

to bring fuller life to others



*Congregation of the Sisters
of the Sorrowful Mother
Third Order Regular of Saint Francis of Assisi*

April 2013 #1

Dear Sisters, Novices, Postulants and Friends,

“To Bring Fuller Life to Others” is the new title of our Generalate newsletter for the next five years. It will replace *“Seeds of Life.”* We want to take this opportunity to thank the former general council for the reflection topics that were published in the seven issues of *“Seeds of Life,”* including the involvement and collaboration of our sisters, SSM associates, partners in ministry and friends of our congregation.

The topics that will be presented in *“To Bring Fuller Life to Others”*, will closely relate to the ones addressed in *“Seeds of Life”*, particularly issues 6 and 7 which focused on Evangelization and Internationality. All of the issues can be viewed on the home page of our congregational website.

The planning and celebration of our 21st General Assembly provided all of us with an opportunity to look more carefully at the reality of the Church in today’s world. It helped us recognize the need to give a deeper witness to our own faith. By the grace of God, we as a congregation made a commitment to transform ourselves and our communities in order to bring to others the good news of Jesus Christ. This year our newsletter will be focused on the topic of ***Jesus and his Mission.*** We will publish three issues developed around these themes: 1) Who is Jesus; 2) The Mission of Jesus; 3) Called and Sent.

Who is Jesus – *“Who do people say that I am?”* (Mk 8:27) This was the question Jesus posed to his disciples as they walked along the way to the village of Caesarea Philippi. The people had great expectations and many different opinions as well as ambiguities concerning the Messiah. Jesus wanted to motivate and prepare his disciples for the upcoming events of his passion, death and resurrection. Indeed, after having heard the people’s various opinions, he asked his disciples a more challenging question: *“But who do you say that I am?”* (Mk 8:29) Today, these same questions can be asked of each of us: people who faithfully participate in the church and the Christian community, people who listen to the word of God and are nourished by his body and blood, as well as people who are disconnected from the Christian community and no longer live their baptismal commitment.

To all, Jesus is Christ the Son of the living God, the One who reveals the Father’s love through his life, death and resurrection. This is the good news to be proclaimed with integrity to all according to Jesus’ mandate.

*Sr. M. Teresina Marra, SSM
General Superior*

Biblical Reflection

If we want to get to know somebody we usually begin by asking them their name.

Our Spiritual Heritage

The centrality of Jesus in Mother Frances’ life

Experiences

How do we announce Jesus and share the Gospel message with people who are now disconnected from the church and faith issues?

**Who is
Jesus?**

“Who do people say that I am?”

Biblical Reflection

If we want to get to know somebody we usually begin by asking them their name. If we want to know who Jesus is, we cannot miss his “I am – Words” in John’s gospel. Jesus is the center of our faith. What he tells us about himself is summarized in the “I am – Words”. They correlate perfectly with the entire gospel in terms of their internal and external structure.



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Jesus is the “Bread” (Jn. 6:35.52). He is the one who gives bread so that no one goes hungry. (cf. “the feeding of the five thousand”, i.e., the feeding of God’s people with the bountiful gifts of God). But he himself is also the bread we receive in the Eucharist. Jesus not only gives something but he gives himself – his very life, for the life of the world. He himself is the absolute gift, not only the giver!

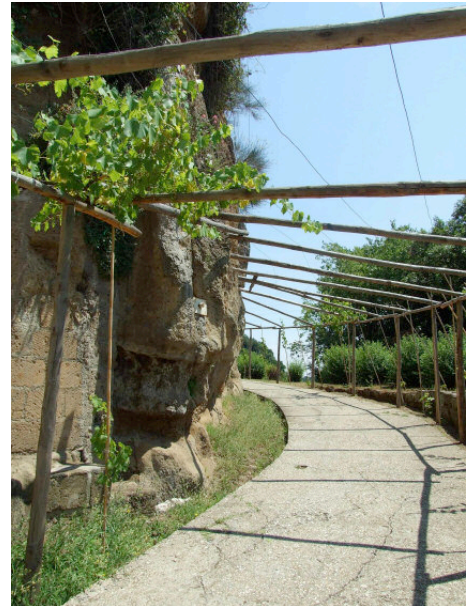
Jesus is the “Light” (Jn. 8:12). He is the one who heals the man born blind and who sheds light on our disbelief and our human weaknesses. Jesus does not ignore those who appear to live in absolute darkness, loving the absence of light more than light itself; instead he offers them the life-giving light of God.

Jesus is “Gate” and “Shepherd” (Jn. 10:7.9.11). He opens the gate to the reign of God for all. He himself is the gate because he not only explains salvation but he brings it about. At the same time, he, as the shepherd, is the one who provides for all that we need for our growth.



Jesus is “Resurrection” and “Life” (Jn. 11:25). He calls Lazarus to come forth from the tomb thus revealing Jesus who waits for us at the end of our earthly life. Through this event, Jesus gives us hope and reveals to us that death now no longer has power over us because He brings to life all those who believe in him and love him.

Jesus is the “Way” (Jn. 14:6). He shows us how our life can be fulfilling. Joys and sorrows are familiar to him. By way of the cross he returns to his father. As the “Way” Jesus is “Truth” because he witnesses not only with his words but with his whole life to God’s love; as the “Way”, Jesus is “Life” because he offers us his life.



Jesus is the “Vine” (Jn. 15:1) He lives in community with his disciples, his “friends”. Even when the disciples are separated from Jesus, they are empowered by him.



The **“I am – Words”** of John’s gospel are both an invitation and a challenge. They demonstrate how Jesus lived with God as his source and his aim. These words call us to follow Jesus who connects us with God, our Father.

Sr. Gudrun Maria Schellner, SSM

*Jesus, You are the Christ, the Son of the living God;
 You reveal to us the invisible God;
 you are the Redeemer;
 You were born, you died, you rose for us;
 You are the center of the history of the world;
 You are the one who knows and loves us;
 You are our companion and our friend;
 You are "the Way and the Truth and the Life";
 You are the shepard, our guide,
 our model, our consolation,
 our brother,
 Jesus Christ: I announce you!*

(Hymn to Christ, Paul VI - 1970)

Our Spiritual Heritage



We follow Jesus as Franciscan religious, according to the vision of our foundress, Mother Frances Streitel of the Cross

(SSM Constitutions, Our Way of Life #2)

“I am the way and the truth and the life...” (Jn. 14:6)

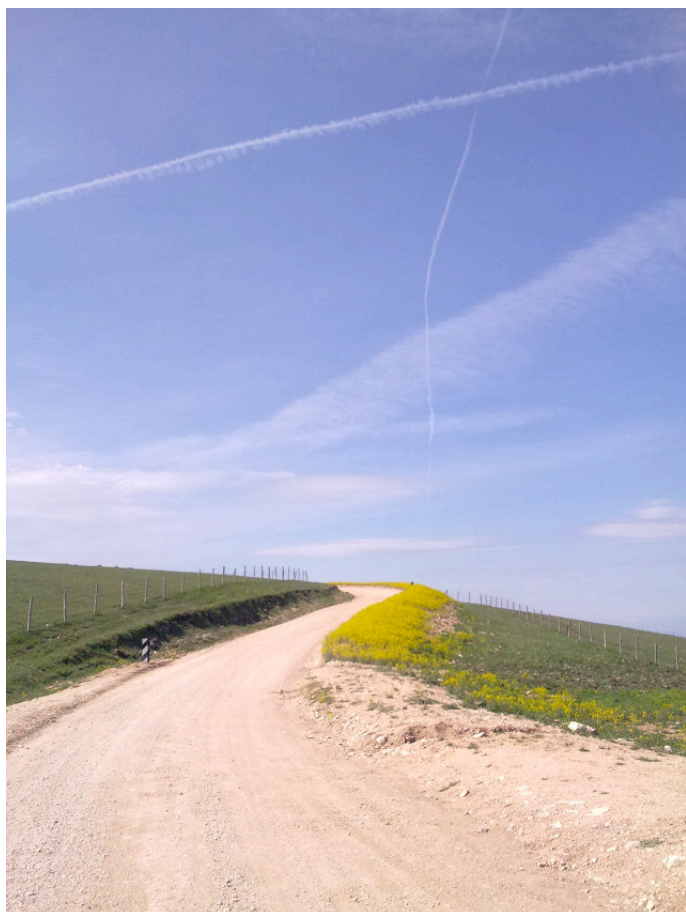
Mother Frances was constantly in search of God’s will for her. This particular aspect of her life always awakens within me a marvel and a wonder. Her openness to God led her to face difficult choices and to let go of her security in order to begin new journeys in response to the call of God.

Surely, “going out, letting go” is a law of life, a life giving movement: the child leaves the mother’s womb to be born; adults leave their families to establish their own families or to make their own life choices; through death we leave this world to enter into eternal life. But we can also see a dynamism of “going out” in our life whenever we have to face changes, community changes, changes in our ministries or our roles, or to face losses. These experiences challenge

us to let go of old images or perceptions of ourselves, to redefine and comprehend our identity in a new way.

Jesus also lived this dynamic through his incarnation—he left eternity and entered our world: *“Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ...”* (Phil. 2:6-7);

Many times in Mother Frances’ life we see this dynamic of “going out, letting go”. Why was Mother Frances a woman who was constantly searching? She was a very talented woman, with many resources and gifts. She, like each of us, experienced many different desires and aspirations within her heart, but Mother Frances was able to have order and harmony in her life, by putting in the centre of her life a very au-



thentic desire: to be for Jesus and with Jesus, uniting her entire being with *“the most holy will of God”* (Tb2 Spiritual Notes 15). Jesus truly found a place in the centre of her life, so her *“soul trembles with joy and exults in jubilation over the voice of the Beloved”* (Letters to Father Jordan 81-2). The journey and mission of St. Francis of Assisi is also led by his desire to be fully united with God’s will as we read in his prayer: *“Almighty, eternal, just and merciful God, grant us in our misery that we may do for your sake alone what we know you want us to do, and always want what pleases you; so that... we may be able to follow in the footsteps of your Son, our Lord Jesus Christ”* (Letter to a General Chapter).

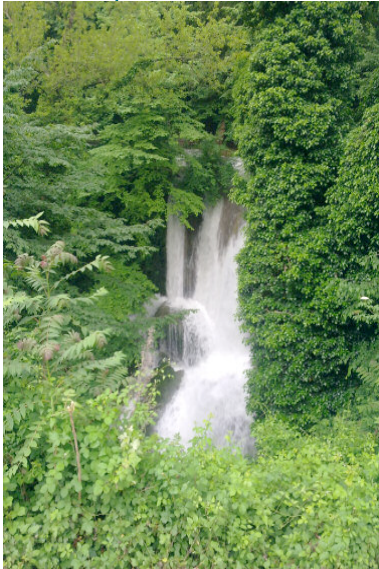


This centrality of Jesus in her life allowed Mother Frances to let go of her security and to be ready to follow God’s call for her and for her congregation. This centrality of Jesus in the life of Saint Francis also allowed him to be always in mission, ready to announce the Gospel.

Like Saint Francis, Mother Frances accepted Jesus as the way, the truth and the life, and this centrality of Jesus in her life allowed her to give herself for the sake of the mission and to offer compassionate service to the poor and the neighbors, in order to be for all a tangible sign of God’s love.

Sr. Samuela Maria Rigon, SSM

Experiences



The **“Year of Faith”** offers each of us an opportunity to renew and deepen our relationship with Jesus through prayer and reflection. It encourages us to build and strengthen relationships and to engage in dialogue with one another which can help us to meet life experiences with faith. It is a call for us to give a deeper witness of our own faith and to make God more credible in this world. It is our hope that this issue of “To bring fuller life to others,” will provide each of us with an opportunity to support one another’s faith, to share one another’s faith and to deepen one another’s faith. So, let us discern together how the Holy Spirit has called and continues to call us to evangelize. As a starting point, we asked sisters and partners in ministry to respond to this question:

How do we announce Jesus and share the Gospel message with people who are now disconnected from the church and faith issues?

Sr. Cathy Hanegan, SSM

In asking how we can make our faith more appealing for people who have distanced themselves from their faith or the church, a prayer from the 14th century immediately came to my mind. It says: “Christ has only our hands to do his work today. We are the only Bible that the people of today will read. We are God’s last message, written in words and deeds.” I must put these words into action both in my life and my work. By my actions I hope to encourage others to learn and to understand the redeeming message of Jesus Christ so that they too can experience it as both freeing and meaningful.

Andrea Kahl
High School Teacher, Austria

***You are holy, Lord, the only God,
and your deeds are wonderful.
You are Good, all Good, supreme Good,
Lord God, living and true.
You are beauty, You are gentleness.
You are protector, You are our guardian and defender,
You are courage,
You are our haven and our hope.
You are our faith, our great consolation.
You are our eternal life,
Great and wonderful Lord,
God almighty, Merciful Saviour***

(Praises of God - Saint Francis of Assisi)

Outreach to those disconnected to the Church

1. Primary is to pray to the Spirit for guidance in our approach, and bring them to the Lord in our prayer.
2. By our non-judgmental attitude of respect, acceptance and kindness. Let them know we are available if they have any questions or just want to talk
3. Through the people in their lives who are “connected to the Church”
 - * encourage them to be open and accepting vs. blaming, disowning
 - * invite them to parish activities, e.g., fish fry, picnic, etc.,
 - * offer: “if you ever want to talk...”
4. Invite them to “Catholics Returning Home” programs

Sr. M. Lucille Flores, SSM

Coordinator of RCIA and Adult Faith Formator, United States



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We, who consider ourselves Christians, laity and ecclesial hierarchy, in order for us to be credible witnesses of the Gospel, need to “let go” of the lavish “tradition” of wealth and free ourselves from the bonds of power that many times have poisoned the authenticity of the Gospel message.

In order to be credible witnesses of the Gospel, we have to draw nearer to the reality of today’s world in humility, simplicity and poverty. We need to understand this reality and be drawn into it through the wisdom of the heart, in order to reach the women and men of today.

We can do this only if we return to the original way of proclaiming the Gospel message by offering with more passion a newer, fresher model that is more convincing, inviting and joyful.

In order to be credible witnesses of the Gospel, we need to announce the beauty, effectiveness and validity of the message of the Gospel with authoritativeness, conviction and joy (television is good at doing that). We need to have the same persistent love as the Father, “*for he makes the sun rise on the good and bad alike, and sends the rain to fall on the just and the unjust*” (Mt. 5:45). We are credible witnesses if we are able to welcome the Gospel into our lives with enthusiasm, live it with commitment and joy and willing to make sacrifices when necessary.

When we commit ourselves to return to the original way of proclaiming the Gospel message, our personal proclamation and testimony can attract and engage people, including those who are disconnected from the church and faith issues, as well as help others grow into a more mature and responsible faith.

Bruna Aquilino

Retired Teacher and Parish Volunteer, Italy

To announce Jesus means to bear witness to the One who accepts you as you are, but he doesn't leave you the way he found you. In my experience, this was the announcement of Christ that I received and that I still believe touches the hearts of all, in particular those who are distant and/or disconnected. Our apostolate is for the service of all whatever their need may be, whether it is healthcare, education or evangelization. We are called to welcome everybody who comes to us, even those who do not share our faith. They can help us present the One who, still today, offers himself as a neighbor to all of humanity, who gave his life on the Cross and daily gives his

body in the Eucharist. As I reflected on this question, many faces appeared before my eyes, among them the face of a young pregnant woman who did not choose to become pregnant. This Christian lady arrived at our ambulatory following an abortion. I had met with her at her home a few days after her abortion. She shared with me her pain and her shame. She also told me that she was afraid to come to our clinic, and how surprised she was that when she did come, we asked no questions, we just took care of her, without judging her and that we accepted her just as she was in her physical and moral pain. This total acceptance without judgment gave her the courage to bury the little body of her child and to confess her sins. This is the Jesus that we are called to announce as individual sisters and as a community, this is the Jesus who came to free us from our slavery (Lk. 4), if we allow him to enter into our lives.

*Sr. Cinzia Maria Tonetti, SSM
M.D., Ifunde, Tanzania*



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“Who is Jesus for you?”

We want to offer you the opportunity in this first publication to once again speak about Jesus and rediscover the joy of our faith through the reflections and testimonies. In order for us to share the truth and beauty of Jesus' saving mission we need your assistance, your openness and willingness to share your faith and life experiences.

Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!

(Redemptoris Missio #2)

“Who is Jesus for me?”

**You can write your answer
clicking here**

