to everything, he returned home, no longer recognizing himself.

An unexpected event radically changed the course of his life. After a night of celebration and entertainment with his friends, he felt something stirring within him, an impulse urging him to turn away from worldly things to quench his thirst for God. The Lord led him among the lepers, where “what had seemed bitter was turned into sweetness of soul and body.”

His encounter with the Crucified Christ in the chapel of San Damiano, together with his renunciation and complete dispossession of his belongings, played a decisive role in the new direction Francis’s journey would take. He no longer sought to be the greatest, but the least of all. He now felt free and joyful. The passage from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew (10:7, 9–10) gave Francis the answer he had been seeking concerning his future life: the call to mission, the demand for poverty and the message of peace.

This was the path of life that the “Poverello” would follow, the path traced out by the Gospel and that he would travel with the brothers whom the Lord had given him. A new model of community life emerged, characterized by an apostolic calling that would take the brothers to the four corners of the world to proclaim the Gospel as poor, itinerant mendicants, following in the footsteps of Christ, who had nowhere to lay his head. In accordance with Francis’s wishes, they were to form a fraternity of “Friars Minor,” seeking to live the Gospel as obedient members of the Church, in profound respect for priests, who live in the image of the Son of God.

Within a short time, these new fraternities multiplied in several countries. Francis himself travelled to Egypt to meet the Sultan. This marked a first step towards relations of friendship with Islam.

After returning to Italy in August 1224, Francis withdrew to Mount La Verna, travelling on a donkey because he had become so weak. It was there that he received, from Christ Himself, the Stigmata of His Passion, making him wholly conformed to the Crucified Christ.

From then on, illness and solitude increasingly took hold of Francis. Yet, without knowing why, he felt light-hearted and joyful. When he groaned in pain, a voice would come to comfort him and promise him the Kingdom that awaited him. Francis felt the desire to sing. On that radiant morning, he embraced all of creation: the sun, the moon and the stars. The wind, the clouds, fire, the earth—all creatures joined together in a fraternal chorus of praise to the Creator. Francis called this song

the *Canticle of the Sun*, or *Canticle of the Creatures*, in which he expressed his love and affection for the work of God.

When the time came and he felt his life drawing to its close, Francis lay down on the bare ground near the chapel of the Portiuncula, the cradle of the Family he had founded. At nightfall on October 3, 1226, Francis welcomed “Sister Death,” while the birds sang in praise of the little Poor Man.

How beautiful is the path traced by Francis of Assisi more than eight centuries ago! Still very much alive today, his example continues to attract people from all walks of life, inviting people of different beliefs and cultures to discover and share in his journey. We may well ask — as people already did in his own lifetime — what lies behind this enduring attraction. Perhaps it is because the Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ took such deep root in the heart of the Poor Man of Assisi that it brought forth in him the humanity of God, drawing him ever closer to the poor and the humble.

May the spirituality of Francis continue to travel our paths today and sow the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ! May our age be drawn by his thirst for Peace, Love and Fraternity! May praise of the Creator rise up everywhere!

“MOST HIGH, ALL POWERFUL, GOOD LORD,
YOURS ARE THE PRAISES, THE GLORY, THE HONOUR, AND ALL BLESSING.”

“Great Little Women”: “You’ll Have to Step Over My Dead Body” Mother Moïse, the Nun Who Stood Up to the Gestapo



Mother Moïse (1880–1970), a Franciscan nun born in Brittany, became an emblematic figure of the French Resistance in the Royans region. In recognition of her exceptional courage during the Second World War, she was made a Knight of the Legion of Honour on February 4, 1951, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her religious life. She was later posthumously promoted to Officer of the Legion of Honour, and the Officer's Cross was placed on her coffin in 1970 by the Prefect of the Drôme.

Before the Second World War, she was sent to Saint-Laurent-en-Royans in 1904 to care for deaf-mute children at an institution known as “La Providence,” where she became Superior in 1921. A woman of both strength and compassion, she transformed the institution, welcomed Spanish refugees and devoted herself wholeheartedly to the local community.

When France came under German occupation in 1940, she did not simply stand by. Together with her Sisters, she took in endangered families, Jewish children and members of the Resistance. The “Providence des sourds-muets” institution and the religious community became a discreet haven of refuge, protection and hope.



Mother Moïse, in the middle

From the beginning of the conflict, she involved her community in the Resistance, working closely with the mayor and turning the convent into a refuge and a clandestine hospital where wounded members of the Maquis could receive treatment. She even agreed to hide weapons in the Sisters' own burial vault in the village cemetery and gave shelter to more than 80 members of the Maquis who had survived the fighting in the Vercors, as well as seminarians from Alsace and Jewish families.

On August 8, 1944, when some fifty German soldiers arrived to search the institution, Mother Moïse courageously stood in their way at the entrance and declared to the officer: *"You will not enter this convent—you'll have to step over my dead body first."* Her extraordinary composure and the intensity of her gaze, which reflected both serenity and a spirit of prayer, caused the soldiers to back down, saving the institution and the village from a terrible tragedy.



Mother Moïse receives the insignia of the Legion of Honour from the Prefect

Echoes of Pope Leo XIV's Visit to France: "So That the World May Have Life"

With hearts filled with gratitude and thanksgiving, we reflect on the fruits of Pope Leo XIV's visit to France, which has just come to an end.

What a magnificent gift from God to the Church in France and to each and every one of us!



We came to witness the heartbeat of the Church, and once again we heard this Eucharistic and missionary promise: **"So that the world may have Life."** Although the Holy Father has now left our country, the fruits of his visit remain within us as urgent calls to nurture our hope and offer it to a thirsty world, to bear witness to Christ through concrete acts of charity, and to make our lives a gift in the service of fraternity.

The visit is over, but the Gospel continues to be written!

Visit of the Relic of Saint Francis of Assisi's Tunic to the Community of the General House

On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the death of Saint Francis, the community of the General House had the joy and grace of welcoming the relic of his tunic. Many members of the Franciscan Family, together with Christians from near and far, gathered to share this profound moment of communion.

The event began with a conference given by Brother Henri Namur, OFM, on the theme **"The Pasch of Saint Francis of Assisi."** This time of reflection enabled us to deepen our understanding of the

spiritual meaning of his passage into Life. The assembly then came together in a fervent moment of prayer and veneration of Saint Francis's tunic. To bring this beautiful day to a close, everyone gathered for refreshments, continuing their conversations in an atmosphere of joy and fellowship.

The visit of this relic and the meditation on the Pasch of Saint Francis offer us a renewed invitation to rekindle our faith and enter more deeply into Franciscan spirituality.

You too have certainly experienced this Jubilee Year in your own way. Would you like to share with us one of the meaningful experiences that has particularly touched you? Send us your testimonial by email at contact@fmnd-international.org.



Regional Council in Ethiopia

Following our recent visit to Ethiopia, we give thanks to the Lord for the vitality of the mission in this Region. With great joy, we introduce the members of the Regional Council who have been appointed to guide the mission in the Region and support its local projects. In this photo, from left to right: Sr Abebech Kiftaga (Regional Minister), Sr Haymanot Amanuel (Regional Assistant), Sr Fikerte Mota, Sr Agnez Finta and Sr Sara Gabriel, Councillors.

We warmly thank these Sisters for their dedication, for responding with trust to this call, and for their generous “yes” to serving the Region. We surround them with our prayers as they undertake the mission entrusted to them.



Perpetual Profession of Sister Auria Luísa Bernardo Ramos “Abide in me, and I in you.” (Jn 15:4)



On July 5, 2026, our Sister Auria Luísa Bernardo Ramos made her Perpetual Profession at Saint Luke’s Parish in Zango (Luanda, Angola), the Christian community where she grew in faith.

Inspired by the words of Jesus, “*Abide in me, and I in you*” (Jn 15:4), Sister Auria definitively gave her life to the Lord within this religious family, committing herself to remain united with Christ and to bear witness to Him with joy and fidelity in her mission.

The preparation for this great celebration was marked by three days of prayer in the parish community where her vocation was born. During these days, the faithful shared in

a profound time of reflection and prayer: a meaningful spiritual journey for each person and a beautiful preparation of hearts to celebrate our Sister's definitive "yes."

The celebration, presided over by Bishop António Bengui, Auxiliary Bishop of the Diocese of Luanda, took place in a profound atmosphere of thanksgiving and brought together family, friends, Sisters of the Congregation, priests, religious men and women, and many faithful who wished to accompany Sister Auria at this moment of total self-giving to the Lord.

We give thanks to God for the gift of Sister Auria's vocation and for the fruits of the Congregation's mission in Angola. May her witness continue to inspire young people with the courage to respond to God's call, and may Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception of Muxima, Patroness of Angola, always accompany her on her journey of faithfulness!

"Mamãe Muxima, tubane dibesá!" (*Mother of the Heart, grant us your blessing!*)



Temporary Vows: Madagascar

“All things work together for good for those who love God.” (Rom 8:28)

These words of Saint Paul encourage us to move forward and to continue responding to the Lord’s call.

We give thanks to the Lord for having chosen us and for helping us to remain faithful to His call within our Congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. For our part, in our daily lives, we strive to remain faithful to our commitments and to live according to the spirit of our religious family wherever we are sent.

Thank you, Sisters, for your fraternal support. We continue to count on your prayers.

Sr RAHARIVOLA EVASOA Clara Yvette

