

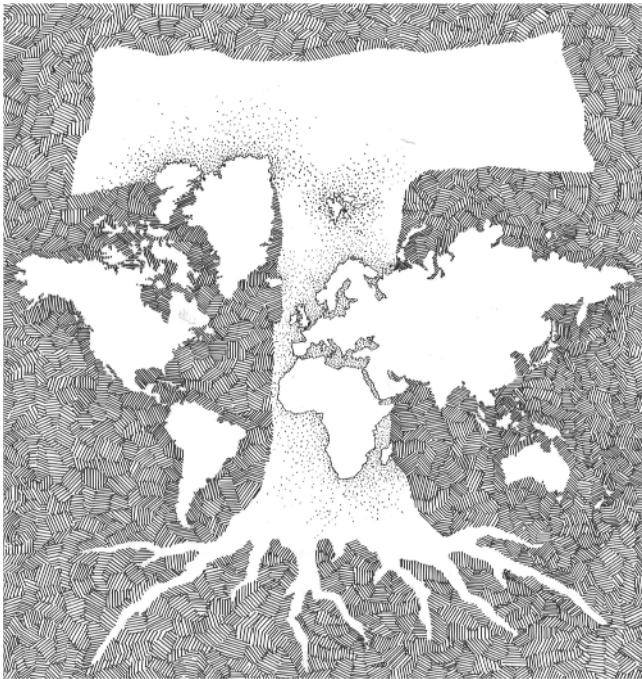
cTc - communion and communication



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QUADERNI DELL'UFFICIO "PRO MONIALIBUS"

Roma, Curia generale OFM



NUMBER 60/December 2022

cTc comunione e comunicazione

Quaderni dell'Ufficio Pro Monialibus
Bollettino di collegamento fra i monasteri francescani in comunione con
l'OFM attraverso l'Ufficio Pro Monialibus

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Presentation

The 60th issue of *Communion and Communication*, invites you to listen to the voices it has collected and relaunched, so that they may find a prayerful welcome in the hearts of those who read it.

Voices of solidarity in pain and hope, voices of our Sisters living in places heavily marked by violence in so many of its manifestations. The stories that come from the Central African Republic, Haiti, Brazil, Sri Lanka, show us what form the Lord's promise to Clare has today, that promise she received for herself, for her Sisters, for the city of Assisi: "I will always protect you". Together with them and with those who live in the midst of conflicts and clashes, we welcome the words of the Apostle that Br Fábio reminds us of in his letter, meditating on how "Christ is indeed our peace".

Voices, that also tell of paths of unity: the journey of the Coordination of Federations in Italy; the online course organized by the Irish Sisters in which monasteries from four continents participated; the challenges, joys, discoveries experienced by Brothers and Sisters in Holland who share daily existence as a Franciscan Family; the life of the Sisters who, 'hidden behind the Andes Mountains', are a sign and leaven of the Gospel on Chilean land... Like instruments of the same orchestra, each playing their own score, they make heard the one symphony of communion.



Finally, the voice of proposal and stimulus which comes from Gabon and urges us to welcome and make our own the encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*. In this issue, we are listening to the first part.

In conclusion, a voice that... comes from the future! You will find an outline of the path that, together with Br Fábio, we have thought out for the next issues of *Communion and Communication*... A path for which we are already inviting each community to become active in their willingness to share experiences and reflections: a gift for all!

In the days when this issue of cTc will be sent out, the Commission for the revision of the General Constitutions will already be working 'in person', hosted by the Monastery of St Clare in Rome. We feel united with the Sisters and Brothers who, coordinated by Br Fábio, are trying to listen and see where the Spirit is moving in the life of our communities. We are grateful to them, and we invoke from the Father the same Spirit, so that he may inspire in them words which will move us all to follow with authenticity in the evangelical footsteps of Clare of Assisi today.

Happy reading!

LETTER TO THE POOR CLARES

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

“Christ is our peace” (Ephesians 2:14)

We have reached the sixtieth issue of our beautiful magazine. They are, therefore, thirty years worth of “cTc”, that is, of so much *Communication* which, of course, has made our *Communion* grow and deepen. A heartfelt “thank you”, then, to everyone and all those who have collaborated with the magazine in recent years, especially in the service of secretary and with the translations.

To commemorate all this, we dedicate this issue to the ever-present and indispensable theme of Peace. In this sense, I hope that when this message reaches you the war in Ukraine will have subsided, because at the time of writing it seems to be getting worse. This is not counting the untold and forgotten wars, such as those in Syria, South Sudan and Yemen. Indeed, as Pope Francis has said several times, we are experiencing a third world war in “pieces” and which today could be called “total”. (cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*, 10.09.2022)

To this are added all those contexts of violence, socio-political tension, and religious intolerance in which so many of our Sisters and so Brothers live. To be honest,



we also must recognize that, for a variety of reasons, we often experience tensions and conflicts within our communities and even within ourselves.

Faced with all this, it does us very good to hear the announcement of St Paul to the Ephesians that inspires our reflection:

“Christ is our peace.”

Yes, Sisters and Brothers! In Christ we find our true peace, because, as the Apostle explains immediately afterwards, he is “the one who made two of two, breaking down the wall of separation that divided them, that is, enmity, by means of his flesh.” Thus “he abolished the Law, made up of prescriptions and decrees, to create in himself, of the two, a single new man, making peace, and to reconcile both of them with God in one body, by means of the cross, eliminating enmity within himself (*Eph 2:14-16*).” Therefore, all wars, divisions, and conflicts, personal or collective, have been assumed and transformed, and somehow already eliminated, by the death and resurrection of Jesus, by his paschal mystery which we always celebrate anew sacramentally in order to express it in our own daily existence.

Thus, beyond and through all violent contexts, in the heart of our fraternities and in the depths of ourselves, with “spiritual eyes (cf. *Adm 1,20*),” we will always be able to find Christ Crucified/Risen and, with Him, our true peace. It is a question, therefore, of always entering



into contact and communion with what Paul calls “the new man,” that is, our true identity, the best of ourselves and of the whole of humanity which is offered to us by the Passover of Christ.

“Christ is our peace.”

Francis and Clare lived it with all intensity. Francis, always finding again in the Crucified/Risen Christ the answer to his questions and to his inner conflicts, became the great herald of peace, so much so that “in all his sermons, before communicating the words of God to the gathered people, he wished peace by saying ‘The Lord give you peace’ (IC 23; cf. *Test* 23; *LR* 3.14).” Indeed, he had experienced within himself that only the Lord can give us true peace.

In her own way, Clare too always promoted peace, both by interceding for the community of San Damiano and for the city of Assisi, threatened by invasions, and by invoking and wishing it for her sisters, those near and far, present and future (cf. *BICI* 4; *LEr* 1), especially at the time of elections to various offices and in times of illness and tribulation, when the risk of losing peace and patience is greater (cf. *FLCI* 4,22; 10,10). For this reason, in the famous writing that he addressed to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano at the end of his life, the *Audite Poverelle*, from which we will take the themes of the next issues of our magazine, Francis also advises the sick and those who assist them to support all their labors in peace (cf. *ClExh* 10).



Sisters and Brothers, may the “Prince of Peace,” whom we celebrate at Christmas, become ever more “our peace,” that is, the peace that we welcome and preserve in our hearts and in our communities, so that they may ever more be oases that satisfy the great thirst for peace of humanity.

May the Lord give you peace!

Fraternally,

Br Fábio Cesar Gomes, ofm
General Delegate “Pro Monialibus”

Minister General

SALUTATION on the occasion of the online meeting of Poor Clares and Conceptionists of Latin America (19/08/2022)

Dear Poor Clare and Conceptionist Sisters,
May the Lord give you peace!

It is with great joy that I greet you in your online meeting. I heartily thank Br Fábio for the initiative and for the invitation that he sent me. He is working very well as my delegate *Pro Monialibus*, and I invite you to trust in him for a fruitful collaboration.

First of all, I want to emphasize how beautiful it is that you are gathering together as Sisters of two contemplative Orders, different it is true, but united by the Franciscan charism. In particular, the charismatic realities of the Poor Clares and the Conceptionists both value very strong reference to the Virgin Mary. St Francis saw in Clare another Mary and described the life of the Poor Sisters as “to follow in the footsteps and the poverty of the Son of God and of His most holy Mother.” The Conceptionists find the heart of their charism in “service to God and to Holy Mary in her Immaculate Conception,” as I noted in the recent letter that I addressed to them for the feast of St Beatrice da Silva. To the Poor Clare Sisters, I recalled the importance of taking care the vocation of each sister and of all the



sisters, rediscovering its foundations in the charismatic experience that St Clare presents in her Testament.

Dear Sisters! It is not by chance that in the Franciscan charism there is so much richness of contemplative life. Indeed, St Francis reminds the brothers and sisters that “to have the Spirit of the Lord and His holy operation” is the heart of our life and that nothing may be an impediment to the life of prayer for deepening the search for the Lord and friendship with Him, which extends to the contemplation of His Presence in us, in our brothers and sisters, in the Church and in the world.

How much we need this contemplative gaze in the present moment of history, in order to recognize the signs of the times and the presence and action of the Spirit of the Lord in it. How necessary it is to have “spiritual ears,” in order to hear what the Spirit is saying today to the Church and to our Families.

Sisters, I thank you for your silent and profound testimony and I beg you to help us friars to rediscover and live this contemplative dimension, which is urgent and necessary for us today. May the Lord accompany you and bless you. Pray for our Families, and also for the general definitory and for me.

Peace and good to you all!

*Br Massimo Fusarelli ofm
Minister General*

Testimonies from conflict areas

FROM THE POOR CLARES IN BOUAR, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

At the end of 2015 Pope Francis, despite the countless difficulties and “headwinds” to his visit, touched down in the Central African Republic. His presence is for all a visible sign of the closeness of the Lord who does not leave us alone in our journey. As a pilgrim of peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation, he offered us the strength and tenderness of God that heals us and puts us back on our feet.

“Today Bangui is becoming the spiritual capital of the world. The Holy Year of Mercy is beginning early in this land. A land that has been suffering for many years from war and hatred, from misunderstanding and lack of peace. Bangui is becoming the spiritual capital of prayer by the Father’s mercy. Let us all ask for peace, mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness, and love. For Bangui, for the whole of the Central African Republic, for the whole world, for the countries that suffer from war, let us ask for peace! And now, with this prayer, we begin the Holy Year”. (Pope Francis)

These words, spoken on the evening of 29 November 2015, are unforgettable and remain fixed in the hearts of all Central Africans and in our own. The country had just emerged from a very violent conflict following the 2013 coup d’état that overthrew President François Bozizé

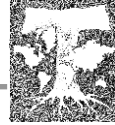


and caused thousands of casualties and the displacement of a third of the population. In this context, where the security situation was still very volatile, Pope Francis' gesture and invitation are prophetic. They also remain a path to follow, beyond all that can thwart and hinder the way.

It is a challenge that, as a fraternity of poor sisters, we wish to embrace and live in the humility of the daily round: to remain steadfast in his Love, to hold on to our ministry of praise and intercession, to remain “a door of mercy always open”, a visible sign of hope, a gift of peace and consolation. “But we carry this treasure as in earthenware vessels, so that it is clear that this great power belongs to God and does not come from us”. (2Cor 4:7)

In this blessed land of the Central African Republic, which at the same time bears deep wounds, the Lord has given us and still gives us the grace to live our vocation and our mission to give Him glory. We are continually confronted with the suffering of a Church and a people who, for thirty years, have been living with political instability, precariousness, and poverty, caused by a regular cycle of violence, mutinies, successful or unsuccessful coups d'état and rebellions. This country has suffered too much, because of political and economic interests; external plots with internal complicity.

During these years of repeated crises that the country has experienced, we have also been faced with anxiety and fear of others and of ourselves. We have experienced fear of tomorrow and disarray. But the



Lord never abandoned us. On the contrary, in times of trial, He has always guarded us with great tenderness, “as a mother guards her child”.

We would like to share with you some pearls of “this treasure that we carry in our arms of the poor”: a richness that has changed our way of looking at things, our way of evaluating reality and reading history. This new vision has converted and shaped us at the very heart of our fraternity. It remains for us a gift and a source to return to.

The first precious pearl is that of the presence and intercession of our Mother St Clare: “Lord, guard your handmaidens... and defend this city too...” and the response of the Lord’s faithful promise: “I will always defend you...”. Indeed, how many times have we heard gunfire very close to our home; how many times have we seen shots flying over our house... and yet, the Monastery has always been spared... How can we forget that three times, against all odds, the rebels (Seleka) have left our town of Bouar? This is humanly inexplicable.

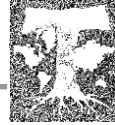
The other pearl is the power of prayer and the wonder at the trusting abandonment to God of the poor and the little ones. In the midst of the last rebellion, the edifying testimony of our parish priest 'pierced the night of violence'. Every day at 5 p.m. he prayed the rosary with the children of the displaced, in front of the grotto of the Virgin next to our chapel. We could not but unite our voices and our hearts with them... How can we not listen to the supplication of the innocent who cry out to the Lord and who ask for justice?



It was the treasure of community discernment that gave the fraternity the strength to remain united and to walk in faith even though it was impossible to hide our fear and anxiety. It was always together that we decided to stay and not to leave the country. For staying and living with it is the sign that speaks most in the silence...

The attentive care and special solicitude of our Capuchin brothers is still a pearl. On the evening of Palm Sunday 2013, when the situation had become very dangerous and risky for us, they came to take us and welcomed us into their home to shelter and protect us.

We are blessed by the welcome and hospitality given to the displaced, both Christian and Muslim. The experience of 2013 has prepared us. So much so that on 9 January 2021 when the town of Bouar was again besieged by an armed group called 3R, we now know how to react in brotherhood. When everyone started to flee with their “kungba” (bundle) towards the Cathedral and the mission site, we immediately prepared the place to welcome them... Little by little, mothers with their children took their place in the area of our visiting rooms, about 30 people. The silence that used to characterize our life was confronted with the cries, the tears, the running of the children under the cloisters of the monastery, but all was grace. Their presence allowed us to touch the suffering of our people and their resilience. Our eyes saw what it means to have no place to lay your head. It has also made us question our way of living *sine proprio*, to recognize the long road ahead, to be more vigilant about the sobriety of our choices and more attentive to discerning between the necessary, the useful and the superfluous.



For today, the words of our Central African bishops say it all: "If a significant advance towards a return to peace throughout the country has been noted and must be welcomed, it is still the case that certain areas and regions of our country are still under the control of armed groups that are rampant and mistreat the population. Furthermore, in the going forward of peoples and the world, the Central African Republic is suffering, like other countries in the world, from the jolts of the Ukrainian crisis. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the presence of Russian forces engaged alongside the Rwandans and the Central African Armed Forces in the reconquest of the entire national territory and in the pacification of the Central African Republic, today place our country in a rather delicate position in terms of international diplomacy. (Message from the bishops of the Central African Republic on 26 June 2022)

It is in this complex and difficult situation of our country and of the world that we understand even more the urgency of being "poor sisters" on the way, with peace-loving hearts, trying to remove all forms of violence from our words and attitudes and to uproot that which separates us and can create barriers between us and the people who approach us.

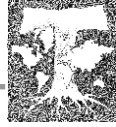
Sisters who are ready to show closeness and solidarity through actions, under the sign of communion; Sisters who, "gathered from so many provinces and countries", live the joy and fatigue of welcoming each other in their differences, making fraternity visible.



Sisters capable of “recognizing that within the tribulations of history the Passover of the world is being accomplished” (Br Massimo Fusarelli ofm) and of bearing witness to faith in the Risen Christ, who irresistibly carries all history towards the victory of good over evil.

In these days, four young women from this land are living an experience among us. Clare's light shines on the world: in every circumstance beauty is reborn and life continues to flourish.

“Therefore, we do not lose heart, but look not at what is seen, but at what is not seen: ...what is not seen is eternal”. (2Cor 4:18)



FROM THE POOR CLARES IN PUERTO PRINCIPE, HAITI

We are five Sisters from El Salvador, and we came from the Monastery of San Damiano of Planes de Renderos, El Salvador. We arrived in Haiti on 6 April 2021 and were welcomed with great joy by our dear Franciscan brothers. With time, we have been discovering more and more that thanks to the unity and fraternity that exist between the Order of Friars Minor, the Order of St Clare and the Order of Secular Franciscans, the Franciscan Spring can still be lived with a Caribbean face when you also have a town which has welcomed them with their own characteristic overflowing joy.





The social and political situations are not good, but it is possible to go out into the streets and buy necessary shopping, even though Msgr. Max Leroy Mesidor (Metropolitan Archbishop of Puerto Principe, Haiti) said to us: “I think you have come at the most difficult moment, but that is just when we most need your prayers”.

After the assassination of the President of the Republic, Jovenel Moise, the situation deteriorated into an undeclared war. Bands of armed groups dominate the country, killing the innocent every day, adding to the number of kidnapped people both religious and secular. There is looting, petrol shortages and a great insecurity which complicates the lives of us all, crucifying Haiti as well as richer countries. For sure though, that of the Haitians is our fate too. As Poor Sisters, we have to stay with this crucified people because to leave Haiti at this moment would be to betray the wellspring of our Franciscan charism.

We put our trust in the protection of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour and the promise made to our Mother St Clare: “I will always protect you”, and also in the prayers of all of you. These give us the confidence and strength to go forward. When we leave the Monastery, we are well aware that we may not return, and for this we need your prayer.

Peace and Good





As we are sending this article, we wish also to communicate the sad news of the death of one of our Sisters in the Haiti Foundation: Sister Susana Cristina Argueta Delgado, aged 42. She died of a fulminating cardiac arrest. She is buried in Haiti, in the grounds where the Monastery will be built. The presence of our Friars Minor really was a strength at this very difficult time, but at the same time full of much hope. "Where we go, we stay until death": our Sister Susana took this aspect of our life as Poor Clares very seriously, and this became at the same time strength and impetus to continue the foundation in this beloved country, so suffering, sharing with them and like them the following of the Poor and Crucified Christ.



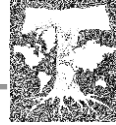


FROM THE POOR CLARES IN NOVA IGUAÇU, BRAZIL

Our Monastery of Santa Clara is the fruit of the persevering prayer of the then Bishop of the Diocese of Nova Iguaçu, Dom Adriano Hipolyto, OFM, who, risking his life to counter violence, continually prayed to Jesus to grant him the presence of a community of contemplatives. He wished to have sisters who would intercede and sacrifice themselves for the suffering people of Baixada Fluminense. He said that it was extremely necessary that the life of the diocese be sustained by the strength emanating from silent prayer, united with the sacrifice of sisters, apparently absent but constantly present before the "Source" in favour of their brothers and sisters, emanating in the silence of the "enclosed garden", the spiritual soil of the Holy Church.

He asked some monasteries in Brazil, but the way was not simple. In 1982, he received a positive response from the Poor Clare Sisters of the Monastery of Our Lady of Mercy, in the Madeira Islands, for the new foundation.

The founding Sisters did not come to Brazil definitively until 1986, when they obtained a visa to enter the country, which was living under military dictatorship. The land for the construction of the monastery was on top of a hill; the site was deserted, and nearby there was a large "container" where the corpses of victims of drug trafficking were dumped



every day. After the construction of the monastery had begun, the "container" was deactivated, and the bodies were no longer dumped in the locality.

The five founding sisters arrived in Baixada Fluminense on 24 April 1986 and settled in a temporary house near Bishop Adriano's house until the monastery was completed. On May 13, 1989, the inauguration of the monastery took place, thus fulfilling the great dream of "Brother Bishop", who on that occasion said: "The Poor Clare Sisters, living a hidden life with Christ in God, praying and sacrificing themselves for us, are the guarantee that we will not lack the grace, light, and strength of the Holy Spirit, to remain faithful to the ministry and find the courage to help us to resist".

After two years, the area around the monastery, previously uninhabited, became inhabited such that the neighbourhood we live in has been growing since our arrival. The people of God whom we meet bear the signs of suffering. In their simplicity, they are supportive and fraternal. They are people of faith, praising, singing and dancing; rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep. They are a welcoming and courageous people.

We live in the midst of the terror of violence, of shootings; we weep with the parents who have lost their children to drug trafficking, to prostitution... and at the same time, we are sheltered by the welcoming embrace of so many who care for us. In the midst of so much poverty that affects so many of our brothers and sisters, we lack nothing, and we are treated like true ladies. In

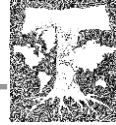


return, we repay them with love and joy, and that captivates them.

The great number of people who come to this hill of St Clare to participate in the liturgical celebrations, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, in sharing their experiences, affirm that they experience inner peace from the silence that surrounds them, in the welcome they receive, in finding someone who listens to them and is interested in their pain. We receive everyone, and in silent prayer before Jesus in the monstrance we present each one, with their intentions and needs, begging the Lord to grant them mercy and forgiveness.

Don Adriano's other wish was that this monastery should be a centre of Eucharistic Adoration for the diocese. To this end he built a house next to the monastery to accommodate the parishioners from the various parishes who took turns at the nocturnal adoration of the Blessed Sacrament which lasted all night, closing with Holy Mass at 5 am.

We want to share the testimony of Juan one of the parishioners from the parish of Barrio Posse who faithfully shared in the experience of nocturnal adoration each month. Juan was the owner of a bakery; while working at the cash register, he noticed that a group of bandits were approaching with evil intentions. He fervently invoked in the silence of his heart, that Jesus, whom he adored in the monstrance every month in the Poor Clares' Monastery, would deliver him from danger. Immediately, one of the bandits said to him: "Are you praying to your God? Don't worry we will not harm you." After this experience, Juan shared his testimony



with us and faithfully continued to come to Adoration in our chapel.

As the years passed and violence and drug trafficking increased, the people who came to Adoration at night declined, and now the scourge of the coronavirus pandemic has contributed to the decline of the people, although we continue to keep the Blessed Sacrament solemnly exposed each day and our sisters remain in adoration, taking turns every hour.

Recently we began welcoming groups of people for Eucharistic adoration in our chapel on the first Saturdays of each month, in reparation for the Immaculate Heart of Mary; then, after the eight o'clock mass in the morning, the Blessed Sacrament is exposed until five o'clock in the afternoon.

At present there are many operations to combat drug trafficking in the centre of Rio de Janeiro. This has resulted in the criminals taking refuge in the outskirts of our neighbourhood. There are constant shootings, which sound as an alarm for us to intensify our prayers, sacrifices and pleas for peace.

In these 36 years of our presence in Nova Iguaçu, we are immensely grateful for God's protection, who never allowed us to suffer any harm and even gave us Brazilian vocations. We have faced many challenges: shootings, violence... in the midst of so many tears, we maintain serenity and peace, welcoming our brothers, manifesting the love of God, nourished by the certainty that fidelity to the living of our charism in its essence gives us the courage to fight and every day we have the opportunity to express the fulfilment of Jesus' words to our mother Clare: "I will always protect you".



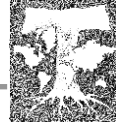
FROM THE POOR CLARES IN TEWATTE - RAGAMA, SRI LANKA

PAX ET BONUM

We the Poor Clares at Tewatte, Ragama, in the diocese of Colombo in Sri Lanka, who live under the shadow of Our Lady of Lanka, thankfully accept to write this little account to the cTc, to share with all the readers a few of our many experiences we had during the past three years of difficulties and hardships we had to encounter in our country.

In Sri Lanka this is the first Poor Clare Colettines monastery with a community of 17 Sisters and one postulant at present. We are called Colettines after the reform of the rule by St Colette of Corbie, by whom divine inspiration on the 16th century.

Now let us look at our experiences in the light of our Seraphic Mother St Clare, who held out the Monstrance and turned to the Eucharistic Lord with trust and confidence in time of danger of the attack of the enemy to the monastery. There came to her the assurance from the Eucharistic Lord: 'Fear not, I will always protect you'. Unfailing was the promises of Our Lord, the enemy was incapable in their efforts to attack the monastery as they took to their heels seeing the Monstrance. Obviously, 'more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of' if there is faith.



During the past three years, our country had to face many contacts beginning from the bomb attacks in many places on Easter Sunday, April 21st, 2019. It was very sad to see on TV screen hundreds of coffins carried to the graves by priests and religious Sisters and at the same time trying their best to bring consolation to the afflicted. Soon after that Covid 19 pandemic came, for which many became victims. In the universality of the Church, we are one body with our holy Mother the Church. Hence, we carried in our hearts and prayers the bitter sufferings and pain of our shepherds and sheep, begging the Lord for mercy, pardon, and healing.

Like a compassionate father, our chief shepherd Malcolm Cardinal Ranjith, especially in the Archdiocese of Colombo took up the cause to relieve and console the suffering victims and to find out the truth behind the bomb blast on Easter Sunday. In the meantime, hundreds of priests and religious showed their protests silently, while the daughters of Seraphic St Clare took their stand before the Eucharistic Lord, day and night in relays continuously praying the rosary. We know in the history of the Church, grave battles were won by praying the rosary. To mention one such battle is the battle of Lepanto. It is sure for all who call on our Blessed Mother for assistance and protection, unailing is her help.

After the Ester Sunday disaster, the churches were closed for some time, fearing further attacks, and the pandemic also played its part of making it hard to celebrate the Holy Mass. But for us God's goodness was infinite, and we did not miss the Eucharist because of



our brave chaplains Carmelite and Capuchin Fathers, who came to celebrate the Holy Mass for us in spite of many difficulties, expect for just a few days due to the emergency laws. On such days, our Mother Abbess gave us Holy Communion during the Morning Prayer of the Divine Office. The Heavenly Bread continues to sustain us, strengthening and giving every hope for a better future.

As the Pandemic faded away, the entire country had to face the biggest ever problems with economic, political and social crisis. There were constant power cuts, lack of petroleum, medicine, gas, fertilizers for farmers and daily sky rising increase of prices of food items and other essentials, which caused much suffering to all.

You would ask us how did all these affect you? As the daughters of the Poor Lady of Assisi, our needs are simple and small. For instance, we still use mainly firewood for our cooking and able to collect it from our own garden, and scare city of gas was not so much of a problem for us. We did not have electricity cuts as our monastery is located close to one of the main hospitals in the country. During those days, we tangibly felt the generosity of our Divine Provider through the kindness of our friends, relatives and benefactors. Our ever-giving Giver never allowed our cruets to be empty. As a result, the extern Sisters had to go for marketing rarely. Hence we did not have to worry about travelling or for petrol.

In our garden we have many large, tall trees that bear fruit for cooking. To mention a few: coconuts, jack,



bread fruit, bananas, papaws, etc. Along with the help of the gardeners we are growing vegetables for monastery consumption. Our main sustenance is from altar breads. Sometimes the orders are beyond our possibility of supplying. During the pandemic it has been requested to enlarge the size of the hosts, which we had to comply with, for the safety of the priests so as to continue the distributing the Sacred Hosts on the tongue of the faithful.

Those who come and knock at our monastery door for spiritual and temporal help have been increased since the difficult times began. By our own trials and difficulties, we learn to understand the crosses of others. It is a joy for us to see always when they go consoled and happy hearted. And the gratitude which flows from their hearts, we offer back uniting to ours to Him who is the Source of every good gift.

All these show us the beauty and value of prayer which is our vocation. God never abandons all those whom He calls for His service. His love is so great. We leave what we call 'All' to follow and possess Him who shower on us daily His super abundant blessings and strength. On our part, we only have to lovingly obey His will as best as we can, in our faith journey to the ultimate goal, God of love.

In our monastery choir we daily gaze upon Him in adoration praying '*My God and my All*'.

Experiences



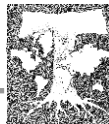
SPECIAL CARE AND SOLICITUDE...

The Meeting of the General Delegate with the Presidents of Italy

Sr. Chiara Amata Casalini, osc- Coordinator of the Presidents of the Poor Clares of Italy

From April 20-22, 2022, the Coordinating Committee of Presidents of the Poor Clares of Italy met in Rome for its regular annual meeting, which is dedicated to planning and to looking at what the Federations are doing. At present, the revision of the General Constitutions, promoted and resolutely supported by the Minister General Fr Massimo Fusarelli, demands a great deal of reflection and the search to establish a set of instruments with which all communities can work. The recently established International Commission, on which our sisters Mother Chiara Cristiana Mondonico and Sr. Chiara Benedetta Conte serve as Delegates, has already begun the process with various meetings.

The experience is proving to be exciting, although it is not without difficulties, among which are the various languages and translations, internet connections that do not always work, and different ways of seeing and approaching the themes most proper to our way of life. It is certainly an opportunity to grow in listening to and welcoming different viewpoints, which express the beauty of a diverse world in which the face of Clare and her Sisters is always present - her experience as a woman of communion and a disciple of Christ, who in every culture speaks of simplicity, humility and



fraternity. We face this historical event with silence and a slow pace, aware that we are rendering ourselves, the Order, and the Church a service and a witness of synodality and communion.

In the meantime, the first fruit of that process is the preparation of a report on the life of our communities, which will be sent through the Presidents to all the fraternities. For the moment, the journey is foreseen as being in three stages, following the Clarian itinerary of,

“Gaze...” report on the life of our communities;

“Consider...” preparation of a questionnaire;

“Contemplate...” draft of the new Constitutions.

To better understand the dynamics of this itinerary, the presence of Fr Fábio Cesar Gomes, General Delegate Pro Monialibus, at our meeting proved to be enlightening and fraternal. Fr Fábio first presented his work in the Office Pro Monialibus and his commitment to be at the service of the Sisters throughout the world in the name of the Minister General. Having been in the office for only a few months, he is still reviewing the work done by his predecessors, so as to focus it and include new information in it that may better serve our communities. He emphasized the importance of the periodical cTc, which is sponsored by the Office, as an effective tool for communication and communion among Sisters across the world. He hopes that it can be enhanced and strengthened, both editorially and economically, through the collaboration of all the sisters.

Fr Fábio has already met various communities and federations around the world, finding in all of them a



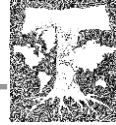
keen desire to know other experiences of Clarian life and, both directly and through him, to create a communication network capable of facilitating the exchange of news and formation programs.

Regarding the General Constitutions, Fr Fábio highlighted the intention of the Minister General for a revision of the text, with a language more suited to our time, that also reflects contemporary theology and that integrates such new documents such as the Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere* and its instruction for implementation *Cor Orans*. Fr Fábio's contribution initiated a very interesting discussion about the working methodologies of the International Commission and about the steps that will mark the process in the years ahead.

In this first meeting, Fr Fábio's attention and openness to the various needs and proposals greatly comforted and cheered us. The solicitude and care of St Francis continues to accompany us through history with the presence of these Brothers who, with humility and charity, put their skills at the service of our communion and our formative journey.

Our gratitude becomes prayer for the Franciscan Order, which is committed to being a sign of unity and a witness of evangelical fraternity - a mirror of that gift which the Lord has given us so that we can give it back multiplied with our lives.

To the praise of Christ. Amen.



CLARE'S SISTERS AND THEIR RULES

A series of lectures by Professor Gerard Pieter Freeman organised by the Poor Clares of Galway, Ireland

The Poor Clares in Galways - Ireland

In early 2022 we hosted a series of lectures over Zoom by Professor Gerard Pieter Freeman. We first got to know Professor Freeman a few years ago after he authenticated a translation into early modern English of a papal bull dating from March 1253 which we found in our archives and which had previously been assumed to have been a fabrication. (AFH An. 111 2018 pp. 377-423). We had no idea at that stage that examining such documents was integral to the approach he takes to studying the early history of the Order. Professor Freeman has a long personal history in Franciscan studies but widened his focus to Clare and her sisters in the 1990s making the Poor Clares of the Thirteenth Century the subject of his 1997 doctorate. Aside from his expertise, his affection for St Clare and her sisters prompted us to ask him to consider giving us some input to bring us up-to-date on new developments in Clare studies. Not only was he very happy to oblige but he offered to give us ten lectures based on his own recent research.

INTERNATIONAL

This opportunity seemed far too good not to share with others so we sent word around to other monasteries through the good offices of the Pro Monialibus team. The lectures were attended not only by



our own sisters here in Ireland but by many of our Poor Clare sisters around the world. We were also very happy to be joined by many of the Sisters of St Clare, a teaching congregation which grew out of one of our daughter houses in eighteenth-century Dublin. It is now a world-wide congregation of apostolic sisters who deeply cherish their Poor Clare heritage.

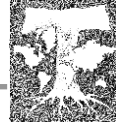
Communities or individual sisters attended from the UK, the US, Italy, the Czech Republic, Taiwan, Australia, Nigeria, Uganda, Guatemala and Zimbabwe, to name a few. We were also very happy to be joined by two religious assistants: Fr Russel Murray of the Holy Name Province in the US and Fr Gerald Evans who joined us from Costa Rica.

FORMAT

This series of lectures called: 'Clare's Sisters and their Rules' took place over the course of five Tuesdays from the end of January with two sessions per day. There was a break in between the sessions with an opportunity to ask questions and have a discussion. We recorded the lectures but didn't record the Question and Answer sessions. We distributed the lectures afterwards to the participants. There was so much information to take in that the recordings were a great help to later assimilate the richness and density of the content of the presentations.

CONTENT

Professor Freeman took us through the Rules under which Clare and her sisters lived: Francis's Primitive Form of life, the Rule of Hugolino, the Rule of Innocent IV and Clare's own Rule. He also examined later Rules,



those of Isabelle of France and Urban IV and examined what influence Clare's Rule had on them.

Freeman describes, in broad brushstrokes, three approaches to the early history of the Order: the traditional one, outlined by the Irish Franciscan Luke Wadding in his seventeenth-century history of the Order, in which Francis and his brothers are the main protagonists and Clare and her sisters are the pupils, the more modern approach in which Cardinal Hugolino and the Curia are the contesters of the poverty of San Damiano and the sisters have to submit and a third, less common approach, which consists in examining more closely the details of the life of Clare and her sisters in San Damiano and elsewhere in order to glean, sometimes obscure, information from the monasteries themselves such as the papal bull mentioned above. The third approach, he believes, complements the other two approaches which in his view are too narrow and incomplete. The third approach recognises organic developments within individual monasteries and takes into account the role and contribution of the women themselves. It also allows for the human reality that people learn from their experiences and change accordingly. On this basis and backed up by other convincing evidence, he contends that the practical provisions on daily life in the Rule of Hugolino (like fasting, bedding or going barefoot) were really an attempt by the then Cardinal Legate to codify the practices of Clare's community of San Damiano in the early years, practices which, as the years progressed, were sometimes recognised by the sisters themselves as too severe.

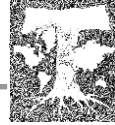


He provided a nuanced understanding of how the Rule of Hugolino was received by Clare and the sisters in San Damiano and other monasteries and, contrary to the prevailing opinion among scholars today, he doesn't think that there is sufficient evidence to hold that Hugolino's Order existed entirely apart from San Damiano. He demonstrates that Clare's Rule was not only approved for San Damiano, but also for some other monasteries. In fact he believes that, with the exception of Assisi and Prague, it is impossible to make a sharp distinction between monasteries "of Hugolino" and those of "of Francis/Clare."

He also approaches the elements of the life of the sisters in an original way. While recognising the importance of the issues of poverty and the 'care and solicitude' of the Friars Minor for Clare and her sisters, he gives equal prominence to the union of mutual love, enclosure and the more practical elements of the sisters' daily life (eating, sleeping, clothing, silence/talking and care of the sick). In fact at one point he said that in his view the 'union of mutual love' may have been the foremost value for Clare.

GAME-CHANGING?

At times provocative, Freeman admits that some of his claims can rouse strong reactions from those who hold different views about the early history of the Order. One sister described them as 'game-changing'. He was at pains to point out that the limitations on our time with him (only ten lectures) prevented him from presenting all of the reasons for his claims. To fill in the gaps, he is currently preparing the lectures for publication as a book. He gave permission for the material of the lectures



to be shared internally among the Poor Clares and requested that sisters addressed their responses, observations and possible objections to his presentations directly to him so that he can consider and reflect on any concerns and include them in his book.

A 'CLARIAN QUESTION'?

As we know, a huge amount of work has already been dedicated to investigating and elucidating the early history of the Order. However this series of lectures gave us a stronger sense of what scholars often point out: that there is still much to be done before a clearer picture of Clare and the early Clares can truly emerge. What made this series of lectures so compelling was the large amount of persuasive evidence provided to back up claims and conversely the willingness of the lecturer to acknowledge how much there is that we (and he) still don't know.

Much attention has been given to the 'Franciscan Question' over the past century. What Freeman's research shows is that a 'Clarian Question' now looms large within the Franciscan family.

A PROPOSAL

Fr Russel Murray, Religious Assistant to the Holy Name Federation, said that the lecture series was "both extremely rich in scholarly content and profoundly challenging to virtually everything that the series' participants thought they knew about the topic." He believes that, in view of the historical moment in which the lectures were taking place - the revision of the General Constitutions - it is important to continue the

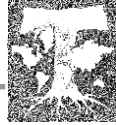


conversation about the topics raised.

He suggested that this might be done in three ways: by the publication of a book based on the presentations, (already underway as mentioned above), by the organisation of a virtual International Colloquium of scholars at which the book could be launched and where the topics raised could be examined more closely, and thirdly, by the publication of a book based on the discussion of the Colloquium in order to make the information available to a broader public. He believes that it is important that these issues be discussed in tandem with the Revision Commission's work so that the significance of our rule and its heritage might be appreciated more deeply and that we might be assisted in discerning how well our revised constitutions will enable us to live our vocation today. Since the revision project is intended to last four years, there would be ample time for both a book and subsequent colloquium to make their contributions to the commission's work.

FORMATION IN COMMUNION

This lecture series was a hugely enriching experience not just for the high quality of the content but also for the sense of sisterly communion we all experienced through it. Although dedicating five Tuesday afternoons was a big commitment for us and no doubt for the others who took part, it was very well worth the effort. Our Federal President, Sr. Bernadette, insisted on having our Federation sponsor this event, which was a blessing for all. The lectures met with an enthusiastic response from all the participants and it was very interesting to hear, during the discussion periods, the responses and reactions of sisters to the various new ideas that were



presented. We concluded this course with a deep sense of gratitude for the dedication of Professor Freeman and so many other scholars - some Poor Clares among them - who devote so much time to helping us understand and appreciate more deeply the charism that has been entrusted to us.

As mentioned above, for now, these talks are only to be used internally by the Poor Clares with the permission of Professor Freeman. Any monastery wishing to receive a copy of the recordings can contact us at: poorclaresgalwayvocations@gmail.com



SISTERS AND BROTHERS IN THE LOW COUNTRIES

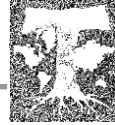
1. Collaboration between Friars and Sisters in the Netherlands

Br Fer van der Reijken, ofm

The Netherlands is rapidly secularizing. From a religious point of view that is a sad situation, but it also offers opportunities!

In 1986, the very first 'Franciscan Meeting' was organized. A weekend for new sisters and friars (from postulants to one last time after solemn profession) of the Franciscans, Capuchins, Poor Clares, and Franciscan Sisters in the Netherlands and Flanders. Through initial formation, the brothers and sisters have already been becoming familiar with each other and each other's spirituality for 35 years. For the formators of the sisters and the friars as well, the 'Franciscan Meeting' is a platform to encounter one another.

Contacts between friars and sisters take a variety of forms. Not only are friars active as the personal pastor of sisters, there are also various friars who have chosen a Poor Clare as their spiritual directress. Communities and Chapters of the friars are sometimes coached or chaired by a Poor Clare, and the reverse is also true. The sisters and friars also visit one another during special, particularly Franciscan feasts, by being present (with a delegation) at transitus celebrations, the vigil of the feast of St Francis or St Clare.



In Flanders, the publication 'The Bond' was the common channel of communication for both the friars and the sisters. Every now and then, a book on Franciscan spirituality is published in Dutch that both a sister and a friar contributed to. (Corveleyn - De Vos; Zweerman - Van den Goorbergh)

On August 2, 2018, a noteworthy initiative started in 's-Hertogenbosch. The 130-year-old convent of the Capuchins had been taken over by the Franciscans, and at the behest of a member of the Secular Franciscan Order a collaboration was set up between Franciscans, Capuchins, Poor Clare sisters, and a couple belonging to the Secular Franciscan Order, to live and work together in this convent.

2. City Convent San Damiano

Michel Versteegh, ofs

Introduction

As early as 1228, two years after Francis's death, Friars Minor settled in the Netherlands, in 's-Hertogenbosch. In 1350, the Poor Clares followed. Around the houses of the First Order, groups of the Third Order formed. After 's-Hertogenbosch was seized by state troops in 1629, it was forbidden to openly profess the Catholic faith. Convents were confiscated, religious brothers and sisters were either driven away or quietly tolerated, as long as they did not enter into the public domain. They remained present and active in clandestine churches. The last Capuchin in 's-Hertogenbosch died in 1761. Only after the restoration of



the Episcopal Hierarchy (1853) did a new foundation of the Franciscan family in 's-Hertogenbosch become possible. In 1897, the Capuchin friars built a convent and church in the new neighborhood 't Zand, just outside the city walls. Later, an office building was added to this (the provincialate) and a building for the Third Order to gather and meet (the Francis house). When the Capuchins decided to sell the convent buildings in 2015, the possibility was investigated of beginning a new initiative here, a collaboration of Franciscans, Capuchins, and Poor Clares. In 2018, the Franciscans bought the buildings and the new project began. At this moment (Spring 2022), the convent is inhabited by six Franciscan friars, one Capuchin friar, two Poor Clare sisters, and two members of the Secular Franciscan Order. Besides these, there are also temporary residents, such as a theology student (for the duration of his studies) and often guests of the Poor Clares who come for a sabbatical (for several weeks or up to several months). When we mention housemates in this article, we are referring to the permanent residents.

Structure

We live under the same roof, but we are three independent communities: a community of the First Order (Friars Minor), a sub-community of the Second Order (as Poor Clares, the sisters are members of the community De Bron, the other members of which live in Nijmegen), and a married couple who both belong to the Third Order (the Secular Franciscan Order does not really have communities). We consider it to be of essential importance that each community has and



retains its own charism, but we support each other and complement each other where it is possible and useful to do so. A number of aspects of our life are realized together. For example, we pray together and eat together.

Moments of prayer

We celebrate the liturgy together, in part in the church (morning and evening prayer or Mass), in part in an inner chapel, the former choir of the Capuchins (midday prayer and compline). All services are open to guests and people from the city who wish to join us. On Sundays mornings there is Mass in the convent church, and on every first Sunday of the months there is an English Mass in the afternoon. For the preparation of special celebrations, such as vigils during Advent and Lent or transitus celebrations on the evening before the feasts of St Clare and St Francis, ad hoc working groups are formed. Our aim is for such groups to always consist of members of more than one group of residents. On Tuesday and Friday afternoon and Thursday evening, the church is open for confession or spiritual dialogue. On those occasions there is also room for silent prayer. For pastoral conversations, individual appointments can of course always be made with the various residents.

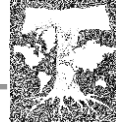
The Poor Clare sisters are responsible for midday prayer and compline. The members of the Third Order and some friars also participate in these services, to the extent that their work does not prevent them. Morning and evening prayer is led in turn by nearly all the residents.



Organization

A coordination team was formed, consisting of members of the three groups: OFM, OSC, and OFS. Various working groups were also formed, each also including at least one member of the three groups. Each community has a weekly chapter meeting, where decisions are made that concern only that community. Matters that have consequences for more than one community are decided by the coordination team. The various opinions of all the residents are taken into account. In practice, this means that sometimes a proposal is made by one community, this is discussed in the coordination team and subsequently in the other communities, after which the decision is made during a following meeting of the coordination team. The coordination team meets every other week and consists of the Guardian and the Vicar of the friars, a fixed representative of the Poor Clares, and a fixed representative of the OFS members. The latter is also the chairperson of the coordination team. Sometimes, there are matters that cannot wait until the next planned meeting of the coordination team and an ad hoc meeting of the team is organized. All the housemates are informed of the decisions of the coordination team by means of a digital bulletin, which is sent to everyone within a few days of the team's meeting.

Matters of long-term policy are discussed among all the housemates once every two months in the house meeting. This meeting is led by an external chairperson. Subjects that have already been elaborately discussed in these meetings are how we wish to pray the Liturgy of the Hours and how we experience and wish to express hospitality. Once a month, we have a communal evening



recreation, and we regularly meet over coffee and tea. Special events, such as birthdays and anniversaries, are celebrated together as much as possible.

We make sure that the three communities are represented as much as possible in the working groups and committees (garden group, activities committee, liturgy committee, etc.). For all the tasks that do not belong specifically to one of the groups of residents, a person has been appointed who is the first one responsible, as well as someone who can step in if the first person is absent or detained for a longer period of time. This list of tasks is evaluated from time to time and revised when necessary.

Vision

Together, we composed a vision paper. In essence, our vision comes down to the following: “City Convent San Damiano is formed by women and men who have chosen to follow Christ in the footsteps of Francis and Clare of Assisi.”

Within the convent, this means:

- that we belong to different communities which each have their own characteristics and autonomy;
- that the primary responsibility for living together as brothers and sisters lies within that own community, where we care for one another;
- that we, each on the basis of our own charism, seek commonalities and respect differences;
- that we wish to live in community with others, but leave room for personal freedom. We support each



other in our weakness and vulnerability. We seek one another's happiness:

- that we pray and eat together and encounter each other. Together, we take up the responsibility for our common home.

And externally:

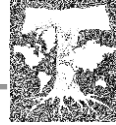
- We are aware that this is a project in development and are therefore open to everything that crosses our path. We deal with such things in a flexible way, so that this is a dynamic process.
- We are aware that we are part of a greater whole and are frugal and conscious in our use of what mother earth offers us.
- We are part of the worldwide Roman Catholic Church, are brother and sister of all Christians, and are hospitable and open to people with different views, seekers, doubters, and non-believers.

Our openness and hospitality for all people of good will takes shape concretely in our daily life of prayer and pastoral and social care. In this, the city where we live is the first focus of our attention. We give shape to a simple and well-considered form of prayer and liturgy in which, on the basis of a valuable tradition, we keep trying to fit in with the faith and the world of the people of today.

To list a few points

Prayer and Liturgy

As stated above, everyone can join in with the Liturgy of the Hours and the Masses (Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday) in the church. Three times a week there is the



opportunity for a more profound conversation or confession (Tuesday and Friday afternoon and Thursday evening).

Coffee to go

The pastoral care for the homeless in 's-Hertogenbosch has found accommodation in our City Convent. There are two afternoons a week (Monday and Thursday) when homeless people (also called 'our friends of the street') are given coffee or tea in a large parlor. On Monday afternoon there are people there from the foundation 'Loods' ('Guide'), which tries to help people of this group to gradually regain employment. On Thursday afternoon the pastor of the streets has his office hours. Besides this, there is a service led by the pastoral care for the homeless in our church every first Saturday of the month. And every day of the week, homeless people can ring the doorbell of the convent for a cup of coffee and a nutritious cookie. Many people make use of this opportunity.

Open garden

The convent has a beautiful, large garden. That is something quite special in the middle of the city. So sometimes, we share the garden with visitors. On appointment, or on one of the Saturday afternoons that we open the garden for free access. Visitors can also take a meditative walk there and ponder some themes from the spirituality of Francis and Clare.

A 'greener' life

We are trying to lead a 'greener', more sustainable life. On a structural level by, for instance, a better insulation of the windows; and on a small level by -



where possible - opting for more environmentally friendly groceries, for example. This is a field that challenges us to live in a creative and conscious way.

Separate and together

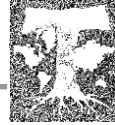
Because 's-Hertogenbosch is also a cathedral city, there is much attention for collaboration with the diocese wherever possible. There are also warm connections with the Dutch Protestant Church in the city and we are looking for opportunities for collaboration.

3. As Poor Clares, the sisters realize their contemplative life within the larger whole of the City Convent

Sr. Beatrijs Corveleyn, osc and Sr. Elisabeth Luurtsema , osc

It is our experience that our current times call for a more intense collaboration between the First, Second, and Third Order. Precisely through our different vocations and forms of life, we can complement and inspire each other. The City Convent gives us the room and the possibility to experience and realize this under one roof, but each according to our own vocation. Within the larger whole of life together in the City Convent, we as sisters feel the challenge to live our contemplative vocation with care and dedication, in a setting where there are many activities and areas that call for attention.

We give shape to this in our daily timetable, in the choice of activities that we either do or do not actively



contribute to, in planning and experiencing our monthly day of reflection and the yearly retreat week here in the convent. The clear demarcation of the times of silence and the quiet hallway (enclosure) where the sisters have their rooms create the necessary conditions for this. There are many tasks that the sisters do in silence and for the benefit of all. For example, liturgical tasks (sacristan, arranging of flowers in the church) or digital tasks.

We value this close collaboration, not only because our Franciscan and Clarian spirituality is so dear to us, but also because we want to let others share in this in a simple way. By living and working together like this, we join forces in a time of decline within the Church of Western Europe. Together, we can also show people a sign of fraternal and respectful coexistence, in a society marked by so much division; a society that strongly emphasizes individual self-realization, which causes much loneliness, also spiritually. We can show that we



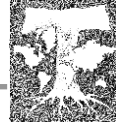


can live together respectfully with the different charisms, in the midst of a society that places the individual front and center. Our contemplative dimension in the convent has an added value for both residents and guests. Guests often join in our prayer services; something there would be much less opportunity for if there were only two services a day.

We are a project that is under construction. Sometimes that means pioneering, sometimes fumbling and seeking: How do we deal with this? Do we join in with this or not? Sometimes it also means reaching limits, because not everything that is inspiring or fascinating or good is also possible. Our first concern in this is always that we live and give shape to our own charism with care. That is the foundation of our life here, that the rest of the construction is built on.

In our experience, City Convent San Damiano is a good place to live, pray, and work as followers of Saint Clare.





FROM THE POOR CLARES IN LOS ÁNGELES - CHILE

Today we are invited to share in the life of a monastery of the Poor Clare Sisters of St Clare.

Almost literally: at the end of the world, behind an imposing mountain range lies Chile, and in it a community of Poor Clare Sisters. Our beautiful country is a vast strip of land stretching from the desert in the north to the Antarctic in the far south. It is surrounded by the Pacific Ocean to the west and the Andes Mountains to the east. We have the most varied landscapes throughout the length in this narrow country, which is why it is popularly said that when God made creation, he hid everything that was left over behind the mountain range.

Here, after the discovery of America, the Franciscan-Clarean history was born, and has contributed so much to the development of evangelisation in this remote land in our continent.





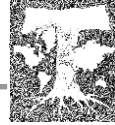
We would like to share with you the rather unusual beginnings of the Order here in Chile. To do so, we remember with appreciation the sisters who have preceded us, allowing themselves to be guided by the hand of God with fortitude of soul and a loving heart. We invite you to get to know this fascinating history.

History

In order to speak of the origins of our Order in Chile it is necessary to go back to the year 1571, in the present city of Osorno, when three ladies of Spanish origin: Isabel de Landa, Isabel de Palencia and her niece Isabel de Jesús founded the Beaterio de las Isabelas, which was called the Monastery of Santa Isabel, attached to the Franciscan Third Order. It is recorded that in 1571 that home (which already had seven professed nuns and two novices) was established as a convent by the Franciscan provincial Friar Juan de Vega.

In 1600 the city was invaded by the natives and the sisters were forced to take refuge in the Fort along with the other inhabitants of the city. They stayed there for about three years. Because of the constant indigenous siege and the precariousness in which they found themselves, the last inhabitants of Osorno began to flee towards the south of the country, heading for the nearest Hispanic enclave, which was the city of Castro. On the long journey they suffered great hardship and lacked the necessities.

As soon as news reached Santiago of the ruin experienced in the towns in the south, a ship was prepared with provisions to help the inhabitants of these villages. On board this ship was Br Juan Barbero,



together with two lay brothers of the Order of St Francis. Their mission was to collect the "Isabelas" and bring them with them to this city. Thus they began the journey to Valparaíso, and then arrived in Santiago.

In 1604, the 13 surviving sisters of the long pilgrimage professed the Rule of St Clare. Soon after their arrival, the first monastery in Chile, was founded. in the capital on Alameda Street, on the land currently occupied by the National Library. It was there that the charism of St Clare was brought to life in our country (and remained) for three centuries. In 1913, a great earthquake devastated the country, leaving the monastery premises in poor condition. The Community moved to its new monastery located in Calle Eusebio Lillo, in the Recoleta neighbourhood, to continue its contemplative life. They remained in this place until 1972, when they moved to





Puente Alto, where the Old Monastery of Santa Clara continued to function.

Our Monastery of Santa María de Los Ángeles was founded on March 19, 1974 in the city of Los Ángeles, Province of Bío-Bío, at the request of Msgr Orozimbo Fuenzalida, then Bishop of the Diocese.

Four sisters from the Old Monastery of Santa Clara in Puente Alto left to bring the Clarean charism to the southern part of our country. On their arrival in Los Angeles they settled in a small house on the former Highway 5 South. The beginnings were very difficult, as in every foundation, and our sisters lived in total abandonment to Divine Providence, joyfully entrusting their lives to the Lord. As the years went by, different spaces became necessary and were built to make that small house into a monastery of contemplative life, They began welcoming the new sisters that God was giving them in this diocese even as they were building.

The Lord made the community grow and in his Providence a new monastery was built which is now located on the outskirts of the city in a very beautiful place which we call the "Hill of Assisi."

Closure of the Old Monastery of Saint Clare

What has deeply marked the history of our country have been the terrible earthquakes that weaken our structures so that they can not last over time. The last one occurred in 2010 and the Old Monastery of Santa Clara in Santiago (from where our foundation arose) suffered structural damage that made it uninhabitable.



From that moment the sisters moved to live in the Infirmary, which was the last pavilion built. Its structure was built with more resistant materials than the rest of the Monastery which was made of adobe.

They continued to live there, with joy and Franciscan simplicity, adapting to the circumstances, and to the changes resulting to the fact that it was a small place. This meant, that they did not have the usual spaces: church, refectory, cloister, work room, parlours, etc... Added to this was the decrease in the number of sisters and the lack of vocations.

After a long process of discernment, of searching for a new place to build (since the reconstruction of the monastery itself was too expensive), and of considering the possibilities in the face of the difficult reality that was being experienced, it was decided to close the



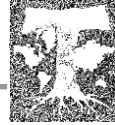


monastery in October 2017. It was undoubtedly a very painful step, especially as it was the first Poor Clare monastery in Chile. However, God also spoke in the midst of these circumstances and pain, and gave them the strength and grace to close the monastery. Two sisters from the Old Monastery of Santa Clara asked to join our Community. One of them was the one that 43 years ago gave us life by giving up four sisters for this foundation in the south of the country. In them the Lord gave us a rich inheritance of tradition and history -- the legacy of all the Poor Clares who for more than four centuries gave themselves to God in the fertile silence of the cloister, taking care of all the details of divine worship and leaving a deep mark on society through the work carried out within the Community, the most famous of which is the scented ceramics.

The Situation of the Order of Saint Clare in Chile

At present there are only two monasteries of the Order in our country. It is worth mentioning that for centuries the Old Monastery of St Clare established only one foundation that prospered in time, and in the same city of Santiago, which meant that our spirituality was not spread to other cities in Chile.

It is also necessary to consider that the monasteries of contemplative life in our country are few, which means that there are many Dioceses that do not have one in their ecclesial life. Moreover, the current vocational situation is going through difficult times. The decrease in vocations has led to the closure of various women's monasteries, especially in Santiago de Chile, the city where most of the monasteries are located.



Because of the historical reality that we have shared above, it led the Orders to look for a safe place to establish themselves and not risk the vicissitudes of the times of conquest in the various regions of our country.

Over the centuries this reality changed, and some Orders established foundations outside the capital of the country.

Today our Community is composed of 15 sisters: 13 solemnly professed and two novices. We have only two older sisters, who belong to the group of foundresses: Mother Margarita María (94 years old) and Mother María Luisa (85 years old), so we can say that we are a young Community.

The place where we live - far from the city, at a certain altitude and surrounded by a beautiful valley - favours silence for the encounter with God. That is why many brothers and sisters of faith come here to have a moment of prayer or to spend a few days of retreat in the guest house. Groups from parishes or schools also come to learn about our life and to deepen the themes they have dealt with in catechesis or with various groups. For this we receive them in the Locutorio and some sisters will share with them about various topics and especially to create awareness that every form of life is a vocation and each of them requires discernment and the question that Francis of Assisi asked himself in the past: "Lord, what do you want me to do?"

We are the only Monastery of contemplative life in the Diocese, a focus of spirituality for so many hearts thirsty for God, to which many brothers and sisters come asking for prayer for their needs. The porter's lodge and the telephone become places of welcome and



listening to the most diverse situations that afflict them, and which lead us to offer our lives to the Lord with renewed commitment every day.

From this remote part of the world we ask the Lord for the grace to live with fidelity the charism of St Clare and to be able to witness to it in the concrete place where He has called us, immersed in the reality of our Diocese, of our country, of our brothers and sisters who trust so much in our prayerful mission, and of so many who do not know that we pray for them. We ask for this grace for each of our sisters throughout the world, so that our life given in the silence of the cloister may be a sign of God's closeness to the world.

We unite ourselves each day in prayer, living the joy of our vocation as Poor Clare sisters. With all our fraternal affection!



We received

FRATELLI TUTTI... SORELLE TUTTE! (BROTHERS ALL... SISTERS ALL!)

Sr. Marie de Jésus, osc - Libreville, Gabon

Introduction

'Fratelli tutti'. With these words, St Francis of Assisi addressed his brothers and sisters and proposed to them a way of life marked by the flavour of the Gospel. Of the counsels Francis offered, I would like to select the one in which he calls for a love that transcends the barriers of geography and distance and declares blessed all those who love their brother "as much when he is far away from him as when he is with him". In his simple and direct way, Saint Francis expressed the essence of a fraternal openness that allows us to acknowledge, appreciate and love each person, regardless of physical proximity, regardless of where he or she was born or lives. (Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti* (=FT) 1).

Dearest brothers and sisters in Christ, dearest beloved sisters,

The Lord Our God, Father of mercies, full of goodness for all his children, grants us all that we need to know and love Him and flourish in Him in every period of our history and our lives. The gift to our Church of our Pope Francis and the extraordinary documents he gives us is truly providential, and we cannot let them pass us by after a distracted reading, especially we members of the Franciscan family because St Francis of Assisi (and all



Franciscan spirituality in general) inspires these documents enormously. As I read and meditated carefully on *Fratelli tutti*, I had the desire to share with you this meditation and what it inspires in me for our lives as Poor Clares and as Christians today. Our Pope really does resemble a modern St Francis. As our Mother St Clare did with many of the words of her elder brother in the faith, we can only translate "into the feminine" what our Pope Francis says to us today: *Fratelli tutti*, *Sorelle tutte!*

The Encyclical letter *Fratelli tutti* of our Pope Francis was a cry, a prophetic call to which we Poor Clares, daughters of St Francis, cannot remain insensitive, but it must return to us, challenge us in a special way. Providentially, this Encyclical arrived shortly after *Cor Orans* and *Vultum Dei quaerere*, which invited us to draw closer to one another in fraternal communion and inter-community mutual aid.

Called to Merciful Love

FT 2: "...Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters."

In our communities and federations, even if we find it difficult to recognise it, there are also poor, abandoned, sick, marginalised sisters, whom we could call "the least". The one to whom I feel less attracted, who apparently has fewer qualities and more faults, who



tires me, who irritates me, who has lost her physical or intellectual capacities, whom I cannot forgive... But we often forget that we are one Body of which Christ is the head. Each one of us has, in our body or our character, aspects that we find less successful or that we would like to improve. But despite this, we do not cut off our ears because we find them too big, but we try to accept ourselves as we are and as God has created us. As St Paul says (cf. 1Cor 12:23-24), we treat the parts that seem less decent with more decency and respect. How do I treat my sisters when they seem to be in trouble when they upset me? Do I myself never have a crisis in life? Don't I have sides that are also difficult for others to bear?

I would like to quote here the words of Pope Francis, who invites us to kindness in our interpersonal relationships (cf. FT 224): "Kindness frees us from the cruelty that at times infects human relationships, from the anxiety that prevents us from thinking of others, from the frantic flurry of activity that forgets that others also have a right to be happy. So often nowadays, we find neither the time nor the energy to stop and be kind to others, to say "excuse me", "pardon me", or "thank you". Yet every now and then, miraculously, a kind person appears and is willing to set everything else aside to show interest, give the gift of a smile, speak a word of encouragement, and listen amid general indifference."

What a great invitation for all of us! If, when I have a hurried and "very important" job, I manage to listen to my sister who wants to explain her problem to me,



which is important to her but surely much less important to me, if I manage to make her problem my own, that is to say, to share my sister's concern, or at least to understand it, I will be able to say to myself that I am coming closer to the Mystery of the Body of Christ because I am coming out of myself and my programme to share my time, my abilities and above all my love with my sister who is coming closer to me. Mother Mary of Jesus, foundress of the Poor Clares of Cameroon and Gabon, used to say: "You must not write "urgent" on your letters; it is ridiculous. It is only urgent to love."

Our Pope Francis tells us: "The ability to sit down and listen to others, typical of interpersonal encounters, is paradigmatic of the welcoming attitude shown by those who transcend narcissism and accept others, caring for them and welcoming them into their lives. Yet "today's world is largely a deaf world... At times, the frantic pace of the modern world prevents us from listening attentively to what another person is saying. Halfway through, we interrupt him and want to contradict what he has not even finished saying. We must not lose our ability to listen". Saint Francis "heard the voice of God, he heard the voice of the poor, he heard the voice of the infirm and he heard the voice of nature. He made of them a way of life. My desire is that the seed that Saint Francis planted may grow in the hearts of many." (cf. FT 48)

What does 'having a brother or sister' mean to me?

A brother or a sister is a great gift that God gives me, as Our Mother St Clare says, "the sisters that the Lord gave me" (Test 7). Indeed, the qualities, the abilities that



God Himself has put in my sister or brother are also for me and the whole family. When we have a brother or sister who succeeds, who is appointed to a high position, for example, if we really love that brother or sister, we are proud of him or her, we rejoice, knowing that this will be positive for the whole family. Our Mother St Clare said to Agnes of Prague: "I greatly rejoice and exult in the Lord on hearing the fame of Your holy conduct and irreproachable life, [a fame] that has wonderfully reached not only me but almost the whole world, and so not only I, but all who serve and desire to serve Jesus Christ are able to rejoice". (cf. 1LAg 3-4) But when bitter jealousy burns the heart, we listen to the whisper of the devil who seeks to divide us by telling us that my brother's or sister's happiness or success will bring me down, making me forgotten or less loved by others. Do I really rejoice when I hear that such and such a monastery is receiving postulants, making progress, etc.? Because, in reality, the success, the progress of a community of Poor Clares is that of our whole Order.

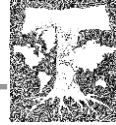
The word "brother" or "sister" is so important, so frequent in our lives, that sometimes we can tend to trivialise it. For each person, it takes on a unique colouring, depending on the first experience lived in the family, the first community. For me, a sister or a brother is not a person who is flawless, perfect, or who is always kind and gentle to me, but it is a person with whom I am bound forever, no matter what. It is a person with whom I can allow myself to be myself without hiding my faults because I know that our misunderstandings (which cannot fail in a family) will never be greater than what unites us, the brotherhood. It is a person who loves me as I am and whom I know will always forgive me. A



brother, a sister, is another myself, the one who is my own flesh, someone I cannot be afraid of. This unconditional love, this indestructible bond that exists in a brotherhood, makes us truer, more spontaneous, and often less delicate with our brothers and sisters than with strangers, knowing that my brother or sister will always remain close to me, that he or she knows me as I am and that I have nothing to prove to him or her or to hide from them. It is a truly free love.

This experience that children have in a family, this experience of human or carnal brotherhood, helps us to understand something of the love that God desires to see between all his children on earth. This is why Jesus taught us to pray by saying: "Our Father", and He tells us well "you have only one Father, and you are all brothers" (cf. Mt 23:8). It is this word, taken up by Our Father St Francis in his first Rule (1 Kings 22:33), which inspired the title of this Encyclical. Jesus was warning his disciples against the desire to be above others or to place anyone above them, and He makes us understand with these words, "you have only one Father, and you are all brothers", that God alone is above men, but above them, because He loves us more and puts Himself humbly at our service, even to the point of washing our feet: this is not an authority that crushes, and this is what Francis and Clare have lived and wanted for their respective fraternities.

I was touched by sharing the experience of our Poor Clare Sisters of Mbuji-Mayi. As soon as a young sister arrives in the community, they call her "Yaya", that is to say, "big sister", to signify that in the community



gathered by Jesus Christ in the footsteps of Francis and Clare, the youngest is not the least, is not below the others but is as worthy of respect as an elder because, in Africa, the elder brothers and sisters enjoy great respect from the younger ones.

Our Pope Francis forcefully reminds us (FT 5) that "God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters". (cf. Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Common Coexistence, Abu Dhabi (4/O2/ 2019)

The simplest things, the most basic things that seem obvious, how we need to remember them, listen to them again, and make them our own in our daily lives! Yes, in my community, in our relationships, in the people who come to us, do I understand that every person, whatever their social level, their state of physical or mental health, their status and function, their abilities, their age, their beauty, etc., is equal in right, duty and dignity? Is he my brother, my sister, my mother, as Jesus reminds us? Do I leave him or her wounded on the road, or do I recognise in the one who suffers my brother, my sister, my child, the flesh of my flesh, Christ Himself?

Do I really consider my Poor Clare sisters from other Monasteries, other Federations, or other countries as my "same father, same mother" sisters?

In Africa, the words "brother" and "sister" are used in the broad sense of a person who is related to me by blood, even remotely, or a brother in the same parish, the same church movement, or a friend. For this reason,



we have an expression for the closest siblings: a brother or sister, "same father, same mother."

Do I really consider my sisters in community, in the Federation or in the Order of St Clare as my sisters, same father, same mother, our common parents being Francis and Clare, and even more so, Our Father in Heaven and Our Mother the Church? Sometimes, unfortunately, the term "sister", rare in the Franciscan Family, would be more appropriate, given what is lived between us. Sometimes there are glances of distrust towards those sisters who are "wimpled" or not, who live "behind the grill" or not, who are called "closed" or "liberal. Was Our Mother St Clare "closed" because she lived in an enclosure?

I had the grace, as a French sister of an African Monastery founded by another African Monastery, to stay in several monasteries of our Order during my visits to Europe, often for health reasons, and, of course, to have many contacts with sisters of our Solofo Kamuti Federation in French-speaking Africa. I have been edified on several points, and I believe that each community, as well as each sister has her own gifts and riches which can help others: fraternal life, the sense of sharing, the practice of poverty, the respect for sisters coming from other countries, the way of celebrating the liturgy of the hours, the provision of places of adoration or prayer for the sisters, the respect for fasting, the abandonment to providence, the respect for enclosure, the generosity in work, the shared joy in recreation, the care and sensitivity towards the older sisters, etc... These are some concrete examples of the various



aspects of our charism lived out in a unique way by the communities I have been able to approach. I believe that we can look at each other with more confidence and fraternal love beyond the different sensitivities: "Always be lovers of your souls and those of all your sisters. And may you always be eager to observe what you have promised the Lord." (Blessing of St Clare, 14-15)

Sr. Maria Hii Lu Keong and Sr. Chiara Alba Mastrorilli, from the Monasteries of Bergame and Louere (cf. cTc N° 55 of May 2020), who seemed to me to be truly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and I thank them very much. I ask God for the grace that this process of bringing us all closer together through a more concrete link of communication and communion may succeed, for how can we love each other without knowing each other? I do not even know in which countries of the world my sisters are present and what they live... I also thank our sisters of Cortona for the cTc magazine and our brothers of the Pro Monialibus Office for their service to our Order of St Clare very much.

(continued on the next number)

UPCOMING ISSUES

A CENTENARY WITHIN THE CENTENARY: *AUDITE POVERELLE*

As you read these lines, the celebrations of the Franciscan Centenary will have begun, a 'jubilee of jubilees' from 2023 to 2026.

In 1225, along with the *Canticle of Creatures*, Francis wrote words "with melody, for the consolation and edification of the poor ladies, knowing how much tribulation they felt because of his infirmity" (cf. Spec 90). They were given to Clare and the Poor Sisters of San Damiano, but ideally to all those who, following the poor and crucified Jesus, recognise themselves in their own inspiration.

We have decided, therefore, to devote great space to the *Audite poverelle* in the next issues of our cTc magazine, as follows:

N° 61 (June 2023): Introduction to the reading and experience of finding the text.

N° 62 (December 2023) : *1Listen, little poor ones called by the Lord, / who have come together from many parts and provinces.*

N° 63 (June 2024): *2Live always in truth, / that you may die in obedience.*



N° 64

(December 2024):

*³Do not look at the life without, /
for that of the Spirit is better.*

*⁴I beg you out of great love, / to
use with discernment / the alms
the Lord gives you.*

N° 65 (June 2025):

*⁵Those weighed down by sick-
ness / and the others wearied
because of them, / all of you:
bear it in peace.*

*⁶For you will sell this fatigue at
a very high price / and each one
will be crowned queen / in
heaven with the Virgin Mary*

You all are invited since now (by June 2023) to send in your experiences and reflections on the theme of the December 2023 issue: that of **vocation** (*called by the Lord*) and the experience of **multiculturality** in fraternity (*from many parts and provinces*), the latter a theme of particular topicality.

The editorial staff



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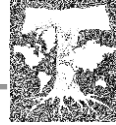
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