The Franciscan Times

A Publication of the Third Order
Society of St. Francis
Province of the Americas

Pace e bene

Fall 2026

"The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters": A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas

A Personal Journey Shaped by Francis — October 2026

Dear Sisters and Brothers, peace and all good!

I am grateful for the invitation from *Franciscan Times* to share something of my personal story and, especially, my hopes for the future of our beloved Province of the Americas.

My name is Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro. I was born in Guatemala, in the heart of Central America, and, for many years I have lived in Costa Rica, where I have spent an important part of my family, professional, and ministerial life.

I am a priest of the Episcopal Church of Costa Rica and, by the grace of the Most High and Good Lord, a professed brother of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis.

My Franciscan journey began long before I joined the TSSF. In 1985, I entered the Order of Friars Minor, where I received a formation deeply rooted in the spirituality of St. Francis and St. Clare of Assisi. For approximately fifteen years, I shared in the life of the Franciscan fraternity — an experience that forever transformed my understanding of the Gospel, the Church, and human relationships.

Over time, my vocation found new expressions. Family life, marriage, fatherhood, priestly ministry, and educational service taught me that following Christ in the spirit of Francis is not limited to any particular form of religious life. Franciscan spirituality can be lived in the home, in the workplace, in the Church community, and amid the social realities of our time.



In 2021, I began my formation journey in the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis. It was an experience of reconnecting with my spiritual roots and, at the same time, discovering an international fraternity united by the desire to live the Gospel through prayer, simplicity, and service.

Since June 2022, I have had the responsibility of accompanying the formation of our sisters and brothers in the Hispanic American Region. This ministry has allowed me to become familiar with their stories, their vocational journeys, their difficulties, and their hopes. It has also confirmed my conviction that Franciscan formation is not simply about transmitting knowledge, but about accompanying processes of personal and communal transformation.

The Rev. Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro, Newly Elected Minister Provincial, Province of the Americas

Continued on page 3

The Franciscan Times
is a publication
of the Third Order
Society of Saint Francis
Province of the Americas

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Table of Contents

News from Chapter 2026

From Our New Minister Provincial from Costa Rica,
Rev. Jorge Anibal Urrutia Castro 1

From our new Bishop Protector,
The Rt. Rev. Jos Tharakan, Bishop of Idaho.....5

From John Rebstock, English-Language Formation 7

From Keith Oglesby, New Formation Guardian.....**9**

Mother Earth Calls Us

Living Through the Spokane Fires by Finn & Jean Pond 10

Mother Earth Calls Us to a Franciscan Renaissance by Gordon Kubanek, An Introduction to "Responding to the Cry of the Earth: Steps Toward a Franciscan Renaissance" by Jeff Golliher (hyperlinked).....12

Milestones: Welcome the Newly Professed.....13

Elizabeth Roehm.....13

Oliver Hartner.....13

Karen Allen-Thomas.....14

Milestones: Rest In Peace.....14

Brian Thomas.....14

Mary Lou Hall.....15

Nancy Hammer.....15

Allison De Foor.....16

Eleci Passos Neves, ...17

Don Josephs.....19

John Long.....19

Peter Miller.....21

Book Reviews.....21

Andrew D. Mayers, *Stars in the Same Firmament*
reviewed by Weston Cook.....21

Bill Blaine-Wallace *Mending the Space Between* reviewed by Beverly Hosea.....25

Art.....26

Tertiary Treasures from the Past: Works of Louise Mangini, Gary Ost..23

St. Clare and St. Francis of Assisi in adoration before the Child Jesus. (1603-51) Gerard Seghers painting.....12

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters” (cont.)

An Election I Receive as a Call to Serve

During the Provincial Chapter held in October 2026 in Mississauga, Canada, I was elected Provincial Minister of our Province of the Americas.

I received this election with gratitude, humility, and a profound sense of responsibility. Being the first Latin American elected to this ministry in the history of our Province holds special significance for me. I do not interpret it as personal recognition, but rather as an expression of the richness and diversity of our fraternity.

Our Province of the Americas is an extraordinarily rich and diverse community. We share the same Franciscan vocation, yet we live in different countries, speak different languages, and belong to a wide variety of cultural, social, and ecclesial contexts.

This diversity is one of our greatest gifts. It also presents challenges for communication, participation, and a sense of belonging.

My hope is that we will move toward a Province in which no sister or brother feels distant, invisible, or excluded because of language, geographical location, age, or personal circumstances.

We need to strengthen the bonds among our regions, create opportunities for encounter, and listen especially to those who, for various reasons, have had fewer opportunities to participate in provincial life.

Fraternity does not mean that we all think alike. It means learning to recognize one another as sisters and brothers, even when our experiences, perspectives, and opinions differ.

St. Francis expressed one of his most fundamental experiences in these words: “The Lord gave me brothers.” This statement can also guide our provincial life: we have not chosen all the people with whom we share our vocation, but we have received them as gifts from God.



Group Picture of Chapter 2026, Mississauga, Canada,

Continued on page 4

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters” (cont.)

Some Hopes for the Future

I do not believe that the future of our Province should be built around a project belonging exclusively to the Provincial Minister. We need to discern it together by listening to our fraternities, to those who hold responsibilities of service, and to every sister and brother who wishes to contribute.

Nevertheless, I would like to share some convictions that I consider important for our journey together.

Strengthening our spiritual identity. Prayer, study, simplicity of life, and service must continue to be the foundation of our vocation. In a society marked by haste, individualism, and uncertainty, our Personal Rule of Life can help us offer a witness of serenity, hope, and faithfulness to the Gospel.

Renewing formation and accompaniment. Franciscan formation does not end with profession. We need to accompany one another throughout our lives, strengthen processes of vocational discernment, and provide formation resources that are relevant to our different cultural and linguistic realities.

Opening pathways for new vocations. We must pay particular attention to younger generations and to those seeking an authentic spirituality that is engaged with the world. Our task is not merely to increase the number of members of the Order, but to share a way of living the Gospel that can inspire others.

Strengthening communication and preserving our provincial memory. I hope to promote closer and more consistent communication among our fraternities, while also recovering the stories and testimonies of those who have gone before us. Knowing our history will help us recognize the gifts we have received and build our future with gratitude.

Deepening our commitment to justice, peace, and creation. Franciscan spirituality cannot be separated from human suffering or the challenges facing our planet. We are called to accompany those living in poverty, migrants, and excluded people; to work for reconciliation; and to care for creation as a concrete expression of our love for the Creator.

These priorities should not become simply additional activities. Rather, they should help us live more authentically what we have already promised as Franciscan tertiaries.

Eight Hundred Years Later: Living the Gospel Today

Our provincial election took place in a particularly significant year: the commemoration of the eight-hundredth anniversary of the Transitus of St. Francis of Assisi, who died in 1226.

This celebration invites us to look back with gratitude, but above all, to ask ourselves what it means to be Franciscans in the twenty-first century.

Francis left us more than an admirable story. He left us a way of understanding and living the Gospel, a continuing invitation to conversion, fraternity, simplicity, and an encounter with Christ in the most vulnerable.

Today we need to ask ourselves: How can we be instruments of peace in increasingly polarized societies? How can we live simply in cultures dominated by consumerism? How can we build fraternity amid so many divisions? How can we make Christ's love visible through our daily lives?

I am convinced that our Province has much to offer the world if we are able to live our vocation with authenticity and joy.

Continued on page 5

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters” (cont.)

Walking Together in Hope

I begin this ministry aware of my own limitations and conscious that no one person can face alone the challenges of a Province as large and diverse as ours.

For this reason, my first hope is to help strengthen our mutual trust and our willingness to walk together.

I wish to listen to our sisters and brothers, learn from those who have served before me, value the experience of our fraternities, and accompany with particular care those who are going through difficult times.

I deeply believe that Franciscan authority finds its true meaning when it helps others grow, creates opportunities for participation, and enables the gifts of every member of the fraternity to be placed at the service of others.

As I begin this new chapter, I return to the words of St. Francis: “The Lord gave me brothers.”

Today I can say with gratitude that the Lord has given me sisters and brothers from many cultures, languages, and nations. In this diversity, I discover a manifestation of God's generosity and an extraordinary opportunity to live the Gospel in fraternity.

I do not know everything that the coming years will bring, but I trust that if we remain united in prayer, open to discernment, and committed to service, the Holy Spirit will continue to guide our Province.

May we not seek to be a Province considered important because of its structures, but rather a fraternity recognized by its love. May we be concerned not only with preserving what we have received, but also with passing on the Franciscan charism to future generations with faithfulness and creativity.

May the Lord grant us the grace to walk together in humility, joy, and hope.

Peace and all good!

Br. Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro, TSSF
Provincial Minister
Province of the Americas
Third Order of the Society of St. Francis

Spanish and Portuguese Versions of the letter are found on page 29-34. Click here

The Bishop Protector: A Ministry of Presence

The Rt. Rev. Jos Tharakan, Our New Bishop Protector

When Francis wrote his Rule in 1223, he asked that a cardinal be appointed “governor, protector, and corrector” of the fraternity so his brothers would always remain at the feet of the Church. The Bishop Protector of the Third Order, Society of St. Francis, carries that same calling today. The role is not that of a superior. It is that of a companion who keeps the Order rooted in the wider Church while it lives its Franciscan charism with integrity and joy.

The ministry begins in prayer: praying with and for the Order, offering retreats, preaching on feast days, and meeting with leaders and members when invited. It continues in quiet accountability, reviewing the Rule and constitutions, encouraging sound formation, and offering counsel on governance and ethics.

In difficult seasons, the Bishop Protector becomes a steady, impartial presence through conflict, transition, or a member’s struggle. In the wider Church, the role is advocacy, affirming

Continued on page 6

The Bishop Protector: A Ministry of Presence (cont.)

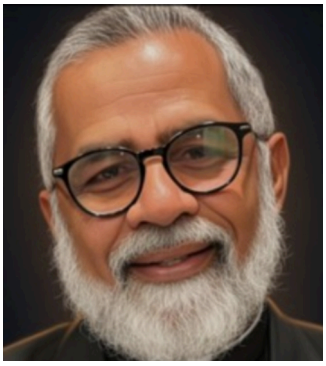
the Order's witness and helping its life be seen and supported. At chapter, the Bishop Protector opens in prayer, offers reflection, and listens while the community discerns.

This is a ministry of presence, blessing, and encouragement, never control. It is the humble service Francis asked of all his followers.

Taken from the Episcopal Church in Idaho Website (https://www.episcopalidaho.

Bishop Jos Tharakan was born and raised in a traditional and devout Roman Catholic Eastern Rite home in Kerala, India. His parents and four siblings grew up in a poor but religiously rich and diverse place, among Hindus and Muslims.

After completing High School, at 15, he joined the Religious Order of Friars Minor Capuchins, First Order Franciscans. He was ordained on December 30th in, 1994 and served in the North Indian Missions of the Capuchins. While in Delhi, he served as priest and chaplain to the Missionaries of Charity of St. Mother Theresa and was blessed to know and work with her. Besides being the Assistant Director of the Media House Publication Center, he was an itinerant preacher, music composer, spiritual director, Theology Professor, and interim High School Principal for St. Paul's and Holy Angels in Uttar Pradesh, India.



At the invitation of Bishop Andrew J McDonald, +Jos came to the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock and served in the diocese until the day of Pentecost in 2001. Then he moved into Chester, AR, a small town of 98 people. He lived a simple life there and worked on a cow farm, caring for 900 cows. After completing eight units of Clinical Pastoral Education in San Antonio and Pine Bluff from 2001 to 2003, he returned to Chester and started a successful business – USLinx – providing internet access to poor and rural communities. In 2006, Bishop Jos was received into the Episcopal Church and served Christ Church, a small mission in Mena, and All Saints in Russellville, AR.

During these years, he presented popular teleconferences on Pastoral Care and Complementary Healing through the University of Texas and taught the same in hospitals and the CASA Retreat Center in Scottsdale, AZ. In 2004, he received a certificate of recognition for his innovative Healing Ministry presentation for Chaplains at the International Conference of the National Association of Catholic Chaplains in Kansas City, MO. His workshops were also approved for Continuing Education Credits for Chaplains and healthcare workers. His CAMPaM Network was officially approved through the Association of Clinical Pastoral Education.

In 2015, he founded the House Of Blessings Foundation, a non-profit renewal center for clergy and laity to grow spiritually. Being technology-savvy, Bishop Jos designed several websites and church apps, including the one for the Diocese of Idaho. Bishop Jos is also a nationally commissioned Centering Prayer Facilitator through Contemplative Outreach and a member of Spiritual Directors International. Before he was elected bishop of our diocese, he served as rector of St. James Episcopal Church, Springfield, MO. He is currently serving as the Bishop Visitor for the Anglican Dominican Order of Preachers

Bishop Jos is married to Kimby, a preschool teacher and a children's minister. They have six children and four grandchildren. They also have a dog named Mia and a cat named Bunny FuFu. Bishop is a published author with books and music on Amazon. You can download his music on iTunes, Spotify, and other distribution sites.

English-Language Formation—The Outgoing Guardian's View

John Rebstock

What does it mean to enter formation with the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis (TSSF)? Is it a journey of personal deepening? A chance to receive affirmation and support from a community of fellow seekers? A learning experience, a nurturing of our relationship with God, or a welcoming into a faithful community that is changed by our presence and depends on our participation? Is it a time of discernment, of identifying the qualities and goals that matter most in our lives, and building habits that help us live them out? Is it the spiritual groundwork for a lifelong commitment to follow Jesus in the way of St. Francis, alongside others who share that calling? And might it mean falling in love—perhaps anew—with Jesus, Clare, and Francis? Yes. It is all of these.

I have served in TSSF's formation ministry since shortly after making my life profession in 2007. Over the years, I have watched the program change, while those aspirations have remained our guiding lights. As I prepare to hand over the role of Formation Guardian, I'd like to share a brief look at how our approach has evolved—and what has changed most recently.

From Paper to Participation

When I first became involved, formation took place almost entirely in writing. In-person classes were possible only in the occasional fellowship area with enough participants. Aspirants developed a personal Rule of Life and, once it was approved by the Formation Director, were assigned a one-on-one Postulant Counselor. For at least six months, Postulants sent the Counselor a written report each month and received a written response. Their reports reflected on how they were living their Rule and on their reading of the formation handbook, *Forming the Life of a Franciscan*.



After about six months, the Counselor reviewed the Postulant's file and mailed it to the Assistant Formation Director. If all was in order, the Postulant could be approved to become a Novice. The same reporting format continued throughout formation, with periodic reviews and files passing from one leader to another for successive approvals. At some point, Counselor assignments were changed midway so that participants could benefit from another tertiary's perspective.

The process was thorough, but it was also paperwork-heavy. Beyond fellowship gatherings and Convocation, Postulants and Novices had few opportunities to interact with one another or with other members of the Order. The community dimension of formation was there in principle, but not always woven into the experience itself.

A More Holistic Approach

In early 2020, just before the pandemic began, I became Formation Guardian. That year, a work group appointed by Chapter studied the program and recommended changes, which were introduced in 2021. The new approach gave each stage of formation a clearer focus, encouraged more group interaction, and offered conversational, interactive reporting as an alternative to written reports.

Postulants focused on learning about, developing, and living by their personal Rule of Life, while continuing to work individually with a Counselor. First-year Novices explored our Principles, Franciscan history, and values in a group with fellow Novices and

Continued on page 8

English-Language Formation (cont.)

professed Mentors. Second-year Novices explored our Ways of Service—Prayer, Study, and Work—in a group, while also working one-to-one with a Counselor. Online conversations at each transition point replaced the former sequence of reviews and mailed files.

The new system was popular and successful. Participants had more chances to learn together, share experiences, and support one another. But the administrative demands remained substantial. We were still managing written accountability and extensive files, along with hierarchical team structure. Now we also had interactive meetings, using sometimes temperamental technology, and a larger group of volunteer leaders with more complex responsibilities. It was time to simplify.

Making the Work Sustainable

In 2025, we began lightening the administrative structure and simplifying oversight. Rather than relying on periodic reviews by a hierarchical team, we entrusted accountability to group leaders, who could respond to participants' needs in real time. We also continued dividing leadership responsibilities among several roles, making the work more manageable and sharing the responsibility for this important ministry.

Today, the process begins with Janet Wakefield and Judi Thomas, who welcome Inquirers with written materials and occasional Zoom information sessions. Ellen Rutherford, Aspirant Guardian, guides Aspirants through the application process and then refers them to Victoria Logue, Postulant Guardian. Victoria assigns each Postulant a one-to-one Counselor. This stage remains largely as it was reshaped in 2021. After about six months, Victoria helps determine readiness to move on to the Novice One team.

Learning in Circles of Community

Harvey Hill, Novice One Guide, welcomes each new Novice to the Novice Circle and issues the Novice Permission Form. The Novice rite takes place with the fellowship. Afterward, Novices meet monthly with one another for worship, study of our Principles and Franciscan values, and sharing from their own experience. Rick Bellows serves as Lead Mentor, supported by a team of other professed Mentors.

After a year, the Novice One team refers each participant to the second-year Novice team. Terry Hurlbut welcomes the Novice to Nexus—Novices Exploring Our Service. Lucinda Dyer serves as Lead Mentor, alongside other professed Mentors. The group meets monthly to hear from a Franciscan engaged in an interesting form of service. Novices also share their own experiences in living their personal Rule.

After about a year in this stage, the Novice writes to Chapter to request approval to make a lifetime vow. By then, formation has offered not only study and discernment, but also relationships, shared worship, and opportunities to put Franciscan values into practice.

New Challenges

Historically, the Order has had approximately 35 people in formation at any given time. In 2026, that number is approaching 60. We have little control over when people come to us, but major world events, including the pandemic and the 2024 U.S. presidential election, seem to have prompted more people to seek a deeper spiritual community. The most recent bulge in our pipeline is now in the Novice One group, which has tripled in size over the past year.

Our formation efforts are also reaching beyond familiar geographic boundaries. In Guyana, Charles Roland expressed interest in expanding formation in the country's hinterland at the 2023 Provincial Convocation. He subsequently began a formation group in his village and in

Continued on page 9

English-Language Formation (cont.)

other areas. Max Sklar visited in 2024 to assist, followed by barbara luz bennett in 2025 and Charlie McCarron in 2026.

Supporting formation in Guyana presents distinctive challenges, including geographic remoteness, language differences, and limited technological infrastructure. The Order is working to determine how best to support this growing effort, recognizing that the call to Franciscan community extends across distances and cultures.

Gratitude—and the Journey Ahead

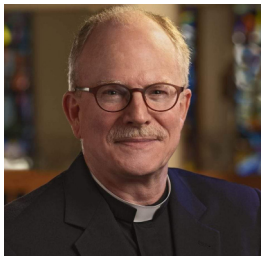
My term ends on December 1, and after seven years I will hand responsibility to Keith Oglesby. Keith has served as a Novice One Mentor and as an Assistant Formation Guardian.

I am grateful to all the leaders who faithfully carry out this ministry of welcome, spiritual growth, and community-building. Formation has changed in its methods over the years, but its purpose has remained steady: to help people discern their calling, grow in relationship with God and one another, and prepare for a life of commitment in the spirit of Francis and Clare.

Our formation program is, truly, an all-of-the-above effort.

Keith Oglesby, New Formation Guardian

The TSSF Formation ministry welcomes people exploring the Third Order as a way to follow Jesus according to the life and teaching of St. Francis. For those who decide to enter the process, mentors and guides walk with postulants and novices as they learn more about Franciscan faith and develop and live their personal Rule of Life. This leads many to profession while others may use their time in formation to discern another spiritual path.



John Rebstock has faithfully and lovingly served the Third Order as Formation Guardian for the past seven years. This has included twice reworking how TSSF does formation to simplify it and make it more communal and personal. John's gifts include a keen intellect, deep faith, and a kind heart. His gifts have brought many blessings to the Order.

In the summer of 2025, John suggested my name to Minister Provincial Charlie McCarron as his possible successor. After much conversation and prayer, I agreed. Charlie nominated me and Chapter elected me on October 7, 2026 to a three-year term as the new Formation Guardian as of December 1, 2026.

My agreement to become Guardian is based first on the need of the Order. I have experience working in complex organizations in business and in the church. I have learned the importance of listening and working across differences to produce healthy relationships and fruitful results. My goal is to facilitate that type of listening and cooperation across all phases of our formation process

My priority as Guardian is to continue the spirit of inquiry, acceptance, and love that characterizes the best of TSSF Formation. Our goal continues to be to support each person as they move through the stages of our process and hopefully make their profession.

It will also be important to coordinate initial formation within TSSF with other vital ministry areas such as Fellowships, Chaplaincy, and Lifelong Formation, so tertiaries are loved and supported throughout their Franciscan lives.

Keith Oglesby, New Formation Guardian (cont.)

I am grateful to John and all the Formation mentors, counselors, and leaders who have been involved over the years. Especially over the past several months, I appreciate how John, Janet Fedders, and many others have worked to further streamline the formation process for all involved.

I trust these next three years of serving you will be filled with God's grace. The witness of Third Order Franciscans to make Christ known and to work for peace and justice is critical for our world today.

Mother Earth Calls Us

The Spokane Fires August 2026

By Finn & Jean Pond

Finn: Our summers are no longer what they once were. Dry vegetation west of us now routinely fuels wildfires, bringing smoke and unhealthy air our way. This summer was worse — three fires invaded Spokane. The fire most threatening to us began Saturday afternoon, August 1st, about six miles from our home. Driven by high winds, it moved rapidly through residential areas toward us. Within hours it was three miles away, forcing our evacuation.

Jean: The first day we left quickly with a few possessions and an unhappy cat. We drove across town, from the north side of Spokane to the South Hill, to stay at the home of fellow Franciscan Beverly Hosea. As we drove, the scene became increasingly surreal. Wailing sirens and clouds of smoke gave way to…nothing in particular. People shopping. Walking their dogs. Complete devastation separated from normality by a matter of blocks.

Finn: As Spokane's population has grown, residential areas have pushed into surrounding foothills and forested areas creating a more vulnerable "wild-and-urban interface", and a conduit for wildfires to find their way into the city. This threatened even our neighborhood, which was considered low fire risk.

Jean: The second day the winds died down and the fire's advance slowed. We returned home to think more carefully about what we could save. Old photograph albums. One Christmas ornament. My father's dog tags from WWII.

I wandered around the house, exhausted, stuffing clothing in garbage bags to throw in the car. Nothing seemed important — or worse, everything seemed equally important.

Finn: In the end, our neighborhood remained safe, but the experience forced us to think more seriously about our attachment to possessions — about what it means to hold lightly to the things of this world, about our connection to the wider community.

Grief and trauma have left their mark—tens of thousands of people were evacuated in the city, some not knowing for days whether they would have a home to return to. Three businesses and over 800 homes were lost in the fires. These losses, (combined with the expense of fighting the fires), are estimated at over a billion dollars.



Jean: The firefighters were utterly heroic and the community has been supportive and giving. But disasters, whether natural or human-caused, are part of this world, and many of us now know that we are more vulnerable than we ever believed. Our experience has challenged us to reach out with greater kindness and compassion to those who are suffering.

Mother Earth Calls Us

Mother Earth Calls Us to a Franciscan Renaissance

Gordon Kubanek, Animator for Creation, Justice and Peace

To live is to experience great joy and great pain. Our journey as Franciscans is to always reach out to heal those in pain, care for those on the margin, and advocate for those with no power — and then to help them transform that pain with joy. Today there is no denying the world encompassing pain and grief that we are inflicting on God's creation, a creation that we were meant to care for and to be the stewards of. We all see the pain that Mother Earth and her creatures are in.

The only question is this: How do we respond? Do we react with the same compassion that Francis did when he hugged the leper he met on the road, which was one of THE key turning points of his conversion, when he became the St. Francis that we know and love. That hope is what we seek to kindle today in our hearts, in our minds and in our souls.

For that reason, we are sharing here a recent Reflection — "**Responding to the Cry of the Earth: Steps Toward a Franciscan Renaissance**" — written by our very own Jeff Golliher (click link).

I live in a part of the world where climate driven wildfires have become a fact of life. I have two daughters who are experiencing the devastating wildfires in British Columbia. And one of Jeff's environmental colleagues in the Anglican Communion was recently evacuated from his home in the same part of Canada. Our TSSF members, Finn and Jean Pond, was recently evacuated from his home in Spokane, Washington. Many others from around the world have been experiencing their own climate and ecological catastrophes. For all those reasons, I hear my soul speaking deeply honest words like these:

> *I'm surrounded by fires and my heart is burning. The sky is smoky with grief.*
>
> *All around the globe the earth is on fire. The air is burning. It's hard to pray.*
>
> *It's hard to hope. But hope I must. I can't stay silent. So, I witness. I feel my cramped heart and wonder how I can allow this grief to not overwhelm me. So, I pray — for clean air and flowing water, for rain and for miracles in the human heart. To be alive today and watch the world burn means you and I must be brave, but I am not brave. So let this be a thread to hold our grief together so we can be brave together. Let us cry together. Another day hope will return but today is my day to grieve the horror of fire that we have loosed upon God's beautiful Earth.*

We have been warned about this perilous dilemma by scientists and by Creation itself, but we have not reacted decisively to the painful cry of the Earth. Yes, we do our best within the bubble of the so-called "normal." But it is very clear that any notion that the "normal" will continue is delusional at best.

We are now paying the price for the war that our culture has declared on Mother Earth. We may think that we are "innocent bystanders," and most of us feel helpless to make an impact that really matters — but as Thomas Merton understood so well, God sees that there are no innocent bystanders and none of us are helpless, as we murder the innocent creatures we were meant to be stewards of. We are God's hands and feet on Earth; and thus, we actually have God's infinite healing power in our hearts, minds, souls, and hands.

A Franciscan Renaissance

I want to conclude this invitation by making this point: While "Crisis is Opportunity" may be an old saying, we strongly believe that it encourages us to transform the ecological collapse we are now experiencing into a new and better life, both for the Earth and people. We also believe that our foundational Franciscan understanding reminds us that the salvation Christ brought to us actually applies to all God's creatures. So, let's remember, as Golliher's reflection emphasizes, that our charism is "*penitence as the transformation of life*." Our charism puts us in a position of responsibility to be leaders in extracting ourselves from the curse of seeing the land as simply a resource to be exploited solely for our benefit. That is why we hope that these reflections will inspire ALL Franciscans to work together to be healers of the Earth and its creatures — that is our crucial role. As Francis emphasized so well, as humankind we are creatures created by God whose task is to be a part of, and not the whole, of God's creation. This, of course, means that deep prayer and contemplation must become action. The actions we take individually will be unique to each of us, but whatever they might be, those actions must step beyond the "normal." We must raise eyebrows, which might make us seem a "little eccentric" [in a good way!]. It means the sacrifice of our old ways, so that new ways of being and living can blossom. And yet, we already know from our experience that this sacrifice actually sets *all of us* free from the old chains that we did not even know we had.

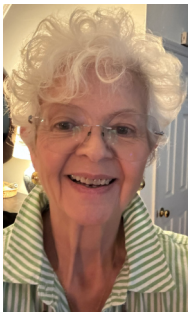
God's Creation is now crying for us to act. To pray. To share. And most importantly, to repent. As we read and discern Jeff's reflection, we ask you simply to follow the last instructions that St. Francis gave to us:

I have done what was mine to do; may Christ teach you what is yours to do.



St. Clare and St. Francis of Assisi in adoration before the Child Jesus. (1603-51) Gerard Seghers painting…

Milestones: Welcome the Newly Professed



Elizabeth Roehm

I am a Charlestonian by birth, and an Episcopalian by choice. I say Episcopalian by choice —raised Southern Baptist confirmed a few years after I graduated college.

Yes, it was a huge, but necessary, leap.

I serve as a choir member and a Eucharistic Visitor at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, which is the first free church in the nation and one of three historically Black congregations in Charleston.

I came to the Third Order through a circuitous route: first seeing a listing for the Order on the Church's webpage in 2009 and feeling a nudge. I feel like I stalked you for several years by returning to that page frequently. However, someone talked me into professing a different Order that was not where I belonged or felt comfortable. Eventually I wrote for information, was released from my previous vows, and returned to the TSSF.org website numerous times as I prayed for direction for months. I found myself reading that webpage daily (doing the Daily Obligation without realizing it) and finally I began visiting my fellowship for months before returning my application a year after writing for it.

Yes, I stalked you, and I freely encourage others to do the same.

The past few years have been a learning experience. I found what I am called to do — intercessory prayer and being a Eucharistic Visitor. I find myself talking with others about Francis, Clare, being a Franciscan, and what it means to live by a rule of life. I'm thrilled to be a Franciscan because of the joy this way of life brings me.

Oliver Hartner



Oliver Hartner grew up in a modest faith-filled home in St. Francisville, Louisiana, as the son of a firefighter and a nurse. Raised in the Episcopal Church, he served as an acolyte from childhood and felt an early pull toward the sacred rhythms of worship. Unable to afford college, he joined the Louisiana Army National Guard as a combat engineer to fund his education, and enrolled at Louisiana Tech before his unit was activated for the Iraq War in 2003.

His deployment brought profound loss, including the death of a close friend, and tested his faith under the weight of combat. Sustained by consecrated hosts sent from home by his priest, Fr. Danny Whitehead of St. Andrews in Clinton, Louisiana, he found in the Eucharist a source of steadiness amid chaos. During this period, he felt compelled to convert to Roman Catholicism, and did so after returning home and completing his degree in English and Classics at the University of Mississippi.

The years that followed brought further trials: his parents' divorce, financial hardship during the Great Recession, and disillusionment with the Catholic Church following renewed scandal. Settling in Columbia, South Carolina, he found lasting spiritual footing at an Anglo-Catholic Episcopal parish, Church of the Good Shepherd, where he began serving as a Eucharistic Minister and Visitor. There he rebuilt his life—finding steady work and establishing a strong community. He met his wife, Rebecca, in 2016, and they now raise their daughter, Virginia, across both Episcopal and Presbyterian traditions.

During the pandemic, Oliver discovered Franciscan spirituality through Bishop Michael Curry's podcast, on which the featured guest, Fr. Richard Rohr, OFM, spoke about the Franciscan tradition. The encounter ignited a new fire in his faith and sent him searching for a way to live out this spirituality within his own Anglican tradition. That search led him to the Society of St. Francis, and on October 17, 2026, he will be professed as a Tertiary (TSSF) — marking the newest milestone in a lifelong faith journey anchored, always, by the Eucharist.

Welcome the Newly Professed cont.)

Karen Allan-Thomas



Greetings my Franciscan Sisters and Brothers,

What joy it brings to share news of my profession on October 4th in Alabama. These past few years of formation have been filled with spiritual gifts, growth, and wonderful people. I am grateful to each of you who I've met via zoom, emails, fellowships, and in-person. A quote from Richard Rhor's *Just This* stands out to me as I've been reflecting on my formation thus far: "We don't manufacture our core identity...We merely awaken it by letting loving people rub off on us, eating the Eucharist, enjoying an entirely sacramental universe, and fully recognizing God's image in all creatures without exception." Thank you all for rubbing off on me through your prayers, guidance, friendship, and care these past few years.

For those I haven't met, I spend most of my time in North Alabama with my wife, The. Rev Mary Catherine Allan-Thomas. Her ministry includes Metagem Institute (https://www.metagem-institute.org/), which has given me the gift of meeting and spending time with wonderful folks from around the country.

I love a long day hiking in the mountains, a slow morning coffee with a good book, meaningful conversations, fellowship around the dining table, the arts, public health advocacy, bird song, and the miracle of the everyday.

I look forward with a joyful heart to the years ahead — sharing in the service, support, fellowship, and love of our TSSF community.

Milestones: Rest in Peace

Brian Thomas — Became a Postulant in 2025



Brian died on October 2.

Brian was a first-year Novice, living in Florida. Sadly, Brian had stage 4 pancreatic cancer, which was diagnosed last May. He wished to pursue formation, has great enthusiasm, and asks for our prayers. He was supported by his loving husband these last days who in turn noted Brian's being in our Order made his pancreatic cancer journey this last year kinder and more positive.

From Richard Pearce

Brian was a carpenter working at East Hill Renovations, who lived with his husband in Florida. He was a mystic, and had a small altar in his breezeway where he felt the call to be a Franciscan. Brian volunteered in a homeless ministry at his church. He was motivated to do this because he was afraid of suffering of homelessness after he himself came close to being homeless earlier in his life. He faced his fear and helped those who Jesus loved.

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)



Mary Lou Hall — Professed 41 Years

One of our Province's oldest members died at 98 ½. She joins her beloved husband, Fr. Allen Hall, who died four years ago was also a tertiary. They were married 75 years and tertiaries together for 39 years.

The date of her death was Sept 20, 2026.

From Allnutt Funeral and Cremation — Macy

While at Ripon College in Wisconsin, she met and fell in love with classmate Allen K. Hall, and they were married in Portland on July 5, 1947. Earlier, Allen had joined the Army and fought during WWII in the European theatre. After the war, he returned and finished his degree at Ripon College.

Mary Lou followed her husband's military career, living in Germany, U.S., and Panama. After the military, Allen began a career at IBM in Boulder, Colorado.

Along with following Allen's career, Mary Lou spent most of her time raising their three daughters. As the girls grew and left the home, Mary Lou continued to volunteer in the Girl Scouts. She was also involved at Northern Colorado hospital as a volunteer, Bookworms, Third Order of St. Francis and Daughters of the King. She started the St. Anne's chapter of Daughters of the King at Trinity Episcopal church.

Mary Lou also found the love of painting, a passion that started when she was in her late 60's. She also had a green thumb and when they bought their first house in Boulder in 1968, she started gardening. She grew and canned a variety of vegetables and had a house full of green plants and maintained this practice the rest of her life.



Nancy Hamner— Professed 25 Years

Nancy Hamner died on Sept 22nd at 95 year. She was a long-time member of God's Joyful Fools Fellowship.

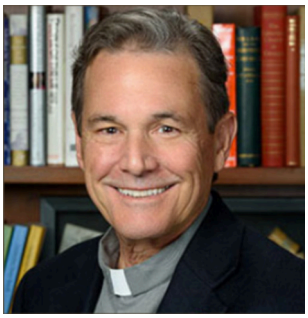
From AL.com (Birmingham)

Nancy traveled the world — Hong Kong, to England, from Saudi Arabia to Prague, and from Tokyo to Singapore and lived life to the fullest. As an accomplished writer, her works won awards. She published several original books of short stories and poetry. She was a member of the National League of American Pen Women and the Quill Club Writers. She was also a wonderful artist and found pleasure in her last months doing watercolors and sharing them with her granddaughters. She found tremendous joy in her grandchildren and tried to instill the beauty of the world in them. From roaming the Botanical Gardens to lunches at the Birmingham Museum of Art, she built memories that will live with them forever. Gardening was one of her passions and her yard always shone brightly wherever she lived. From gathering rocks for a wall to digging a hole for a fishpond, her grandchildren assisted her in these endeavors. As with many southern women, Nancy Hamner was an exceptional cook. From her Mississippi Mud, macaroni and cheese to her lemon meringue pie, her meals were always a treat to look forward to.

She had a deep and abiding faith that got her through hard times. She was a devoted member of the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis and an active member of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church.

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

Allison DeFoor II—Professed Eight Years



From self-introduction in the Franciscan Times, Spring 2018

Criminal Justice. Politics. Business. Priesthood. Prison Ministry.

By way of introduction, please permit me to share my background, which I would normally say is rather eclectic, except that I can see that it is a Franciscan norm. It is my daily pleasure to live in Jacksonville, Florida and be married to a wonderful, faithful woman, Randy. Currently I am a church bureaucrat, serving as Canon to the Ordinary to the Episcopal Bishop of Florida. Previously, I was a non-stipendiary prison priest in this diocese, which takes such things very seriously and has 15 churches inside prison walls. My labors included setting up the first prison inside a community college, when serving as its board chair in Tallahassee.

My prior background was in criminal justice, politics and business. I was a public defender, prosecutor, judge, sheriff (of Key West!), and professor, et al. I like to sail, skin dive, and go to the beach. Recovery, yoga, prayer and meditation are big parts of my life. I belong to the Explorer's Club.

It is a humbling and wonderful blessing to be professed.

From the Florida Politics Website

DeFoor also had a stellar legal career before becoming a high-profile environmental crusader.

Allison DeFoor, the President and CEO of the North Florida Land Trust (NFLT) and a leading figure in Florida's conservation movement, has died from complications of pneumonia.

He had been involved with the organization for eight years. He was 72.



DeFoor helped broker multiple agreements among corporations, private landowners, government agencies and environmental groups that set aside hundreds of thousands of acres of protected land.

Sarah Hande, the NFLT's Director of Strategic Communications, said the loss is hard for an organization that often reflected his personal passion for the environment.

"It's hard to quantify the loss that we feel," Hande said.

DeFoor was also an Episcopal priest. Before leading the land trust, he had an extensive legal career as a prosecutor, public defender, Judge and law professor. He also was elected Monroe County Sheriff. He resigned from that post to run for Lieutenant

Continued on page 17

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

Allison DeFoor (cont)

Governor on the Republican ticket supporting Gov. Bob Martinez in his unsuccessful bid for re-election in 1990.

Jacksonville Mayor Donna Deegan honored him on the city's Facebook page.

"Jacksonville has lost a remarkable public servant and a true son of Florida. Allison DeFoor shined in roles ranging from prosecutor to priest to a leader in conservation," Deegan said.

"Throughout his remarkable life he was always guided by a deep love for this state and its people. I extend my deepest condolences to his wife Randy, the North Florida Land Trust, and all who loved him."

From the Diocese of Florida

Alongside his years as a judge, sheriff and conservation leader, Allison offered more than a decade of faithful service to the diocese, including a deep commitment to prison ministry and nearly eight years as Canon to the Ordinary.

Aural obituary and wonderful pictures on Facebook

https://www.facebook.com/reel/2186228595294328

Eleci Passos Pereira Neves — Professed 12 Years

Frpm Barbara d. bennett and Christina Winnoschofer, Provincial Secretary, Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil (IEAB)

With deep sorrow, we mourn the death of Eleci Passos Pereira Neves, TSSF, wife of the Rt. Revd. Jubal Pereira Neves, TSSF, Bishop Emeritus of the Diocese of Southwestern Brazil. Eleci passed away on the morning of Saturday, September 19, 2026.

Eleci was an active and devoted companion in life and ministry alongside Bishop Jubal, sharing in the joys, challenges, and responsibilities of episcopal ministry. Her quiet, loving, dedicated presence touched the lives of many people. And at times her passion flared, surprising some and motivating others to carry on when the work got challenging.

Eleci and Dom Jubal were some of the first supporters and movers to welcome TSSF into the Episcopal Anglican Church of Brazil (IEAB). Their support was quiet, generous and unrelenting. In our prayers for Eleci and Dom Jubal, let offer thanksgiving for their dedication and perseverance. Eleci began her Francisclarian vocation as a supportive partner to Dom Jubal, but after companioning the community for many years, she too experienced a call to the Order and was professed in 2014.



Caption: Barbara d. bennett, Rt. Revd. Jubal Pereira Neves, Eleci Passos Pereira Neves

The Neves family lived in Santa Maria, Rio Grande do Sul, where Eleci made a significant contribution to CVV Santa Maria and the Associação Viva a Vida, partner programs for suicide prevention. She devoted many years of volunteer service, assisting in the administration of the local center and working alongside the organization's supporting body. As one of the

Continued on page 18

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

Eleci Passos Pereira Neves(cont)

institution's longest-serving volunteers, she leaves a legacy of commitment to welcoming, listening, and caring for others.

TSSF joins the IEAB, who stands in solidarity with the Diocese of Southwestern Brazil, Bishop Emeritus Jubal Pereira Neves, Eleci's family, and all her friends at this time of farewell, praying that God may grant comfort and hope to all who mourn her passing.

May God, in infinite mercy, receive Eleci into the light and peace of God's presence, and may the Holy Spirit, the Comforter, sustain all hearts that grieve.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."

Matthew 5:4

From Barbara d. bennett e Christina Winnoschofer, Secretária Provincial, Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil (IEAB)

Com profunda tristeza, lamentamos o falecimento de Eleci Passos Pereira Neves, TSSF, esposa do Rev. Jubal Pereira Neves, TSSF, Bispo Emérito da Diocese do Sudoeste do Brasil. Eleci faleceu na manhã do sábado, 19 de setembro de 2026.

Eleci foi uma companheira ativa e dedicada na vida e no ministério ao lado do Bispo Jubal, compartilhando as alegrias, os desafios e as responsabilidades do ministério episcopal. Sua presença discreta, amorosa e dedicada tocou a vida de muitas pessoas. E, às vezes, sua paixão se manifestava, surpreendendo alguns e motivando outros a seguir em frente quando o trabalho se tornava desafiador.

Eleci e Dom Jubal foram alguns dos primeiros apoiadores e impulsionadores a acolher a TSSF na Igreja Episcopal Anglicana do Brasil (IEAB). Seu apoio foi discreto, generoso e incansável. Em nossas orações por Eleci e Dom Jubal, ofereçamos ação de graças por sua dedicação e perseverança. Eleci iniciou sua vocação franciscclariana como companheira de Dom Jubal, mas, após acompanhar a comunidade por muitos anos, ela também sentiu o chamado para a ordem e fez sua profissão em 2014.

A família Neves morava em Santa Maria, no Rio Grande do Sul, onde Eleci deu uma contribuição significativa ao CVV Santa Maria e à Associação Viva a Vida, programas parceiros de prevenção ao suicídio. Ela dedicou muitos anos de trabalho voluntário, auxiliando na administração do centro local e atuando ao lado do conselho de apoio da organização. Como uma das voluntárias mais antigas da instituição, ela deixa um legado de compromisso com o acolhimento, a escuta e o cuidado com o próximo.

A TSSF une-se à IEAB, que se solidariza com a Diocese do Sudoeste do Brasil, com o bispo emérito Jubal Pereira Neves, com a família de Eleci e com todos os seus amigos neste momento de despedida, rezando para que Deus conceda consolo e esperança a todos os que lamentam sua partida.

Que Deus, em sua infinita misericórdia, receba Eleci na luz e na paz da Sua presença, e que o Espírito Santo, o Consolador, sustente todos os corações que choram sua perda.

"Bem-aventurados os que choram, pois serão consolados."

Mateus 5:4

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

Don Josephs —

Don was 85 years old and died on October 1.

Professed 26 Years

From Weber Baker

When Kris and I were planning our wedding, we wanted to make sure we included as much as possible and everyone in the fellowship. At that time, I had just started in formation. We particularly wanted to include the folks who had gone to Assisi. Perhaps because we were a bit closer in age, Don and I had commiserated a lot about all the walking.



Heart of Texas Fellowship in Assisi in 2009: Evelynn Mackie, Joan Josephs (Don's wife), Don in the hat, Clint Hagen, Kris, and Weber Baker.

We also had time to talk, and I came to see him as a good friend. When we had gone to Assisi, I had not yet begun the formation process; seeing and listening to Don was one of the deciding factors in my choosing to become a Franciscan.



From Evelynn Mackie

Don was one of the kindest, gentlest and joyful man I've ever known! As a fellowship, many of us traveled to Assisi together. He and his wife were with us. We had an inspiring journey with Sts Francis and Clare memories were everywhere!

He was generous and thoughtful as well. He gave us each a St. Francis candle as pictured and donated a beautifully made ceramic chalice and paten as well, which we used at our retreats.

John Long —

Professed 5 Years

From his self-introduction in the Franciscan Times, Spring 2018

My journey of faith has had many detours throughout my life, but a loving and patient Creator has always been ready to welcome back this prodigal son. I grew up in a suburb of Chicago and attended a Lutheran Church (LCA) every Sunday. I was active in Luther League, Summer Church Camp, and many other youth activities.

When I graduated from high school and attended a local community college, I quit going to church. After a year at the community college, I enlisted in the Army and found

Continued on page 20

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

John Long (cont.)

myself in the jungles of Vietnam (1967-68). After being discharged from the Army in 1969, I used the GI Bill to return to college and went on to attend graduate school. My wife and I met in 1970 and have been married for 51 years.

We decided to move to California after graduating from college and moved to the San Francisco Bay Area where we have lived for 38 years. For over 40 years of our marriage, we did not feel the need to be a part of a community of faith. We were both Union Representatives and were very active helping people we represented in their personal and work lives.

Something Was Missing

I retired in 2005 and kept busy volunteering at a local hospital. When my wife retired in 2008, we moved to the Phoenix area. We both felt a need to join a community of faith; "something was missing in our lives." We were called by the Holy Spirit to the local Episcopal Church, and I began discernment with my parish priest to explore the call to either the diaconate or the Third Order. Living in California for most of my life, I had visited all 21 Franciscan Missions on the Camino Real numerous times, where I became interested in the Franciscans. Our retired rector was a TSSF brother, and I visited the TSSF website.



After I was certain about what God wanted me to do, I began Formation and have recently been professed. My Rule of Life, my virtual fellowship, my sisters and brothers in the Order, my spiritual director, TSSF mentors, and formation counselors all have become a part of my life and lifelong journey into the Franciscan charism. I aspire to live my life following in the footsteps of St. Francis and St. Clare, with humility, love and joy; to "preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words."

From Gabe Sinisi

In diocese and parish, he served in many roles. John was an usher at the consecration of Jennifer Raddall as Bishop of Arizona. He served on the vestry and was a senior warden and president of the men's club of Advent Episcopal Church in Sun City West. He was also leader of the Generosity, Gratitude and Stewardship program of education. He is well loved and will be missed.P

Continued on page 14

Milestones: Rest in Peace (cont.)

Peter Miller — Professed 15 Years

From Gillooly Funeral Home Obituary

Peter Miller of Braintree, Massachusetts, passed away peacefully on October 8, 2026.

In the Fall of 1971, Peter began teaching English at the McCall Middle School in Winchester, Massachusetts. At the same time, he was accepted into the Weston Jesuit School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. In 1987, Peter made his profession in the Secular Franciscan Order (OSF) and spent the next several years gaining experience in various ministries around Boston.



After retiring in 2001 from the Winchester Public Schools, Peter pursued his life-long calling and was ordained in the Catholic Apostolic Church of North America in 2004 as a deacon and as a priest in 2005. In 2011, Peter made his profession in the Third Order of the Society of St. Francis (TSSF), Province of the Americas.

Peter touched many lives in his lifetime of ministries. To those who knew him, he was a loyal and loving friend with a kind demeanor, dry sense of humor, and endless generosity. He is sorely missed.

Book Reviews

Stars in the Same Firmament by Andrew D. Mayes, TSSF

Resource Publications (CA), 2026, 164 pages, hardback and paperback, 979-8385273010

Review by Weston F. Cook

Andrew Mayes has gifted us a beguiling and illuminating study of the life and career of Saint Francis in an exhilarating and very original context. While he places Francis firmly in the tumultuous era of his life, the twelfth and thirteenth centuries (1100-1300), his real context is the spiritual journeys of thirteen saintly men and women who shared that milieu with him. These saintly “stars” are not only Christian luminaries but also Muslims and Jews. Like Francis, they were also “wandering stars”, traveling through different countries, cultures, and intellectual challenges. They were actors in politics, in scholarship, in the arts and culture, and in environments of great social, economic, and demographic change. All of them sought and, to varying degrees, found God in deeper, more profound study of their own faith communities, scriptures, theologies, and cultures. However, what they also strove for was an intimacy with the Divine that took them beyond the boundaries of standard practice and learning into a more profound, personal friendship with the Creator. In this quest to live constantly in God-awareness, they would encounter other strivers, sometimes of rival religious communities and discover unexpected kinships with these fellow seekers. In this wonderful “same firmament”, the discovery God’s deepest presence within themselves, within nature, and

Continued on page 22

Book Reviews (cont.)

Stars in the Same Firmament (cont.)

with others in human society simultaneously embraced their traditional faiths while enlarging their vision of God's love to the embrace of all creation, all humanity, and a comradeship of all seeking The Loving One.

The times did not encourage such greatness of heart. Francis and all these seekers ached to draw closer to God in environments fraught with violence. Christians, Muslims, and Jews knew vividly the textual, doctrinal, and historical differences that separated them. In some ways, this era saw those divisions and animosities intensify: the eviction of the Crusaders from Palestine balanced the steady loss of Muslim al-Andalus to the Reconquista, the fall of Constantinople to the Fourth Crusade and the persecution of Orthodox Christians, struggles between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims throughout the Middle East and the Maghrib, pogroms against Jews, persecution of non-conformist sects, and violent struggles between religious and secular powers as well as noble and bourgeoise classes. Looming over all in the mid-1200s awaited the horrific impact of the Mongol invasions. If wars and persecutions weren't enough, spiritual and intellectual challenges bubbled up from science and philosophies of Greek rationalism, Hellenistic and Hindi sciences, Persian scholarship, and spiritualism.



Here, in the cacophony of upheaval and suffering, Dr. Mayes leads us into the underlying common threads that Francis and his fellow stars moved through. Without ever forgetting their real differences, Muslims, Christians, and Jews shared a vast territory of common experience and belief — a dynamic personal Loving-Creator-God intimately and incessantly involved in the natural creation and its living creatures, common stories, common events, common heroes and villains, common literary expressions and vocabulary. Threading through these shared wonders ran the threads of a God who called, who beckoned, who invited a spiritual intimacy greater than that obtained from routine worship that promised to revolutionize for true seekers their relationship to God and to all people, creation, and creatures. All common traits, too, we find with all these women and men is a sense of journey, not only spiritual but physical. They all traveled a lot, often spending time and companionship with members of their two opposite faiths. They were literally, "wandering stars".

Francis himself provides the archetype, traveling first through Italy, modeling his ideal of a life of joy, service, and worship unencumbered by the weight of material possessions or social class identities. While he sought God in nature, in scripture, and in the light of an Inner Presence, he also delighted in meetings and exchanges with others on that same intense quest. He found them not only among the Little Friars of Spain but also in contacts with Muslims and Jews, many of whom responded to the turmoil around them in study, prayer, and dialogue. The study of Aristotle and other works inherited from the first centuries of Islam now competed with revived interest in the Sufi mystics of Persia, Syria, and Morocco. In Judaism, analysis and application of the ancient texts invited deeper investigation, which culminated with the Zohar, and invited devotees to move from the literalistic text

Continued on page 23

Book Reviews (cont.)

Stars in the Same Firmament (cont.)

surface to allusion, metaphor, allegory and deeper, personal mystery. Followers of Francis already had encountered Jews and fellow Christians building little bands of mystics among the cities, the monasteries and schools in France and Germany. Perhaps his most riveting and inspiring exchange took place with the Sultan Malik al-Kamil. Standing against the Christian armies besieging Damietta, Egypt, Francis was eagerly risking death for the opportunity to share his faith in God and Christ with an embattled champion of Islam with sectarian war raging around them. The Sultan heard him out, engaged the poor friar in an extended conversation over several days, and opened to Francis ways of devotion that would inspire him to litanies, practices, and motifs echoing Islamic and Sufi ideas. This last journey also exposed Francis to the practices of the Coptic and Orthodox communities and the mysticism at the heart of their varying "Rule of Life" disciplines.

To illuminate his spiritual insights, Dr. Mayes presents us with three well crafted and intriguing sections holding up the examples of Christian, Jewish, and Muslim "Luminaries" as models and inspirations. Each chapter covers the life of one (sometimes two) women or men who stand out in their time and place not only as stars in the same godly firmament but also lights in the darkness of those violent, oppressive eras. He first tells the individual's spiritual story, covering not only events and context, but the moments of genius, courage, and creative vision that defined them. Their quest to draw closer to God, ironically, often puts them at odds with the structures of privilege and power around them. At the end of each chapter, Dr. Mayes presents a selection of thought, poetry or devotion that allows the subject to speak directly to the reader. These selections vary in length, but they are informative, instructive, and invite your serious meditation. Many are also emotionally charged – like Rabbi Eleazar's lamentation over his martyred wife, Dulcea, in a heart-rending celebration of her devotion and her innumerable acts of charity and celebration of God.



Moses Maimonides

Some of these figures are familiar, but Dr. Mayes tells their stories by weaving their life stories, the social and political challenges they confronted, the ministries they undertook in the aching world around them, and their spiritual journeys in crisply rendered portraits. So, we meet Saint Dominic, famous as a scholar, preacher, and missionary, as a man of intense prayer and passionate simplicity. Later, the Dominican Order he founded became noted for a preoccupation with Hellenic-style rationalism epitomized by Thomas Aquinas while Franciscans inclined more towards the intuitive modes of learning. Yet a common thread among these luminaries is how rationalism often beckoned

Continued on page 24

Book Reviews (cont.)

Stars in the Same Firmament (cont.)

them from cold analysis to deeper mysteries in scripture, in the natural world, in their own hearts and even in the tumultuous lives of everyday people. Thus, the great Jewish scholar, Moses Maimonides, the architect of a grand syntheses of religious tradition with rationalist philosophies serves to introduce his son, Abraham. For Abraham Maimonides, study must support devotion, by cultivating a constant awareness of the presence of the Living God within the human, the natural and soul's own world. Living in Cairo, surrounded by Muslim Sufis, he adapted some of their practices as avenues to open the senses to what the heart could feel.

If God permeates this world, we must live in it as though it were a sanctuary.

Passion serves as another binding theme that weaves through these seekers. Rabia, one of the first Sufi mystics of Islam, wrote love songs to God, and prayed that neither hope of heaven nor fear of hell enter her mind that they might not mar her delight in the Creator by making it somehow transactional. Ibn-al-Arabi likened deep love of God to an intoxicant, as did Rumi, a metaphor highly offensive to legal-minded authorities given the prohibition of wine-drinking laid down in the Quran. Christian, Jewish, and Muslim mystics would also invoke images of Divine love that paralleled carnal eagerness. As a result, many of them clashed with the powers of Church, Synagogue, and Mosque who were offended by their intimate language, their episodes of defiance, their willingness to break the laws and practices of the institutions in the name of their visions of a God who valued mercy over dogmatism.



Rabia grinding grain

Stars in the Same Firmament offers an exceptional choice for adult (or youth) study groups seeking a text that sets the social and spiritual journey of Francis and his contemporaries in a uniquely cosmopolitan, interfaith framework. It's especially helpful that Dr. Mayes divides his book into nine short but riveting biographies, and each portrait ends with a brief list of remarkably insightful questions. These questions not only promote reflection on the life and piety we have just encountered but invite personal self-examination — what might this unique life mirror in ourselves, our inner world, how we manifest Christ in our own lives? Finally, Dr. Mayes provides his own thoughts on Saint Francis and these other saintly, passionate lives, the emerging themes and contradictions they display and how we ourselves might live in the tumult of our own times as they did in theirs. In so doing, as throughout this luminous book, while he shares his experiences and exhortations, he insures his "stars" always get their say too.

So, as autumn unfolds, consider adding this book to your study list for Francistide or Advent. The saints you'll meet in its pages are truly exceptional companions for these two blessed seasons. And may the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ abide with us all, our families, our friends, and our animals.

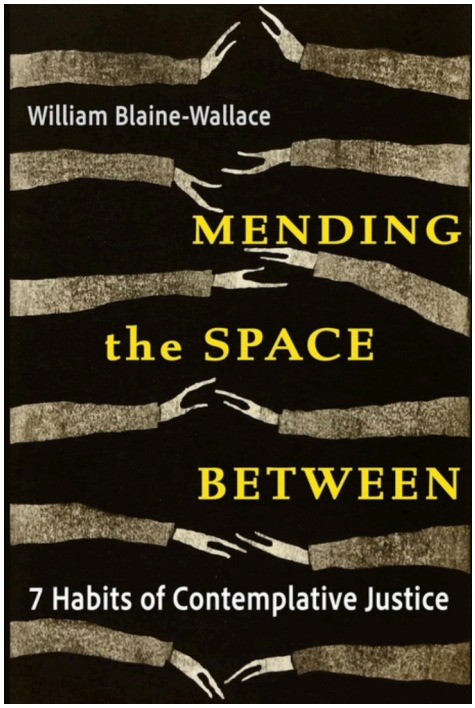
Book Reviews (cont.)

Mending the Space Between: 7 Habits of Contemplative Justice by William Blaine-Wallace (postulant)

Review by Beverly Hosea

Orbis Books, 2026, Paperback and Kindle, 208 pages, 978-1626986473

Allow me to introduce you to a new book that is just the right one for this present moment in history. As Franciscans many of us feel the call more urgently to live out our Principles with engagement in the world for the sake of all those who are suffering injustices, in need of all kinds, are being denied basic rights, and experience the impact of global climate change. This is a book that can be especially helpful for those who may be feeling compassion fatigue and/or are overwhelmed by the current immensity of need for social justice. William Blaine-Wallace has written a gem of a book addressing ways of weaving together spiritual practices, pastoral skills, and political actions effectively. Reading this book at this time is exactly what I have needed right now.



The author's emphasis is on how we have conversations with each other that can bridge the gaping disconnect in communication that keeps us divided into them and us. He does this through illustrations from history, especially U.S. history over the last 60+ years, in which much of it focused on racism, and reflects on them from the perspective of seven aspects of engagement he calls habits. How we pray, behold others, connect with others, build bridges of communication, host others and welcome them, remember our history and the history of others, pause for the much-needed time to celebrate, recognize beauty despite great suffering, and love our neighbors are aspects of engagement that we can build into habits, contemplative/reflective habits that lead towards justice.

The author has lived through a lot of the Civil Rights Era and reflects back on specific incidents that illustrate the seven areas he addresses, and he does so in a poetic manner and with deeply reaching quotations from such giants of history as Desmond Tutu, Pope Francis, John Lewis, Albert Einstein, and especially Simone Weil. The book is a combination of storytelling, personal reflection, spiritual insight, and reverent pauses to simply be with what we have just read.

Pauses are an important part of his message. He introduces the idea of pause with the illustration of how we might read the Psalms. The asterisk in the middle of each verse is a break in the flow of speaking, a pause to let the message of the first half of the verse catch our attention before the second half of the verse completes, expands or contrasts the first half. He presents this as a model for conversations, a model that helps us listen better and hear what is being communicated before we jump in with our own responses. He writes, "Seeing requires being 'still enough' to reframe our worldview, our sense of self,

Continued on page 26

Book Reviews (cont.)

Review *Mending the Space Between* (cont.)

our relationship to others." This is carried through in each chapter with each of the seven contemplative ways of responding and taking action for justice.

Many of us participated in *Sacred Ground*, the Episcopal Church study and discussion series of just a few years ago that opened up a lot of conversation addressing racism. This book, *Mending the Space Between*, is definitely a book that I would recommend as a helpful and practical follow up to that course.

Mending the Space Between is not necessarily a how-to book, nor a handbook of steps to be taken to assure a successful outcome in ministry. This book is an extended meditation reflecting within a beautifully constructed framework for a way to endure, to continue, to carry on in our Franciscan vision and practice. This book can be like a cool water for the thirsty who are over the edge of self-sufficiency, exhausted, or are in despair.

The author intends for this book to be "about embracing the trouble we see, enriching our love for justice and kindness and strengthening our commitment to a more humble and generative walk with God." I believe he has succeeded.

Tertiary Treasures from the Past: The Works of Louise Mangini.

Gary Ost

In 2012, the Lord called home my good friend Louise Mangini. Louise professed in 1980, was the person most responsible for my finally saying, "Yes!" to the gentle but insistent call of the Spirit to follow Christ in the way of St. Francis. In fact, back in the early 80s, I wrote an article on "How I Met Louise Mangini…and How That Meeting Was the Catalyst for My Becoming a Franciscan Tertiary." I haven't found it, but I think I could recreate the gist of it.



Louise was "The Bag Lady" (as a modern stand-in for the Leper story) in the SSF contribution to the 800th anniversary of the birth of Francis at St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in San Francisco. I believe the production was put together by Sr. Pamela Clare and entitled "The Conversion of Francis." Louise was a "Bag Lady" who got stiffed as a street person by Francis and another brother. Later, however, Francis repented and hugged Louise the "Bag Lady" and kissed her. I knew at that moment I needed to become a postulant in the Third Order.

Louise was very active in the New Umbrian Fellowship of the San Francisco Bay Area, but later dropped out of the Order in the 1990s.

As one of the executors of her estate, I took it upon myself to go through all the notebooks and folios of music that were in her apartment. Her cousin Diane and I put quite a sizeable number of her poems and short stories here:

https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/b74rfjolfjazn95t6v3ro/Louise-Mangini-Coplete-Creative-Work-1.docx?rlkey=5q0fbsbhex2g30s37ltncadkv&st=lcmlpe4e&dl=0

We copyrighted this material to ensure she got credit for her creativity, but we also "designated" everything as "in the public domain."

Continued on page 27

The Works of Louise Mangini (cont.)



Amongst all this material, we also found that she had written *Francesco*, a musical in four acts. The libretto is some 54 pages long with 30 characters, and includes 28 pieces of music. The libretto and her collected musical works can be found here on our TSSF website

Libretto url

Music url

Here is a sample of the musical from **Act I, Scene ii.** This sample was the only portion ever staged in San Francisco. Once again, I recall that Sr. Pamela Clare was the director and Lance Woodruff played Francesco. We were as rag-tag a production company as Francis was a friar! But it was fun.

Act I, Scene ii: A forest

(As lights come up, we see Francesco, Rufino and Bernardo walking up the aisle toward a forest. Stage right we can see the outline of a broken-down church, San Damiano. The crucifix is visible.)

A song may be sung in the background: "I Want to Become a Fool"

(Enter Francesco, Rufino and Bernardo--possibly singing.)

Rufino: Francesco, you seem so happy, and--believe me, I'm glad that you are—but, well, aren't you even a little concerned that your father is so angry with you?

(Francesco looks at his friend with an expression of disappointment that the painful reality has ended the gaiety.)

Bernardo: Rufino is right, Francesco. I thought he was going to beat you today when you gave that old woman that silk cloth.

Francesco: (Sitting on a stump and tossing stones absent-mindedly into the forest. He sighs heavily.) I know, I know. It is strange. I love my father and I know he loves me--but each day we seem to grow further and further apart.

Bernardo: Come now, Francesco. You can hardly blame him. After all--he is in business to make money by selling things--if you keep giving things away…

Francesco: Dear Lord, help me! Not only has my father not understood me--but neither do my friends. If only…

Rufino: (Looking into the shadows) Eh--what was that?

Bernardo: What is it? What did you see?

Rufino: I'm not sure—A—A shadow moved--I'm not sure what it was

Francesco: (Not yet frightened, but tense) Yes--I do see something--or someone. (Calling into the shadows) Who are you? Come out. Show yourself.

Continued on page 27

The Works of Louise Mangini (Cont.)



(The three men stare into the shadows for a moment. Then out of the darkness emerges a cloaked figure. They are able to see the figure more clearly than is the audience.)

Rufino: Oh, my God!

Bernardo: Jesus, Mary and Joseph! Spare us! It's--it's a leper.

Francesco: (Transfixed in a mixture of fear and horror in the strangled cry) O--Dear Lord—No—No—Please. (The Leper starts to move toward him.) NO!

(For a moment, The Leper and Francesco stare at each other as Rufino and Bernardo huddle together in fear.)

The Leper: (Softly and deliberately) Peace. Do not be afraid. I will not come any closer than you wish.

Francesco: (Still frozen with fear) What--What do you want of me?

The Leper: I have a great hunger--a great thirst.

(Francesco looks at The Leper, then at Rufino and Bernardo--then Heavenward.)

Francesco: Oh, God! I'm so afraid. (Pauses, then he forces himself to look into his pack. Then to The Leper) I have some dry cheese. A few slices of bread--a piece of fruit--I'll--I'll—I'll put them in the middle of the path. Don't move! Do not move until we are out of sight. Do you understand?

(The Leper nods. Francesco gathers the food; hesitates--then runs to the middle of the road. He bends down quietly. As he puts the food on the ground, The Leper raises his hand.)

The Leper: May God, our Father, bless you, my brother.

(Francesco freezes in a half kneeling position. Slowly, he lifts his eyes to look into those of The Leper; then still looking at The Leper, Francesco stands. Slowly he begins to walk toward The Leper.)

Bernardo: Santa Maria! NO! No! Francesco, stop.

Rufino: (Moving toward Francesco for a moment in an attempt to grab him) Francesco, are you mad? Don't touch him. He's a leper. God, don't touch him!

(Francesco has begun moving slowly toward The Leper. He stops, then solemnly kisses him.)

Rufino and Bernardo: (In horror) Good Lord, spare him. Mother of God, help us.

(After the kiss, Francesco bows, then slowly turns to face his friends. They, crying, move away from him. Francesco is smiling. His smile gives his face a look of radiant joy. The Leper remains motionless.)

Continued on page 28



Francesco: (Laughing slightly) Ah, Bernardo, Rufino. Do you fear me now? Do not fear me--do not pity me—Rather, rejoice with me.

Rufino: You--you kissed a leper.

Francesco: (Cheerfully) Yes, I know. Ah—go, my friends. Go back to Assisi. I need to go to give thanksgiving to God.

Bernardo: Thanksgiving?! Thanksgiving for What?

Francesco: (Laughing) For setting me free. Go. Go, my friends. And may God be with you.

Bernardo and Rufino: And with you. Goodbye, Francesco.

(Francesco watches them go--then turns to The Leper.)

Francesco: Oh, my brother--You asked me for a gift of food and, by God's grace--I was given a greater gift--oh my joy is so great. I will dance all the way to the poor broken chapel of San Damiano.

(Dance---Song)

(Francesco begins dancing, and soon The Leper joins in on the dance. As the dance goes on, Francesco gets more and more carried away with joy — and, as he dances in ecstasy he forgets The Leper--and does not see The Leper fling off the cloak--revealing The Clown. Francesco takes The Clown's hand and they dance. Suddenly--Francesco sees The Clown.)

Francesco: (Surprised) Oh --where did you come from? Where--where did the other go?

(The Clown mimes that he is mute.)

Francesco: Ah yes. You are the silent one. Ah, well--thank you, my silent friend--Thank you for sharing my joy. (Picking up his pack) Well, I'm off to San Damiano to give thanks to God.

(The Clown mimes that he wants to go, too.)

Francesco: (Laughing) What? Oh--you want to go, too? Very well, let us go pray together. For the Lord cares about the prayers of the heart--not of the lips. Come, my friend.

(Hand in hand, the two walk toward the chapel--the crucifix.)

Francesco: Ah, poor little house of God…broken…broken. Like His Body--broken because man doesn't care--doesn't love.

(Cue for dance, perhaps a song of joy and praise--then God singing in duet—"Build My Church")

(Meanwhile--The Clown "prays" by dancing--perhaps joined by some angels. At the end of the song, Francesco and The Clown are kneeling at the foot of the cross.)

Francesco: (To the cross) Oh--blessed Lord--dear Jesus--I hear you—I--I heard you. And--and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit—Oh, my Lord--by your

Continued on page 29

The Works of Louise Mangini (Cont.)



grace--I will rebuild your church to the Glory of God, Our Father. (Cue for exit music)

(Angels' voices--reprise of "Build My Church")

(The lights fade slowly on Francesco and The Clown.)

"The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters": A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions

«El Señor me dio hermanos y hermanas»: una visión de fraternidad y esperanza para nuestra Provincia de las Américas

Octubre de 2026

Una historia personal marcada por Francisco

Queridas hermanas y queridos hermanos, paz y bien.

Recibo con gratitud la invitación de *Franciscan Times* para compartir algo de mi historia personal y, especialmente, mis esperanzas para el futuro de nuestra querida Provincia de las Américas.

Mi nombre es Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro. Nací en Guatemala, en el corazón de Centroamérica, y desde hace muchos años resido en Costa Rica, país donde he desarrollado una parte importante de mi vida familiar, profesional y ministerial.

Soy presbítero de la Iglesia Episcopal Costarricense y por gracia del Altísimo y buen Señor hermano soy un profeso de la Tercera Orden de la Sociedad de San Francisco.

Mi camino franciscano comenzó mucho antes de mi incorporación a la TSSF. En 1985 ingresé a la Orden de Frailes Menores, donde recibí una formación profundamente marcada por la espiritualidad de san Francisco y santa Clara de Asís. Durante aproximadamente quince años compartí la vida de la fraternidad franciscana, una experiencia que transformó para siempre mi comprensión del Evangelio, de la Iglesia y de las relaciones humanas.

Con el paso del tiempo, mi vocación encontró nuevas expresiones. La vida familiar, el matrimonio, la paternidad, el ministerio sacerdotal y el servicio educativo me enseñaron que el seguimiento de Cristo según el espíritu de Francisco no está limitado a una forma particular de vida religiosa. La espiritualidad franciscana puede vivirse en el hogar, en el trabajo, en la comunidad eclesial y en medio de las realidades sociales de nuestro tiempo.

En 2021 inicié mi camino de formación en la Tercera Orden de la Sociedad de San Francisco. Fue una experiencia de reencuentro con mis raíces espirituales y, al mismo tiempo, el descubrimiento de una fraternidad internacional que comparte el deseo de vivir el Evangelio mediante la oración, la sencillez y el servicio.

Desde junio de 2022 he tenido la responsabilidad de acompañar la formación de nuestras hermanas y hermanos de la Región Hispanoamérica. Este ministerio me ha permitido conocer sus historias, sus búsquedas vocacionales, sus dificultades y sus esperanzas. También me ha confirmado que la formación franciscana no consiste únicamente en transmitir conocimientos, sino en acompañar procesos de transformación personal y comunitaria.

Una elección que recibo como llamada al servicio

Durante el Capítulo Provincial celebrado en octubre de 2026, en Mississauga, Canadá, fui elegido Ministro Provincial de nuestra Provincia de las Américas.

Recibí esta elección con gratitud, humildad y un profundo sentido de responsabilidad. Ser el primer latinoamericano elegido para este ministerio en la historia de nuestra Provincia tiene para mí un significado especial. No lo interpreto como un reconocimiento personal, sino como una expresión de la riqueza y diversidad de nuestra fraternidad.

Nuestra Provincia de las Américas es una realidad extraordinariamente rica y diversa. Compartimos una misma vocación franciscana, pero vivimos en diferentes países, hablamos distintas lenguas y pertenecemos a contextos culturales, sociales y eclesiales muy variados.

Continued on page 30

"The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters": A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions (Cont.)

Esta diversidad constituye uno de nuestros mayores dones, aunque también presenta desafíos para la comunicación, la participación y el sentido de pertenencia.

Mi esperanza es que avancemos hacia una Provincia donde ninguna hermana ni ningún hermano se sienta distante, invisible o excluido por razones de idioma, ubicación geográfica, edad o circunstancias personales.

Necesitamos fortalecer los vínculos entre nuestras regiones, promover espacios de encuentro y escuchar especialmente a quienes, por diferentes razones, han tenido menos oportunidades de participar en la vida provincial.

La fraternidad no significa que todas las personas pensemos de la misma manera. Significa que aprendemos a reconocernos como hermanas y hermanos incluso cuando nuestras experiencias, sensibilidades y opiniones son diferentes.

San Francisco expresó una de sus experiencias fundamentales con estas palabras: «El Señor me dio hermanos». Esta afirmación puede convertirse también en una orientación para nuestra vida provincial: no hemos elegido a todas las personas con quienes compartimos nuestra vocación, pero las hemos recibido como un don de Dios.

Algunas esperanzas para el futuro

No considero que el futuro de nuestra Provincia deba construirse a partir de un proyecto exclusivamente personal del Ministro Provincial. Necesitamos discernirlo juntos, escuchando a las fraternidades, a quienes ejercen responsabilidades de servicio y a cada hermana y hermano que desee contribuir.

Sin embargo, quisiera compartir algunas convicciones que considero importantes para nuestro caminar.

Fortalecer nuestra identidad espiritual. La oración, el estudio, la sencillez de vida y el servicio deben continuar siendo el fundamento de nuestra vocación. En medio de una sociedad marcada por la velocidad, el individualismo y la incertidumbre, nuestra Regla de Vida puede ayudarnos a ofrecer un testimonio de serenidad, esperanza y fidelidad al Evangelio.

Renovar la formación y el acompañamiento. La formación franciscana no termina con la profesión. Necesitamos acompañarnos durante toda la vida, fortalecer los procesos de discernimiento vocacional y ofrecer recursos formativos pertinentes a nuestras diferentes realidades culturales y lingüísticas.

Abrir caminos para nuevas vocaciones. Debemos prestar especial atención a las generaciones jóvenes y a las personas que buscan una espiritualidad auténtica, comprometida con el mundo. Nuestra tarea no consiste solamente en aumentar el número de integrantes de la Orden, sino en compartir una manera de vivir el Evangelio que pueda inspirar a otras personas.

Fortalecer la comunicación y la memoria provincial. Deseo promover una comunicación más cercana y constante entre nuestras fraternidades, así como recuperar las historias y los testimonios de quienes nos han precedido. Conocer nuestra historia nos ayudará a reconocer los dones recibidos y a construir nuestro futuro con gratitud.

Profundizar nuestro compromiso con la justicia, la paz y la creación. La espiritualidad franciscana no puede separarse del sufrimiento humano ni de los desafíos de nuestro planeta. Estamos llamados a acompañar a las personas empobrecidas, migrantes y excluidas; a trabajar por la reconciliación y a cuidar la creación como expresión concreta de nuestro amor al Creador.

Estas prioridades no deberían convertirse simplemente en actividades adicionales. Deben ayudarnos a vivir con mayor autenticidad aquello que ya hemos prometido como terciarios franciscanos.

Ochocientos años después: vivir hoy el Evangelio

Nuestra elección provincial tuvo lugar en un año particularmente significativo: la conmemoración de los ochocientos años del Tránsito de san Francisco de Asís, ocurrido en 1226.

Esta celebración nos invita a mirar hacia atrás con gratitud, pero sobre todo a preguntarnos qué significa ser franciscanos en el siglo XXI.

Continued on page 31

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters”: A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions (Cont.)

Francisco no nos dejó solamente una historia admirable. Nos dejó una forma de comprender y vivir el Evangelio, una invitación permanente a la conversión, a la fraternidad, a la sencillez y al encuentro con Cristo en las personas más vulnerables.

Hoy necesitamos preguntarnos: ¿Cómo podemos ser instrumentos de paz en sociedades cada vez más polarizadas? ¿Cómo podemos vivir la sencillez en culturas dominadas por el consumo? ¿Cómo podemos construir fraternidad en medio de tantas divisiones? ¿Cómo podemos hacer visible el amor de Cristo mediante nuestra vida cotidiana?

Estoy convencido de que nuestra Provincia tiene mucho que ofrecer al mundo si somos capaces de vivir nuestra vocación con autenticidad y alegría.

Caminar juntos con esperanza

Inicio este ministerio consciente de mis propias limitaciones y de que ninguna persona puede asumir por sí sola los desafíos de una Provincia tan amplia y diversa.

Por eso, mi primera esperanza no es realizar grandes proyectos, sino contribuir a fortalecer nuestra confianza mutua y nuestra disposición a caminar juntos.

Deseo escuchar a nuestras hermanas y hermanos, aprender de quienes han servido antes que yo, valorar la experiencia de nuestras fraternidades y acompañar con especial cercanía a quienes atraviesan momentos de dificultad.

Creo profundamente que la autoridad franciscana encuentra su verdadero sentido cuando ayuda a otras personas a crecer, cuando crea oportunidades para participar y cuando hace posible que los dones de cada integrante de la fraternidad se pongan al servicio de los demás.

Al comenzar esta nueva etapa, vuelvo a las palabras de san Francisco: «El Señor me dio hermanos».

Hoy puedo decir, con gratitud, que el Señor me ha dado hermanas y hermanos de muchas culturas, lenguas y naciones. En esta diversidad descubro una manifestación de la generosidad de Dios y una oportunidad extraordinaria para vivir el Evangelio en fraternidad.

No sé todo lo que nos depararán los próximos años, pero confío en que, si permanecemos unidos en la oración, abiertos al discernimiento y comprometidos con el servicio, el Espíritu Santo continuará guiando nuestra Provincia.

Que no busquemos ser una Provincia importante por sus estructuras, sino una fraternidad reconocible por su amor. Que no nos preocupemos solamente por preservar lo recibido, sino también por transmitir con fidelidad y creatividad el carisma franciscano a las generaciones futuras.

Que el Señor nos conceda la gracia de caminar juntos con humildad, alegría y esperanza.

Paz y bien.

Hno. Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro, TSSF
Ministro Provincial
Provincia de las Américas
Tercera Orden de la Sociedad de San Francisco

“O Senhor me deu irmãos e irmãs”: uma visão de fraternidade e esperança para nossa Província das Américas

Outubro de 2026

Uma história pessoal marcada por Francisco

Queridas irmãs e queridos irmãos, paz e bem!

Recebo com gratidão o convite do *Franciscan Times* para compartilhar um pouco da minha história pessoal e, especialmente, minhas esperanças para o futuro de nossa querida Província das Américas.

Continued on page 32

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters”: A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions (Cont.)

Meu nome é Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro. Nasci na Guatemala, no coração da América Central, e há muitos anos resido na Costa Rica, país onde desenvolvi uma parte importante da minha vida familiar, profissional e ministerial.

Sou presbítero da Igreja Episcopal Costarriquenha e, pela graça do Altíssimo e Bom Senhor, sou irmão professo da Terceira Ordem da Sociedade de São Francisco.

Minha caminhada franciscana começou muito antes do meu ingresso na TSSF. Em 1985, ingressei na Ordem dos Frades Menores, onde recebi uma formação profundamente marcada pela espiritualidade de São Francisco e Santa Clara de Assis. Durante aproximadamente quinze anos, compartilhei a vida da fraternidade franciscana, uma experiência que transformou para sempre minha compreensão do Evangelho, da Igreja e das relações humanas.

Com o passar do tempo, minha vocação encontrou novas expressões. A vida familiar, o matrimônio, a paternidade, o ministério sacerdotal e o serviço educacional me ensinaram que seguir Cristo segundo o espírito de Francisco não está limitado a uma forma particular de vida religiosa. A espiritualidade franciscana pode ser vivida no lar, no trabalho, na comunidade eclesial e em meio às realidades sociais do nosso tempo.

Em 2021, iniciei minha caminhada de formação na Terceira Ordem da Sociedade de São Francisco. Foi uma experiência de reencontro com minhas raízes espirituais e, ao mesmo tempo, de descoberta de uma fraternidade internacional que compartilha o desejo de viver o Evangelho por meio da oração, da simplicidade e do serviço.

Desde junho de 2022, tenho a responsabilidade de acompanhar a formação de nossas irmãs e irmãos da Região Hispano-Americana. Esse ministério me permitiu conhecer suas histórias, suas buscas vocacionais, suas dificuldades e suas esperanças. Também confirmou minha convicção de que a formação franciscana não consiste apenas em transmitir conhecimentos, mas em acompanhar processos de transformação pessoal e comunitária.

Uma eleição que recebo como chamado ao serviço

Durante o Capítulo Provincial realizado em outubro de 2026, em Mississauga, Canadá, fui eleito Ministro Provincial de nossa Província das Américas.

Recebi essa eleição com gratidão, humildade e um profundo senso de responsabilidade. Ser o primeiro latino-americano eleito para esse ministério na história de nossa Província tem para mim um significado especial. Não interpreto isso como um reconhecimento pessoal, mas como uma expressão da riqueza e da diversidade de nossa fraternidade.

Nossa Província das Américas é uma realidade extraordinariamente rica e diversa. Compartilhamos uma mesma vocação franciscana, mas vivemos em diferentes países, falamos diferentes idiomas e pertencemos a contextos culturais, sociais e eclesiais muito variados.

Essa diversidade constitui um dos nossos maiores dons, embora também apresente desafios para a comunicação, a participação e o sentimento de pertencimento.

Minha esperança é que avancemos em direção a uma Província na qual nenhuma irmã e nenhum irmão se sinta distante, invisível ou excluído por razões de idioma, localização geográfica, idade ou circunstâncias pessoais.

Precisamos fortalecer os vínculos entre nossas regiões, promover espaços de encontro e escutar especialmente aquelas pessoas que, por diferentes razões, tiveram menos oportunidades de participar da vida provincial.

A fraternidade não significa que todas as pessoas pensem da mesma maneira. Significa que aprendemos a nos reconhecer como irmãs e irmãos, mesmo quando nossas experiências, sensibilidades e opiniões são diferentes.

São Francisco expressou uma de suas experiências fundamentais com estas palavras: “O Senhor me deu irmãos”. Essa afirmação também pode se tornar uma orientação para nossa vida provincial: não escolhemos todas as pessoas com quem compartilhamos nossa vocação, mas as recebemos como um dom de Deus.

Algumas esperanças para o futuro

Não considero que o futuro de nossa Província deva ser construído a partir de um projeto exclusivamente pessoal do Ministro Provincial. Precisamos discerni-lo juntos, escutando as fraternidades, aqueles e aquelas que exercem responsabilidades de serviço e cada irmã e irmão que deseje contribuir.

Entretanto, gostaria de compartilhar algumas convicções que considero importantes para nossa caminhada.

Continued on page 33

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters”: A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions

Fortalecer nossa identidade espiritual. A oração, o estudo, a simplicidade de vida e o serviço devem continuar sendo o fundamento de nossa vocação. Em meio a uma sociedade marcada pela pressa, pelo individualismo e pela incerteza, nossa Regra de Vida pode nos ajudar a oferecer um testemunho de serenidade, esperança e fidelidade ao Evangelho.

Renovar a formação e o acompanhamento. A formação franciscana não termina com a profissão. Precisamos acompanhar uns aos outros ao longo de toda a vida, fortalecer os processos de discernimento vocacional e oferecer recursos formativos adequados às nossas diferentes realidades culturais e linguísticas.

Abrir caminhos para novas vocações. Devemos prestar atenção especial às gerações mais jovens e às pessoas que buscam uma espiritualidade autêntica e comprometida com o mundo. Nossa tarefa não consiste apenas em aumentar o número de integrantes da Ordem, mas em compartilhar uma maneira de viver o Evangelho que possa inspirar outras pessoas.

Fortalecer a comunicação e a memória provincial. Desejo promover uma comunicação mais próxima e constante entre nossas fraternidades, assim como recuperar as histórias e os testemunhos daqueles e daquelas que nos precederam. Conhecer nossa história nos ajudará a reconhecer os dons recebidos e a construir nosso futuro com gratidão.

Aprofundar nosso compromisso com a justiça, a paz e a criação. A espiritualidade franciscana não pode ser separada do sofrimento humano nem dos desafios enfrentados pelo nosso planeta. Somos chamados a acompanhar as pessoas empobrecidas, migrantes e excluídas; a trabalhar pela reconciliação e a cuidar da criação como expressão concreta do nosso amor ao Criador.

Essas prioridades não deveriam se transformar simplesmente em atividades adicionais. Devem nos ajudar a viver com maior autenticidade aquilo que já prometemos como terciários franciscanos.

Oitocentos anos depois: viver hoje o Evangelho

Nossa eleição provincial aconteceu em um ano particularmente significativo: a comemoração dos oitocentos anos do Trânsito de São Francisco de Assis, ocorrido em 1226.

Essa celebração nos convida a olhar para o passado com gratidão, mas, sobretudo, a nos perguntar o que significa ser franciscanos no século XXI.

Francisco não nos deixou apenas uma história admirável. Ele nos deixou uma maneira de compreender e viver o Evangelho, um convite permanente à conversão, à fraternidade, à simplicidade e ao encontro com Cristo nas pessoas mais vulneráveis.

Hoje precisamos nos perguntar: Como podemos ser instrumentos de paz em sociedades cada vez mais polarizadas? Como podemos viver a simplicidade em culturas dominadas pelo consumismo? Como podemos construir fraternidade em meio a tantas divisões? Como podemos tornar visível o amor de Cristo por meio de nossa vida cotidiana?

Estou convencido de que nossa Província tem muito a oferecer ao mundo se formos capazes de viver nossa vocação com autenticidade e alegria.

Caminhar juntos com esperança

Inicio este ministério consciente das minhas próprias limitações e de que nenhuma pessoa pode assumir sozinha os desafios de uma Província tão ampla e diversa.

Por isso, minha primeira esperança não é realizar grandes projetos, mas contribuir para fortalecer nossa confiança mútua e nossa disposição de caminhar juntos.

Desejo escutar nossas irmãs e irmãos, aprender com aqueles e aquelas que serviram antes de mim, valorizar a experiência de nossas fraternidades e acompanhar com especial proximidade as pessoas que atravessam momentos de dificuldade.

Creio profundamente que a autoridade franciscana encontra seu verdadeiro sentido quando ajuda outras pessoas a crescer, quando cria oportunidades de participação e quando torna possível que os dons de cada integrante da fraternidade sejam colocados a serviço dos demais.

Continued on page 34

“The Lord Gave Me Brothers and Sisters”: A Vision of Fraternity and Hope for Our Province of the Americas—Spanish and Portuguese Versions (Cont.)

Ao começar esta nova etapa, volto às palavras de São Francisco: “O Senhor me deu irmãos”.

Hoje posso dizer, com gratidão, que o Senhor me deu irmãs e irmãos de muitas culturas, línguas e nações. Nessa diversidade, descubro uma manifestação da generosidade de Deus e uma oportunidade extraordinária de viver o Evangelho em fraternidade.

Não sei tudo o que os próximos anos nos reservarão, mas confio que, se permanecermos unidos na oração, abertos ao discernimento e comprometidos com o serviço, o Espírito Santo continuará guiando nossa Província.

Que não procuremos ser uma Província importante por suas estruturas, mas uma fraternidade reconhecida pelo seu amor. Que não nos preocupemos apenas em preservar o que recebemos, mas também em transmitir, com fidelidade e criatividade, o carisma franciscano às futuras gerações.

Que o Senhor nos conceda a graça de caminhar juntos com humildade, alegria e esperança.

Paz e bem!

Irm. Jorge Aníbal Urrutia Castro, TSSF
Ministro Provincial
Província das Américas
Terceira Ordem da Sociedade de São Francisco