



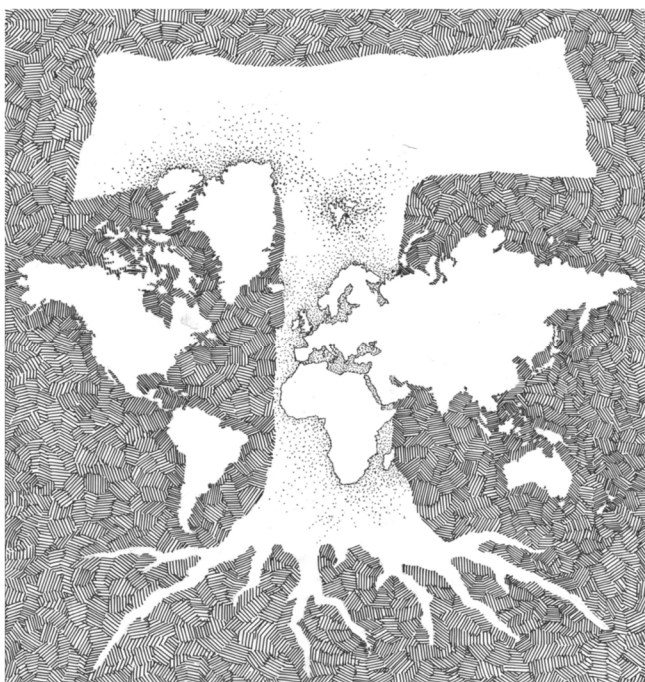
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**QUADERNI DELL'UFFICIO "PRO MONIALIBUS"**

Roma, Curia generale OFM

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NUMBER 59/June 2022

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## **cTc comunione e comunicazione**

Quaderni dell'Ufficio Pro Monialibus  
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NEWS FROM THE PRO MONIALIBUS OFFICE

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Monastery of Sainte Marie des Anges of the Order of Saint  
Clare in Ihosy (Ihosy Diocese, Madagascar)

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## Presentation

We offer you this No. 59 of Communion and Communication while Easter time is still approaching its fullness. After the day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus who had been scattered after his death, began to learn to walk together, guided by the Holy Spirit who is the Lord of communion.

The texts which will follow are accounts of federal experiences, community ones and personal ones which may find a common understanding in the dynamic of a shared journey.

We Poor Clare Sisters, who live our response to the Father's love in the context of the monastery, follow the Son of God who made himself the Way. Fr. Fábio reminds us of this in his reflection about Clare the synodal woman. In Clare, the metaphor of the journey and also that of the contest are frequent as we know: this paradox, which is only apparently so, is extremely fruitful.

We, so many people, are making this journey together. From the four corners of the world the sisters show us, in these pages, some of their travelling companions. These are the sisters themselves, sisters of the monastery, of the federation, of the monasteries to be re-energised. These sisters form the local Church in which the monastery is situated even while they are women from other Churches and Christian communities as well as being people of the places in



which they are putting down the roots of new foundations. And our travelling companions are also those who have travelled the Way before us. The sisters of Camerino tell us of one particular encounter which they are living with Camilla Battista da Varano, whose body has been entrusted to their care. Further, there are those companions of the journey who, whether they knew it or not, had helped us to understand that to be a Poor Sister was the Way for us. From Mbarara in Uganda we have received a testimony in just this sense.

Let us also continue to travel together then through the pages of cTc.

Happy reading!

## LETTER TO THE POOR CLARES

Dear Sisters and dear Brothers,

Pace e Bene!

I am writing these lines to you immediately after Holy Week, which brings to mind so many events in the life of our Mother, Clare of Assisi.

It began on Palm Sunday when, in an act of extreme courage, the very young Clare **went out** through the 'door of the dead' of her father's house and committed herself wholly to the Lord in the hands of Francis. Then we move to Holy Thursday, calling to mind the immense faith Clare had in the presence of her Eucharistic Lord, from whom she drew the strength to live a Eucharistic life, that is, always to be at the **service** of the sisters. Like the Lord on that same Thursday, she washed and kissed their feet. (cf. LegCl 12) Next, on Good Friday, we are again presented with a Clare 'quite inebriated' by her passion for the Passion of the Lord. (LegCl 30) She invites the poor virgin Agnes of Bohemia to **embrace** the poor Christ (2LAg 18). On Holy Saturday, we in our turn are invited to enter more deeply into that great **silence** which Clare so valued as an opportunity for listening and for **contemplation** of the Son of God. Then finally, on Easter Sunday, which for Clare was experienced as a day of great **joy** and therefore a day of sacramental communion (cf. RCl 3,14) and a dispensation from fasting (cf. 3LAg 36).



The paschal joy is actually so great that the liturgy invites us to live it for fifty days right up to the Solemnity of Pentecost - by which time this edition of our magazine should have reached you. It is the feast of the Spirit which, established as the bond of love between the Father and the Son, urges us too to seek and always to grow in that communion and that '**unity** of mutual love which is the bond of perfection'. (RCl 10,7)

Perhaps we can sum up the whole of this journey to which the liturgy has invited us to travel with Clare, in these words: **going out, service, embrace, silence, contemplation, joy, unity.**

It also seems to me that these words very well sum up my first months as Delegate General *Pro Monialibus*, during which time I have had the gift of meeting so many sisters, either in person or online, either by sharing in the meetings of some of the federations or by visiting a particular monastery. To this must be added the intense communication with monasteries and federations through the various requests that arrive in our Office every day, especially in recent months because of the International Commission for the revision of your General Constitutions. In all these meetings, I have found the Sisters so very ready to **go out** of themselves in order to be at the **service** of God and humanity, **embracing** Christ Crucified, present in so many forms of suffering, both personal and communal. They do this in order to preserve their fidelity to the **contemplative, silent** vocation which is the source of the true **joy** arising in the hearts of the Poor Clare sisters. It is this which gives them the strength so that they can always be constructors of **unity.**





In addition to this, these words seem to me to throw a bright light on the pathway which we ourselves have in front of us in the years ahead. This pathway will demand from each one, singly and together, a great capacity to go out of ourselves in the service of others and in our readiness to embrace the cross, to be open to contemplation, joy and unity. In reality, we have never gone out of ourselves enough, because the *old man* and the *old woman* who live within us, are always inviting us to enclose ourselves within the narrow limits of our own ideas and our own personal understanding, within - put briefly - the narrow limits of our self-centredness. This means that every day we need to renew our choice of Christ, poor and crucified, as our only Lord and spouse. He is the one to whom we are always binding ourselves more and more tightly so that our contemplation and silence may really be fruitful, so that they may generate more joy, unity and communion. Humanity is longing for these and looks to us for them.

In this way we shall always be sure that we are in harmony with the designs of God for our times, and with that *Spirituality of Communion* which St John Paul II pointed out to us as the spirituality *par excellence* for the third millennium. (cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte* n. 43) This has again been put before us by Pope Francis in terms of *Synodal Spirituality*, as a journey of encounter, listening and discernment (Mass for the opening of the Synod of Bishops on Synodality, 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021) and as something which we live together with the whole Church and all humanity.

As has already been said, this number of cTc is about the theme of synodality. So many sisters have shared



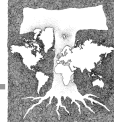
with us their experiences and reflections about our 'travelling together' in our different contexts and in our different ways. Also, Fr. Russell, Assistant to the Federation of the Holy Name, in the United States, has given us a most beautiful text about our part in the task put before us by the Holy Spirit.

To all those who have collaborated in this number of our review, a thank you from the heart. Here is added a simple meditation on the theme of synodality which I first presented to the Assemblies of the Federations of Ireland and Great Britain.

Thank you, sisters and brothers all! Let us continue to journey together because the Lord, who has made himself our Way (TestCl 5) walks among us.

Your brother,

*Br. Fábio Cesar Gomes, ofm*  
*General Delegate "Pro Monialibus"*



## **CLARE OF ASSISI, SYNODAL WOMAN**

*Br. Fábio Cesar Gomes, ofm*

The title of this reflection may seem a little strange, not least because neither the adjective ‘synodal’ nor even the noun ‘synod’ are to be found in the writings of Clare nor in any other Clarian source. However I really believe that the meaning of this word, which is ‘to walk together’ was lived to the full by Clare of Assisi and this is borne out by her writings and by the biographical sources. In fact, Clare, just like Francis, was a synodal person, meaning people who were able to walk alongside either with one or with the many others whom they met. In the same way we can call Francis a ‘synodal man’ and there is food for thought in that but for the moment I would like to focus on the figure of our Mother Saint Clare. With you I would like to recall some incidents of her life and passages from her writings which show her to have been a woman capable of walking alongside, of being a synodal woman.

So I am not offering you anything new but simply a reflection, a remembering that is, a recalling to heart some passages from the sources of Clare which immediately come to my mind with the awareness that much more could be said and said better.

### **1. Clare, a woman walking with the Lord Jesus**

Right at the beginning, the Legend of Clare tells that from childhood, Clare cultivated prayer and a life of intimacy with the Lord, that when she reached a marriageable age, she postponed it for as long as



possible having entrusted her virginity to the Lord. This was because she already felt called to a life of total intimacy and consecration to the Lord Jesus. (LegCl 3,1-5) This came to pass on that Palm Sunday of 1212 when, according to the Legend,

‘After she received the insignia of holy penance before the altar of the blessed Virgin and, as if before the throne of the Virgin, the humble servant was married to Christ,’ (LegCl 8) and she definitively entered into a spousal relationship with the Lord Jesus.

Therefore Clare more and more became mistress of the contemplative way to follow the poor, humble and crucified Christ, teaching her great disciple, Agnes of Bohemia, to place herself before the mystery of the Incarnation as before a mirror to be looked at, considered and contemplated, (cf. 4LAg 15-23) to allow herself to be transformed into the ‘image of the Godhead’. (3LAg 13)

In the same way Clare has left us, in her Testament, her greatest legacy, namely the following of Christ, journeying with Christ, because ‘the Son of God has made himself our Way’. (TestCl 5)

## **2. Clare a woman walking with Francis**

If Christ is the Way in which and with whom Clare wants to walk, it was Francis who “showed her and taught her by word and example,” as she says immediately afterwards in the Testament. (TestCl 5) Therefore, if Christ is the Way, Francis was always, for Clare, the arrow which certainly pointed to Christ. And this, from the very beginning of her spiritual experience, when according to the Legend,



that same Francis - at whose own stripping before the bishop Clare had perhaps been present, he 'whispered in her ears of a sweet espousal with Christ'. (LegCl 5,5) So right from the start, Clare travelled with Francis, always remaining at his side by her prayerful presence, promising obedience to him and his successors. (RegCl 1,4)

For his part, Francis always walked with Clare and her sisters, asking their advice and entrusting himself to their prayers and promising 'always to have loving care and special solicitude' for them. It was to them that just before his death he disclosed his last wish which was, simply, to live the journey with Christ right to the end, following his life and poverty. (UltVol 2)

### **3. Clare, a woman walking with her sisters**

There are numerous passages in the sources which testify to the extent to which Clare, notwithstanding the graces which the Lord gave only to her, and notwithstanding the title of abbess which was put upon her, never felt herself to be above or apart from the sisters of San Damiano. She shared their tiredness and the joy of journeying together in following the poor and crucified Christ. In fact Clare did not think of the role of abbess in terms of power over the sisters but in terms of service and example. (cf. TestCl 53,61) She settled that the abbess is to call all the sisters to chapter (RegCl 4,15) which is a privileged situation in which the sisters can regulate the rhythm of their own journey forwards.

Also Clare did not only walk with the sisters who were physically near, but also with those who were far away, as the most beautiful correspondence between her and Agnes of Prague as well as Ermentrude of Bruges,



testify. From them we receive five precious letters. Truly, for Clare, there are no obstacles, not even distance, to walk together with her sisters

#### **4. Clare, a woman walking with the Church**

We all know the difficulties that Clare faced in obtaining approval for her Rule, the difficulty of an ecclesiastical hierarchy which, even while it loved and admired her, had great difficulty in understanding the specific nature of her charism. But in Clare we find no word of condemnation or lack of respect for the Church, never an impulse towards breaking away, because for her to walk with Christ is only possible by walking with the Church. It meant to 'observe forever the poverty and humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and his most holy Mother, and the holy Gospel' and always to be 'subject and prostrate at the feet of that same holy Church'. (RegCl 12,13)

This is a Church which is the triumphant Church that Clare contemplated in its glory while, at the same time, is the Church militant in its fragility and human confusion. She never wanted her sisters to offend the Church while always remaining faithful to the way of Christ. (cf TestCl 74-75) So she called down upon them the blessing of God so that they could 'grow in grace and in His strength among the servants and handmaidens of the Church militant, in heaven raising you up and glorifying you in the Church triumphant among the men and women saints. (Bl 9-10)

#### **5. Clare, a woman walking with the whole of humanity**

For Clare the horizon widened even further. In fact, she did not want only to walk with Francis, with her



sisters and with the Church but also with all humanity, for whom Christ made himself the Way and for whom he lived, died and rose again. For this reason, Clare gave entry to all the the dramas and joys of humanity so that many people ran to San Damiano asking for her blessing and her prayers, as we learn from the various testimonies of healing and liberation recounted in the Process of Canonisation. Above all, they speak about Clare's miracles of healing especially for children, and behind these stories we can glimpse the mothers in a bond of feminine solidarity with the women of Assisi. In fact, as she says in her Testament, Clare wished the sisters to be transformed into the mirror-Christ, to be 'an example to those living in the world'. (TestCl 20)

## **6. Clare, a woman walking with all creation**

In the time of Francis and Clare there was no talk of ecology, which is a modern word; nevertheless, they lived what it means, namely with admiration and respect for every created being and an awareness that everything is interconnected. It is not by chance that pope John Paul II proclaimed the *Poverello* 'heavenly patron of ecologists' in 1979.

Perhaps not as explicitly, but no less intensely, the same title can be attributed to Clare. In fact she lived in close contact with the nature which surrounded her at San Damiano, living there with moderation, working with her hands, washing the feet of the sisters and always praising God for his creatures. This is what she recommended to her sisters who went out in service of the monastery, according to the 14<sup>th</sup> witness in the Canonisation Process when she exhorted them 'when they saw beautiful trees, flowers and bushes, and [...]



always to praise Him for and in all things when they saw all people and creatures'. (ProcCan 14,9)

To conclude, we could ask ourselves: in what direction is Clare walking with the Lord, with Francis, with her sisters, with the Church, with humanity and with all creation?

I think the answer can only be this: towards the 'Father of all mercies', the giver of all good. (TestCl 2) She walked towards that Source from which everything comes and which, at the same time, is the ultimate destination towards which everyone and everything consciously or unconsciously, is directed: to God the Creator to whom Clare dedicated her last words, directing her soul to return safe and sound to the One from whom it came. 'Go without anxiety, for he who created you has made you holy and always protecting you as a mother her child. He has loved you with a tender love. May you be blessed O Lord you who have created my soul'. (LegCl 46)

May she help us to live better and better, with creative fidelity, but always together, as we journey back to our Father's house.



# Experiences



*The President of the Holy Name Federation, USA, shared with us this interesting experience of 'synodal walk'. The excerpt from her email, here below, gives the proper context of the article that follows:*

*«A few weeks ago, our Federation with some of the Sisters from our sister federation in the USA, Mother Bentivoglio Federation, had two zoom meetings to prepare our contribution to the Synod. Our religious assistant, Fr. Russel Murray, ofm prepared for us in advance "PARTICIPATING IN THE 2022-2023 - SYNODAL PATH AND EMBRACING THE SYNOD MOMENT". We had this in advance and then we had three questions to consider. Some communities had a meeting in advance of our Federation zoom meeting which was open to all the sisters. At our first meeting we a brief introduction and then had small groups, this was all by zoom. We had sisters from different monasteries in each group. After an hour, we came back to the larger group and shared briefly something significant from our group. Each group had a secretary, and these notes were sent to a sister who compiled the responses from the groups. We met a week later and had the report in hand. Together we went through almost ten pages and made some changes and additions. It was a very fruitful experience for all of us at this time when it is difficult to have in person meetings. It may be that this proposal would be something helpful to others as we do our Revision of the Constitution and use a synodal approach».*

## **PARTICIPATING IN THE 2022-2023 SYNODAL PATH AND EMBRACING THE SYNOD MOMENT**

**A Proposal to Holy Name Federation of Poor Clares**  
*Br. Russel Murray, ofm, Religious Assistant*

On October 10, 2021, Pope Francis launched the two-year “synodal path” that will culminate in the 2023



Synod of Bishops, the theme of which, as chosen by the Holy Father, will be For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission. This is an important moment in the life of the Church and, I would suggest, for the life of the Order of St. Clare, as well. As the Church embarks on this “journey together”, I propose that you, the Poor Clare Sisters of Holy Name Federation, do participate actively with it and, what is more, embrace this as a moment to deepen your own journey together in the footsteps of Jesus Christ.

### **SYNODALITY & THE 2023 SYNOD OF BISHOPS**

As we know, the concept of “synodality” is rooted in the combination of two Greek words: *syn* - which means “together” and *hodos* which means “journey.” The concept was embraced early in the Church’s history to signify how Local Churches (i.e., “dioceses,” as we usually say today) journeyed together through this world as the One Church of Jesus Christ. This concept was embraced anew by the Second Vatican Council to describe how the Catholic Church, which the Council defined as a “communion” of Local Churches (cf. *Lumen gentium* [LG], 26), makes her pilgrimage through this world to the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven (cf. LG, 7), where all creation will be united in the life-giving communion of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit (cf. LG, 1-2).

One means that the Council established to give concrete expression to synodality was the Synod of Bishops (*Christus Dominus*, 5). The 2023 assembly will be the nineteenth time since the close of the Council that a Pope will have convened a synod. That this particular synod will have synodality *per se* as its focus is



significant. It marks a point of maturity in the post-conciliar life of the Church wherein our experience of “journeying together” has born such fruit that we are now capable of considering what next step the Spirit is asking us to take on our pilgrim journey. Hence, as Pope Francis has stated, the “synodal path” that has just begun is “a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God.”<sup>1</sup> This process laid out by the Holy Father has a special resonance with the charism bequeathed to us by St. Clare.

## **THE SYNODAL METHOD AND THE CHARISM OF ST. CLARE**

In her Third Letter to St. Agnes of Prague, St. Clare outlined her method of adoration, prayer and dialogue with God’s Word: to gaze, to consider, to contemplate (cf. 15-23). Her methodology corresponds exactly to the methodology that Pope Francis outlined for the synodal path: to encounter, to listen, to discern.<sup>2</sup> To gaze upon Christ Crucified is not a matter of simply looking at Him. It is to open the eyes of our hearts, so that we may encounter Christ as He gazes upon us from the wood of His life-giving Cross, mirroring the truth of who we are called to be as God’s beloved children. To consider Christ is to open the ears of our hearts, so that we may listen to Christ inviting us to embrace Him in love (cf. 30-31). Finally, to contemplate Christ is to discern how He desires that embrace may take flesh in the reality of our lives, so that, like St. Francis, we may become a “tongue” with which Christ may proclaim that same, saving love to the entire world (cf. 1 Cel, 97).

The path that Pope Francis has opened for the Church



as we journey towards the 2023 Synod of Bishops is, therefore, one that you may wholeheartedly embrace precisely as Poor Clare Sisters, with your active participation as well as with your prayer. The gaze of faith that your contemplative silence makes possible enables you to see the presence of God not only in your own lives, but also in the world within which you live (cf. *Vultum Dei quaerere*, 33). It is from that privileged place – at the heart of the Church – that you can speak a word capable of strengthening the communion of the Church and of contributing to the Church’s mission of proclaiming the Gospel to every creature under heaven until God is all in all (cf. 1Cor 15:28). What a blessing your participation in the synodal path would be – for the Church, yes, and also for yourselves.

### **PARTICIPATING IN THE SYNODAL PATH**

First, the blessing for the Church: The first phase of the synodal path has already begun. Although considerable attention has been focused upon the establishment of “listening sessions” with the Local Churches (i.e., forums in which Catholics may encounter, listen and discern together), its fundamental question is addressed to the entire Body of Christ: “What is the Spirit saying to the Church today?”<sup>3</sup> It was for that reason that the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (CICLSAL) issued its letter of October 7, 2021. In that letter, CICLSAL called upon all religious communities to create and initiate their own listening sessions, structured in ways that correspond to their own particular vocations, so that their members may participate fully in the synodal path. In light of what is



outlined above, this is something that you, the Poor Clare Sisters of Holy Name Federation, may do and, if I may be so bold to say, ought to do.

In the same letter, CICLSAL recommended that religious communities use Part IV of the preparatory document as a template for organizing listening sessions that “work” for them. Moreover, it set that recommendation within the schema of the synodal path as a whole. What I propose is that the abbesses work with federation leadership to establish a listening session(s) that they deem proper for their sisters and develop a process whereby the feedback from those listening sessions may be compiled and summarized, and then shared with the sisters. Please bear in mind that time is of the essence. CICLSAL gave March 30, 2022, as the date when the results of all listening sessions must be submitted to it. Although this is a tight deadline, it is not too difficult a one to make, provided that you follow what we, your brothers, refer to as the K.I.S. methodology: keep it simple. What is important is that you gather as Poor Clare Sisters to encounter, listen and discern what it is that the Spirit is saying to the Church today and then convey what have seen, considered and contemplated to the Church as your particular gift for our pilgrim journey as God’s People.

## **EMBRACING THE SYNODAL MOMENT**

Now, the blessing of the synodal path for you: It is no exaggeration to say that this precise moment in the life of the Church is a profoundly synodal moment. This is not simply because of the path we are embarking upon in preparation for the 2023 Synod of Bishops. It is also because so many communities with the Church – from



episcopal conferences to dioceses to religious orders— have embraced synodality as the way to discern what the Spirit is asking of them at this moment in time. By way of example, the general defintory of my own order has published guidelines for a synodal process designed to prepare us for our 2027 General Chapter. Closer to your lives, the process being developed by the OFM Office Pro Monialibus for the revision of your General Constitutions will be synodal. Synodality is a true sign of the times, and I respectfully propose that you embrace the synodal path Pope Francis has set forth for the entire Church and make it your own, i.e., that you establish synodal path of your own and make it a privileged way for you to strengthen your bonds as daughters of St. Clare and to assist you in your common itinerarium in Deum.

In terms of what your synodal path may look, I propose that it complement the four-year process for the revision of your General Constitutions. In that way, your particular journeys, as individual monasteries and as a federation, will be in direct conversation with the discernment of your order as a whole. That should enable you both to contribute more readily to the revision process as it unfolds, but also to discern more easily, following the publication of your revised constitutions, whether they genuinely serve your vocation. Of course, more word on what that process will look like will follow upon the first meeting of the international commission the end of this month, and Sr. Vickie Griner, osc, who is representing the English-speaking region, will keep you well informed as it unfolds. So, there is no rush to predetermine what your own synodal process should look like. What is important



is that it be a process that will “work” for you – though I would be remiss if I did not say that participating in at least the first phase of the Church’s synodal path, as proposed above, would aid you tremendously in that regard.

Please know that, as your Federation’s religious assistant, I am ready and most willing to aid you in anything and everything that I have proposed above – should you accept it, of course, either in whole or in any part. I consider it a true blessing for me to be journeying with you, particularly at this time in our life as a Church and your life as Poor Clare Sisters. Thank you for considering my proposal.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Pope’s Francis homily for the opening of the Synodal Path.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> See Process for Facilitating Synodal Consultations, published by Leadership Roundtable for the Holy See, page 1.

## **Synodal Consultation**

### ***Holy Name Federation of Poor Clares***

#### **Small Group Discussion Questions**

Below are the questions that will be used for the small group conversations on Day 1 of the Synodal Consultation. Please take some time between now and March 15<sup>th</sup>, when those conversations take place, prayerfully to consider your responses to them.



1. No matter where in the world they may live, Poor Clares are always at home for the People of God. Who are the people who come to your monasteries? What are the hopes, the hurts, and the hungers of their hearts? What does your experience of “journeying with” them reveal to you about the hopes, hurts, and hungers of our Church?

2. In its dogmatic constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, Vatican II declared that the Christ established the Church as the “universal sacrament of salvation” to unite all people with God (cf. 1 & 48). As contemplatives, you live at the heart of the Church. As Poor Clares, your life is the Gospel. How do you understand your evangelical life as contributing to this mission of the Church? How does your life speak to people’s hearts and invite them to experience for themselves the saving love of God?

3. In his allocution for the opening of Vatican II, St. John XXIII stated that the Spirit is calling us not to guard a gilded museum but to cultivate a thriving garden of life. What might the Spirit be asking you, Poor Clares of Holy Name Federation, to do in order to cultivate the gift of your vocation as nourishing food for the future of our Church and of our world?





## THE ASSEMBLY OF THE GREAT BRITAIN FEDERATION

*Sr. Gabriel Davison, osc, Federal President - Arundel,  
Great Britain*

Dear Sisters,

It is a joy for us, as the Federation of Poor Clares in Britain, to share with you some aspects of our Federal Assembly. It has been more than five years since we met together as the Corona Virus prevented us from holding our triennial assembly. Finally, after many cancellations and re-bookings we came together to celebrate our Poor Clare Life. We were helped enormously by Br. Niall Ó Connell ofm, one of our Irish brothers, who expertly facilitated our meeting. We had the joy of welcoming Sr. Gemma Simmonds CJ, Director of the Religious Life Institute, Cambridge, a lecturer, theologian, retreat giver, to name but a few of her jobs, who gave us some excellent and challenging input on Religious Life and where we find ourselves today. Finally, through the electronic waves of zoom, we welcomed Br. Fábio Cesar Gomes ofm, who gave us an inspiring talk on St. Clare and an over view of our Poor Clare sisters throughout the world.

The important work of the assembly began some months before we met, as each community had been invited to prepare and share at the assembly their 'timeline'. This involved beginning with the sister who had been in the community longest, sharing her



memories of how things were when she joined. The story was then taken up by the sister who entered after her until the most recent arrival, thus spanning several decades of the community's history. As we shared our 'timelines' at the Assembly we were able to see how many challenges and difficulties we had surmounted over the years and this has given us the courage to embrace what seems to be a very uncertain future.

To help us discern the path, Sr. Gemma gave us much food for thought and challenged us to look at ourselves and our current reality. She spoke of her passion for religious life but also of the challenging place in which we find ourselves today, facing so much diminishment. She asked us to dream of how we want to live our Poor Clare life now, since what we have lived in the past is no longer viable. She invited us to explore our resistance to change and to ask ourselves how ready and able am I to bend, move and accept the unwanted.

When given reflective questions to consider, we had the opportunity to work individually, or in small groups and many worthwhile conversations happened at the dinner table, over coffee and during free time when we had the opportunity to enjoy the extensive grounds of the retreat centre. It was often during those moments that deep bonds of communion were nurtured between our houses and old friendships were renewed. For the first time we made the assembly available to every house via zoom, and after some technical hitches at the beginning it was wonderful to be able to allow each house to journey with us as and when they could join in.

We were delighted to meet Fr. Fábio by zoom and his talk on St. Clare as a Synodal woman gave us much food



for thought. This idea of Clare and Francis walking together and with others linked in well with the theme of our week. There were five aspects to Fr. Fábio's talk, Clare a woman who walks with Jesus, secondly, a woman who walks with Francis, thirdly a woman who walks with the Church, then a woman who walks with humanity, and finally a woman who walks with creation. After this inspiring input we shared many thoughts on this idea of walking, even though we have promised to live enclosed. We understood that walking is an attitude of the heart and that it involves an active participation on the journey, wherever it may take us. On this journey of transformation from the old ways of religious life to the emerging patterns for today, we asked ourselves how can we do this as communities and together as a federation.

There are many, many more things that I would like to share with you about our time, but sadly space will not allow me. Our President Sr. Dominic did an outstanding job in the preparation of this meeting and it's smooth running. We appreciated her report and that of our assistant Fr. Patrick ofm and also the presentation given by Sr. Frances Teresa on the writing of our new Federal statutes which have been sent to Rome for their approval. We thank God for Sr. Dominic's nine years of service as President and for all that she has given to the Federation during her time of office.



## SHARING FROM THE INMACULADA CONCEPCIÓN FEDERATION OF THE POOR CLARE NUNS IN PERU

*Sr. Johanna de Jesús, osc, Federal President – Trujillo, Peru*

It is with great pleasure and joy that we have accepted the invitation to share the experience that we, as the Immaculate Conception Federation of Poor Clare Nuns in Peru, live in this geographical area of South America.

Despite the fact that our monasteries are, in some cases, from the XVI-XVII century, and others much more recent in comparison with these, our Federation has only been canonically erected for 22 years. We are at the beginning, and we still have a long way to go.

Beyond any fears or resistance that might have been encountered at the beginning of this Federation journey,





today we find ourselves at a new stage, much more aware of the need to move forward together to achieve the goals of our charismatic ideal, (and) eager to live this treasure that God and the Church hope to see bear fruit in us, in the midst of our limitations and frailties.

The cry of the Spirit has called us and urges us to live this historical reality today.

A church synod, a revision and update of our general constitutions, an absurd war that threatens the whole of humanity, (and) let's not forget a pandemic that doesn't end - everything compels us to confront our lives with the gift we have received, and to ask ourselves if we are really being what we are called to be by our vocation and profession; if we are able to be that light that shines in the darkness and in the uncertainty of a humanity that questions us, and that is shouting in a thousand ways: Where is God? Our world is experiencing much darkness, and this absence of light is not the fault of the children of darkness. They cannot give light; it is not in their essence. It is the fault of the children of light, that we do not shine as we should. For us, daughters of Francis and Clare, two very powerful lighthouses that





illuminated the ecclesial and social reality of their time with the full and joyful living of the Gospel, it is urgent to give this testimony that contributes to bring a little divine light. As a Federation and as a result of the contribution that we have to make as contemplative life in the light of our charism, we have felt truly questioned in the face of this reality and mission.

Our Federation is composed of eleven monasteries, eight of which are in Peru (Cusco, Ayacucho, Trujillo, Lima, Huanta, Huanuco, Tarma and Chota), one in Puerto Rico (foundation of Lima), one in Cochabamba-Bolivia and one in Florida-Santiago de Chile.

In all our monasteries, from the peculiar and cultural and geographic diversity to which we belong, there is a great sensitivity towards our neediest brothers and sisters, a trait very characteristic of our Mother St. Clare who, poor among the poor, sought to help and share; she was never oblivious to the needs and sufferings of her brothers and sisters, the men and women of her time, nor to their deepest joys and longings. Thus, for example, in the monastery of Cusco there is a dining room for children, in the Monastery of our sisters of Huanta, there is a hostel and a boarding house for young girls of low resources who come to study from the most remote areas of the highlands, also the sisters of Cochabamba-Bolivia have a popular soup kitchen, or a dispensary.

In other monasteries like the one in Trujillo we seek to channel help through the congregations of active life that work directly with the poor, the migrants, the elderly, human trafficking, etc. And so, in one way or another, all our Poor Clare monasteries are particularly



sensitive to the pain and suffering of our most needy brothers and sisters.

But, above all, our deepest bonds are created in the support of the faith. In the specific case of the monastery of Trujillo, to which I belong, there is a great closeness with our faithful. They feel like family to us and we to them; and they have managed to identify themselves so much with us that they call themselves the Poor Clares or external Poor Clares. There are many things that connect them with our monastery and we to them.

They express their affection in a special way on the feast of our Mother Saint Clare and on the birthdays of the sisters. I believe that we owe to our Mother St. Clare that the celebratory and grateful spirit of life that all the Poor Clares experience.

Their either suggest an idea themselves or they immediately support any creative idea we may have that will help them to celebrate or deepen our faith. They not only participate in the daily Eucharist, but also in Eucharistic Adoration on Thursdays, preparing the





theme themselves, which helps us to meditate on the Word before the Lord, just as they have seen us do.

At the end of the Eucharist, a group stays behind to pray the holy rosary; and during Lent, they stay to do the Way of the Cross on Fridays. Groups such as the Divine Mercy group meet in our church, prayer and life workshops meet seasonally, and sometimes we are asked if the church can be used for a day of retreat for the Legion of Mary.

When our city was hit by the rainy phenomenon called "the coastal child", many families were affected and we all suffered the lack of drinking water.

We decided then, that our prayer also demanded a concrete expression in works of mercy. So we began to prepare lunches for those most affected, and our faithful and other active religious women got organized to provide rides and carry out the distribution. In difficult times for our country, which has gone through constant political crises, as well as the incomprehensible war we are suffering today, we have always felt very united with the people, sharing prayers, celebrations and other initiatives that help us to live more united as a Church. It is a gift we have received from the Lord and we feel very committed to cultivate it.

In all this time of pandemic we did not lose the connection, and since we could not have the Eucharist in person during those most difficult times, we did not stop communicating with our faithful in various ways, and offer them spiritual food via WhatsApp with some reflection of the Gospel of the day. This way we kept alive the liturgical celebrations such as Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost, Corpus Christi and we placed creative





posters relative to the liturgical season, with messages encouraging the faith of our people at the temple door; we even left cards or prayers that they could take home. It filled us with immense joy to hear from their lips phrases like: "Thanks to you we have not felt alone and abandoned," because when the temples were totally closed it was very hard.

Another providential experience that we have had at the federal level, which was extremely enriching during this time of pandemic and key for "synodal" (path), has been to be able to share the courses that we organized virtually, with other sisters of some monasteries of Poor Clares and Conceptionists from various countries. They included Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and in some cases Spain. This kept us sharing mutually. It is beautiful to be able to share the same charism, the same spirituality and the same desire to configure ourselves more with Jesus Christ in this concrete way of the Gospel, (and) to live with joy and passion our consecration as Poor Clare Sisters.

United in a fraternal embrace with all the Poor Clares of the world, we wish you a special grace on this March 18 as we renew our vows, remembering the determined and loving surrender of our Mother St. Clare and thus support our wounded world so that it may walk towards Easter full of certain Hope in the Lord of Life.





## FORMING COMMUNION THROUGH OUR MATURE FAITH ECUMENICAL WOMEN FOR PEACE

*The Sisters of Planes de Renderos, El Salvador*

We thank our dear sister and friend, Mariella Tapella for the opportunity to participate in this group of Ecumenical Women for Peace. She is a lay missionary of Italian origin, a woman committed for many years to our Salvadoran land, particularly accompanying the communities of peasant women.

How did this initiative begin?

During the celebration of the Via Crucis of the Migrant, held in the Divine Savior of the World Square in 2017, three women present there, Rev. Blanca Irma Rodriguez from the Lutheran Church; Rev. Rosa Irma Alvarado from the Anglican Church and Mariella Tapella



Conversation with the U.S. delegation to the Methodist Church



from the Catholic Church were open to being ecumenically accessible, and the initiative began.

From the beginning, the principal objective was to have an opportunity to participate, support, develop and have projects based on work that reflects, and shows systematically, the national and church reality. We wanted to demonstrate this through our capacities and identities, by using the talents, and personal, community, pastoral, social and academic experiences that we could share in the group.

As time went by and with the purpose of facilitating the participation of some representatives, the first sisters met in our San Damiano Monastery. This was done at the initiative of our sister Mariella, who valued the contribution that, as sisters of the contemplative life, we could share and at the same time enrich this proposal.

For us, it has been a rich and beautiful experience to share with our sisters from the different realities, and to carry out concrete actions for life, principally in search of a deep communion in the midst of difference. We shared the historic memories of each one of the churches that participated in the group, re-evaluating those elements that help our faith to mature, deepening the spirituality of each one. We are all confessors of the Christian faith. For now, we are part of the group and represent it officially or particularly: Claudia, Emmanuel Baptist Church; Carmen Diaz, Calvinist Reformed Church; Adela Samayoa, Methodist Unity Church; Blanca Irma Rodriguez, Lutheran Church; Rut Eunice, Shekina Baptist Church; Mariella Tapella, Suyapa Escapini, Poor Clare Sisters, Catholic Church.



We feel privileged, and at the same time very grateful to the Lord, for allowing us to have this experience so characteristic of our spirituality, and for showing us how to live in communion as we are accompanied by the openness to the action of the Holy Spirit as manifested in the differences. The dialogue and reflection on the reality that challenges us as women on how to be women who are bearers of life, and how to have communion through our form of life as contemplatives, has enriched us so much.

In this space we see how the dream of our beloved Pope Francis becomes possible and grows close, to the extent that we open our hearts to the diversity of the Spirit.

We would like to add some thoughts that have resonated with some of our sisters about what it means to come together as a group of ecumenical women for peace:



Christmas Meeting



"...this ecumenical journey leads us to join forces in the task of rebuilding hope in a world where life reigns for all human beings and for nature, with a taste of tenderness, harmony, women's sensitivity, bringing about a new birth, giving birth to the new woman. Thus the prayer of Jesus (John 17:21) takes flesh in faith, communion, witness and service." (Mariella Tapella)

"...to live and share the same ecumenical fraternity. To learn from one another and to share our spiritualities based on the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, inspired by the theology of the cross, of hope, of life and liberation..." (Reverend Blanca Irma Rodriguez)

**"We grow together from good to better."**



Ecumenical Women participate in the final Eucharist with the Poor Clare Sisters from the Foundation in Haiti



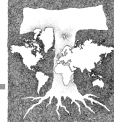
## **MISSION EXPERIENCE IN THE CREEKS**

*The Sisters of Bomadi, Nigeria*

After our arrival on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2017, we were excited being missionaries of God's love among the people. Everything about the environment became prayer points and contemplation for us. Children were countless, and hover around us like bees on hives whenever we set our feet outside. Young boys were many, jobless and many of them drug addicts and chain smokers. Young girls of 14-18 years of age have children in their homes.

Education is not a priority for them at all. When we inquired to know why it was so, we were told that in their culture, a woman is honoured if she has many grandchildren. If a woman dies without having grandchildren, they bury her inside the forest. For this reason, most women force their children both boys and girls to give birth at home. In every hundred couples you may find only two or three that are legally married and wedded in the church. Women can live with four different men and have children with them. Most times children don't know who their real father is. Seeing the high level of immorality which even threatens the future of the little ones, we understood why God needed the light of Clare to shine in that small village. There are so many unbaptized parents, youths and children.

A Claretian priest Fr. Mark, who was the parish priest, tried his best to get many wedded but there was no sign of interest from them.



The three years he spent here, he wedded only one couple.

We gradually began by witnessing with our presence, prayer life and simplicity, offering the people and their needs to God. We encouraged the girls to take their education serious to enable them to become responsible people.

There is also high level of poverty. The construction of our monastery building offered the boys job opportunities. Occasionally we cook food for them while they were at work, and they would not stop thanking us for being so generous. We listen to and chat with them to know how we could help them know God and become good people. Through the help of our benefactors, we took some of the girls to Ijebu-Ode where they could receive good education, training, and different orientation.

An opportunity came that we were invited to talk to the people concerning wrong parenting during a national family week program. Two of our sisters, Sr. Julie and Sr. Elizabeth used the opportunity to educate both parents and young girls on the issues of abuse, early pregnancy among teens and the effects on them.

It was in 2018 that we had our first Christmas experience here in Ogrigbene village. We had to run back to Ijebu Ode in September 2017 because one of the bad boys ganged up with other boys and began to terrorize the entire village and neighborhood; abducting people for ransom even the bishop's driver was one of their victims. It was on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2018, that we came back after military men hunted and captured them. Peace was restored in the village.



Our first Christmas here was something totally different. Every year, from 21<sup>st</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> of December all the priests in the diocese with their parishioners go to different places of their choice within the diocese for retreat. Christmas retreat for the people is an experience of catechesis, evangelization and sharing of the word of God, done every year in different Parishes. People from different places are invited to give input. They follow a timetable for each day from rising to night rest. Some days they have all-night vigil for prayer and songs of praise. The bishop also takes turns to visit each group and celebrate Holy mass for them. So on the 6<sup>th</sup> of December all the students of St. Michael nursery and primary school with their teachers came to our compound for their Christmas carol. They were very colorful in their attire. They sang beautifully with demonstrations, danced, and also presented a drama on the birth of Jesus. In appreciation we offered them some refreshments. It was a moment of shared joy and happiness. Because of the parish week of retreat, there was no priest to celebrate mass for us. Through the bishop's help we got Fr. Magnus (rector of the junior seminary) who was on holiday. He came around to preach our own retreat in the monastery. It lasted just for two days due to his engagements and tight schedules.

We began with holy mass on the evening of 22<sup>nd</sup> and ended on the 24<sup>th</sup> midday. Our reflection was on the mercy, love and forgiveness (the attributes of God) embedded in the incarnation and birth of Jesus. These attributes of God we are called to live each day as God's children. For without love we cannot show mercy nor forgive others.





On the 25<sup>th</sup> morning we could not stay without holy mass, so we travelled by boat to Kalafiugbene, a far village in the creeks where our parish is having their retreat to attend Christmas mass. We wore life jackets for safety since none of us knows how to swim. At the end of the mass different outstations under the parish were called up for thanksgiving. They danced carrying their offerings to the altar. They also called the parish priest together with the Poor Clare nuns, seminarians and altar boys. We all danced to the altar accompanied by the parishioners. After mass people expressed their joy of seeing us and took pictures with us. We left the place while they continued with other celebrations (cultural dances and displays, football competition etc.) Back to the village, it was a different ballgame. Life

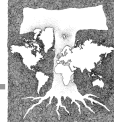




seemed normal except for children beautifully dressed going from house-to-house greeting people while you offer them money or gifts. Many of them came to us too. We gave them little gifts, took them inside our chapel to show them the crib decorated with lights. We explained to the children what it meant seeing that they knew nothing about it. One of them saw the statue of our Lady and exclaimed, 'see big doll baby'.

God truly knows how to care for His own. Three of the outstations in the creek, across the river don't have Holy masses during the week except once in a while on Sundays. It was one elderly man (Mr. Isama who passed on last year) that shared this experience to us during our visit. He told us how he normally used his own boat to carry people to the parish to attend Holy mass on Sundays because many can't afford transport fare since the distance is too far and costly.





Sometimes the catechist goes to celebrate communion service for them. And if it happens that the parish speed boat is faulty, they may not have mass for six months or more. The disadvantage is that when they stay for long without a priest coming to them, many of them leave the Catholic Church and join the white garment churches.

Amidst these challenges there are still very few people who would never trade their catholic faith for anything at all. Priest or no priest, they still come together inside the place they use for church (there are no church buildings; some make use of school buildings) to sing and pray the rosary. We keep such people in our prayers asking our good and loving Jesus to fill them with grace and joy.



## SISTER CLARE IN SENEGAL

*The Sisters of Ndollor, Senegal*

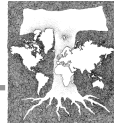
All stories have a starting point...

The story started in 2018 in the monastery of Sainte Claire in Abidjan (Ivory Coast) with a simple and inspiring invitation from Br. Vincenzo Brocanelli, then guardian of the fraternity “La Portiuncula” in Rufisque (Senegal): “My sisters we are waiting for you in Senegal!”. The request was part of a project which was including the Franciscan family: The Friars Minor, the Poor Clare Sisters and the Secular Order, at the heart of a people remarkably open and welcoming.

In the wide ethnic spectrum represented in Senegal, the vast majority of the population is Muslim (94%), 5% are Christians and 1% Animists. Strong bonds unify people and open the door to religious freedom. It is one of the charms of this land of TERANGA (welcome).

In 2020, 5<sup>th</sup> December, at dawn when the sun was





rising on the universe, we started to write the book of our foundation. Only Christ who is the Chief-editor knows its full content. Day after day, drawn to this desert of SINE, we unfold the story in the daily “ink” of our experience enlightened by the light of GOD.

Settled in NDOLLOR, a small and austere village located in the centre West of the country, we are tasting with delight the benefits of the desert: "In this desert, solitude helps contemplation, the beauty of the flowers leads to admiration, the song of the birds leads to harmony and peace in common life." (Sermon by Guibert de Tournai on St. Clare)

In NDOLLOR (where 99% of the population is Christian), the warmth of the people is as hot as the sun; and sandstorms don't prevent people from coming together in joy (for baptism, marriage, traditional ceremony, during the time of sowing and harvesting...) or in hardship (death, illness...). In the midst of the people, we are a presence. Presence of GOD in a loving, gentle and discreet way to draw attention to the Most High. Our little monastic history enriches the great family history of this village and we love to be part of that story! We still remember the warm and kind welcome people gave us the day we arrived. Rakes,





hilars, machetes, brooms in hands, young and old have worked hard to welcome us. We will never forget that gleam in their eyes, and their reassuring smile! Their eyes shining with well-being and their generous smile, already lit up this mutual encounter. The Advent season was preparing the dawn of a new birth of the divine MESSIAH. At the beginning, we thought that we had received this warm welcome because people were expecting something from us as it was the case with apostolic sisters with schools and hospitals. With time we realised that it was not the case. Yes, years teach us what we don't know on the day! On the contrary, as true workers in the vineyard of the LORD, they put themselves at our service because they understood that we were at their service before GOD, in praise and intercession. They certainly yearn for a better life, for a "tomorrow" filled with hope for their children which is legitimate but above all they seek that divine embrace





which alone can change our life. To understand their thirst for GOD, you only have to see them travelling tens of kilometres from one village to another for the celebration of the Eucharist.

St. Clare passed on to us her gracious and gentle way of behaving with all in a life of poverty, simplicity, and fraternity. Looking with admiration at the Fulani shepherds grazing their flocks, just in front of the monastery, we cannot help but smile and exclaim inwardly "We have the same vocation!" because: "The shepherds who look after their sheep are those who control the five senses of their body and do not allow them to go wandering here and there, but who on the contrary dominate them and control them like a shepherd his flock...". (Robert de Sorbon's sermon on St. Clare)

How to live in high poverty in the midst of these poor people, these everyday heroes? What is our message for them? Many of our questions will find their answer our presence in this village, a silent presence but a presence which can reflect the splendour of the eternal glory, like the radiant star of the morning.



## A NEW VENTURE FROM UGANDA TO LEBANON

*Monastery of the Holy Church - Mbarara, Uganda*

Our monastery has been blessed with a number of vocations these past 10 years. For a long time, especially after having celebrated fifty years of existence in Uganda in 2017, we have been considering making a foundation. We prayed in particular to St. Joseph during the month of March 2021-year dedicated to him - that the Lord may give us a sign as to where He wanted us to go. A few weeks later, the sign came, quite unexpected: the Church was asking us to go to Lebanon to give fresh support to the Monastery of Our Lady of Unity in Beirut. This call came to us from Rome through St. Damien Federation, to which the Lebanese monastery belongs,







and our own African Bikira Maria Association. With trust in the Holy Spirit, we have accepted this mission. Five sisters will go to Lebanon in April, chosen from those who volunteered for this mission.

Already two sisters have spent five weeks in Lebanon for a first contact with the community. The monastery was founded by Sisters from Jerusalem and France in 1958 with a particular mission to pray and work for the Unity of Christians and other religions, in this country where so many denominations and Muslim sects coexist. The monastery is deeply rooted in the local Church and cherished by all the people around. Actually, there are six Sisters from different nationalities, some of them aging and fragile. They are very courageous and full of faith, having lived through the war, political unrest, economic difficulties and illnesses; they welcomed our Sisters with open arms, saying that our coming was like a “miracle” answering their long prayer. The Lord gave us a sign of hope for the future: some aspirants to the life of St. Clare came to visit the community during the stay of our two sisters. One of them actually came to Uganda to join our novitiate group and spent three months with us. She was happy





and enthusiastic about the Poor Clare life, but her health was fragile and the onslaught of Covid 19, we experienced in December-January, weakened her so badly that she had to return home; there was sorrow on both sides! But we put everything in the hands of God.

We entrust this venture to the prayer of all our Poor Clare Sisters. The challenges are many: language (French and Arabic), culture, economic situation in the country, etc... but if this is the will of God, He will accomplish his work. May the light of St. Clare continue to shine in Lebanon for the glory of God and the life of all his people!





*Every day seek the face of the saints  
and find peace in what they teach you  
(Didache IV,2)*

## **THE RECOGNITION OF THE BODY OF ST. CAMILLA BATTISTA VARANO**

*Sr. Chiara Laura Serboli, osc and the Sisters of  
Camerino, Italy*

In the course of the year 2021, we found ourselves confronted by an unexpected, but at the same time marvellous, task: the need to authenticate the body of St. Camilla Battista. This had become unavoidable because the earthquake and the passage of time had left profound marks and some serious damage to the urn in which her mortal remains were kept. In addition some dust had got in as well as small insects and woodworm which had compromised the integrity of the reliquary in which they were kept. From this came the urgent need for a canonical recognition in order to protect what still remains today of the body of St. Camilla Battista. Then this precious ‘patrimony’ or inheritance can be handed on intact to those who will come after us, in line with the dynamic Christian understanding of traditio as handing on and therefore of entrusting.

For this reason, on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021, during the Eucharistic celebration in memory of the canonisation, we made an official request to the Bishop to be able to undertake this process of recognition. In the presence of the Minister Provincial, several friars minor, various



priests, the mayor and some scholars, anthropologists, from the University of Camerino, we articulated our desire and the urgency of our need. The Rector then signed an agreement with our Monastery to offer the skills of the Atheneum for this purpose. Next we contacted the firm Linea Tabarin to carry out this work in its entirety and so we began the journey of this adventure. The first recognition, as far as we know, took place in 1554 while the latest was in 1959. Since then there has been no direct verification.

Through faith, we know that the relics are not simply bones but they represent the memory of the saint's presence in history and are a sign of the grace of God which works among us. Pope Benedict XVI reminded us of this in his homily to young people on the World Day for Youth in Cologne, when he said:





*«Relics point us directly to God: it is God who, by the power of His grace, gives fragile beings the courage to bear witness to Him before the world. By inviting us to venerate the mortal remains of the martyrs and saints, the Church does not forget that, by definition, while we are indeed speaking about poor human bones we are also speaking about bones which belonged to someone who had been visited by the living power of God. The relics of the saints are traces of that Presence, invisible but real, which shines in the darkness of this world, bearing witness that the Kingdom of heaven is among us».*

Therefore, when we touch the body of a saint, we are touching the temple of the Holy Spirit, the temple of the presence and work of God's grace and mercy in that person's life. Relics are a narrative of 'everything in a fragment'. The whole of a life poured out for Christ, given to the Gospel and for others, the whole of that which is Camilla Battista, reminds us and reassures us of this: she is beside us and, at the same time, she is beside God, in communion with God, interceding for us.

But there is another aspect which moves us and energises us. Today technology has made huge advances and made it possible not only to preserve the relics but also from them after 500 years, we can reconstruct the true face of St. Camilla Battista! The face of a saint is like a map with shows all the terrain she has crossed, all the places where she lived until she reached her goal which was to have, in herself, the likeness of Christ. It is this which transforms our face into a sure embrace for everyone and especially for those who are the most wounded so that they too can be warmed by us, like people brought into the warmth of the sun.



The expression of Tertullian: *caro salutis cardo*, the flesh is the hinge of salvation, helps us understand that this search for a face is not only an emotional issue but a logical response to the concrete history of the Incarnation. Jesus was incarnate, he took a specific body, appearance and face. In the same way the saints, and in the same way St. Camilla Battista.

Thanks to the skill of the Laboratory of Archeology-Molecular Anthropology of the School of Bioscience and Veterinary Medicine at the University of Camerino, this dream will become a reality! On this journey we will be accompanied by Professors Isolina Marota and Stefania Luciani who, like modern Veronicas, will put their professionalism competence and passion at the service of this project. The canonical moment of recognition is an event which effectively involves only a few people,





according to the directives of the Church which, in order to protect the holiness of the relics, only allows a limited number to be present at the ritual. However, because this will be a moment of grace for everyone, we have decided to precede and accompany the recognition by a journey of preparation which is open to everybody. Our desire is to be able to travel together to discover the face of St. Camilla Battista because this will open us to the mystery of the true Face of God, of our own faces and the faces of our brothers and sisters, all encompassed within the universal call to holiness.

In order to do this and in collaboration with the Atheneum of our country and with our Brothers in the Province of St James of the Marches, we have thought of a multi-disciplinary approach to the mystery of the face. This will embrace the prophecies of Holy Scripture. the beauty of art and the wisdom of men and women.

It is true that at a time of pandemic and also a time of post-earthquake reconstruction, there might seem to be other priorities but, in these difficult times, the awareness has grown within each of us that we need to attend to healing wounds which are more of the spirit than of the structures. The exterior reconstructions must leach into the interior, in order to heal the spirit of our community. Then those robust and profound roots which characterise it, may once again grow wings of hope and life.

The way we have thought of doing this and offering this is that same way which, in life, has already confronted the 'existential earthquake' and the reconstruction that followed it. This experience has left us a splendid example of 'Archimedean resilience' and





shown the firm point upon which we can rest our lever -  
St. Camilla Battista Varano!

The journey of reconstruction (after the earthquake) helps us to fix our gaze on the face of God as Saint Camilla did in order to learn how our own faces and those of our brothers and sisters and of life itself, can all be kept in that glance of love and mercy with which our Father Himself looks and and contemplates each one of us!





*We received...*

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## **FRANCIS WAY: A LIFE ON FIRE WITH THE DIVINE LOVE**

*Sr. Mary Elizabeth Tushabe, osc - Mbarara, Uganda*

The first time I came to hear of St. Francis was one Sunday at High School. It happened to be the 4<sup>th</sup> of October in 1980s. The celebrant of the Sunday liturgy did what was unusual. “We are going to have a solemn procession, today is a great day Feast of St. Francis, a great Saint in our Church”, he said. I later came to learn that Francis was able to communicate and spoke the language and was understood by all animals. I wondered, what it was all about St. Francis!

A year later however I found myself knocking at the door of The Monastery of the Holy Church which was next to our School. I was searching for God and the Spirit moved me to this place which had always been a mystery to me. This time round however I felt drown by the silence and a climate which was conducive to prayer. Only to be informed that the sisters were in retreat and unable to receive visitors. I went to the chapel to have some time of quiet listening to the voice inside me and drinking in the peace and calmness of the Monastic environment.

Out from one of the rooms came a Trappist Monk who was directing the retreat of the Sisters. The wonder and Providence of God which is beyond our understanding. This man of God was to become for me what St. Philip was to the Ethiopian Eunuch. After an hour

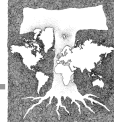


to listening to my story Fr. Aeugus became my first spiritual director on this journey searching for the will of God. I was for some time not sure whether my vocation was to be realised in the Trappist or Poor Clare Monastery.

God's Will became clear to me and, I asked to be admitted in this family of Sts Francis and Clare. Not that I knew what these twin saints were all about, but I was being driven by the Love that I experienced once I got the opportunity to get in contact with the sisters. It was such Love and Joy that I had never experienced before.

Part of my Formation journey was to hear and study about the Lives of Sts Francis and Clare. History of Assisi, their birthplace, I learnt with interest their lives journeys, the miracles they performed, I learnt many lessons about their desires to have nothing, but living poorly and as pilgrims and strangers, their love for the





crucified Christ, the mortifications they embraced, love for the lepers, ability to attract many followers, and the list is almost unending. Many other saints had lived such lives as well but what was so special about these saints whom God had given me to be my mirrors and guide for the journey? My searching soul kept on desiring to know who They actually were. Pope Francis too has been caught up by this love for the *Poverello* to the point of taking this name Francis as he begun his papal service in the Church. The first Pope ever to do such.

Richard Rohr ofm, in his very inspiring book “Eager to Love”, has helped me greatly in my search. He presented Francis in a very unique and true way. “Francis was a master of making room for the new, and letting go of the tired empty and expired. He was always new, always fresh, always beginning again”. Each new day was an invitation to begin again, each experience was holy ground, a place where he encountered God as if it were for the first time. St. Francis was ready for the absolute newness from God. His God was not old, so Francis remained ever young. Francis also knew intuitively that the only way to bring in the new was to make room for it. He knew that you cannot hold onto the old, all the while declaring that you want something new. The old will defy, deny and decry the new. Think of the process of renewal for the eagles. The secret, of their long life is their ability to strip themselves of the old. The aged and good for nothing beaks and feathers, have to be plucked off, painful though it may be. That is the only way of being assured of a long life of about 70-80 years. Once tresses of old age appear, up they fly to the mountain top to do the needful.



Through Jesus, the new Man, God made man, The fairest of the Children of men, The Good and new Wine, Francis, discovered the Newness of The Gospel. Francis had a deep and loving relationship with Jesus. Francis knew who he was. He was aware of his identity as a child of God, In Jesus his brother he has been adopted as a child of God. In Jesus Francis had come to know himself as a brother to all created things, since all originates from the one source. His writing shows a fascination of the God who became human that human being could have a father with whom they were in deep loving relation. Francis knew that God loved him uniquely and Francis in turn had a unique and personal, response to this love. In the testament St. Francis wrote “No one taught me what I ought to do, The Lord himself revealed it to me”. no one had taught Francis what he had to do, which church he had to rebuild, which garden he was to till but God himself, it is God who gave him brothers too.

The Human experience was the gateway to The Divine, the God we search for is not far away but actually very near, he is in the human heart. Francis knew intuitively that the search for God and the search for one’s true self is actually one and the same. “Who are you my God, and what am I”? God is Love. (1Jn 4:15)

The Invitation of Jesus in John, “**Remain in my love**”, (Jn 15:9) was not just an invitation but had taken on a character of a command for Francis heard the Word of God and took them to heart.

Francis’s desire was to remain in the Love of God, and he never wanted anything to come between him and the Love of God. It is not that Francis wanted nothing,



Francis wanted everything, in God, anything that came in His way he absolutely rejected.

Francis kept his simple gaze on Jesus, the mirror, he considered the humility, and contemplated his poverty. Francis realised the love, power and goodness that God had for him. Francis searched to dwell in the encounter and tried to recognise the habits that could distort it. As with the disciples to Emmaus, Jesus opened his heart to understand the scripture with a newness born in contemplation.

He allowed Jesus also to gaze on him, Francis opened up his life, his emotions, instincts, desires and drives to the heavenly physician. The light of the spirit touched him and opened in him a wound that put him in a state of letting go. He was urged to make the needs and ways of Jesus his own. His earlier desires were challenged.





Francis in turn loved and was pervaded with an inner energy, he experienced the urge that the spirit brings. To keep moving, risking all things, going out of himself to reach out to the other at a deeper level and look upon the other with a new gaze.

We were created out of Love, in Love and for Love, as the Spanish mystic Ramon Llull wrote.

They asked the lover where he was from, he replies From Love. What are you made of? Love. Who conceived you? Love. Where are you born? In Love. Who raised You? Love, what do you live on? Love. What is your name? Love. Where do you come from? Love. Where are you going? To Love. What do you live on? Love. Where are you? in Love. Do you have anything besides Love? He replied Yes, sins and offenses against my beloved. Does your beloved pardon you? The lover said, there was mercy and justice in his beloved and so he found shelter between fear and hope.

The scripture of Remaining in the Love of God is the most preferred text for most of the Sisters. This was all reflected in our Vocation stories. We have had, all of us sisters varied inspirations and reasons in embracing this Franciscan/Clarian life, but one reason that has kept us moving as a family. It is the love and Unity that we have found in this place of belonging which we Love to call home.

In conclusion, God surprised me today with the Gospel of the day: Lk 12:49-53. Jesus declared I came to bring fire on earth, how I wish it were blazing already.

On my way through the garden, for the hour of meditation this morning, I was greeted but a shy snail. As soon as it heard my steps it took shelter in its shell.



This image struck me greatly. The shell is for the snail what the love of God was for Francis and for me and all of us. The shell marks the identity of the snail, the snail is one with the shell. It can not exist with out it. Likewise, The Love of God is roof for our heads, it is shelter from the storm of life, it is nourishing bread for the journey, tender and strong, is our wisdom, our humility, our patience, our beauty, our meekness, our inner peace, our joy, our justice, our moderation, all our riches; The Love of God is enough, it is more than enough.



# *News from the Pro Monialibus Office*

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## **Monastery of Sainte Marie des Anges of the Order of Saint Clare in Ihosy (Ihosy Diocese, Madagascar)**

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life granted that the Monastery of Sainte Marie des Anges of the Order of Saint Clare in Ihosy (Ihosy Diocese, Madagascar) be canonically erected and entrusted to the particular care of the Order of Friars Minor of the Province of Madagascar and Mauritius.

The Minister General, Br. Massimo Fusarelli, responding to the petition of the Sisters of the new Monastery of Sainte Marie des Anges - Ampandratokana Ihosy, Madagascar, by decree of April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022, established that this Monastery be under the jurisdiction of the Minister General of the Order of Friars Minor, according to the norms of the Common and Proper Law.

Pro-Manuscripto  
Monastero S. Chiara - Cortona (AR), Italia