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Sr. Francis Ó Brien, osc



Presentation

This issue of *Communion and Communication* gathers, according to the plan drawn up to celebrate the 800 years of the “words with melody” that Francis addressed to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, testimonies and reflections inspired by verses 2 of the exhortation: *Live always in truth / that you may die in obedience* (cf. [cTc 60, p. 68](#)).

Br. Fábio Gomes, OFM, our General Delegate, introduces us to welcome Francis’ proposal by putting into dialogue living ‘in truth’ and living ‘in obedience’ as methods that must “pass through and shine through in everything the Poor Sisters (*Poverelle*) live and they do (p. 8).” And this, not in a hypothetical reality, but in this today which is characterized for us sisters by the VIII centenary of the Stigmata of our Father St. Francis and by the process of revising the General Constitutions, which has reached its third phase and which the Cardinal Prefect of the Dicastery invites us to continue “in order to discern the Lord’s will and be able to implement it in a spirit of collaboration.”

We are then led on a journey across the four continents, stopping by sisters who, in culturally different contexts, but spiritually not so distant, justify the observation by Br. Carlo Paolazzi: “An adverb is enough for Francis, «live always in truth», to remind the ‘poor ladies’ gathered in San Damiano that the gift of their life of poverty, charity, and obedience in the Spirit must be welcomed and lived in the dimension of daily life and perseverance, so that sister bodily death may find the «daughters and handmaids of the most high King, the heavenly Father» industrious and vigilant in carrying out their Lord’s most holy will ([cTc 61, p. 37](#)).”

With the sisters of Nantes we reflect on the challenge that living in truth, unity, poverty, and praise constitutes in



the current context, which is strongly marked by lies, individualism, consumerism, hyper-speed.

The *implantatio* of the Clarian life form in Bomadi, Nigeria, and the end of its presence in Arizkun, Spain, are very different situations certainly; however, they respond to the same need to 'live in the truth': not a subjective truth, but the truth of the Gospel, our only 'rule.'

The sisters in Cincinnati, USA, and in Cantalapiedra, Spain, tell us how this is possible: only through a constant attitude of discernment, of listening to the Spirit of the Lord in order to perceive where and how He is already operating, and where and how he calls us to assent to his work.

"Listening" is the keyword that opens Francis' exhortation and remains the keyword for us: listening to every voice - and the sisters in Aitape, Papua New Guinea, tell us from experience; listening to history and what ferments in it like a grain of wheat in the earth - the sisters in Brno, Czech Republic, know this well, as protagonist witnesses to a great transition of era in Europe.

In a few words, almost with brush strokes, Sr. Mary Andrew of Mbarara, Uganda captures the profound meaning of all of this.

To Live in the truth, adhering to the Word of the Lord until the end, until the definitive Easter: let us remember Br. Enrique Gonzales Arango, OFM, General Delegate during the first years of the millennium, who recently preceded us to the Father's House, and Sr. Bernardette Cotter, OSC, President of the Federation of our sisters in Ireland and Scotland, who was visited by Sister Bodily Death during the time of her maternal service.

Our gratitude goes to each sister and brother who contributed to the creation of this issue.

To all of you who are reading this, I invite you to compose the next issue together around the next verse of *Audite*



Poverelle: «Do not look at the life outside / for that of the Spirit is better. / I beg you through great love / to use with discretion / the alms which the Lord gives you» (vv. 3-4).

Happy reading!

The editorial team

Office Pro Monialibus

Letter of the General Delegate

Dearest Sisters and Dearest Brothers!

May the Lord give you his peace!

The phrase, taken from the first verse of the exhortation written by Francis as a sort of Testament for the Poor Ladies of the Monastery of San Damiano, is the one I want to reflect on with you in this edition of our review, and it is: *'Live always in the truth and die in obedience.'*

In this phrase we mark the presence of two nouns which were extremely important both for Francis and for Clare. Both nouns are preceded by the preposition *in*, and thus they both indicate a way of living, a fundamental attitude which must overarch and colour everything which the Little Poor Ones live and do: in truth and in obedience. Let us begin with the first expression.

"In truth"

The word 'truth' takes us at once to Jesus who, according to the evangelist John, declared himself to be 'the truth'. (*Jn 14,6*). So, we must say that in Christianity, the truth is not simply a concept or a theory but a person, Jesus Christ, with whom we are called to live in relationship, in an experience of encounter and of an ever-deepening knowledge.

To live *'in truth'* therefore, seems to mean above all to live in an ever-deepening personal rapport. As a result, we are unique and irreplaceable with God and on this basis, we discover our own truth, that is our true identity, because, as St. Francis teaches us, 'what a person is before God, that he is and no more' (*Adm 19*). In addition, it means to live in har-



mony with the truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God, who lived in poverty and humility. Therefore, it means 'to follow the poverty and humility of His beloved Son and of his most holy Mother' (*TestCI* 46). So, we can understand how, at the end of his life, in this final text sent to the Poor Ladies of San Damiano, Francis gives an even better explanation of what it means to live *in truth* when he says very exactly that he is speaking about living always in 'this most holy life and poverty'. By this he means always following 'the life and poverty of our most high Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother' (*Last Will and Test* 1-3).

"In truth"

Therefore, rather than a theoretical agreement with some list of the truths of faith, to live *in truth* lies at the heart of the spirituality of Clare and Francis. It is the following of the poor Christ. It is the observance of his Gospel in the context, both culturally and socially, of the community in which we find ourselves, in other words, in our diverse and concrete situations. More than orthodoxy, which is always important and necessary (cf. *RCI* 2,3; 12,13), we are dealing here with orthopraxy, meaning by that an ever-greater conformity of life and fidelity to the *form of life* and the lifestyle lived by Jesus and which was accepted by Clare and Francis as their Rule.

It is exactly this consistency, between that which we profess and that which we live, that the Church means when she invites all those of the Contemplative Life to revisit their legislative texts, an especially their General Constitutions, in order to adapt them to the new approach. This is what the Minister General said in his letter of 27th September 2021, when he said that they should be expressed 'in language more attentive to today's concerns and bearing in mind the journey made in these almost forty years'¹. In this context, I am also sharing with you in this number of *Communion and Communication*, the letter from the Cardinal Prefect of our Dicastery in which he encourages us to continue faithfully with the process of revision.



“*In obedience*”

From all our reflections so far, it has become clear that a life ‘*in truth*’ which Francis speaks about to Clare is an expression of the great openness and closeness to God which has been revealed to us in Jesus Christ and for this reason it must be lived *in radical obedience* to his Gospel.

We are speaking here about an obedience in which we not only live but also die, in other words, in which we persevere for the whole of our existence, observing ‘in perpetuity the poverty and the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ and of his most holy Mother and of the holy Gospel (*RCI 12,13*) because ‘blessed indeed is the one to whom it is given both to walk in it and to persevere in it until the end’ (*TestCI 73*).

Here we touch on the sensitive matter of requests to leave our Order, made by sisters and brothers, even after long years of consecrated life. This not only presents us with the question of *why* they are leaving but also with the *why* of our own permanence. What are the deeper reasons which sustain us with the gift of fidelity and joy in perseverance, and which cannot be anything other than the Lord himself and his Gospel.

“*In obedience*”

In fact, our life and death in holy obedience are founded on that of Jesus who made himself obedient to the Father right up to his death on the cross (cf. *Phil 2,8*). And in the cross of Christ, as St. Clare explains, are the *blessed poverty* and the *holy humility* of his birth and the whole of his earthly life, and these come to a focus in the *ineffable love* by which he obeyed the Father right to the end (cf. *4LAG 19-23*).

I seem to find here a great harmony between Clare and Francis who, in his *Salutation of the Virtues*, specifically unites obedience and charity as sisters who look after each other (cf. *SalVir 3*). On the one hand they enable us to understand that the most authentic motivation for any expression of obedience must always be the love of God and his



creatures and, on the other hand, that it is obedience to the commandments which authenticates the true love of God and neighbour (cf. *Jn* 14,21).

“In truth” and “in obedience”

Thus, we see that the bond of perfection is when love, (cf. *Col* 3,13), truth and obedience meet. This is because, as we have already said, that if love be the deepest motivation for and authentication of true obedience, then the truth will always be lived and spoken in love (cf. *Eph* 4,15) because we are seeking to ‘speak from the heart’³.

It was just this confluence of truth and obedience through love which came about in the life of Francis in the wonderful event of the Stigmata - of which we are celebrating the eighth centenary. In fact, moved by love for Christ crucified whose poverty and humility were obedient to the end, it was through these that Francis received from the Lord in a kind of loving exchange, the gift of the Stigmata. This was like a seal on the truth and authenticity of his life which he had lived in a radical following of Christ (cf. *LM* 12,12).

So, we too, always moved by love for God and His creatures, can persevere in obedience to a following of Christ lived in the truth of poverty and humility.

Fraternally,

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

¹https://ofm.org/uploads/old_site/sites/9/2021/10/110735-MinGen_PresOSC_ENG.pdf

² I refer to the Dicastery’s document on the subject, which is entitled: https://www.vitaconsacrata.va/content/dam/vitaconsacrata/LibriPPDF/Inglese/dono-della-fedelta_ING_testo_stampa-1.pdf

³Pope Francis, Message for the 57th World day of Social Communications. Speaking with the heart “The truth in love” (*Eph* 4:15), in <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications/documents/20230124-messaggio-comunicazioni-sociali.html> .



**DICASTERY
FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED LIFE
AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE**

Vatican City, 25 January 2024

Prot. no. R 77-1/2022

Reverend Father,

Your valued letter of 4th December last, in which you informed this Dicastery about the status of the work of the International Commission for the Revision of the General Constitutions of the Order of the Poor Sisters of St. Clare, has arrived at our Offices.

I thank you for the information and the documentation that was sent, and I am grateful to the entire Commission for the work thus far, done with passion and in a timely fashion for the good of the Order.

In this process, topics of great topicality and importance for the Communities of Sisters throughout the world are being dealt with. As the Commission has already done, I wish to express my appreciation for the prompt responses from the Monasteries.

I therefore invite you to continue along this path, to discern the will of the Lord and to be able to implement it in a spirit of cooperation.

I take this opportunity to greet you in the Lord with the wish, *'Peace and all Good.'*

João Braz Cardinal de Aviz
Prefect

REV. BR. FÁBIO C. GOMES, OFM
General Delegate
c/o General Curia of the Friars Minor
Rome

Audite Poverelle



Francis delivers the Rule to Clare
(*Miniature from the Monastery of Novaglie Codex*)

Live always in the truth and die in obedience...

... Brno, Czech Republic

Vivate sempre en veritate: The story of the Poor Clare Sisters in Czechia

When exactly St. Francis' words with a melody *Audite, poverelle* first sounded in our country, we will probably never know. We know, however, with certainty, that the call of the charism of St. Francis and St. Clare reached us as early as during their lifetimes and has not ceased to sound to this day. The story of the Poor Clares in the Czech Republic is woven from many stories, old and new, known and unknown. We would like to share a few of them.

The first begins with St. Agnes of Prague. From the beginning, she and Clare shared a common experience: both were able to defy the marriage policy of their families and to embrace as a poor virgin the poor Christ.

Their friendship is a testimony of faithfulness to a common love and a common vocation, as well as their joint effort to obtain legal confirmation for their radical way of life. Agnes was probably the first of them who sent her own rule to the Pope. She was severely castigated. Clare was more successful, and she managed to have her rule sent to Prague before her death.

It is well-documented that even in the 14th century the monastery of Agnes of Prague had no regular income.



St. Clare and St. Agnes
(Painting on wood by Susanne Ernst)



St. Agnes shone throughout the Czech Kingdom as a great inspiring example. One hundred years after her death, there were already seven monasteries here. They mostly followed Pope Urban's rule as any other form of life was not acceptable for the society of their time. They left to us beautiful works of art. However, we are in their debt above all for the fact that the name and charism of St. Clare remained alive in our country until the Enlightenment. In 1782 the Habsburg emperor and then Czech king Josef II, famous reformer and modernizer, abolished all Poor Clare monasteries. The seed which St. Agnes had sowed, though, remained in the soil and was about to sprout.

In the 1980s' Czechoslovakia (the then federation of Czechia and Slovakia), a group of young women in the city of Brno decided to live according to the Rule of St. Clare. They knew that under the atheistic regime's restrictions, they were risking prison, but God's call was stronger. They lived together in a small house, went to work normally and, with the help of the Franciscan brothers, in secrecy, under the nose of communist police, attempted to live a contemplative life. A story of heroism and faithfulness to the vocation which, as it seemed then, would never be possible to realize fully.





The canonization of St. Agnes came in 1989 as a miracle and suddenly brought freedom. But also the need for a new orientation. At the invitation of Sr. Thoma Wüpping osc, the whole group moved to the Monastery of Poor Clares in Paderborn, Germany, to gain experience of life in a



Sr. Thoma and Mrs. Müllerová, on the day of the dedication of our new Monastery, 1st November 1997

monastery. Preparations for the canonical foundation of a monastery in Brno started there. The vocations gradually crystalized. Some sisters left, others came. In 1994 the first group of sisters, led by Sr. Thoma, returned to Brno to supervise the construction of the monastery in Soběšice.

Soběšice is a small village now attached to the edge of Brno. Another story of faithfulness is linked with it. Soběšice also experienced in its history that Josef II abolished its village chapel as superfluous. The locals have never come to terms with it. During the 20th century they tried twice to build a new one. One attempt was thwarted by the Nazis, the other one by the Communists. All seemed lost. However, Mrs. Otilie Müllerová did not allow her dream about a chapel in Soběšice to be taken away. She tirelessly lobbied for a new church with the bishop of Brno and when she accidentally met Poor Clare sisters there, looking for a building plot, the stories came together and they celebrated a happy ending at the dedication of the new monastery in Brno-Soběšice on 1st November 1997. In 2006, our monastery was canonically erected and Sr. Thoma was elected the first abbess. She did not return to Paderborn till 2012. And in 2022 we cele-



brated 25 years since the return of our order to the homeland of St. Agnes of Prague.

Currently, our community consists of ten sisters from Czechia and Slovakia. We live a contemplative life within papal enclosure, but the specific of our monastery is close connection with the parish community of Soběšice. It is both a claim and an enrichment for us. Spiritual care for both the parish and us is provided by the Franciscan Brothers from Brno-Husovice. We also have excellent relations with other contemplative monasteries in our country: Capuchin Sisters, Dominican Sisters, Carmelite Sisters and Norbertine (Premonstre) Sisters from the monastery in Doksany, where St. Agnes of Prague spent part of her childhood. All the monasteries had the same starting line and same conditions after the Velvet Revolution and dissolution of communism, so joint formation meetings have been a great encouragement and a real help to us since the very beginning.

The story of the Poor Clares in our country is a story of many stories. A story of destruction and rebirth, a story of faithfulness on a small and large scales. The faithfulness of the Paderborn sisters, who did not succumb to the temptation to keep several of the 'young vocations' for themselves. The faithfulness of Sr. Thoma, who went with us to our country initially for two years, eventually staying – despite of the pitfalls of the difficult Czech language – for eighteen years. The faithfulness of Mrs. Müllerová, who simply did not





let her dream go. The faithfulness of sisters who live here today, as well as those whom the Lord has sent to us to meet Him and the truth of themselves and to learn that their true vocation leads to a different place.

But above all, this is a story of the faithfulness of the Lord, who truly stands by the calling He once gave. Even where one fails, God, who offers new beginnings just at the places, where we people come to an end.

Sr. M. Benedicta Lišková, osc





...to Aitape, Papua New Guinea

Live always in truth...

Listen, little poor ones! It's all about listening: we Poor Clares in Papua New Guinea are very fortunate that we were given a monastery in a rural area. All day, every day, we hear a great variety of birds singing in praise of their Creator, each in their own language. But one flocks' song is: "Thank you, thank you", how can we not pause and add our hearts' voice to theirs? Sometimes their call becomes more urgent: "Thank you true, thank you." After heavy rain, usually quite frequent, the frogs add their song of joy, reminding us that they keep silent in sympathy during the dry times, because so many are dying due to severe drought.

So this is our setting, inviting us to hold our hearts always open to the Lord speaking his truth in our depths and also challenging us to hear the truth of his message, made known to us by one another through example or word, also through those we encounter along the way.





Our neighbours, and others around us, challenge us by having a much simpler lifestyle than we in our big, spacious monastery.

Many who have so little themselves, bring us gifts of food or money when they request the help of our prayers. We need to live our vocation to prayer and to always keeping close to the Lord – living always in truth – the important value in our life.



We are all children of the same Father, so we live in truth by accepting each one as s(he) is, aware that each of us falls short in so many ways each day. Yet we are firstly beloved children, constantly in need of being forgiven over and over again, a constant reminder to us of our need to also forgive one another.



A further reminder to me is when I pray many times a day: “Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us, your children, now and at the hour of our death”. We ask the help of our Mother Mary to cast sin out of our lives because we are



her beloved children also, and she longs to help us much more than we do, because she wants us always to be friends of her beloved Son, Jesus, and never turn away from him again.

Learning to live each day in the presence of Jesus and Mary, allowing them to lead us to the Father by the light and power of the Holy Spirit, transforms our hearts so that when we are called

...to die in obedience

we may gladly respond, as we have learned to “give ourselves totally to him, / who gave himself totally for us”.

Sr. Regina, osc





...to Nantes, France

Live always in truth that you may die in obedience

«How do you face the challenges of living the truth of our form of life in the current context, persevering in obedience to God in the events of history and daily life?». To answer this question asked from the cTc editorial team, we had a community meeting and we are sharing the outcome of this meeting with you.

First of all, how do the different terms of this question resonate for us?

What do we understand by the expression our '**form of life**', what are the main aspects? Our form of life gives us a framework in which to LIVE "together" and "with Jesus", a life of prayer in "poverty and simplicity", in "withdrawal" from the world, in "fraternal life" lived in "co-responsibility" and "mutual service," with "joy" and with "the desire to have the Spirit of the Lord," throughout our daily life.

And the truth? The Truth is Christ who made himself obedient even to the cross. We have to live the Truth of our form of life: to live the Gospel, together, as Poor Sisters, in truth with ourselves, with God and with others. We were struck by a comment from an Italian Poor Clare sister and the link she made between this call to "live in the truth" and the word "*honestas*" that St. Clare uses in her rule and in her testament, i.e. to do "the right thing." Therefore "to live in truth" also includes discernment.

We are called to live this "life *in truth*" in France, in the cultural, ecclesial, monastic and Poor Clare context of today. In our country, the Catholic Church is becoming a minority after having played a great role in its history. In the confederation, we are facing the closure of many monasteries leading us to review our federal structures. The Church



has also been deeply affected by the sexual abuses crises. So what are the challenges for us and how are we working to address them?

The challenge of truth in a world where lies are the norm in social medias.

To follow Christ who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, we must discern “what is appropriate.” But how do we discern? We are able to move forward when we pray with the Word of truth transmitted in the Gospel and when we go back to our Franciscan and Clarian sources. In our community meetings, we are using the “spiritual conversation” (as in the last Roman synod on synodality). Each sister has a few minutes to express her thought freely without being interrupted by the others. We then have a second round of exchange to deepen the sharing. The conversation then leads to some concrete decisions. Listening to others in their uniqueness and otherness is both important and fruitful.

The challenge to build holy unity and to live the fraternity in a world marked by individualism.

How can we make decisions which take into account both the personal balance of each person and the “common good” in a way which allows us to build the community?

Some concrete examples: to find a balance between community life, work, and the care of the elderly sisters, we have decided, at a community meeting, to stop taking orders from a regular customer for our small printshop (source of income). We have also set up small intergenerational groups of two or three sisters either for various jobs, or to organise times of festivity and “big cleaning” in the monastery. This enables everyone to feel “responsible” as well as sharing the expertise of the elders with the younger sisters. It is through this that we can test out the truth of fraternity. St. Clare in her rule has set up points of dialogue



between sisters like the Chapter and the council which can help us to move forward together in truth.

The challenge of living in poverty in a Western world marked by “consumerism.”

We do not live in great poverty but to accept that the lack of young sisters is perhaps our most obvious poverty. We need help from professionals or volunteers in different areas: in the infirmary, in the garden, for the maintenance of the monastery or in the kitchen. At this moment, the greatest poverty for us is to have a sister who needs to continue her life in a care home. This is a radical disappropriation for the sister herself who, when she entered the monastery, would never have thought that she would end up her life in a care home. It is also a painful situation for the abbess and her council who must take the decision as well as for the community which watches one of its members leave. To live





“the Privilege of Poverty” is to have no other security than the Lord. We rely on him and constantly strengthen ourselves ever more in the theological life of faith, hope and charity. We are able to share in the experience of Saint Francis who, through this poverty found an opening into relationships and was living in solidarity with our brothers and sisters in shared humanity.

The challenge “to live to praise Him”, to give the first place to prayer, and to preserve our life “withdrawn” from this hyper-connected world where everything is moving so quickly.

We receive all kind of requests: requests for broadcasts and programs, to spend time in the monastery to create a dance show, for testimonies... We need constantly to discern how to “bear witness through our life” to the Good News to which the love of Christ urges us and, at the same time, how to remain faithful to our primary mission of prayer.

Over the past year, we have been reflecting on the documents *Vultum Dei quærere* and *Cor Orans*, we have deepened the reflection on the revision of our Constitutions. One of the result of this work has been to set up some guidelines to guarantee a good use of the internet and new ways of communication to preserve an atmosphere of silence and a “withdrawal” from the world necessary for our life, following the example of Clare and her sisters. Without developing any further, we also spoke of other important subjects: the challenge of a healthy exercise of authority in a context of revelation of abuses and the existence of numerous dictatorships; the challenge of caring for our common home and the challenge of fidelity and constancy (and the witness to the joy it gives) in a time marked by a “crisis of commitment.”

In order “to live always in truth and die in obedience”, we have the grace of being able to rely on the support of the Church, so dear to our mother St. Clare. In addition to the



canonical visitation, we had a beautiful experience with the novena for the feast of St. Clare. In June our bishop, in the diocesan magazine, invited us to “realise that it is for the good of our world and our society that we have been sent and that singly and collectively, we have a responsibility to build fraternity and justice in the world”. So as a community we have decided to pray each day of the Novena with one of today’s challenges mentioned in the article such as: violence, inflation, bioethics or even the abuse of power and we looked at how these challenges were actually questioning our charism: the choice of poverty, service and obedience... In this way, challenges of the world became part of the prayer of our community and an invitation to make ourselves more courageous in the Lord for his glory and the salvation of the world.

May He who gave to Clare and her sisters the grace of a good beginning also give to all of us, Poor Sisters in 2024, the grace to flourish in him and to persevere until the end.

The Sisters of Nantes





...to Cantalapedra, Spain

Always live in the truth

If someone were to ask us, "What is truth?" (as Pilate asked our Saviour), it would surely not take us a more than second to answer: Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ is the truth! And so, "*to always live in the truth*" would mean for us to live in Him. Our life as Poor Sisters consists of walking this path of happiness, with our eyes fixed on Him.

For the Sisters, our world, this time in history, as well as our brothers and sisters, are a word from God to which we must respond. We respond to the people of Europe, a continent which St. John Paul II already saw was in need of a stimulus that could only come from renewed listening to the Gospel of Christ. For this, we need to have the Spirit of the Lord, because He alone constitutes the very source from which we can daily live in fidelity to the spirit of truth. This entails a choice **to live in continuous discernment**, with the following question always in our souls: "*Lord, what are you asking of us? Enlighten our understanding so that we may carry out your holy and true command.*"

In our community, the monastery of the Sacred Heart of Cantalapedra (from which we write these letters) we have experienced the need for this "*living in continual discernment*", and we can also proclaim that we are witnesses to the immense blessings that the Father of Mercies gives to those who desire to be docile to divine inspiration. Every day, we understand that fidelity to the truth is never the accomplishment of personal or even community enterprises, however lofty and noble they may be, but is the acceptance and realisation of God's plan for our history here and now. So, what is this history in concrete terms? There are many ways of describing this reality. Spain, like most European countries, has gone from having large numbers of vocations to experiencing a crisis of values and a loss of identity which



has led to predictable consequences. Our landscape, once dotted with thriving monasteries, now witnesses the ordeal of many communities in distress. They see their strength diminishing and closures approaching which, although they will be a 'dying in order to bear fruit', is nonetheless painful.

Six years ago, we had our first experience of the sisters of a monastery that was closing coming to knock on our door. Our community discernment was simple and swift, "If Jesus knocks at our door, then this is his home!" We took in five elderly and dependent sisters. A few years later, another monastery had to be suppressed and we again had the joy of being able to welcome that community. These elderly sisters, who joined the many elderly sisters who were already part of our community, soon changed the face of the sisterhood. The proportion of elderly and dependent sisters in the community was now very high. This is an inestimable richness, but it also brings with its fragility that must be attended to and cannot be ignored. On the other hand, the Lord continues to call young people to follow the charism of Francis and Clare and we cannot but thank the Father of Mercies for this gift of new vocations. Again, discernment is required: How can we provide for the needs of our elderly and sick sisters while also maintaining the form of life desired by our seraphic forebears, a life that does not disappoint those who wish to embrace it? The precariousness of our situation became clear: what was once adequate is no longer so. What once was easily carried out now requires considerable effort. In our experience, essential tasks multiplied in such a way that we couldn't do everything. The temptation we faced was to continue to do things as they had been done ("we've always done it this way!"), while coping by doing things more quickly, becoming more efficient, and eliminating what could simply be done without.

We are very grateful to God that this situation shook up our community, and the voice of our mother St. Clare resounded strongly: *"One thing is necessary, I bear witness to that one thing and encourage you [...] to always see your*



beginning. What you hold, may you hold, What you do, may you do and not stop [...] believing nothing, agreeing with nothing that would dissuade you from this commitment or would place a stumbling block for you on the way, so that nothing prevents you from offering your vows to the Most High in the perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you.” Our discernment was clear. To live in truth, faithful to our way of life, we had to continually assess both what had to be retained and what had to be let go of; what we had to do and what we had to abandon. Lots of changes had to be made, which put our creativity to the test: rearranging the timetable, eliminating work which clashed with the caregiving of our sisters, giving up attractive projects which were incompatible with the new situation, adapting our fittings, extending, building, demolishing.

Again and again in our Chapters, we asked God for His Spirit to discern how He wanted us to live in the Truth of His Will. Every change came at a cost, but we had great peace in the knowledge that we, like the people of Israel, were continually guided by a pillar of cloud or fire. When our seraphic mother fled from her father's house, she had no plan either. She went to the church of St. Paul knowing that she would remain there *“until the Most High would provide another place.”* This disposition guided not only the beginnings of her vocation but her entire existence. Thanks to this, at the moment of her death, Mother Clare could say to her soul *“go safely because you have a good escort for the journey.”* She knew this "escort", the One who had accompanied her all her life — the Spirit of the Lord who inspired her to love totally and who showed her how she could please God.

As we conclude these few words, it would not be fair if we did not underline that this whole experience has shown us, in a very powerful way, the beauty of living in the truth of the Gospel. The Lord has poured into our community a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running



over, and providence has manifested itself in an outpouring of generosity. The sisters whom the Lord has given us, full of wisdom in their old age and still desiring to live their profession in truth, have given us marvellous examples of poverty and detachment, walking as pilgrims and strangers, deprived of everything, and embracing the Poor and Crucified Christ alone.

Let's try to give you an image that will illustrate the beauty of what the Lord is allowing us to experience! Can you picture a Corpus Christi procession going through our orchard with the Eucharistic Jesus - majestic in his monstrance - escorted by sixteen wheelchairs, pushed by as many sisters vying for the privilege of being the bearers of these "treasures"? It was quite complicated to organise, but it was so lovely! In the words of Pope Francis: *"This is Consecrated Life: praise which gives joy to God's people, a prophetic vision that reveals what counts. When it is like this, then it flowers and becomes a summons for all of us to counter mediocrity: to counter a devaluation of our spiritual life, to counter the temptation to reduce God's importance, to counter an accommodation to a comfortable and worldly life, to counter complaints – complaints! – dissatisfaction and self-pity, to counter a mentality of resignation and "we have always done it this way": this is not God's way. Consecrated life is not about survival, but new life. It is a living encounter with the Lord in his people. It is a call to the faithful obedience of daily life and to the unexpected surprises from the Spirit. It is a vision of what we need to embrace in order to experience joy: Jesus."*

The Sisters of Cantalapedra

¹ 2LAg,10ff

² LCI 8

³ LCI 46

⁴ POPE FRANCIS, *Homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord*, February 2nd, 2019.



...to Cincinnati, USA

**Live always in truth, that you may die in obedience
Always remain willing to listen to what God is calling us
to do (*obedience*) in our current reality (*truth*)**

In 1875 Pope Pius IX sent two women across the Atlantic Ocean to bring the Poor Clare Way of Life to the United States. Mother Mary Magdelene Bentivoglio and her blood sister, Sister Constance, arrived in New York City and began a long and difficult journey, traveling hundreds of miles and visiting many states, to seek a diocese that would welcome a contemplative order to this “new” world.

The reality in 1875 was that most bishops were looking for active religious sisters to assist with schools, orphanages and hospitals. There was very little interest in welcoming contemplative sisters.

Finally, in 1878, their perseverance was rewarded when the sisters were welcomed in Omaha (Nebraska) and the first monastery of the Order of St. Clare (OSC) in the United States was established.

In 2025 we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the arrival of our Poor Clare Way of Life to the United States. This anniversary holds a special meaning for our Cincinnati community.

With the founding of our Cincinnati monastery in 1990, we finally had Poor Clare monasteries in all the





cities in the United States where Mother Magdelene and Sr. Constance had attempted to establish foundations.

For 125 years we experienced growth (1875-2000). During this time, thirty new foundations were made, both within the United States and in other countries (Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Guatemala, Japan, and South Korea). Although the overall decline in the number of women seeking religious life had arguably begun much sooner, it was not until 2000 that the effects this decline was felt in some of our monasteries.

Our reality was shifting as we entered the 21st century.

From 1990 to 2014 our Cincinnati community grew from three to eight solemnly professed sisters. In 2000, the community became a multi-cultural/multi-national community with the entrance of Sr. Rita, who is originally from South Korea. In 2006 and 2010 we welcomed transfer sisters, Sr. Pia and Sr. Luisa, who are originally from the Philippines. Even within the United States, we have sisters who are from very different cultural backgrounds and traditions. We do our best to learn about each other and grow in relationship, recognizing that our differences can enhance our community life.

Over the years, even though we received fewer and fewer inquiries from women interested in living our Poor Clare Way of Life, we remained committed to our vocation efforts.

We also remained ever vigilant to listen for what God might be asking of us in this 21st century. With faith and trust, we waited for God's plan to be revealed.

In 2018 the next part of God's plan for us was revealed. Our sisters in Memphis (Tennessee) contacted us after they had discerned the need to close their monastery and wanted to explore the possibility of one or more sisters transferring to Cincinnati. This was not a quick process, but required a lot of discernment, planning, and even the assistance of a facilitator. Accepting transfer sisters from closing monasteries can present some challenges, especially if age



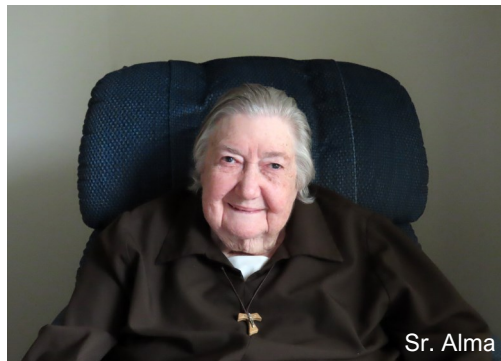
and illness are involved. In June 2019 we welcomed the first Memphis sister, Sr. Alma, to Cincinnati. Several years ago, as part of our community's elder care plan, we made an arrangement with the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur (SNDdN) for sisters to enter their healthcare facility when skilled nursing care was needed. Sr. Alma, at age 89, needing more care than we could manage at the monastery, was the first of us to transition into the SNDdN healthcare facility.

A few months later, in November 2019, we welcomed a second Memphis sister, Sr. Mary Anthony, to Cincinnati.

In the months that followed her arrival, we learned that Sr. Mary Anthony had a serious heart condition that required open heart surgery as soon as possible. To complicate matters further, we were in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through the generosity of the Cleveland Clinic and its medical experts, Sr. Mary Anthony was able to have the surgery needed and to spend some recovery time at the SNDdN healthcare facility before returning home to the monastery.

Our vocation efforts continue. Women continue to make inquiries and some of them come for initial visits and live-in experiences, but no one has reached the point of acceptance as a postulant.

In early 2023, after the death of the abbess in the Evansville (Indiana) monastery on December 26, 2022, one of the four remaining sisters approached us and asked to discern a possible transfer to Cincinnati.





In many ways this situation felt much more urgent, but we still took time to discern what the Holy Spirit was asking us to do.

Sr. Beatrice's transfer from the Evansville monastery presented its own challenges. Sister had not yet completed her two-year transfer process from her monastery in Tanzania, so this meant not only beginning a new two-year transfer process but also consulting with immigration attorneys in both Evansville and Cincinnati, filing additional paperwork with the government and waiting for the necessary approvals. We were blessed to welcome Sr. Beatrice to our community on May 19, 2023.

At the time of writing this article, our Cincinnati community is also in discernment with two sisters from two different monasteries that will likely close soon. One of these sisters has completed a one-month discernment visit with us, and the other sister hopes to visit soon. If these transfers proceed, our community will have a total of 13 solemnly professed sisters (12 in-house and 1 residing at the SNDdN healthcare center). Since our monastery was built for a maximum of 12 sisters - *our present reality in 2024* - our monastery's rooms will soon be filled! We are blessed to be





able to welcome these sisters into our Cincinnati community and are grateful for our benefactors who support our growing numbers and needs.

We continue to experience violence, oppression, poverty and suffering in our world today. Even though some aspects of our reality change over time, our call as Poor Clares to live a gospel life and to be counter-cultural remains a constant. Just as St. Clare and her sisters were beacons of light and hope in the 13th century, living radical poverty and remaining steadfast to their life of prayer and contemplation, we continue to carry that light into the 21st century.

We remain committed to live always in truth and remain obedient to our call.

*sr. Vickie Griner, osc
and the Sisters of Cincinnati*





...to Arizkun, Spain

Go forward with confidence on the road to happiness

My very dear Sisters - Peace and all good!

We have been asked to explain the reasons for our decision to close our monastery and the journey by which we came to take that decision and to move to other communities with freedom, taking into account the reality of our situation.

Our monastery is situated in Arizkun, a small and beautiful town in the north of Navarre in Spain. Here the community has always had good numbers but in recent years, because of the growing infirmity of a number of sisters and the lack of vocations, it has greatly diminished. During January and March 2023 two sisters went home to their Father's house both of whom, although elderly, enjoyed good health. This meant that the community was reduced to six sisters, three between the ages of 55 and 75. The rest were over 85 and, because of their ages, in failing health, physically and mentally.

In the light of all that, our liturgical life and our community life were impoverished, as well as our ability to look after and care for our sisters, to fill the various offices and tasks and to respond to the various situations which presented themselves to us. At this point a question arose in the depths of our hearts, a question which marked out our path for us: 'Lord, what are you asking of us, what are you calling us to which will enable us to continue living our vocation with passion?' From that moment, our prayer and our daily living became alert to the signs by which the Lord was showing us his will.

These months became a time for precious fraternal dialogue, for being accompanied by 'elders' who confirmed the



Lord's path for us and, above all, for kneeling before the Lord with the desire to surrender our entire lives to Him once again in whatever way He was asking in the here and now. We experienced that the greatest gift which the Father of Mercies has given us is our vocation which fills and forms our lives so that they are a gift full of joy, of peace even in sorrow, and full of love. *«Among the other benefits which we have received (and receive daily) from the largesse of our Father of Mercies, and for which we must above all give thanks to the glorious Father of Christ, is that of our vocation...».* (TestCI)

This was why we took the decision to close the monastery. We have been called to a wonderful vocation and we wanted to live it to the full. I have in mind that moment of our solemn profession when the celebrant says: "May God, who as given you the grace of your vocation, grant you to live it fully and to persevere in it until the moment of your joyful meeting with Christ, your Bridegroom".

These unforgettable words resonated powerfully in our hearts, and we had no intention of going back on them. At the same time, we were very aware that in our situation as it was, it was no longer possible to live our calling. For this reason, with all the pain and sacrifice which such a decision would bring with it, all the sisters, in total communion, decided to renew our *fiat* to the Lord, confident that when He asks for a renunciation, He always promises a greater Good.

After speaking about this with the Mother President and the Father Assistant, we began to take our first steps. The first of these, and the most important, was to ask the Lord to show us where He was calling us to be now. We were not asking to choose our monastery ourselves but rather, as at the beginning of our vocation, we wanted to hear His call again, inviting us to live in a particular fraternity with sisters who would be His gift to us.

Listening to this desire in our hearts, we visited some of the communities to which we felt drawn by a desire to get to know the sisters better and to grow in a relationship with



them. With simplicity, we spent time living and sharing together and we were able to pick up an echo of a call which only grew stronger as the months passed. We were moved to see how the sisters welcomed us, how they cared for us and how they have put themselves out to help us and, above all, we were moved by way being with them increased our desire to give ourselves totally to the Lord by following the charism of our spiritual ancestors.

I can assure you that all this is a privilege and that we are deeply grateful to have been able to walk this precious pilgrimage of discernment. It was a time of a second call. It is true that this time was not free from suffering and from great sacrifice. It was a time to live the Cross together with the Lord, especially as we did not all go together to one community, and also leaving our house... so many things which you can guess. Yet already we began to see the fruit of the Resurrection. Out of our "Yes" new life began to flow and we began to walk as our Mother taught us: *«...run even more swiftly, light-footed, treading carefully, so that your stepping raises no dust, be sure-footed, joyful and swift on the path of blessedness.»*¹





We are certain that this is the path of happiness, and we want to give ourselves to nothing less. Suffering is no obstacle to happiness, on the contrary! On so many occasions, we experienced how when we embraced the Cross, embraced the poor and crucified Christ, our pain was changed into a grace and today it has been turned into a pilgrimage of grace. Yes, already today, because every single day we have felt that the Lord was travelling with us, supporting us and guiding us. He did this through the love of so many sisters who have helped us and especially through those who welcomed us into their home, and through the friends who took care of us and through our neighbours in the town who visited us with love and sadness.

The date of our closing is drawing near. We are planning it for the end of June. As the days and weeks go by, everything becomes more concrete. The monastery is gradually emptying. At the beginning of April we took our two eldest sisters to their new community so that we can travel more closely with them at the start of their stay. All the documents have gone to the Dicastery etc. Every step brings a rent in the heart and a tear to the eyes but this wound and these tears are soothed and comforted by that same Lord who invites us to trust in that promise which St. Clare recalls for us: *«If you suffer with Him, you will reign with Him; grieving with Him then you will rejoice with Him; dying with Him on the cross of torments, then you will possess heavenly mansions with Him in the splendour of the saints. Your name will be noted in the Book of Life and among men and women, you will have a glorious future.»*²

Dear Sisters, I would like to end with a text from Adrienne Von Speyr where she places before our eyes and hearts that great hope which awaits us and where she reminds us of the fruitfulness of our lives as co-workers of that same God who gave such fruitfulness to the Virgin.

«Co-operation in the work of grace is always the fruit of a renunciation. Every renunciation lived out with love is fruitful



because it leaves space for the work of God. The Father is always waiting for our consent to show us what we are capable of when God is with us. Nobody has let go of as much as Mary did, in order that God alone can act. That is why God has given to her - as to nobody else, - such a power of co-operation. By her renunciation of all her possibilities, she obtained the realisation of them all to a degree with exceeds everything that humanity has ever hoped for». (The Slave of God)

Pray for us. We also carry you in our hearts as well.

Sr. M. Nieves Ruiz, osc

¹2LAg 12-13

²2LAg 21-23





...to Bomadi, Nigeria

Sharing our experience with joy

*«We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
We will walk with each other hand in hand
We will work with each other side by side
We will speak to each other the language of love
And praise the Spirit who makes us one»*

From one of the interior villages in the creeks of Ijaw land, surrounded by water and giant tropical rain forest trees, our voices echo in unison with all creation in thanksgiving to the One who created us. This is a place where, through listening to the voice of the bridegroom, we, the brides, have come to keep the Gospel light burning in the footsteps of our Seraphic parents. We are unworthy servants to be entrusted with such a noble mission. Therefore each day is a story of how far GRACE has brought us and a testimony of praise.

We are six years old as a foundation, still dependent upon the shoulders of our giants to stand and see farther. It has been six years of varied experiences that we try to put in words because the reality of day to day living varies.





This brings to memory our first beginning here, when we arrived the village in the evening of 21st January 2017 in the company of mother Anuarite from Zambia. Then she was the President of the English-speaking Poor Clares in Africa. She was on a canonical visitation to Nigeria. Also Rev. Fr. Callistus, a Claretian priest and our friend, was there. The small villagers were in awe to see these strangers in their midst. 'Something new has come to stay with us', was their facial expressions as we unload the vehicles. To our ears, their language sounded more like a tongue twisting words with so much repetition of '*emene emene*'. What a miracle that today we can speak and understand this language bit by bit.

On our first outing on a Sunday morning, trekking to church for Mass while praying the rosary, we were shocked to see women and young teenagers bathing half naked beside the river while men were at the opposite side bathing too. It seemed normal to them. It is a small village, but densely populated because young girls start giving birth in their house from the age of 13 or there about without marriage. A woman can have six children from six different men. The youths do not show much interest in the things of God or in education because from childhood they experienced living life in the streets even at night. The things of God did not take root during their initial age. We felt in our hearts that we have a big responsibility to carry out among these our brothers and sisters.

We celebrate daily Masses in our chapel but go to the parish on Sundays. It is only one priest in the parish even till now, and he has the parish and four other outstations to take care of. Some of the outstations don't have Mass on Sundays. So, these outstations in the interior creek did not have Masses during our first three years, because the missionary priest in the parish then did not know how to swim and the bishop could not allow him embark on such mission work through the river. After his transfer, the parish had an indigenous priest who could swim. To this effect, we do not



have Mass on the days the priest would go to the creeks for Mass. We celebrate communion service instead. Our Sunday Mass was affected in a way that we have it on Saturday evening three times in a month and every 3rd Sunday in the morning to enable the priest celebrate Mass in the parish on Sunday morning and meet up with the long journey inside the creeks for other Masses. The labourers are indeed few for the rich harvest.

Our presence has been like a magnetic pole attracting children, adults, flying birds and chickens from the neighborhood to our compound. Every year we invite the children during St. Clare's solemnity and each sister's birthday to give them food, cake or biscuits to make them happy. So sometimes children would gather, ring the door bell and start singing 'happy birthday to you' when it was nobody's birthday. Just that they want to receive gifts or food to eat.





Many of them are from poor families, some don't even go to school. Through the help of our benefactors we were able to pay the school fees of some poor children through their six years primary and also took some girls out to school in a more civilized environment where they will receive good education, moral formation and change of mentality. These young girls now are like models for other girls who did not have that opportunity each time they visited home. Their parents are so happy and grateful.



Ours is a call that came to us individually like to Abram to leave our family and the people we know and love, to a place where God chooses for us. Here we are together still listening to that voice that calls us to 'leave' one thing for the other on daily basis. From prayer to work, to table, recreation, act of charity, sacrifice etc. We are witnesses and instruments of His love, joy and peace.

May His grace and wisdom continue to guide us as we work to bring rich harvest into His kingdom. Amen.

The Sisters of Bomadi



...to Mbarara, Uganda

Live in Truth that you may die in Obedience

My dream led me to Assisi,
Where I met St. Francis.
The Great Singer,
My inspirer.

He was singing a beautiful hymn,
With a special rhythm.
His voice angelic,
It was a lyric.

Living in truth,
Will lead you in a narrow path.
That you may die in obedience,
Fulfilling His ordinances.

Glad to be among his audience,
With Truth and Obedience.
Embracing the Poor Crucified,
In self-sacrifice.

Sharing in his sufferings,
With one's self-offering.
Standing naked,
With Him who suffered.

He who is Truth,
Who became obedient.
Was crucified naked,
And died on the cross.

That for his sake,
And in his Name
You may live in the truth,
And die in obedience.

Sr. M. Andrew Kaggwa, osc

In memory of br. Enrique Gonzales Arango, ofm

On March 2, 2024, the Memorial of St. Agnes of Prague, we were reached by news of the death of Br. Enrique Gonzales Arango OFM, General Delegate *Pro Monialibus* from 2001 to 2006.

We remember him as a good brother, attentive, open to encounter, a beloved Friar Minor who accompanied us believing in the Clarian way of life and in the importance of living it with authenticity in our time. As he wrote when presenting the special issue of *Communion and Communication* (n. 39), on the occasion of the 750th anniversary of the death of St. Clare:

Celebrating this centuries-old memory of the person and of the human and evangelical story of St. Clare must be a Christian and Franciscan moment that leads the Poor Sisters, the Friars Minor and those who recognize in her a gift from God, to a profound reflection, to a sincere revisioning, to a courageous reformulation of the way of being and of thinking about life and the Gospel, in order to be able to learn from the book of the life of St. Clare how one can and one must live today the human and Christian vocation in the Church and in the world. Is this not precisely what we are experiencing in this time of rethinking and reworking the General Constitutions of our Order?





We thank the Father of mercies for having also given Br. Enrique to the “universal fraternity” of Franciscan contemplative sisters. We like to do it in the pages of this magazine which he supported and promoted. As he wrote in the editorial farewell of his service as Director: «Over these five and a half years I have had to worry about the contents of each issue, searching to offer articles, reflections, and sharings that enriched, not so much intellectually as spiritually, those who wanted to approach the magazine to find in it reasons to walk with audacity, lights to illuminate the way, and valid reasons to renew the criteria and behaviors which bring us closer to the truth of the Gospel, to the richness of the charism, and to the duty of positioning ourselves spiritually, intellectually, and vitally (in a practical way) in the moment of grace that we are given to live in today’s world» (cTc 42, August 2006).

In the years since, a word of gratitude from him arrived every time he received a new issue.

Heartfelt thanks, Br. Enrique!

The editorial team



News from the Office Pro Monialibus

Federation of St. Mary of the Angels in Ireland and Scotland

The Federal Elective Assembly of the Poor Clare Colettine Federation of St. Mary of the Angels in Ireland and Scotland took place from 2nd to 8th March 2024.

It followed the death of our former Federal President on a January 31st, 2024, Mother Bernadette Cotter RIP, from the Poor Clare Monastery, Cork.

The changes are as follows:

New Federal President:

Mother Gabrielle Murphy
Poor Clare Monastery, Ennis, Co. Clare. V95 VNP5
Email.: fedpresennis@gmail.com
Mobile: 086 3209911

Councillors

1. Mother Miriam Buckley, Cork (Abbess)
2. Sr. Catherine Kyne, Galway
3. Mother Colette Hayden, Galway (Abbess and Bursar of the Federation)
4. Mother Jemma Hayag, Drumshanbo, Co. Leitrim (Abbess)

*Sr. Francis Ó Brien, osc
(ex first Councillor)
Carlow, Ireland*



**We invite the Federations
celebrating their Elective Assemblies
to send us the names of the elected Sisters
and their Monasteries,
so that we can publish them
in our magazine and in Acta Ordinis.**

Thank you!

◆ ***For your kind attention***

Payment for the FONDO CLARISSE **by transfer.**

For accounting purposes, please send a copy of the bank movement **by fax** to **06 68491414.**

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ORDO FRATRUM MINORUM

Communion and Communication

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