

SHARING THE VISION



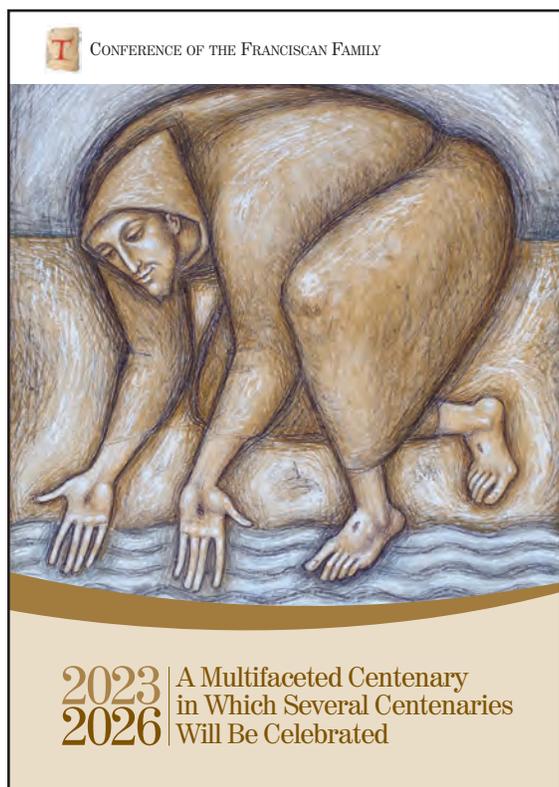
Beginning in 2023, and culminating in 2026, we will celebrate the anniversaries of five significant events in the life of St. Francis of Assisi, namely the 800th anniversaries of the Later Rule and the Christmas at Greccio (2023), the Stigmata (2024), the Canticle of the Creatures (2025), and the Easter of Francis (2026). To guide us in our celebration of these “Franciscan Centenaries,” the Conference of the Franciscan Family has issued a wonderful resource manual. The title of this booklet is “**2023-2026: A Multifaceted Centenary in Which Several Centenaries Will Be Celebrated.**” More simply, we might reference these celebrations by simply referring to them as the “Franciscan Centenaries.”

A working group of experts was entrusted with the task of creating this booklet, which gives an outline for learning more about our charism at each stage of the Centenary. The *entire* Franciscan Family is to come together to celebrate these Centenaries and to participate in ongoing and initial formation programs centered around these events. The celebration of these Centenaries is also intended to make the Franciscan Family more visible to those unfamiliar with us.

Please take time to review this booklet, which gives an overview of each anniversary and then offers suggested activities from four perspectives. **Regional and local fraternities are invited to send in your ideas of how your fraternity will participate.**

For easy reference, we include the first part of this booklet beginning on this page and continuing through page 12. Where can you find the complete Franciscan Centenary booklet? Look for it on the home page of the OFS-USA website: secularfranciscansusa.org.

FRANCISCAN CENTENARIES



General Observations

1. Themes

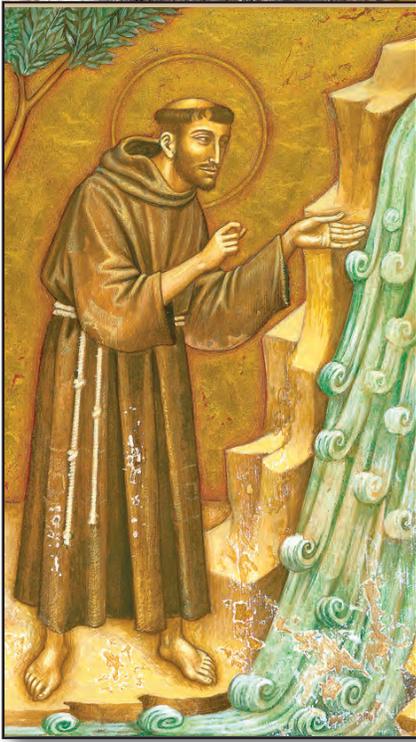
The five centenaries are part of a single thematic Centenary, which will develop gradually and harmoniously according to the chronology of the events celebrated.

The key themes proposed for the celebration of the centenaries are considered from multiple perspectives, present in each celebration. These will specifically refer to the theological dimension (*our being in Christ*); the anthropological dimension (*our being brothers and sisters*); the ecclesiological dimension (*our being in communion*); and the so- ciological dimension (*our being in the world*).

The documents of the Magisterium of the Church, understood from the Franciscan charismatic perspective, are used to provide a theolog- ical baseline. The celebration of each centenary is a promising opportunity for the Franciscan Family to support the ecclesial reform that the Pope is carrying out in his pontificate.

The basic purpose for celebrating the centenaries is to direct our gaze to the future and to strengthen our Franciscan identity and charism.

2023
2026



2. Recipients

First, the proposed themes are to be worked on and developed by our brothers and sisters all over the world. Therefore, the integration of all cultures must be standard practice.

The celebration of the centenaries is undoubtedly a good occasion to make the Franciscan Family visible in its entirety. Therefore, it would be very fitting for all activities and initiatives, at the national and/or regional level, to be coordinated by a commission representing the entire Franciscan Family.

Ad intra and *Ad extra* : The centenaries are not intended to have a positive impact only within the Franciscan Family. Imagination and creativity must be brought to bear so that the centenaries impact outwardly upon non-ecclesial social and cultural environments.

3. Methodology

We have already indicated the importance of the theological, anthropological, ecclesiological and sociological dimensions, which, as cross cutting components, should guarantee unity and thematic continuity during this multi-year celebratory event. All of these dimensions play an important role in the *ad intra* programs, but perhaps the anthropological and sociological dimensions could be further enriched in the *ad extra* programs.

There is a risk that these proposals could remain too focused on the theoretical and intellectual aspects. Therefore it would be appropriate to define, for each of the proposed themes, what *objective* is being pursued and to recommend an activity, so that the *experiential* and *practical* dimensions can be made more dynamic.

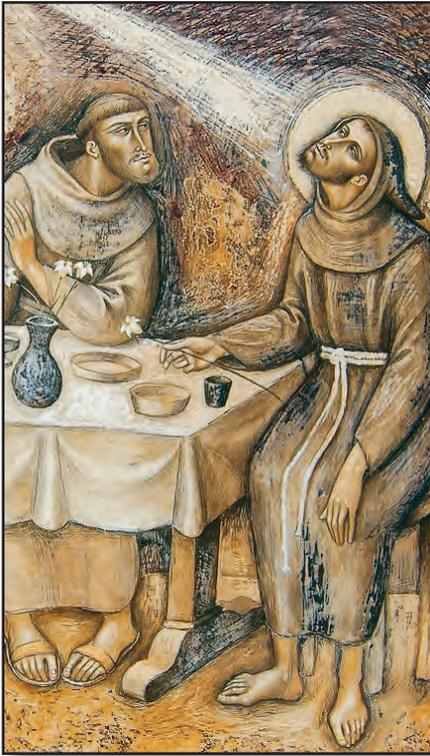
The *activities* are suggested in a very general way, since they should be made more concrete based on various real-life contexts.

The themes herein can be further explored and developed through lectures, meetings, Chapters of Mats, exhibitions, pilgrimages, mission experiences, etc.

Celebrating the Centenary as a Franciscan Family

Tres ordines hic ordinat: primumque fratrum nominat minorum pauperumque fit dominarum medius sed poenitentum tertius sexum capit utrumque.

Three were the Orders he arrayed: The Friars Minor he called the first; and the Poor Ladies were next, becoming the middle Order. Then thirdly came the Penitents, comprising men and women.



This is how we would have prayed the antiphon for Morning Prayer in the ancient *Rhythmic Office* by Julian of Speyer. He wrote it in 1235, for the canonization of St. Francis of Assisi. The antiphon mentions the direct filial relationship between the Saint and the three Orders. The first he called the Friars Minor, the second he called the Poor Ladies, and the third was for men and women who wanted to follow Jesus on the path of penance according to Francis. In the antiphon, verb *ordinat* is chosen to highlight the style of organization that belongs to the Franciscan Family. It is not reducible to a juridical structure, but rather indicates the reciprocity inherent in the bond of community, which is typical of the Franciscan charism.

The gift that St. Francis received from the Divine Giver is most fully realized in its complementarity and lively reciprocal communion. This is a motivating force in the lives of “all those who love the Lord with their whole heart” (*First Version of the Letter to the Faithful 1, FF 178/1*). Therefore, as a Franciscan Family, we invite everyone who is attracted to the evangelical beauty of the Poverello (cf. *Laudato si’ 10*) to join us in celebrating these centenaries. The centenaries offer us a valuable opportunity to invigorate the richness of our charism with a prophetic vision toward the future.

Moreover we want to celebrate them in keeping with the mindset that comes with this gift we have received. Indeed, the hagiographic sources tell us that Francis of Assisi died naked, with nothing of his own: “He asked to be taken to Saint Mary of the Portiuncula so that he might yield up the spirit of life...he threw himself in fervor of spirit totally naked on the naked ground” (*Major Legend 14:4, FF 1240*). His whole life was a journey of living *sine proprio*, that is, a life of giving back, from the beginning of his conversion, because only the man who keeps nothing for himself, but gives all of himself, is able to walk in fraternity, guided by his desire for the Supreme Good: “Let us refer all good to the Lord, God Almighty and Most High, acknowledge that every good is His, and thank Him, “from Whom all good comes, for everything.” (*Earlier Rule 17:17, FF 49*).

The Poverello recognized that everything in his life was a free gift of God’s love, as he himself affirms in his Testament: “The Lord gave me thus to begin doing penance...the Lord gave me some brothers... the Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel.” (*Testament 1-14, FF 110-116*). He not only received divine gifts but also chose to give them back, so today, eight hundred years later, we can celebrate these five centenaries as a Franciscan Family. The centenaries invite us to live according to the concept of receiving love and transforming it into self-giving and giving back to others.

Let us begin, sisters and brothers, because now it is up to us to give back to others the gifts that Brother Francis gave to us.

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Celebrating the Rule 1223-2023

Texts

Later Rule 1:1, FF 75; *Rule of St. Clare* 1:1, FF 2750; *Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Third Order Regular* 1:1; *Rule of the Brothers and Sisters of the Secular Franciscan Order* 2:4, FF 3424; *Testament* 14-15, FF 116; *Anonymous of Perugia* 11, FF 1497.

All members of the Franciscan Family profess a Rule that becomes a pattern of life and consists in observing the Gospel. As we celebrate the *Later Rule*, we are reminded that for Francis of Assisi, the nucleus of his Rule was the Gospel, as he stated in his *Testament*: “The Most High Himself revealed to me that I should live according to the pattern of the Holy Gospel. And I had this written down simply and in a few words and the Lord Pope confirmed it for me” (*Testament* 14-15, FF 116). Having listened prayerfully to the words of Jesus Christ, Francis and his first brothers exclaimed: “‘This is what we want; this is what we were seeking.’ And blessed Francis said: ‘This will be our rule’” (*The Anonymous of Perugia* 11, FF 1497).

No member of the Franciscan Family professes his own Rule privately, because he is called to live the Gospel in fraternity. It is important to remember that Francis composed the *Later Rule* at a time in his life when he was dealing with a lot of tension and crises at the fraternal level, but he never renounced the prophetic vision of living as a brother to all and he invites us to do the same. Today the Church, in promoting its synodal and communal dimensions, points to Francis of Assisi as a model of fraternity, calling him the “saint of fraternal love” (*Fratelli tutti* 2). His words and deeds can again, after eight hundred years, illuminate the path of an ecclesial community that seeks to become an outgoing, synodal Church, listening to all, in solidarity with the least, bearing the good news that has the power to fill the lives of those who accept it with joy and meaning (cf. *Evangelii gaudium* 21).



Celebrating the Rule (1223-2023)

Celebrating the *Later Rule* as a Franciscan Family gives us an opportunity to get to know each other better. It promotes communion and fosters mutual trust among ourselves. It lets us rediscover the importance of dreaming together, it opens new evangelical paths that help us become a more open and outgoing fraternity, a fraternity that can generate a new culture of encounter and social friendship, a fraternity that strives to reach out to all members of society, “each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all” (*Fratelli tutti* 8).

Our being in Christ

The Rule consists in “observing the Holy Gospel of Our Lord Jesus Christ” (*Later Rule* 1:1, *FF* 75).

Objective

To love and better understand the Rule we have professed.

Activities

- Assess the impact of the Gospel and the Rule we have professed in our daily lives.
- Use passages from the Rule to enrich our prayer life.
- Constantly evaluate ourselves in the light of the Rule, in such a way that it can illuminate personal and fraternal discernment.

Our being brothers and sisters

“For if a mother loves and cares for her son according to the flesh, how much more diligently must someone love and care for his brother according to the Spirit!” (*Later Rule* 6: 8, *FF* 91).

Objective

To rediscover the fundamental importance of the Rule for protecting and nurturing fraternal life.

Activities

- Organize study days and reflections about our Rule in order to seek together, in fraternity, the most suitable ways to embody it in our daily activities.
- Encourage time for meetings that allow us to improve the quality of relationships within our families, our fraternities, our work areas, etc.
- Promote initiatives, in collaboration with other members of the Franciscan Family, which foster mutual knowledge and increase fraternal communion.



Celebrating the Rule (1223-2023)

Our being in communion

“Steadfast in the Catholic Faith, we may observe poverty, humility, and the Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as we have firmly promised.” (*Later Rule* 12: 4, *FF* 109).

Objective

To restore meaning and significance to our way of living the Rule in the Church, promoting fraternity and synodality as ecclesial styles.

Activities

- Confirm whether the way we live our Rule, which we have professed in the Church, prompts us to carry out our pastoral work and our apostolic activities in communion with the local and universal Church.
- Participate in the synodal journey undertaken in our local Churches, valuing the variety of gifts and charisms that the Holy Spirit arouses to benefit the entire human family.
- Where possible, publicly renew the profession of our Rule.

Our being in the world

[They are] “not to quarrel or argue or judge others when they go about in the world” (*Later Rule* 3: 10, *FF* 85).

Objective

Starting from our witness of fraternity and minority in living our Rule, collaborate in building bonds of unity within society and the institutions that comprise it.

Activities

- Promote proposals aimed at reinvigorating relationships among members of Christian communities, as well as between those communities and other social and religious groups, nurturing a culture of encounter and social friendship.
- Enhance the evangelizing power of the cultural and artistic heritage that belongs to the Franciscan Family, in such a way that it becomes an instrument of encounter and dialogue with contemporary society.

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Celebrating Christmas at Greccio 1223-2023

Texts

1 Celano 84-87, *FF* 466-471; *Admonitions I*, 16-21, *FF* 144; *Letter to the Entire Order* 26: 29, *FF* 221; *Office of the Passion XV*, *FF* 303.

When Thomas of Celano presents the story of the celebration of Christmas at Greccio, he talks about the reasons Francis of Assisi had for setting up the manger and celebrating the Mass in a cave. The Poverello stopped at Greccio because he wanted to contemplate the realness of the Incarnation, namely, the simplicity, poverty and humility of the Son of God “who gave Himself for us with supreme and indescribable love” (*1 Celano* 30: 87, *FF* 471). We find the same dynamic in his contemplation of the Eucharist. In fact, Francis invites us not only to see with our physical eyes but with our spiritual eyes as well, so that we might contemplate the humility and the real manifestation of divine love present in the Eucharist: “Behold, each day He humbles Himself as when He came from the royal throne into the Virgin’s womb; each day He Himself comes to us, appearing humbly; each day He comes down from the bosom of the Father upon the altar in the hands of a priest” (*Admonitions I*, 16-18, *FF* 144).

As the Franciscan Family celebrating the centenary of the Christmas at Greccio, we are invited to pause before the mystery of the Incarnation in order to contemplate the depth of God’s love for humanity. The Son of God becomes the Son of man; he becomes one of us, our brother (cf. *Second Version of the Letter to the Faithful* 56, *FF* 201). Our faith in the Incarnation prompts us to discover the *seeds of the Word* present in all cultures and in contemporary society, so that we might bring to bloom the seeds of humanity we find there. Moreover, it urges us not only to defend life but also to become instruments of life and humanity in our families and fraternities, reaching out to those who are seen as social rejects, who are no longer considered human. The concrete way that Francis of Assisi celebrated the mystery of the Incarnation at Greccio, invites us to more fully realize “that we have been entrusted with a treasure which makes us more human and helps us to lead a new life. There is nothing more precious which we can give to others” (*Evangelii gaudium* 264).



Celebrating Christmas at Greccio (1223-2023)

On Christmas day, the Poverello, together with his brothers, prayed: “This is the day the Lord has made let us rejoice and be glad in it. For the Most Holy Child has been given to us and has been born for us on the way and placed in a manger because he did not have a place in the inn” (*Office of the Passion* XV, 5-7, *FF* 303). As we celebrate the centenary of the manger at Greccio, we are invited to think about the place that Jesus occupies in our hearts, and even more, whether we have a place in our hearts for those with whom Jesus wanted to be identified: “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25:40). By his Incarnation, Christ Jesus eliminated any distance that separated him from humanity. He calls us to do the same, that is, to be close to our brothers and sisters to welcome them, to touch them with mercy, as the Magisterium of the Church reminds us: “With the simplicity of that sign, Saint Francis carried out a great work of evangelization... In a particular way, from the time of its Franciscan origins, the nativity scene has invited us to ‘feel’ and ‘touch’ the poverty that God’s Son took upon himself in the Incarnation. Implicitly, it summons us to follow him along the path of humility, poverty and self-denial that leads from the manger of Bethlehem to the cross. It asks us to meet him and serve him by showing mercy to those of our brothers and sisters in greatest need” (*Admirabile signum* 3).

Our being in Christ

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” (Jn 3:16).

Objective

To renew our life of faith so that it can become more incarnational and concrete.

Activities

- Raise our awareness of daily life, with all its joys and difficulties, as a privileged place of encounter with the Lord.
- Ensure that adequate importance is placed on the liturgical and sacramental life, in order to progress in the life of faith.
- Reexamine how we celebrate Christmas and other liturgical feasts, ensuring they reflect the simplicity, poverty and humility that Francis of Assisi desired.

Our being brothers and sisters

“Consider, O human being, in what great excellence the Lord God has placed you, for He created and formed you to the image of His beloved Son according to the body and to His likeness according to the Spirit” (*Admonitions* V, 1, *FF* 153).



Celebrating Christmas at Greccio (1223-2023)

Our being in communion

Objective

To develop a more comprehensive view of humankind and its inherent male-female reciprocity, a view that is free of divisions and dichotomies.

Activities

- Ensure that the formation programs in our fraternities implement a formation process that is more comprehensive from a human, spiritual and interpersonal point of view.
- Encourage concrete initiatives that work toward overcoming discord between men and women or between the laity and priests or consecrated persons.

“Hail, O Lady, Holy Queen, Mary, holy Mother of God, Who are the Virgin made Church” (*Salutation of the Blessed Virgin Mary* 1, FF259).

Objective

To live in minority as members of the Church.

Activities

- Confirm whether our pastoral service in ecclesial communities reflects the maternal dimension of the Church and is characterized by humility and poverty, which are revealed in the Incarnation and in the Eucharist.
- Reexamine our way of celebrating the Eucharist, so that it may be authentically experienced as the source and summit of Christian life and a source of communion and fraternity.
- Bring the motherly compassion of the Church to our brothers and sisters who find themselves on the existential outskirts of our ecclesial communities.

Our being in the world

“God said: ‘Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness’” (Gn 1, 26).

Objective

To love and serve every human being, promoting his or her dignity as a person created by God and made in his likeness and image.

Activities

- Set aside time for reflection and discussion on promoting the dignity of every human life and make a commitment to defend life from conception until natural death.
- Promote activities to defend the rights of women.
- Offer help to parents who are finding it difficult to raise and educate their children.
- Provide assistance to shelters for orphaned children, street children, young people suffering from any kind of addiction, etc.