

ST. ANTHONY'S BREAD

THE FRANCISCANS' NEWSLETTER KEEPING OUR
FRIENDS, BENEFACTORS AND FAMILIES UP TO DATE



IN THIS ISSUE



The wind blows wherever it
pleases /p4



Gathering at assembly to
prepare for Chapter /p5



St Clare and the path of
purification /p6



Following the footsteps of Jesus to grow the kingdom of God

“The process of discernment is directed by the word of God in order to live in obedience to Him; it is aimed at dwelling within history in an evangelical way, following the footsteps of Jesus so that the kingdom of God may grow in the world. Our projects are good if they are not ‘only ours’, if they blossom, like a root, from our willingness to collaborate with all our hearts in the work that God is already doing.”

This was a reflection of Friar Michael Perry, our Minister General, in his letter

to the Order and to the sisters of the Second Order for the Solemn Feast of Clare of Assisi in 2019. Although it is based on what transpired at the Plenary Council of the Order of Friars Minor in Nairobi earlier this year, this reflection is apt as we consider the challenges facing the Custody of St Anthony Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, and in light of the coming Chapter that will determine the Custody’s direction for the next three years.

See page 3 for more...

Dear family and friends,

Greetings of Peace and Good.

Every year at Pentecost, St Francis of Assisi and his friars would gather to share the results of their preaching. During these gatherings, they would make decisions regarding the life of the friars, and they would issue new preaching assignments.

We follow in the footsteps of St Francis with our tradition of holding General Chapter meetings every three years. This is when we elect new leadership for the Franciscan Friars of the Custody of St Anthony Malaysia-Singapore-Brunei, and when we set the course for our future. Our Chapter meeting is in October.

Last month, the friars from Singapore and Malaysia gathered in Penang for the Assembly to prepare for the Chapter meeting. We reviewed and reflected on the past three years of our community and ministries. We looked forward and planned for the direction of the Custody over the next three years. This reflection and planning will help us elect the friars we believe are best equipped to lead us in our undertakings.

Having the assembly in Penang also served as an introduction to the friars' presence in the diocese of Penang. With the warm welcome of Bishop Sebastian Francis, the Franciscan Friars have assumed pastoral care of the parish Church of Risen Christ at Air Itam. A friary has been established at Tanjong Bunga, and the assembly in Penang provided the occasion for the blessing of this new friary which can accommodate eight friars.

On 11 August, the Church marks the feast of St Clare, who resolved to lead a simple, literal Gospel life, as Francis taught her. She had a passion for poverty and humility, an ardent prayer life, and a generous concern for her sisters. In this issue, Brother Michael Goh, who has been missioned to New Zealand, shares a reflection on the process of discernment in the light of St Clare. May we always remain true to our vocation in following in the footsteps of Jesus.

We wish you all blessings and family joys.



Brother Martin Low OFM





St Clare of Assisi was a close companion of St Francis of Assisi. Gender discrimination did not allow her to follow St Francis as the brothers did. Instead, she and the women who followed her were put into a monastic structure. Prevented from adopting St Francis' mendicant way of life, St Clare nonetheless opened herself to the Spirit of the Lord and his holy manner of working both in prayer and in action.

She held true to the Franciscan/Gospel project stated in the Rule of 1221 that calls for living an evangelical life (Poverty, Chastity, and Obedience) of conversion and penance in minority, simplicity, joy, and mutuality of care (fraternity) and service (mission) in following in the footsteps of Christ Crucified as Francis did.

In St Clare's process of discernment was, like St Francis', an optimistic and joyous trust in God and the goodness that the world can offer. She was unlike other abbesses of her time. She regularly washed the feet of the sisters returning to her monastery. She tended to the sick sisters and even washed their bedding. She sent the extern sisters out. She encouraged mutuality of care and love among the sisters even in the administration of the monastery and Order.

St Clare transformed and offered an alternate reality of women monasticism of passivity and removal from the world to one of activism and engagement of the world. She and her sisters became mendicants-in-monastery and fraternity-in-mission.

St Clare's daring, her commitment to the Franciscan/Gospel project of St Francis, her trust in the Spirit of the Lord, and her courage in the face of adversity can be reminders to us as we live our own Christian faith and life. For us brothers of the Custody, St Clare is both a reminder and a challenge as we look back on the past three years to understand the past and present to plan for the future now and in the coming months. If we are true to our Franciscan project and open to the Spirit "following the footsteps of Jesus so that the kingdom of God may grow in the world", we can move forward as a fraternity-in-mission and in our own personal conversion, from good to better.

May we hold on to God and our Gospel project as St Clare did. In words of St Clare to St Agnes of Prague (2nd Letter): "What you hold, may you hold, what you do, may you do and not stop. But with swift pace, light step, unswerving feet, so that even your steps stir up no dust, may you go forward securely, joyfully, and swiftly, on the path of prudent happiness, believing nothing, agreeing with nothing that would dissuade you from this commitment or would place a stumbling block for you on the way, so that nothing prevents you from offering your vows to the Most High in the perfection to which the Spirit of the Lord has called you."

Brother Michael Goh OFM
(Aotearoa-New Zealand)

The wind blows wherever it pleases

Novice Marvin Voo recently entered the Franciscan novitiate house in the Philippines. He shares a short reflection on his formation journey thus far.



My journey has been very exciting and challenging. My postulancy time of come and see with the friars was about two and a half years. It began in St James of the Marches Friary in Johor Bahru in 2017, moved to the Franciscan Friary in Penang in 2018, and moved to Singapore in 2019. I was in Greccio Friary in upper Bukit Timah from early to mid this year. Now I am in Juan De Plasencia, the Franciscan Novitiate House in Laguan, Liliw, Philippines. Yes, the wind blows wherever it pleases (John 3:8) in the life of the Franciscans.

My time experiencing Franciscan life with the friars as a Postulant was more about knowing myself and establishing a deeper relationship with God as our Father, as St Francis did when he was rebuilding the physical church. I continued to say yes to God, and He brought me here to the Philippines for my novitiate. I wish to cherish whatever experiences come here as the next step of my relationship with God, to know more of him and to follow the way of St Francis in following Jesus, so that what is bitter becomes sweet.

We novices had our Investiture on 15 July, after a three-day Investiture Retreat. Please pray for us in our year of discernment.

The Investiture is the formal reception of the Franciscan habit. During the ceremony, newly received members of the community symbolically shed their former identities in the world and begin their new lives as religious.

My Gift in Honour of St Anthony

I enclose a gift of \$ _____ :

- For the Formation and Education Fund
- To be used as you see fit

Kindly make cheques payable to
The Order of Friars Minor (S) Ltd

Malaysian Cheques may be made out to
Franciscan Friars

Please send a receipt to:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Return this tear-out in an envelope to:
Franciscan Development Office
5 Bukit Batok East Ave 2, Singapore 659918

My Petition

Dear Franciscan Friars,

Please pray with me for the following intentions:

Gathering at assembly to prepare for Chapter

The week of 1 to 5 July saw 36 Franciscan Friars from the Custody of St Anthony gathering at the Stella Maris Retreat Centre in Penang for a Custody Assembly. This fraternal assembly is held every three years to prepare for the Custody Chapter.

The friars spent the five days engaged in intensive discussions, praying together the liturgy of the hours and celebrating the Eucharist, and enjoying meals and nightly recreation. This enabled brothers who are posted to different regions of the Custody – Singapore, Kuching, Johor, Penang – to reconnect and renew bonds.

One evening, they went to the Church of the Risen Christ, which is under the pastoral care of the friars, for Evening Prayer and dinner. Bishop Sebastian Francis joined them, taking the opportunity to meet the friars informally. The evening concluded with a Penang classic – a durian party, thanks to a parishioner who owns a plantation. Like the five loaves and two fish, there was plenty leftover!

The discussions covered all ministries undertaken by the friars. The work of the ministries in the last three years, including financials, were presented for review and comment by all, including those in formation, as were proposals for future directions. There was also lively discussion on formation matters, with considerable input from the seminarians.

The resolutions formulated during the assembly will be brought to the Custody Chapter in October for further deliberation and fine-tuning, and will be voted upon by the solemn professed friars. This democratic process is a feature of the mendicant Order of Friars Minor, which for the past 800 years has relied upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which St Francis said is its true Minister General.

Friar Robin Toha, a friar in formation, summed up his experience of the assembly thus, “The Custody Assembly was a joyful event, like how an extended family meet for a reunion dinner. Like any family, we have differences and challenges. As a young friar, it is very heartening to witness the spirit of renewal and fraternity that we share. If we can be brothers despite the challenges, then we can hope for the bigger community, the church. And if we have hope for the church, we can also have hope for society, for the world.”



my petition to st anthony

“Holy Saint Anthony, you are the consolation of so many people. We come to invoke your help, confident of experiencing your goodness and power. Pray for us to the Father of Mercies, that we may obtain the graces we need for ourselves and for our loved ones. Amen.”



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Join us at our Devotions to
St Anthony: Tuesdays after the
Masses at 12.15pm and 7pm at the
Church of St Mary of the Angels.

St Clare and the path of purification



Looking over the Clarian sources, the letters in particular, I notice that Clare lives and suggests discernment as a path of purification: purification of the gaze, of the heart, and of the will.

Purification of the gaze

The starting point is the reality in which we find ourselves; the reality that “we are”, that each of us “is” by nature and by grace. Preconceptions and prejudices can distort our reading of what is going on within us, in our community, in the Church, or in society. Is this not a factor in many misunderstandings, misconceptions and conflicts?

Purify the gaze to see how God sees us, without distorting filters. Clare reminds us that by being like Jesus, making his gaze our own, we can see reality in truth, beyond the changes produced by sin: “He is the radiance of eternal glory, is the brightness of eternal light and the mirror without blemish. Gaze upon that mirror each day, O Queen and Spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually study your face in it,” (4LAg14-15); for surely “in your light we see light” (Ps36:10).

Purification of the heart

If a pure gaze reads reality in the truth of God, it is the heart that judges it, evaluates it, and interprets it. Discernment as judgment is the next step in which reality is confronted with the values that support and guide our journey of life.

Conversion, like breathing, is the essential measure for Christians to continue living. Through experience, Clare knows how easily the heart hardens, gets distracted, gets confused; that is why she rejoices in seeing Agnes of Prague: “you have brought to ruin the subtleties of our crafty enemy, the pride that destroys human nature and the vanity that infatuates human hearts”. Pride and vanity prevent a correct judgment of reality because they close one in on oneself, rather than

opening to God or to others. Genuine discernment requires a refining of the taste for the things of God, being able to recognise the scent and taste of the Gospel in the events of life and in the people we meet.

Purification of the will

The process of discernment is directed towards feeling challenged by the word of God in order to live in obedience to Him. It is aimed at dwelling within history in an evangelical way, following the footsteps of Jesus so that the kingdom of God may grow in the world.

It is good to choose whatever keeps us united to the Lord, and to reject whatever separates us from Him. Clare is able to turn down the offer of Pope Gregory IX – to be released from the bond of highest poverty and to accept the possessions that he offered – and declare with simplicity and truth: “Holy Father, I never wish to be freed from following Christ” (LegsC14). And she exhorts Agnes of Prague, in a similar situation, to embrace the poor Crucified One (Cf.2LAg17-18).

FRANCISCAN PRAYER

*Place your mind before the mirror of eternity!
Place your soul in the brilliance of glory!
Place your heart in the figure of the divine substance
And, through contemplation,
Transform your entire being into the image
Of the Godhead Itself;
So that you may feel what friends feel
In tasting the hidden sweetness
That, from the beginning,
God Himself has reserved for His lovers.*

*And, after all who ensnare their blind lovers
In a deceitful and turbulent world
Have been completely passed over,
May you totally love Him
Who gave Himself totally for your love,
At whose beauty the sun and the moon marvel,
Whose rewards and their uniqueness and grandeur
have no limits;
I am speaking of Him,
The Son of the Most High,
Whom the Virgin brought to birth
And remained a virgin after His birth.*

- Clare of Assisi, 3rd Letter to Agnes of Prague,
vv. 12-17 CA:ED, p.51