

Signs of life

The newsletter of the Franciscan Missionaries of our Lady

A time for the Creation - Praise be to You



The land, situated on a property without an owner or a name, seemed abandoned. Brambles proliferated, weeds grew everywhere, and dry branches piled up, remnants of trees standing upright. Passersby lamented the state of what could have been a lush space, a delight to behold.

Something had to be done to bring this devastated landscape back to life. Yet nothing was lacking: the crystal-clear water of the stream, the fertile soil, the sun, inviting corners to rest in the shade during the summer. For years, decades even, people had said that the land had been destined for oblivion. But one fine day, the light dawned.

A group of scouts, reflecting on the encyclical "Laudato Si'," which they had studied together that afternoon, decided to care for this nameless land. Ideas emerged, and the project began to take shape. Nature smiled upon them. Without hesitation, they started by using farming tools. Those had to be the old, rusty machines from home, tucked away in some corner. Their parents would be proud of their sons, of course. The young men thought that their elders would undoubtedly lend a hand, as they were farmers themselves. And that's exactly what happened. The idea was well received, and there was no shortage of help to pursue this youthful dream: to beautify and enrich the village's natural surroundings.

In only a short time, the land was ready for sowing. Spring arrived, revealing a beauty hidden for centuries. And wherever young hands plowed, fresh water flowed, multicolored flowers bloomed, the fields blossomed, the trees were full of colors, and the song of the birds, busy preparing their nests, resonated in a harmonious melody, praising the Creator!

Passersbys paused and savored the peace that permeated the air, in the shade of the oaks and pines that stood proudly against the sky. And the people smiled, commenting on how nature abounds with hidden treasures. We must love and thank it, respect and care for it.

Behold this lush space! Those who pass through this land, once abandoned and now open and inviting, pause and savor a moment of calm and renewal, a pleasant rest.

It was a Sunday afternoon. The crowd had gathered, talking and applauding. New dreams were born: to continue the revitalization of nature, which generously offers the beauty and richness of the life it harbors.

And to the Creator rose the resounding voices of the assembled crowd in the name of Mother Nature.

Praise be to You, my Lord, praise be to You!

"Great little women": Sisters Maria Javier and Guillermina

The story of Sisters Maria Javier and Guillermina who gave their lives caring for those suffering from the bubonic plague

Don't look for it...this story isn't in the Gospel, but it's full of Gospel...It's the story of two seeds that one ordinary morning were placed in the hands of the Sower...

Their names? *Sister Maria Javier and Sister Guillermina.*

We know little or almost nothing about their lives before they arrived in Argentina.

To the voice that inspired them: "Whom shall I send?", they replied: "Send me"...

They generously left their homelands, Spain and Portugal, and arrived in Argentina in 1912. They began their mission at the Coronda Hospital, working and serving their brothers and sisters as nurses.



The years went by...The year was 1919... A dark cloud hung over the town of Totoras. A terrible plague began to ravage the town, causing great devastation. The scene was utterly bleak. The hospital, which had not yet been inaugurated, had to be set up to care for those afflicted by the disease. The deceased could not be mourned or taken to the cemetery through the town's streets for fear of contagion.

The plague had already claimed so many victims that the only doctor at the hospital could no longer manage on his own. It was then that he turned to the "San José" School, run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, to ask for the help of two sisters.

"If a grain of wheat falls into the earth and does not die...it remains alone. But if it dies..." These words of Jesus resonated deeply in the open furrow of two hearts ablaze with love...Yes!...Once again it was the voice of the Lord: "Whom shall I send?" Who will go? To ask or to appoint?... And thousands of questions and doubts pierced the heart of the good Sister Superior. She turned to prayer...Then she gathered her sisters and explained the request...There was a great silence...Sister Maria Javier: 62 years old...Sister Guillermina: 39 years old...

Two lives and a single response: HERE WE ARE, LORD! SEND US! They volunteered, as all the other sisters in the community had done.

They said goodbye to their sisters, knowing that as a safety measure, they would not be able to return to the community while serving in the hospital. On October 20, 1919, they entered the hospital to care for their brothers and sisters, alleviate their pain, comfort them, and prepare them for their departure to the House of God the Father. The work was arduous and exhausting, day and night, with the constant threat of infection... Despite everything, they went about diligently, healing one, comforting another, helping everyone to offer their sufferings to Him who suffered so much for us. From that day on, they never saw any of their sisters again; a wall stood between them...And so the days passed; The bubonic plague (transmitted by rats) was claiming more lives every day...



Colegio San José, 1920.

One morning, Maria Javier noticed the unmistakable signs: she was sick. She stayed in bed for a few days, and still convalescing, she went back to work to serve Jesus in her suffering brothers and sisters, and also Guillermina, who had contracted the terrible disease.

Weak and feverish, Maria Javier did not falter; an inner strength sustained her, compelling her to visit the sick and spend the nights with the dying...

Sister Guillermina, exhausted by the illness, could no longer regain her strength and became bedridden with fever. The same happened to Sister Maria Javier a few days later. In utter destitution, poor and far from their sisters, they offered up their lives.

Knowing the sisters' condition, the superior insisted repeatedly on seeing them, even at the risk of contracting the disease herself, until, after many refusals, her request was finally granted. What an encounter that was! There were few words... For in life's greatest moments, the most eloquent language is silence. And there was a meeting, which was a farewell.

– “Don't worry, sisters... We are going to LIFE... This evil will soon end. Until we meet again... Until we meet in heaven... Now more than ever we are happy.”...

A few more days passed... The warm sun of the approaching summer had ripened the crops, and the harvest was near. Promising ears of grain announced the white flour for the bread that satisfies the hunger of humankind... Ears of grain that would later become a Host of Love...

Yes, God, Sun of LOVE, had ripened these two sisters, ears of grain brimming with a life given only to HIM and to their brothers and sisters... It was harvest time.

On November 13, 1919, the two died three hours apart... And that evening, as the sun hid behind the clouds, it painted the sky the color of martyrs, the color of love...

Due to the circumstances and out of prudence, as we mentioned at the beginning, the deceased were not usually given wakes and were taken to the cemetery via a road far from the town. But this was not the case with them. The townspeople refused... And so the streets were filled with residents who came to bid farewell to those who had made the Master's words a reality: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.” (John 15:13)

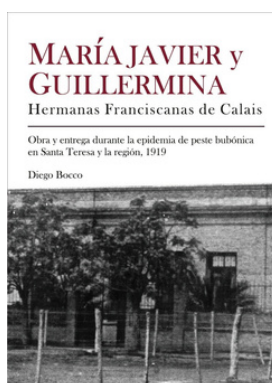
And when these two lives were extinguished, the light of hope was rekindled... The two seeds died, and life began to bloom... María Javier and Guillermina had offered their lives so that the plague would end. Indeed, they were the last two to die. The patients gradually recovered, and the desolation became a thing of the past.

María Javier and Guillermina had a boat and a net...of dreams, of hopes, of projects...but one day Jesus passed by their side and said to them: “Leave your nets...come with me.” And they, seduced by the Master's gaze and voice, left everything and followed in his footsteps...Since that time, the entire town of Totoras has paid homage to them as “the martyrs of charity.”

To learn more, visit the website of the Argentine region of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady: <https://fmnsarg.com.ar/hermanas-maria-javier-y-guillermina/>



Cérémonie commémorative pour María Javier et Guillermina, novembre 1994.



You can also consult the book “María Javier y Guillermina: Hermanas Franciscanas de Calais” written by Diego Bocco.

In Brazil, 105 years of solidarity inspired by Saint Anthony

"The poor are the treasure of the Church" (St Anthony)

During the month of June—traditionally dedicated to Saint Anthony—we highlight a wonderful mission led by the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady in Brazil, a living testament to this great saint's popularity and legacy among the most vulnerable.

Thank you to Sr. Lourdes for sharing this story.



The Church of St. Anthony and of the Souls in Itabaiana, Brazil, gratefully celebrates the 105th anniversary of the "Bread for the Poor" initiative. This charitable work began on August 15, 1919, through the efforts of sisters Idalina and Leonor Nunes; driven by love for their neighbor, they provided 13 baskets of essential supplies to 13 families. Since then, the initiative has grown and now assists 180 vulnerable families each month.

Before each distribution, we gather as a community to celebrate Holy Mass, reminding ourselves that, above all, we are nourished by the Bread of God's Word and the Eucharist—the source and model of all acts of fraternity—and that only then do we receive material bread. In this way, we unite faith and service, prayer and solidarity.

We, the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of Our Lady—with the support of the parish priest, Father Paulo Lima, and the entire "Bread for the Poor" pastoral team—carry on this tradition of love inspired by our patron saint, Saint Anthony. We thank all the volunteers, donors, and families involved, and we pray that God grants us the strength and grace to persevere in this mission of serving those who are the most in need.

May the Lord always guide us in our generosity, and may Saint Anthony intercede for us.

Sister Lourdes

Visits to the United States of America and Mozambique

Following our visits to the United States of America in April 2026 and to Mozambique in May—as announced in the previous newsletter—we share with you, with joy and thanksgiving, the names of the sisters appointed to the various Regional Councils to animate and support the respective missions of these Regions.

Let us praise the Lord for the willingness of each one to serve her Region and her sisters!



Photo of the Council of the United States of America



Photo of the Council of Mozambique

News: Temporary professions

- Portugal : Lúcia Adolfo Filipe
- Mozambique : Susana Luis Chone, Isabel José Quichine et Vilma do Céu Mutapate

On June 13, 2026, amidst an atmosphere of joy and deep gratitude, the Region of Portugal and the Region of Mozambique celebrated the religious profession of Sisters Lúcia, Susana, Isabel, and Vilma, giving thanks to God for the gift of their vocation and for the journey traveled thus far.

The Sisters' profession is a sign of God's faithfulness; He continues to call and sustain those who dedicate themselves to His service. We pray that the Lord may always be the strength, joy, and hope of each sister, and that He may accompany them with His grace at every stage of their lives and mission.

On this festive day, the words of our dear Mother Louise resonated in our hearts: **"Long live our God and our All!"** Yes, blessed be our God and our All, who has called us and continues to bring forth new vocations in this religious family, in the service of the Church. May this certainty continue to light the path for our sisters and renew in each of us the joy of belonging fully to the Lord!

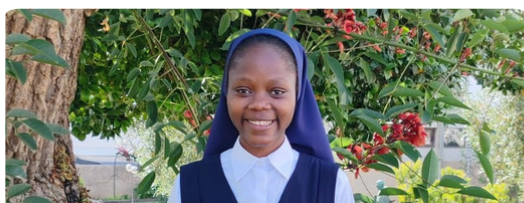


Photo from the Portugal region: Lúcia



Photo from the Mozambique region: Susana, Isabel, and Vilma

The Pope's visit to France in September

It is a source of immense joy! Our Pope Leo XIV is coming to France from September 25 to 28, 2026.

"What extraordinary grace!"

He will visit the Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris, the Shrine of Lourdes, and Metz, where he will pay tribute to Robert Schuman—a founder of the European Union whose beatification process has been underway for many years and who was declared Venerable by Pope Francis in 2021.

Priests, seminarians, deacons, consecrated persons, and religious men and women are all invited to Notre-Dame Cathedral.

We are preparing to welcome this grace that God wishes to bestow upon the Church in France, and upon each and every one of us!

We rejoice with the entire French population, and with all those who dwell on French soil! And indeed, with the whole Christian world!

