



PROPOSITUM

March 1, 2023

HOW LIVING THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS TODAY BRINGS CHRIST TO LIFE IN OUR WORLD

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The Franciscan Centenary has been the focus of many articles and studies over the past few years in preparation for the celebrations of the 800th anniversaries of significant events in the life of St. Francis that are central to our lives as Franciscans. This year of 2023 we remember the 800th anniversary of St. Francis offering the rule as the Franciscan Way of Life and the 800th anniversary of the first Christmas scene being reenacted and celebrated in the city of Greccio. In both the Rule and the Christmas Crib, St. Francis offered to us a way of bringing Christ to those with whom we live and work.

Living the rule of St Francis is living the Gospel of Christ. The values and virtues embodied in the Rule allow all Franciscans to live a selfless life devoted to the care of other people and all of creation. The rule challenges us to live a life not for ourselves but for the good of others.

In this issue of Propositum, we have asked members of the Third Order Regular to reflect on how living the rule has helped them to become better Christians and how they in turn have helped to bring Christ's love to the people whose lives they have touched. May their stories create within you a deeper awareness of how blessed we are to be Franciscans!

Peace and all Good!

Sister Frances Marie Duncan, OSF

Sister Frances Marie Duncan, OSF
President IFC-TOR

IOANNES PAVLVS PP. II

ad perpetuam rei memoriam.

Franciscanum vitae propositum nostra quidem aetate, haud secus ac superiore tempore, complures viros et mulieres evangelicam nitentes perfectionem Regnumque Dei appetentes sine intermissione allicit. Ad Sancti Francisci Assisensis exemplar adhaerentes Sociales Tertii Ordinis Regularis sectari ipsum contendunt. Iesum Christum, dum fraterno vivunt in consortio, evangelica consilia obedientiae, paupertatis, castitatis votis publicis observanda suscipiunt et in varii generis operositate apostolicam incumbunt. Quo perfectius suae vitae propositum exsequantur, adsidue orationis usum frequentant, germanam inter se excolunt caritatem atque verè utuntur poenitentia et abnegatione christiana. Cum autem hae singulae Franciscalis vitae propositi partes ac rationes luculenter in Regula et Vita Fratrum et Sororum Tertii Ordinis Regularis Sancti Francisci - comprehendantur cumque prorsus ita descriptae conveniant vero Franciscali instituto, Nos pro apostolicae potestatis Nostrae plenitudine statuimus, edicimus, decernimus ut haec Regula propriam habeat vim momentumque ad genuinae Franciscalis vitae sensum Fratrum et Sororibus explanandum, usquequaque videlicet perpenis us omnibus quae de hac re iam suo tempore edixerant Decesores Nostri Leo Decimus et Pius Undecimus Constitutionibus Apostolicis - Inter cetera - et Rerum condicio - Quoniam novimus quanta diligentia curaque haec Regula et Vita - cursum renovatae accommodationis perfecit quamque feliciter ad optatam consensionis metam pervenerit communibus ex disceptationibus et inquisitionibus votis et elucubrationibus, idcirco fore certi confidimus ut propositos fructus effectusque renovationis adstatim in posterum consequatur tempus. Haec autem voluntatis Nostrae significatio praecipimus ut firma usque in virtutemque exerat suam tam nunc quam posthac, contrariis quibuslibet rebus minime obstantibus Datum Romae, apud Sanctum Petrum, sub anulo Piscatoris, die VIII mensis Decembris, anno Domini MCMLXXXII, Pontificatus Nostri quinto.



Augustinus Card. Casaroli
a Publici Eccl. negotiis

Avallio
Sabot.

Concordat cum originali - die XXV Januarii MCMLXXXII

Prot. n. 104237. Ser. 52

THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS TODAY

*Author: Superior General Sr. Bonaventura Holzmann OSE,
Convent of Elizabethines Graz – Austria
Hospital Sisters of Saint Elizabeth
Original German*

The testimony of life and the Rule of St. Francis are an unmistakable part of the DNA of the Elizabethine Sisters. The patroness of our religious order, St. Elizabeth of Thuringia, was inspired by the ideal of the Franciscans and named the hospital she founded in Marburg an der Lahn after St. Francis. On this journey of following the humble and loving Christ, the first Sisters of the Elizabethines in the 17th century chose the Rule of St. Francis as their guide in prayer and in their ministry of care of the sick.

Nowadays this attitude is just as necessary as it was then. The Oration for the Feast of the Stigmata of St. Francis states that when the world was growing cold, God wanted to warm people's hearts through the witness of Francis' life. Francis regarded every life in all creation as sacred and met each with sensitivity, an open ear and a helping hand.

In our religious community and especially in our service to the people entrusted to us in our non-profit acute hospital with its two hospices, I often experience how our Franciscan heartbeat makes worries and fears grow smaller and gives new hope. It is not a super glue and does not take anything away from existential questions, but it opens a door into the innermost part of the heart. This is especially true for our VinziDorf hospice, where we give homeless people a home in safety and dignity at the end of their earthly life.

Of course, it is essential for us to be committed to quality in care, medicine and therapy that "goes further than the standard", as the Charter of the Elizabethines in Austria puts it. However, our hospital would not be an Elizabethine hospital if the following of Christ in the Rule of St. Francis were not perceptible and formative. This is especially true through a good word in a critical situation, a hand on the shoulder where words fail and through prayer and help for everyone.

Just as St. Francis designed the Christmas crib in Greccio in the midst of life, we try to make Christ unobtrusively essential in the lives of our patients, and especially in those of our staff. For us, to live a Franciscan life, therefore, means to set up the crib of Bethlehem anew throughout the year. It thus becomes "a refuge for the soul, which hides among the rocks to let itself be enveloped by silence. Why does the crib move us and make us wonder so much? Above all because it reveals God's tenderness," as Pope Francis puts it.

Living this tenderness and attentiveness according to the Rule of St. Francis also gives us support and orientation in difficult questions. We Elizabethines are also confronted with questions about so-called "assisted suicide" in the hospital of our Order. We do not leave anyone alone with their worries and fears, but as Elizabethines we do not carry out "assisted suicide". Not because we think we are special, but because in the shoes of St. Francis we cannot help to end lives. Protecting every life and its dignity is a guiding star for us today and in the future in living according to his Rule.



CHRIST'S PRESENCE IN THE WORLD IN THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

*By Sr. Stella Maris Achieng
Franciscan Sister of St. Anne (FSSA), Kenya
Original language English*

Living the rule of St. Francis practically and more effectively is as living the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ because the rule of the seraphic father Francis is based on the Gospel of Christ himself. How then do the Franciscans as a family live the rule and the Gospel values in our contemporary world?

Franciscans live in holy obedience, chastity, loving one another and without anything of their own following the teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. In living holy obedience, the followers of St. Francis live the life of Christ with limited ability by understanding the spirit of Christ and making that spirit part and parcel of their daily conduct. What matters to Franciscans is what God needs from us, and that is obedience. One of the evangelical counsels, obedience is lived by being humble, trustworthy, disciplined, and humorous and having the right attitude towards authority. The flock of St. Francis, in its diverse nature, is in various parts of the world proclaiming the good news and working for humanity and especially the lepers of our time (the marginalized and the disadvantaged). Franciscans live a life of total sacrifice by

forgetting self, embracing the cross by accepting to work where we are sent and surrendering completely to the will of God and devoting ourselves for the salvation of others. By doing so, Franciscans identify with the poor, the needy and the excluded in society who are the lepers in our world today. These people are the outcasts, the despised, the poor, the weak, the sick, the unwanted, the oppressed and the destitute.

Living a fraternal life is also a way of life in the Franciscan culture and is expressed by the Franciscan by loving one another and by being doers and not hearers only. The followers of St. Francis allow the gospel to be expressed in their daily lives through their good attitude, punctuality, honesty and openhearted humor. To be in union with God and one another and implies dialogue with all creatures. Above all prayer is the very essence of Franciscan life.

Whenever I ask myself why I am a Franciscan or what is that special or unique thing about the way of St. Francis, I always come up with Francis Himself. Something about Francis attracts me, the way he loves Jesus. Francis allowed God to lead him, he moves ahead, and he is not afraid of the unknown. Therefore

the followers of St. Francis are rooted in the policy of trusting and being responsive to the needs of others, being open to God's suggestions, being self-confident, taking risks and tolerating frustrations. They must be – ready to continue with struggles and transparent in what they say and do.



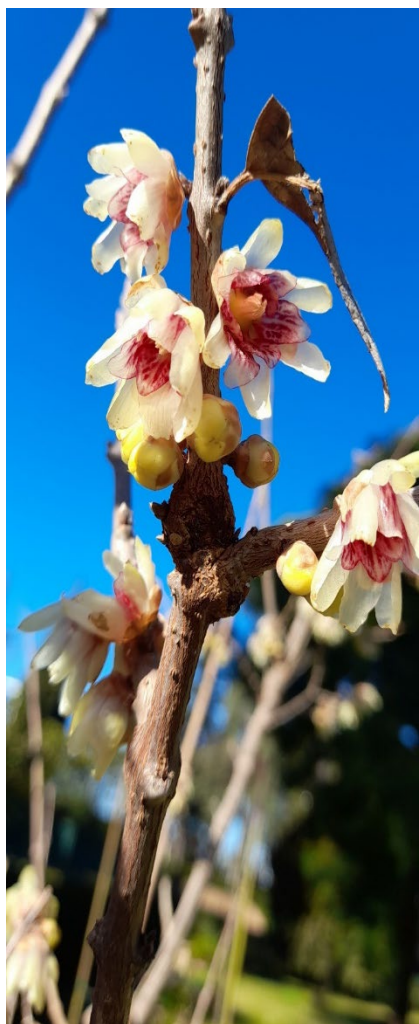
HOW LIVING THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS TODAY BRINGS CHRIST TO LIFE IN OUR WORLD

Name: Sr. Henriette Anne - Kenya

Congregation: Franciscan Sisters of St. Anne

Language: English

The Franciscan ideal of life in our times continually draws many men and women desirous of evangelical perfection and thirsting for the kingdom of God. St. Francis was known as the person who most patterned his life after that of Christ, he places the Gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of his Rules.



Our Congregation, inspired by the example of St. Francis of Assisi, chose him as the patron saint of our Ministry, therefore, living the rule of St. Francis today brings Christ to life in our world by embodying the values and teachings of Jesus Christ in everyday actions and attitudes.

The rule of St. Francis, a set of guidelines for the Franciscans, emphasizes humility since it was the joy of St. Francis to follow the poor humble Christ, poverty, and simplicity, as well as a deep love or respect for the dignity of life and reverence for all living creatures and the natural world.

By living simply and humbly, Franciscans who follow the rule of St. Francis are able to let go of material possessions and power and instead have focused on serving others and helping those in need. This is in line with the teachings of Jesus, who emphasized the importance of caring for the poor and marginalized. As a way to honor his memory, Franciscans have reached out to those in need with the gift of their time and treasure through one of the many service organizations in our communities.

The rule of St. Francis also emphasizes a deep respect for all living creatures and encourages care for the environment. This is important in today's world, where many people view the natural world as a resource to be exploited, rather than as something to be cherished and protected. By living in harmony with the natural world, individuals following the rule of St. Francis help to bring the teachings of Jesus to life in a modern context. For the past three years, Franciscans have joined different groups like the "Laudato si"

Movement and "Mother Earth" movement that promote caring for the environment as they involve different organizations in fulfilling the vision of Pope Francis in his encyclical letter, *Laudato si*.

Additionally, the Rule of St. Francis emphasizes the importance of humility, simplicity, and detachment from oneself and the world. This allows one to be more present and attentive to God and to others, as well as to have a more profound encounter with Christ in oneself and others.

In summary, living the rule of St. Francis today brings Christ to life in the world by embodying the values and teachings of Jesus Christ, such as humility, poverty, simplicity, care for the poor and marginalized, respect for all living creatures, and care for the environment. Through these actions, Franciscans following the rule of St. Francis help to bring the teachings of Jesus to life in a modern context and help to make the world a more

just, peaceful, and compassionate place to be. This is the legacy of St. Francis, may it enrich our lives

How living the Rule of St. Francis today Brings Christ to life in our world

*Convent of Oberzell, Würzburg, Germany
Greetings from Sr. Alexandra and Sr. Margit
Original in German*

On May 27, 1855 Antonia Werr founded the religious community of the Servants of the Holy Childhood of Jesus and the "Catholic refuge for abandoned persons of the female sex". Born in Würzburg, she combined her love of God Incarnate with her love of women in need. She discovered the spiritual foundation for her calling in the Franciscan way of life. Accompanied by Fr. Franz Ehrenburg, Franciscan Friar Minor of Würzburg, she joined the community of the Third Order of St. Francis in 1863.

St. Francis celebrated the liturgy of Christmas in Greccio in 1223. For the first time the events of Bethlehem were represented in a visual manner. Francis saw the poverty and powerlessness of God in the Child in the manger.



"May your Incarnation come to its full fruition!"
We Franciscan Sisters pray this short prayer, originally formulated by Fr. Franz Ehrenburg, during our daily noon prayer.

In the mystery of God's Incarnation, Antonia Werr found the spiritual basis for her social action. She recognized that Jesus came into the world to reconcile people with God, with themselves and with each other. The impact of the Incarnation is evident in her lived spirituality and her charitable, social commitment.

In every woman, no matter how wretched, she saw the incarnate Son of God.

She invited women who had been released from prison into her community, offering them a protected place where they could make a new start and so learn to master their lives in a self-determining way. In many cases, through attention, spiritual guidance and education, the wounds of the soul could be healed and self-confidence strengthened.

For Antonia and her sisters, the crib meant they were to constantly visualize the poverty and humility of the divine Child. The sisters were to become a crib themselves by giving Jesus shelter and a dwelling within themselves. For that reason, still today the crib is for us, Servants of the Holy Childhood, a symbol of the following of Christ. On the 25th of each month we display the crib with the Child Jesus. The theme of God's Incarnation takes a central place in the liturgy of that day. Hymns, prayers and the rosary of the Divine Childhood are expressions of this spirituality.

"Because God shows himself vulnerable and powerless, we allow ourselves to be touched by the reality of people's lives. We respect the dignity of every human being, give women a voice and encourage new beginnings. We create spaces for people who are looking for accompaniment, protection and help or who want to reorient themselves. Our goal is to see the good in every person. Through a spirit of appreciation, we enable them to grow and mature."

Our present-day mission mandate is formulated in this way from the Gospel. Each sister and every co-worker is bound into this apostolic service.

The community offers help to women in need, as well as socio-educational support in different forms and levels of intensity.

For those interested in Franciscan spirituality we offer retreats, days of recollection, quiet days and times of prayer, as well as spiritual accompaniment.

Praise be You, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death, from whom no one living can escape

(Francis of Assisi)

Written by Sr. Julie Marie Peters ,SSM

Original language: English

In May of 2022, I attended the IFC-TOR General Assembly and during one of our small group discussions, it was brought to the group's attention that with the publishing of *Laudato Si*, Franciscans, had received a "shot in the arm" because of the recommitment around issues of creation and our interconnectedness. This reawakening, we acknowledged, was particularly important in the face of today's reality. It also surfaced that we had neglected the last two verses of the *Canticle of Creation* but most especially the verse on Sister Death. As Franciscans we have a unique gift in our spiritual tradition to help ourselves and others make this journey as Francis did, from fear to hope, avoidance to embrace, denial to acceptance, exclusion to fraternity, and finally to a place of hopeful active welcome:

*"Be praised, my Lord, through our Sister Bodily Death,
from whose embrace no living person can escape.*

Woe to those who die in mortal sin!

Happy those she finds doing your most holy will.

The second death can do them no harm.

Praise and bless my Lord, and give thanks, and serve him with humility".

(Translated by Bill Barrett from the Umbrian text of the Assisi codex)

In July of 2022, I received a call from a lady saying that she had stage four cancer and had gone through one year of chemotherapy. There was nothing more that could have been done and she wanted someone to walk with her through the dying process.

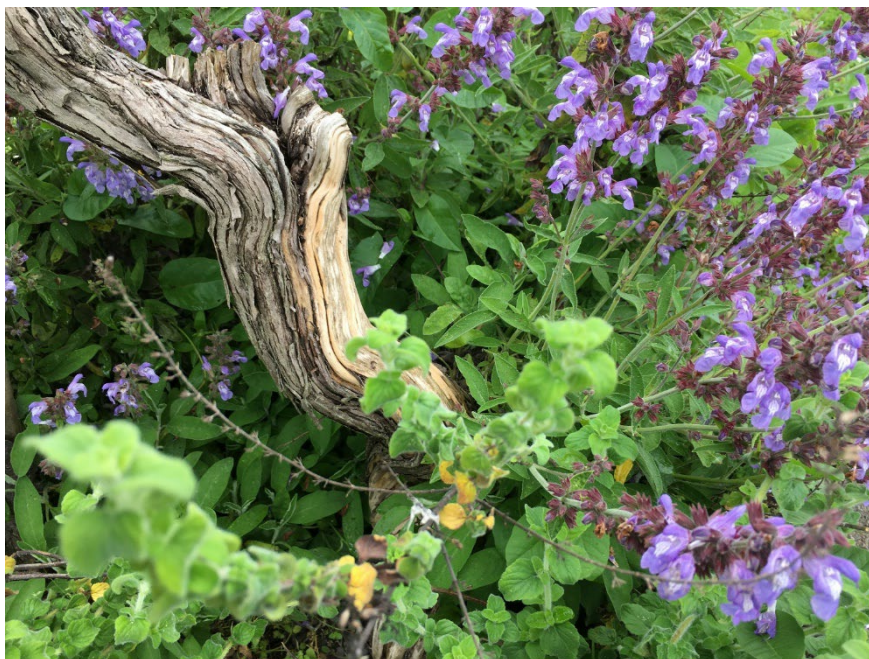


I immediately remembered our group conversation. I felt an emotional barrage of feelings and thoughts: shock, guilt, doubt, helplessness. How can I help her? What if I say "no", and she dies? Is this God saying here is your chance, give life to your words and the words of your Franciscan colleagues? The truth is that the lady's request surfaced my own questions about what I believe or did

not believe about death. I prayed and reflected on her request, and I said “yes” to accompanying her.

I felt that I did not know enough to begin her Retreat with the Canticle. Therefore, we began with what some refer to as “Franciscan Lectio”. We both took on the role of being “unseen observers” to the Event of the story of the Parable of the ten Virgins from Matthew 25: 1-13. We used our four senses to engage ourselves with the dynamics of what was happening until the bridegroom arrived. By God’s grace this experience worked as a springboard to explore Francis’s transformation and understanding of death. She shared that she had come to see Francis’ welcoming attitude as an act of watchfulness and that his fraternal relationship with “Sisterly Bodily Death” was synonymous to Matthew’s “*stay awake*” or “*be prepared*”. The last verse of the Canticle taught her that the silent presence of death calls one’s life to attention. Francis was fully attentive! As Franciscans may we come to know our own death as “Sister Bodily Death” by being “awake” to the present.

*I recommend Chapter ten: Embracing Sister Death: Francis of Assisi and Christian Hope
Francis of Assisi and the Future of Faith by Daniel P. Horan*



Living out the Rule of St. Francis

*Sister Mary Francis Maher, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America
English*

Living out the Rule of St. Francis in my life begins with prayer. It is through prayer that I become Jesus to all those I meet in my day. Being nourished with the Eucharist gives me strength to face the day's challenges.

My mission is here at our Motherhouse and has been for a number of years. I used to think that bringing Jesus to others meant having a job in one of our facilities. I have been blessed to live with our young and aspiring candidates and Sisters as well as our older and infirm Sisters. An extra has been to work alongside lay staff who minister to our Sisters. They mirror Jesus to me on a daily basis. Kindness and concern for each other as well as the Sisters we minister to is Jesus in our midst. Some days, my prayer is broken up and I am not very attentive but I am learning to bring myself to the Lord wherever I am at. He takes me where I am. The challenge for me is not to beat myself up when I am not being the person God is calling me to be. I begin again each and every day trying to be happy and joy-filled as St. Francis was. In doing so, I am, hopefully, bringing Jesus to others.

Another of my blessings is assisting in our Liturgies. I am a lector and Eucharistic Minister. These are also ways of literally bringing Jesus to others...especially in the Eucharist. I am humbled to participate in these celebrations. God is truly with us.



Integrity of Creation as Mirror of Christ: Walking the Talk of St. Francis in the Contemporary Society

Sr. Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA

Kenya

Original language: English

“God requires that we assist the animals when they need our help. Each being, whether human or creature has the same right of protection,” this is one of St. Francis of Assisi’s favorite quotes when it comes to acknowledging Christ in creation.

The reality of the preaching’s of the patron Saint of ecology, who lived 800 years ago, is being apprehended in today’s world that living in harmony with creation, with the poor and the vulnerable is living in harmony with God. Hence, Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically.

Rightly so, as various regions across the corners of the world currently face environmental challenges, St. Francis’ emphasis on humanity as stewards of creation come to reality when through his exemplary life preached the connection between the love of God, concern for nature, justice for the poor and interior peace.

In his book titled, “The ecological crisis: a common responsibility,” Pope John Paul II (now Saint John Paul) narrates that “Environmental crisis is rooted in a moral crisis for humanity, caused by our selfishness, our sin, and our lack of respect for life.”

In this regard, today more than ever, Christians and non-Christians alike understand Christ’s clarion call in the scriptures to care for creation where it says, “*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it,*” *Genesis 2:15.*



To value creation, God’s love and interconnectedness between humanity and other creatures, various groups of the Franciscan fraternity have taken it as a challenge to follow closely in the footsteps of St. Francis and bring Christ to life today by promoting advocacy on care of creation.

In Kenya, a country located in East Africa, one of the Franciscan groups dubbed [Mother Earth Network](#) whose vision is to “make the world a greener place for the wellbeing and sustainability of people,” has partnered with a number of Church and governmental organizations to develop practical solutions to the problems and challenges affecting the country environmentally.

The trust that has influenced planting millions of trees across the country and beyond, has developed other programs including Education and awareness creation which aims at building capacity of youth and women on general environmental issues and practices so as to inspire and influence the society to be cognizant on environmental sustainability.

Other programs carried out by Mother Earth Network include; tree planting, advocacy and information dissemination, media engagement and community mobilization and sensitization which helps “equip communities with knowledge and skills to embrace environmental conservation through change of attitude.”

To support the theme for the Propositum of the 800th anniversary of the Rule of St. Francis and the first Christmas celebration at Greccio, which is “How living the Rule of St. Francis today brings Christ to Life in our world,” another group encouraging the same in Kenya, is called [Laudato Si Movement](#).

No doubt, the Spirit-led hybrid movement was formed after the inspiration from Pope Francis’ Encyclical Letter titled [Laudato Si](#)’ which delves more on care of our common home as the Pontiff decries the loss of biodiversity among other concerns in society saying that, “The loss of forests and woodlands entails the loss of species which may constitute extremely important resources in the future, not only for food but also for curing disease and other uses.”

The movement aims to “inspire and mobilize the Catholic community to care for our common home and achieve climate and ecological justice.”

The **T**hird Order Sisters and Brothers therefore are living the rule of St. Francis and walking the talk through integrity of creation, hence bringing Christ’s love, peace and hope to the contemporary world so greatly in need of restoration.

Long life Franciscan family!!



HOW LIVING THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS TODAY BRINGS CHRIST TO LIFE IN OUR WORLD

*Sister Mariella Erdmann, OSF
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America, English*

The Rule of St. Francis is a spiritual document and based on the truth of the Gospel. Francis brought Christ to life in his day by living this truth in a profound way at a time when the spiritual life of the Church of his day was falling into ruin.



I came to know the Rule after joining the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. I felt called to the Order after experiencing the joyful giving of the Sisters who taught me. I was aware of other Orders, but God was definitely calling me to be a Franciscan. In my Religious Community, the Sisters who lived the spirit of the Rule made it more authentic to me. These were people who put God and love of others first. It was not their degrees, position in the Community or any other honors that attracted me to them. It was their humility, simplicity, self-sacrifice, joy and above all their faith that made me want to be like them. Their life of penance and the daily turning to God amidst the challenges and disappointments of life was commendable.

Most Christian behavior is counter to our self-centered instincts and natural reactions. It would take time for me to become more the person God was calling me to be. The Rule of St. Francis, profound in its simplicity, has been a guide along the way as how to live the truth of the Gospel. Francis was so receptive to God's love that he could live the Gospel so completely. I find myself more and more, deeply moved by his Rule. I am not a St. Francis or a St. Clare but I am simply a Franciscan Sister who wishes to give my life totally to Christ and to seek his will in all things.

Life is not perfect and to follow Christ completely leads to the cross. The cross is a part of our lives which I am trying to face, expect and embrace daily as best I can. In so doing, I am becoming more free. As I embrace the insights and wisdom of the Rule sifting them, weighing them, thinking them through, and savoring their sweetness, I am making them a part of my life. Our Country is becoming more pagan than Christian in many aspects. Once again, our Church and our world need a spiritual rebirth. I truly believe that I, along with all Franciscans, am challenged to sincerely live the Rule of Francis in a way that allows the Spirit to transform me and to rekindle the Spirit of Christ in the lives of others. The Rule is definitely relevant in our broken world of today to the extent that we once again make it a true, living inspiration of the Gospel way of life!

I would like to end with one of my favorite prayers by St. Francis:

"Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of my heart and give me true faith, certain hope, and perfect charity, sense and knowledge, Lord, that I may carry out Your holy and true command."

How living the Rule of St. Francis today brings Christ to Life

Sr. Evamaria Eisele, Franciscan Sisters of Reute
Original in German

How can anyone nowadays still voluntarily decide for a life of poverty, obedience and chastity? My generation, (I am 35 years old) knows nothing other than democracy, joint decisions, self-determination and economic prosperity. So why give in to a seemingly dusty rule of a medieval-thinking man who was even considered a "dreamer" or a "weirdo" in the eyes of some?

First of all, the decisive factor for me was to have experienced the spirit of my community. Quite innocuously and without the thought of wanting to enter there one day. All my clichés about religious life and Franciscan spirituality were thrown out the window and - thank God - I was made to see otherwise. I had *expected* overly pious, strict, serious women. People who had had to leave their will and their sexuality at the convent door and offer up their life in prayer and ascetism.

I *encountered* cheerful, profound and experienced women who live their faith in a very down-to-earth way and give the Gospel a human face today. Women who respond to the plight and needs of others with compassion. Who are truly with and among the people. Women who are aware of their womanhood and live it. I have not witnessed blind obedience, but instead intelligent fellow sisters who attentively and prayerfully follow what they understand of the Good News and the example of the Father of our Order.

Asceticism - this image, too, which I may have taken from films like "The Name of the Rose", immediately vanished into thin air. Celebrating and sharing happiness is just as much a part of lived poverty as "being allowed to share and to share one's need".

Living this poverty, far from the economic level (aren't we among the very well-protected anyway?), is often much more difficult for me than simply doing without material goods. I can then ask myself: What is my deep inner poverty? With whom can I share it? If I succeed in this sharing, this poverty that I initially experience is transformed into courage, which then gives way to a great inner richness.

Even more daunting than the vow of poverty was obedience. How was I supposed to cope with that? After all, I had already been working for many years, with my own apartment and a certain degree of self-sufficiency. But the more I grow into it, the less the image of "blind obedience" appears in my mind - which, by the way, would certainly be easier to live with. No, it is rather a matter of listening to God together, so that what he wants for a successful life in freedom can come to light.

Chastity - this vow also always sounded musty, old-fashioned and prudish to me. Here, too, the simple understanding of chastity as "sexual abstinence/denied sexuality" might be easier to implement. Nevertheless, the perhaps more difficult transmission of "clarity" and "sincerity"

seems more vivid to me - to meet the other with a pure heart and sense. This is a challenge that keeps stalling me and that I may not always succeed in. Francis' encounter with Brother Leo, who was in a similar situation, helps me. He encourages him "not to worry so much about the purity of the heart" but to look at God, to admire him and to rejoice in him - the "wholly holy one". I find this very comforting and it is precisely what makes Franciscan spirituality so down-to-earth and human for me.



Evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility

Sister Anne Marie Lom
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity
United States of America
Original language: English

“With all in the holy Catholic and apostolic Church who wish to serve the Lord, the brothers and sisters of this order are to persevere in true faith and penance. They wish to live this evangelical conversion of life in a spirit of prayer, of poverty, and of humility.” (TOR Rule Chapter 1: 2)



It is the great poverty and humility of God that motivated the placing of this environment in the Chapel of the House of Prayer of the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. It seems there is one great act of Incarnation manifested in the poverty of the crib, the outpouring of love on the cross, and the abundant life flowing from the Eucharist. Those early learned characteristics of Franciscan Spirituality: the crib, the cross, and the ciborium (Eucharist) still linger as the mission of our House of Prayer unfolds. The constant conversion, Metanoia, called forth in the Franciscan Life can be renewed and nourished in times of retreat, reflection, spiritual direction, and contemplative prayer.

Clients for spiritual direction often ask for time before or after a session just to be present and pray in the Chapel. The sense of ongoing Gospel life and the willingness to serve others is the seed that grows with the opportunities to stop, reflect, and serve. The Franciscan Rule has so much richness not only for Franciscans but also for all sincere Disciples of the Gospel.

HOW LIVING THE RULE OF ST. FRANCIS TODAY BRINGS CHRIST TO LIFE IN OUR WORLD

By Sr. Maria Goretti Avanzi
Franciscan Sisters of the Providence of God – Brazil
Original language: Portuguese

St. Francis manifests the essence of his life at the beginning of the Rule: "**...to observe the holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, living in obedience, in poverty without anything of one's own and in chastity**".

Francis, during his life knew and lived Jesus' life project, "*I have come that they may have life ...*" (Jn. 10:10). This project became truth in Francis' life as he sought for himself the answers to such great love. Following the example of Christ, Francis of Assisi experiences the God of life and becomes the man capable of approaching the "lowest" of all, the leper, and through this to all brothers and sisters, to all creatures, and of seeing in each and every one the merciful face of God.

In writing the Rule, it is clear that Francis' desire is to follow Christ Poor, Crucified and Resurrected for himself and for his brothers and sisters. All this lived in the context of community and in the service of so many brothers and sisters who also live in situations of poverty, of death but who nurture hope for a new life. Fraternal life, lived in community, was and is an important point for Francis to the extent that the number of his followers grew and grows steadily. It is by living in fraternity that we are called to reveal the loving and merciful face of Jesus Christ.



Life over the years has lost its value, has deteriorated, at all levels, and it is necessary to take care of it. Francis shows us the way: the Love of God for all creation manifested especially in his Son Jesus Christ. We Franciscans, sensitive to life and the dignity of creation, have a role to play in the midst of this system of exclusion. But Consecrated Religious Life needs to continue to be rediscovered, clarifying what its role is within the Church, following the example of Francis of Assisi, in the midst of the poor, who are left on the margins of society.

Francis of Assisi lived a life of total abandonment to God following the example of Jesus Christ. In everyday life he sought and discovered God's loving presence in every creature, in every person down to the smallest animal. Francis acquired a contemplative and merciful gaze: he contemplated Jesus in all creatures, especially in the poorest and most miserable, and toward them he showed mercy, adjusting himself more and more to their way of being.

To recover the relationship with creatures is to recover Francis' attitudes, his way of living and relating, as Christ himself did. Francis contemplated in every creature the face of God, the disfigured face of Jesus in the excluded.

Facing today's leprosy, Franciscan values expressed in the Rule and Life left to us by Francis are essential for discovering in today's time the face of Christ in a full and dignified manner to transform the world in which we live in solidarity, sharing, justice, love, self-giving.

LIVING WITH CHRIST: MEMORY and IDENTITY

Sister Marsaia Kaster, OSF
Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity
United States of America, English

A 3-word title of a monthly inspirational has become my “New Year’s” theme for 2023: “Living with Christ!” I believe that is what our Rule calls us to: to live with Christ and to carry Him with us into every situation; to allow His Spirit, values, and His Father’s kindness to affect us and our decisions.

How does living the rule of St. Francis today bring Christ to life in our world?

It is 40 years since we received this new rule. Input from TOR members was requested for its production. I remember being given an opportunity as a young religious, to read the preliminary text and to give feedback. That in itself is a treasured memory.

The “prologue” to our Rule is from St. Francis’ “letter to the faithful,” which he wrote to a multitude of lay men and women who begged to be shown how to follow him. (This same writing of Francis IS actually now Article 1 of the Secular Franciscans’ latest Rule.)

The prologue describes the spiritual aspirations that should typify TOR members: we are those “who love the Lord with our whole heart...whole soul and mind, and with all (our) strength and love (our) neighbor as (our)selves and who despise the tendency in (our) humanity to sin, receive the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ and bring forth from within (our)selves fruit worthy of true penance...” Then it says who we are: “his spouses when...united by the Holy Spirit with Our Lord Jesus Christ...” Further expressions praise our relationship to our “Father in Heaven” and to the Holy Paraclete; and extol “a Brother and Son, so holy, beloved...Our Lord Jesus Christ” and the relationship of love to which we are called to enjoy with Him.

The “rest of the RULE” speaks of “Our Identity,” “Spirit of Prayer,” “Life of Chastity,” “Way to Serve and Work”, “Poverty”, “Fraternal Love,” “The Obedience of Love,” etc. All of these aspects are described in words and scripture that inspire and motivate awe and love for our Franciscan life.

So how can we grow in living like Francis? Pope John Paul II, who gave us this holy Rule/way of life 40 years ago concluded his own life’s reflections by writing a small book entitled: **Memory and Identity**. John Paul II notes: keeping a strong “Memory” of who I profess to be will strengthen my identity as a Franciscan.

Many Secular Franciscans have a tiny *Little Red Book* containing their Rule which they carry with them all the time or have handy to pick it up and read the inspiring passages of their 26-article Rule. So, in imitation of them I have decided that I can strengthen my “Identity” as a Franciscan if I will keep my Rule next to my bed and read a small part of it each night. I have come to realize that, as John Paul II notes: keeping a strong “Memory” of who I profess to be will strengthen my identity as a Franciscan.



The Rule of St. Francis is a beautiful document

*Sister Marlene Schwaller, O.S.F.
Franciscan Sister of Christian Charity
United States of America
Original language English*

The Rule of St. Francis is a beautiful document. We can read this 800-year-old document and say how inspiring it is. We can say it leads us to deeper prayer. It appears to have been written to the early friars and their relationships with God and one another. But how does it apply to us today? We may be so engrossed in our community and apostolic efforts that we do not think about how we are living the Rule. By studying it, communities can become more aware of the variety of ways the members can have unwittingly been living it. Like many other communities, our community, the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, puts into practice several directives of the Rule. I would like to share some of the ways we are applying the Rule in our daily lives.

As we read Chapter II, we see the importance of proper preparation for those aspiring to enter the community. All religious communities have their own formation directives. The members of our postulancy, novitiate and temporary professed sisters have many opportunities to deepen their spiritual life. They have opportunities for communal and private prayer. They participate in workshops and conferences such as the recent Seek23 conference. The women in formation who are not already on mission spend one or two weeks each year on one of the missions so they can experience life in a small community. This is an important part of their preparation since it introduces them to the challenges they may experience in their community life and in their ministry.

In Chapter V, the friars are directed to give to the poor whatever they have but do not need. Our community tithes on a monthly basis. The tithe is given to individual persons or charities that we know are in need. Also, for many years we have hosted many sisters from Africa and Vietnam in our motherhouse and paid for their education.

Chapters VI and VII inspire us to live among and minister to the poor, the weak, the sick, the unwanted, the oppressed and the destitute. Some of our sisters, especially those in Arizona, minister to Hispanics, Native Americans, and Blacks. We are on the staff or volunteer to work in the healthcare institutions that we sponsor. We have volunteers to Habitat for Humanity and other charitable associations. And, we are fortunate to be able keep our sick and aged sisters in our infirmary at our Motherhouse rather than having to provide for their care in another healthcare facility.



For us, and for all communities, there are many more ways in which the Rule is put into practice. There are parish leaderships, human rights issues, anti-abortion efforts and a wide variety of other outreach efforts. As Franciscans, we all strive to follow in the footsteps of St. Francis.

May the Lord bless us, shine His light upon us and give us peace as we strive to serve Him and His children.